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Orpheus and Eurydice in Hell and Other Quantum Spaces:
The Golden Mean and Spiritual Transformation
in Pynchon's Fiction

by

Mary Kay Patrick Jennings

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Walter Isle, Director,
Interim Associate Provost,
Clarence S. Carter Distinguished
Service Professor
English and Environmental Studies

Terrence A. Doody, Professor
English

Marj Corcoran, Professor
Physics

Houston, Texas
November, 1999
ABSTRACT

Orpheus and Eurydice in Hell and Other Quantum Spaces: 
The Golden Mean and Spiritual Transformation 
in Pynchon’s Fiction

by

Mary Kay Patrick Jennings

Pynchon’s inclusion of scientific principles and mathematical concepts in his novels has been duly noted by critics as part of the encyclopedic references in his fiction. Pynchon, however, fictionally employs his scientific and mathematical acumen as part of an encompassing Metaphor of Extremes and Means that both provides a structure for his fiction and describes the great complexity human beings experience when they attempt to interpret the natural world and their unique position in it. Pynchon’s metaphor has as its basis two extreme perspectives of the natural world: the mythological world view which has shaped most of human thought over the ages, and the Newtonian view which displaced the mythological in the seventeenth century and ushered in the Age of Reason. Pynchon peoples his fictional worlds with two extreme groups of characters: those who function intuitively and exhibit attributes akin to the frenzied rituals associated with the worship of Dionysus, the ancient Earth God, and those who operate on the Apollonian principles of causality and a will to power. Together, these two perspectives and these two groups of characters provide the extremes in Pynchon’s Metaphor.

More difficult to recognize is Pynchon’s representation of the Golden Mean, identifiable by both a mediating perspective and characters open to alternative possibilities. The mediating perspective he identifies with quantum physics which contains both the
mythological viewpoint in its intuitive sense of forces operating below or behind the 
sensually observable world and the Newtonian perspective upon which quantum principles 
depend. The mediating characters in Pynchon’s Metaphor are Orpheus and Eurydice 
figures who have connections with both Dionysians and Apollonians in the various novels 
and often initially exhibit Dionysian or Apollonian characteristics. Yet, they depart from 
such behavior to forge new paths in search of the Golden Mean. Doing so requires that 
they lose their Dionysian or Apollonian selves by means of a descent into a quantum-like 
space from which they emerge enlightened and ready to encounter an absolutely new order 
of existence—one in which their spiritual identity is retained and the constraints of physical 
existence which ends in entropy and death is transcended. Increasingly in Thomas 
Pynchon’s novels is the idea that loss of self and interconnectedness is necessary for 
spiritual transformation which has ramifications far beyond the transformation of the 
individual. In his most recent novel, *Mason & Dixon*, the novel’s protagonist is a dual-
natured Orpheus consisting of both Mason and Dixon who are finally inseparable, joined as 
they are by the Line they drew.

The Golden Mean is the point at which connections occur and distinctions between 
seemingly mutually exclusive extremes begin to blur. Each extreme is ameliorated by the 
Golden Mean even as it remains part of a larger pattern that can be glimpsed at and 
articulated through metaphor, the most human of connecting devices. In Pynchon’s 
Metaphor the Golden Mean suggests a way back to connectedness with that which is larger 
than oneself and offers the possibility of spiritual redemption and continued existence after 
death.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Extremes permeate Thomas Pynchon’s fiction; they characterize, structure, and define it. His characters often engage in extreme forms of behavior, represent polarized perspectives, belong to adversarial factions which attempt to control each other or certain groups. Indeed, in Pynchon’s fictive worlds, extremism represents the norm and polarities abound. The Golden Mean is elusive because it has been excluded from a world where the extremes are represented by the irrational and chaotic on the one hand and the rational and deterministic on the other; these extremes threaten to give twentieth century human beings only either/or choices. Some characters, however, lament the “excluded middles,” find the “double vision” of extremism “intolerable,” and eventually pursue the middle way; by doing so, a few of these find an alternative to the “exitlessness” which pervades a world bounded by extremes. Even though the “middles” seem absent, I will argue that they become a most important presence because in Pynchon’s fiction they represent a “way back” to a sacred view of the universe that has been all but lost to twentieth century western culture.

My discovery that a metaphorical construct involving extremes and means pervades Pynchon’s fiction from his earliest short stories to his most recent novel, *Mason & Dixon*, emerged not from my reading of literary criticism about postmodern literature in general or about Pynchon’s fiction in particular. The discovery had its origins in my reading of recent books on quantum physics written by scientists for the lay public, most notably Roger Penrose’s *The Emperor’s New Mind* and Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield’s *The Arrow of Time*, Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*, Paul Davies and John Gribbon’s *The Matter Myth*, Paul Davies’ *God and the New Physics*, and Roger Jones’ *Physics as Metaphor*. Reading in the science area reinforced a notion already suggested by Pynchon’s narratives that Newtonian physics and quantum physics, like fiction, are merely metaphorical descriptions of the world from particular perspectives, and that, like fiction,
they depend on a metaphysical context for their meaning. The eventual discovery of a pervasive Pynchonesque metaphor based on scientific paradigms, mythological narratives and characters, and metaphysical speculations depended not only on the scientific writings cited above but on my reading of several writers who discuss diverse subjects which, in light of Pynchon's narratives, exhibited certain connections. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* in which Kuhn likens the acceptance of a scientific paradigm to religious conversion and the indictment in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by Jean François Lyotard of the scientific community's equation of power with scientific knowledge and the "mercantilization" of that knowledge coupled with the dichotomies articulated by Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane*, Ernst Cassirer in *Language and Myth*, and James Carse in *Finite and Infinite Games* informed my recognition of Pynchon's pervasive extreme-means metaphor. A reading of Charles Segal's *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet* and a study of Rainer Marie Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus* revealed the importance in Pynchon's fiction of the median, the Golden Mean.

The discovery of this metaphorical scheme from the reading of such divergent sources may well place my discussion of Thomas Pynchon's works outside the confines of traditional literary criticism. It did emerge, however, out of my long-standing awareness of and interest in the connections between literature and science, connections that no doubt attracted me to the Pynchon's writings as well. The discovery of the metaphorical scheme also reinforced my conviction that examining any literature from a particular category of literary criticism--i.e., feminist, Marxist, deconstructionist--may inform the text, but, as a singular point of view, it may also be reductive of the text. Because Pynchon's writing is so encyclopedic and draws on so many sources for its settings, characters, and plots, an examination of a metaphoric schemata that has its origins in mythology, scientific theory, mathematics, philosophy, and metaphysical speculation is one that opens Pynchon's fiction to greater possibilities of interpretation rather than restricting interpretation to a particular
critical stance. My subject is literary; my method draws from a variety of sources—with hardly a nod to literary criticism—for its execution. Eliade, Cassirer, Carse, and Lyotard suggested the extremes that structure Pynchon’s metaphor; Kuhn and the scientific writers, along with Segal and Rilke, suggested the means or median of that structure.

The extremes in Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme are represented most fundamentally by the ancient Greek religious practices associated with Dionysus, the god of the Vine, and Apollo, god of light and music. Dionysian worship predated Olympian/Apollonian practices by perhaps a thousand years. Dionysus is a telluric god associated with the fertility “mysteries” of Demeter and Persephone and the natural cycles depicting the death and rebirth of nature; rapture, terror, and frenzied behavior characterized Dionysian religious practices. At the other extreme was the worship of Apollo, a paternalistic authoritative Olympian god; more rational and orderly worship of the Olympian gods eventually displaced the frenzied revels of Dionysus as the dominant religious focus of the Greeks. These extreme impulses—the frenzied irrational Dionysian and the authoritative rational Apollonian—reveal themselves more broadly in Pynchon’s fiction as they are connected to two distinct explanations of the natural world: myth and Newtonian science. Myth, the worldview of ancient and primitive cultures, is connected to Dionysian ritual in that a mythological approach to the natural world perceives the cosmos as irrational and intuitive; myth provides a means of connecting a man to divinity both temporally and spatially thereby regenerating time and space. Newtonian science displaced the mythological approach in the seventeenth century and ushered in the Age of Reason, the Apollonian way modernized. The Newtonian scheme, founded on the premise of cause and effect, perceived the natural world as rationally ordered and operating on certain universal deterministic principles; this perception both placed human beings in a position of superiority over the natural world and negated the existence of free will in a predetermined universe. These extremes, the Dionysian impulse and the mythological approach to the natural world on the one hand and the Apollonian impulse and Newtonian
science on the other, provide the structure for "Under the Rose," V., and for Pynchon's later novels.

The middle way or Golden Mean takes several forms in Pynchon's fiction. Mathematically the concept of the Golden Mean as Pynchon uses it encompasses both the terms "median" and "mean." In mathematics, the "median" is defined as the "middle number" in a distribution of numbers. The median is the midpoint of a group of numbers; there are as many numbers greater than the median as there are less than it. The "mean," on the other hand, is the "arithmetic average of the numbers" (Brown 710). In Pynchon's works these mathematical concepts are related as well to the Greek concept of the Golden Mean which is probably best articulated by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle is concerned with the pursuit of virtue by "men of practical wisdom." To this end, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of striving for the "median" or "mean," terms he uses interchangeably for the purposes of discussing the pursuit of virtue. Aristotle defines the "median" as "a point equidistant from both extremes"; the extremes of "excess and deficiency" he labels "vices." Virtue, he maintains, "aims at the median" and is "concerned with emotions and actions" (42-43). The median is good, and he describes "good" as a point, like the "middle of a circle," accessible only to "a man who has proper knowledge" (50). Pynchon's metaphor of extremes and means is neither polar nor static. Even as Aristotle defined the mean, so does Pynchon. The median, Aristotle says, is "a point equidistant from both extremes, and this point is one and the same for everybody." On the other hand, the median "relative" to the individual "is neither one and the same for everybody" (42); it may be closer to one extreme than another depending on the individual. Each individual must choose the "relative" median appropriate for him or her. Pynchon explores the relationship between the median and the extremes in all his fiction, and for each work, as for each character, the median is relative to the "Situations" in which the characters find themselves. Often the "Situation" is dictated by forces beyond the character's control and understanding and defies the rational context assumed by Aristotle
and by the Newtonian world view; it seems, in fact, to have more in common with the irrational, or more precisely with the uncertainty associated with the quantum realm of activity: the "Situation" in Pynchon's writings is complicated indeed. Even so, the Golden Mean in Pynchon's writing, as in Aristotle's, depends on free will and individual choice; Pynchon's Golden Mean necessitates choosing the personal over the impersonal, the humanitarian over the historical tide of events that threatens to annihilate personal and human response even in situations deemed uncertain or incomprehensible. The association of the Golden Mean with individual choice in Pynchon's writing constitutes the essential metaphysical act and recalls the association of the Golden Mean with individual choice. It also references the very primitive notion of a crossroads between the underworld and the celestial realm, between hell and heaven, a place where it is possible for human beings to connect—albeit imperfectly—with the divine and thereby escape the constraints of space and time whereby their "human" existence is defined. The concept of the Golden Mean as Pynchon uses it is important in both the Greek world and the modern, in mythology and in mathematics and science; its importance in Pynchon's fiction suggests that the Golden Mean may be much more fundamental to human existence than twentieth century experience allows.

The "mean" or "median" finds representation in Pynchon's novels in two particular metaphors: Orpheus—both the religious prophet and the mythological character—and certain principles of quantum physics exhibited in characters' physical and emotional activities and represented by certain kind of "time" and "space" in the novels. Orpheus was the central figure of the Orphic religion practiced by the Greeks from the sixth century BC until several centuries after the birth of Christ; he was also a character in Greek mythology. As a religious prophet, Orpheus is situated between and connected to both the frenzied earth mysteries associated with Dionysus and to the worship of the rational Olympian Apollo. The Orphic religion was probably a modification of the earlier Dionysian mysteries, and in it, Orpheus was a religious seer; yet, the Orphic religion preached the
purification of one's Dionysian nature in order to achieve, via rational choice, spiritual
reward. Thus, Orpheus as the central figure of the Orphic religion occupies a position
between Dionysus and Apollo, a mean between the extremes. This position is enhanced by
the connection of Orpheus the religious prophet with Orpheus the mythological character in
the Orpheus-Eurydice myth. Eurydice's association with the worship of Demeter-
Persephone (the Eleusian mysteries were precursors of the Dionysian mysteries), Orpheus'
descent to the Underworld to retrieve her from death's finality, and his eventual
dismemberment connect him with Dionysus; Orpheus' expertise as a musician and the
entombment of his limbs at the foot of Mt. Olympus connect him with Apollo. Even in the
myth Orpheus occupies a position between the extremes.

Although one of Pynchon's two central metaphors for the Golden Mean--Orpheus--
has its origins in ancient Greek religious practices and in mythology, the other--quantum
physics--has as its precursor Newtonian science. In the seventeenth century two scientists.
Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz, developed a new mathematical system that enabled
Newton to mathematically describe his "System of the World." This new mathematical
system, calculus, relied on the concept of the mathematical "mean"--the arithmetic average
of a distribution of numbers (Brown 710)--for two of its most fundamental theorems: the
Mean Value Theorem and the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus. The "mean" in the Mean
Value Theorem refers to the average rate of change over an interval of time (Edwards
175). This theorem is closely related to the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus which
asserts that the two major branches of calculus, differentiation (used to measure the line or
curve) and integration (used to measure area), are inverse operations in the same way as
multiplication and division are inverse operations. The importance of the "means" are as
fundamental to calculus, the tool of Newtonian and quantum physics, as they were to the
Greeks who espoused the Golden Mean as the ideal ethical state.

In the early twentieth century with Newtonian science as its basis, quantum
mechanics emerged as a field of study the principles of which, in Pynchon's metaphorical
scheme, place it between the intuitive and irrational explanation of the world according to
myth and the rational scientific approach espoused by Newton and the scientists who
followed him. In Pynchon's fiction quantum physics emerges as a new median for a new
age. Having as its basis Newton's rational and deterministic principles which causally
explain the macrocosmic world, quantum physics posits an explanation of the microcosmic
subatomic world that is based on uncertainty and probability. When examined on the
smallest scale, the material world becomes once again mysterious; the rational ceases to
provide an adequate explanation for the behavior of matter below the surface level of the
observable world. Quantum physics also offers an arena for "complementarity," a concept
posited by Niels Bohr, one of the founders of quantum physics. Complementarity is an
"explicit expression of the wholeness inherent" in the dualism exhibited at the quantum
level. This idea that "opposites are components of a wholeness" has metaphysical
connections with the world view, especially that presented by Ancient Eastern cultures--a
connection Bohr himself made--a view which includes the opposites of darkness and light,
of female and male, of life and death as part of the wholeness of existence (Wheeler 224
and Kothari 326). Thus quantum physics emerges in Pynchon's fiction as a metaphor for
the Golden Mean, born in the twentieth century but harking back to the ancient Greek
religious practices wherein Dionysus was the "irrational" element in which the
"complementarity" of human existence found expression and over which the Apollonian
impulse to order and rational thought eventually prevailed.

The identification of this complex metaphor of extremes and means, not only in the
individual works of Thomas Pynchon but in specific passages within those works and in
his oeuvre to date, both provides a framework within which to examine many of
Pynchon's encyclopedic references and metaphors but also allows for an examination of
Pynchon's various treatments of this scheme throughout his five novels. In order to
explore Pynchon's metaphorical scheme, I have chosen to thoroughly investigate the
scheme as it emerges in nascent form in "Under the Rose" and as it finds full expression in
his first novel, V. Although my initial recognition of Pynchon’s use of extremes and means came from my reading of all his works, close scrutiny of the short story and V. revealed the existence of a complex scheme which I recognized as structurally and thematically predominant in all Pynchon’s works and which, I discovered, informed his oeuvre as a whole. Published in 1959 and 1961 respectively, “Under the Rose” and V. demonstrate the importance of recovering the Golden Mean in a century that had, at mid-century when these works were published, already been plagued by the extremes of two world wars waged by opposing forces seen in Pynchon’s novels as driven by the Apollonian will to power. These two early works establish a scheme that depicts extremes in their settings, in their characters, and in the political entities that threaten the emotional and spiritual lives of those characters. That the events structuring “Under the Rose” and V. occur at a specific time in history and in delineated geographical locations positions them in the Newtonian framework that explains quite accurately the macrocosmic and political world within which human beings live their personal lives. At the other extreme and set in opposition to historical events driven by Apollonian impulses aimed at possessing lands, peoples, and cultures are those characters who exhibit Dionysian impulses or who represent and hold a mythological point of view and who present a threat to those political entities and individuals who are driven by a will to power. In “Under the Rose” and V., England and Germany and the characters who work for their governments are emblematic of this impulse to power. At the other extreme are those countries which England and Germany wish to dominate and possess either by colonization or by war: in “Under the Rose,” Egypt; in V., South West Africa. In these early works, the extremes are very polar; the Apollonian will to power, ominous. The median or Golden Mean seems “obsolete” and surfaces only subtly against great odds and only when personal relationships occur. In “Under the Rose,” Pompertine “descends” to the personal level to establish a relationship with Victoria Wren; in V., Sidney Stencil is seduced by Victoria Wren, falls in love with her, and fathers a child by her. In both works, the establishing of a personal relationship
becomes a talisman against the forces of history which threaten to annihilate emotional and spiritual bonds between human beings. In both cases, such a bond, however tentative, proves stronger than the forces of annihilation and, in fact, allows the characters who experience such bonds a means of escape.

Because Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme of extremes and means, only outlined here, even in his early works is so paradoxical and convoluted, I have chosen to focus on those paradoxes, those convolutions and complexities as they emerge in Pynchon’s early story and first novel. Such an examination is necessary for an understanding of how the scheme, fundamental for an interpretation of all Pynchon’s novels, is explored as the century itself and America’s role in it mutates, as the large political and corporate powers bring their forces to bear on the personal lives of human beings, as the opportunity for personal relationships waxes and wanes under the influences of forces that seem beyond human control. My decision to examine in detail the metaphorical scheme as it emerges in “Under the Rose” and V. is based on the premise that such an examination is necessary if the implications of the scheme, its changes and its nuances are to be understood in the later, and in some cases “larger” novels, Gravity’s Rainbow and Mason & Dixon. To this end, Chapter 1 will note the appearance of the scheme in nascent form in an early story, “Under the Rose” and will give a rather detailed description of the extremes and means which comprise Pynchon’s metaphor; Chapter 2 will examine the emergence of the complex metaphorical scheme in Pynchon’s first novel, V. as well as its manifestations in particular settings and characters; Chapter 3 will explore the evolution of the “extremes” in Pynchon’s metaphor as they are represented in Pynchon’s novels, three of which I label “masculine” because of their male protagonists--V., Gravity’s Rainbow, and Mason & Dixon--and two of which I term “feminine” because of their female focal characters--The Crying of Lot 49 and Vineland; Chapter 4 will focus on the permutations in Pynchon’s concept of the Golden Mean as it is represented by Orpheus-Eurydice figures and by “quantum spaces” in Pynchon’s last four novels. My intention is that such a treatment of
Pynchon's novels will lead to an understanding of how the extremes and means of Pynchon's metaphorical scheme evolve in his fiction, even as they have unfolded historically, as Pynchon emerges—either by chance or design—as the chronicler of spiritual experience for the last half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Medians furnish the basis of Pynchon's metaphorical use of the Golden Mean as a conduit through the eustressness of existence in an extremist world and as a way back to spiritual experience. Thomas Pynchon suggests in "Under the Rose," V., and his later novels that in a world where "extremes" represent the norm and "means" are at best elusive, the Golden Mean remains the "way back" to revelation and spiritual transformation. In "Under the Rose" and his novels, the "extremes" are represented by Dionysian and Apollonian characters and impulses and by mythological and Newtonian settings; the Golden Mean is achieved by Orpheus figures who descend below the surface level of experience in search of their Eurydices, who confront moments of uncertainty which contain infinite possibility including the possibility of spiritual regeneration, and who consciously choose the Golden Mean.
Notes

1 In Pynchon's novels identification of the extremes is necessary for determining the means; in calculus the Mean Value Theorem relies in part on the Extreme Value theorem for its proof. The Mean Value Theorem has two forms, the differential form and the integral form. The differential form deals with tangent lines and secant lines. Geometrically the differential form of the theorem guarantees the existence of a tangent line that is parallel to the secant line through points \((a, f(a))\) and \((b, f(b))\) somewhere on the interval \(a\) to \(b\) (Larson 175) (See Fig. I.1).

![Figure I.1](image)

**Figure I.1**

**Mean Value Theorem: Differential Form**  
(Larson 175)

The Mean Value Theorem for integrals deals with the area under the curve and states that somewhere "between" the inscribed and circumscribed rectangles there is a rectangle whose area is precisely equal to the area of the region under the curve (Larson 283) (See Figure I.2).

![Figure I.2](image)

**Figure I.2**

**Mean Value Theorem: Integral Form**  
(Larson 283)
CHAPTER 1

"Under the Rose" and the Sources of
Pynchon's Metaphor of Extremes and Means

"Under the Rose" (1959) prefigures the emergence of Pynchon's metaphorical scheme of extremes and means; the story does so by suggesting the difficulty experienced by those living at the onset of the twentieth century in establishing personal relationships amid the threat of apocalyptic events. First, this early but very complicated story, written when Pynchon was an undergraduate at Cornell, establishes the extremes which initially seem to be polarities and exist between Dionysian and Apollonian characters and between mythological and Newtonian settings, perspectives, and symbols. It sets the personal plights of characters in the context of historical events and political situations that occupied the attention of two world powers, England and Germany, vying for control of Egypt and the Middle East. Such a context exists as a prototype for all five of Pynchon's novels published to date. Furthermore, the characters of Porpentine and Victoria Wren provide the precursors of numerous and more complicated Orpheus and Eurydice figures in V., in which Victoria Wren is the first of several persona of the elusive V., and in Pynchon's subsequent novels as well. More importantly, the story emphasizes in the focal character of Porpentine the obligatory descent below the surface level of experience, the importance of enduring uncertainty, and the necessity of conscious decision-making that characterize the middle way as a means to personal redemption and spiritual transcendence. Together these elements furnish the foundation for the emergence of Pynchon's metaphorical scheme within which he explores the complex relationship between the "extremes" of human existence that characterizes the twentieth century experience and the "means" necessary to transcend the exitlessness those extremes imply.

"Under the Rose"

"Under the Rose" (1959) is a story of international espionage that takes place in Egypt in 1898, first in Alexandria and then in Cairo. (See Appendix A, p. 353, and Maps
1 and 2, pp. 359 and 360). The story’s protagonist, Porpentine, and his colleague Goodfellow, two English spies, have been summoned to Egypt which, because of its position in the impending Fashoda crisis, is expected to become a “trouble spot.” They are to keep tabs on Porpentine’s long-term German adversary, Moldweorp, and his associates, Bongo-Shaftsbury and Lepsius, since Germany stands to gain from the unstable relationship between England and France, and the German trio is expected to provoke hostilities by attempting to assassinate the English Consul-General, Lord Cromer, in Cairo. When Porpentine accompanies Goodfellow to a party at the Austrian Consulate in Alexandria, he meets Victoria Wren, Goodfellow’s latest conquest, who is on a Cook’s tour of the Nile with her father, and whose attentions are being sought by Bongo-Shaftsbury as well. Eventually the group travels to Cairo by train, and there Porpentine and Goodfellow decide to “stalk” Lord Cromer to ensure his safety since Cromer is notoriously careless in public. At an opera performance in Ezbekiyeh Gardens, Porpentine thwarts an assassination attempt by the German threesome whom Porpentine, Goodfellow, and Victoria chase to Kheops. The Germans gain the advantage, and because Porpentine has violated the rules of gentlemanly behavior in the espionage game, he is shot; Goodfellow and Victoria are released.

Most attempts to interpret this story either focus on its relationship to Chapter 3 in V. where it is radically transformed or note the opposition between Porpentine’s personal situation and the historical context within which it occurs. David Cowart in Thomas Pynchon: the Art of Allusion calls Porpentine’s “human gesture” “impure” and believes that Porpentine is an “inferior spy” because of his compassion for the prostitute whom Moldweorp beats with his cane and because of his reproof of Bongo-Shaftsbury for frightening Mildred, Victoria’s eleven year old sister. Porpentine’s “fatal weakness,” he says, is “his human decency and compassion” (70), a weakness which finally leads to the loss of “his life and, in time, Europe too” initiated when Porpentine “catastrophically” descends “to the level of human emotions” (72) and tells Moldweorp to “go away and die”
David Seed in *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* sees the story in terms of Porpentine’s meditations which, he says, extend “his personal predicament outward toward history” (53). Seed notes the contrasts between the “individual” and “mass man,” between “feeling” and “efficiency” (55) and speaks of Porpentine (with Goodfellow) as “the personification of a doomed humanism” (57). The theatricality of Porpentine’s behavior, he believes, reinforces the notion that Porpentine comes to realize “all his actions are theatre” and all “attempts to avoid his own destiny” are “futile” (63).

Both interpretations suggest that Porpentine’s meager attempts at personal/human response are “being tolled down” (SL 135) by some Force or Quantity beyond his control as the “century [rushes] headlong to its end” (SL 102). Both views of the story intimate that compassion is worse than futile; it can lead to the death and destruction of continents (Europe) as well as individuals.

Such interpretations are, of course, legitimate. Pynchon himself remarks that the question of whether history is personal or statistical is “the interesting question underlying the story” (Intro. SL 18). However, to insist on polarities alone (between the personal and the statistical, between the individual and the masses, between one’s private life and public function) is to limit and, in some sense, misread Pynchon’s story. The espionage motif, of course, sets up the expectation of polarities: easily delineated adversaries representing adversarial countries. This expectation materializes in the characters, Porpentine (“*il semplice inglese*”), an English spy, and his long-time rival, Moldweorp (“the veteran spy”), a German. The polarity established between the two rivals, however, is soon dispelled when we learn that even though theirs is a “private battle” recognized by their subordinates who take “on the roles of solicitous seconds, attending to the strictly national interests,” Porpentine and Moldweorp “were cut from the same pattern: Comrade Machiavellians, still playing the games of Renaissance Italian politics in a world that had outgrown them” (SL 107). By placing Apollonian-Newtonian perspectives at one extreme, Dionysian-mythological perspectives at the other, and a quantum-Orpheus at the center,
"Under the Rose" becomes richer in meaning and a point of departure for examining Pynchon's novels. If the characters are seen to form a triad rather than adversarial extremes, a number of possibilities emerge. Porpentine, the central character of the triad, has close associations with both Goodfellow, his English colleague and junior partner in espionage, and with Moldweorp, his long-time adversary. Goodfellow is a Dionysian at heart, a spy who never ceases to succumb to the theatricality of his role and a womanizer who never becomes personally involved in his relationships--Victoria Wren being his most recent conquest. Moldweorp, at the other extreme, is an Apollonian, an Armageddon advocate who plays the game of espionage "for its own sake" (113): "All he asked was that eventually there be a war" (107). Porpentine shares characteristics with them both. Like Goodfellow, he has been enamored with his role as a spy, its "doublings-back, emergency stops, and hundred-kilometer feints" (SL 113) and the theatricality of the espionage game. Like Goodfellow he had made it a rule to "never fall in love." And, like Goodfellow, he develops an interest in Victoria Wren. However, he resembles Moldweorp as well. They are, after all, "cut from the same pattern," and even though Porpentine's energies are directed toward evading the "Final Clash" that Moldweorp so longs for, he, like Moldweorp, has played "the game for its own sake"; choosing to do so has propelled him like "an irresistible vector...toward 1900" without his ever having to become personally involved.

Porpentine may be seen as an Orpheus figure who, as a result of an encounter with his Eurydice, Victoria, descends to the quantum world of personal feelings. Porpentine, in fact, has much in common with Orpheus. He is intimately connected with music, especially with the opera Manon Lescaut which itself tells an Orpheus-Eurydice tale. Porpentine identifies with Des Grieux who falls in love with Manon only to have her abducted by Geronte who takes her for his mistress and introduces her to a life of prostitution. When she steals from Geronte, she is imprisoned and shipped off from France to the wastelands of New Orleans. In spite of Des Grieux's love and efforts to save
her, Manon dies. Porpentine has seen the premiere of this opera with Goodfellow; he hums “the aria from Manon Lescaut” as he gazes at Victoria seated appropriately between Goodfellow and Bongo-Shaftsbury; in the shower he improves on Goodfellow’s attempts to sing fragments of a song from the opera. Finally, of course, scenes from the opera are interspersed with Porpentine’s climactic moment of decision which occurs as he and Goodfellow interrupt the assassination attempt on Lord Cromer at a performance of Manon Lescaut in Ezbekiyeh Gardens. The climax of the opera coincides with the climax of the story; Des Grieux’s moment of recognition with Porpentine’s. At the same moment Des Grieux reads “his destiny in her [Manon’s] eyes, Porpentine, like Orpheus, glances “back quickly in that moment of hopeless love” to see in Moldweorp—“looking decayed, incredibly old, face set in a hideous . . . smile” (SL 133)—his own destiny, Death.

As complicated as the climax of the story is, the “journey” Porpentine takes to get there involves an Orphian descent into unknown and dangerous territory. The journey begins when Porpentine meets Victoria Wren, his Eurydice. This he does at the Austrian Consulate where she is escorted by Goodfellow but where she attracts the attention of and is attracted to Goodfellow’s counterpart on the German spy team, Hugh Bongo-Shaftsbury. Porpentine’s initial relationship with Victoria is as voyeur. He watches her with Goodfellow and with Bongo-Shaftsbury at the Austrian Consulate. He watches from a tree as Goodfellow and Victoria lie nude on his bed and identifies with what he takes to be Goodfellow’s impotence. Yet the real turning point for Porpentine is his personal encounter with Victoria in a Brauhaus where she has followed him on the evening of September 24, the day before the Fashoda Crisis breaks. There, she asks Porpentine to keep her affair with Goodfellow a secret from her father, admits her love for Goodfellow, tells him that she has “guessed” their operations, and pleads with him to “understand.” The encounter initiates the process of Porpentine’s redemption, with Victoria-Eurydice as the “means”—for she has “sought out and found the woman in him”—and he descends to a depth of the personal he had never before experienced: “Never had he been down so far:
he was a tourist here. Could have used . . . any Baedeker of the heart” (SL 130). Their “wordless flickerings” of understanding change Porpentine’s life forever.

The encounter immediately precedes the breaking of the Fashoda Crisis, the attempt on Lord Cromer’s life, and Porpentine’s “sick moment of uncertainty” at the opera, all of which occur the following day, September 25. Porpentine’s “uncertainty” is a quantum phenomenon which further establishes his central position between the two extremes, mythology and Newtonian physics. These extremes as well as Porpentine’s position between them are best illustrated by the character, Bongo- Shaftsbury who, as his name indicates, is the epitome of extremes and without a center at all. “Bongo” reflects his archeological activities and associates him with the primitive and the mythical, but this is merely a mask; “Shaftsbury” identifies him as British, yet he is a German spy. He is not what he appears to be. At the Austrian Consulate, he enters the party wearing “the hollow ceramic hawk-head” mask of Harmakhis, God of Heliopolis and chief deity of Lower Egypt”; he claims the mask is “genuine . . . used in the ancient rituals” and associates it with the Sphinx. The connection enchants Victoria. However, even his disguise belies his Apollonian/Newtonian nature: Heliopolis is the sun-city (Apollo is the sun god); the mask is a “hollow . . . hawk-head.” (SL 114). He is Moldweorp’s man looking for war.

A remark made by Bongo- Shaftsbury about favoring “the clean over the impure” (SL 117) further connects Bongo- Shaftsbury with Moldweorp by reminding Porpentine of an earlier incident involving Moldweorp and a prostitute whom Moldweorp beat “ragged” in the street because she had propositioned him. Porpentine remembers the “unkind fury” that recast Moldweorp’s feature into a “wrath-mask” and his own automatic impulse to give comfort to the prostitute. Porpentine painfully recalls his sympathy for the prostitute as “his terrible flaw” in a life-long practice of never descending “to the personal level.” He identifies once again with Des Grieux and thinks of his sympathy for the prostitute as “his performance in the rain” (SL 118). Like Des Grieux, he believes he would “never leave a stage” where “certain passions” could safely be expressed. However, even after reminding
himself that “one must love humanity only in the abstract” (SL 118), Porpentine personally intervenes again when his suspicions about Bongo-Shaftsbury’s true nature are confirmed on the train to Cairo. Bongo-Shaftsbury takes sadomaso-erotic pleasure in baiting Mildred, Victoria’s eleven-year old sister, so that he can horrify her by showing her the “shiny and black . . . miniature electrical switch . . . sewn into the skin” of his arm. “Porpentine recoiled, thinking . . . Bongo-Shaftsbury is insane” and then reprimands Bongo-Shaftsbury: “One doesn’t frighten a child, sir” (SL 121). In each case, Bongo- Shaftsbury, who is more machine than man—the new-generation version of Moldweorp and Porpentine with any semblance of humanity removed—represents the extremes, the mystery of myth (in the case of Bongo-Shaftsbury, this is merely a disguise) and the machine-like determinism of Newtonian physics, but Porpentine’s growing realization that he fits neither.

Victoria, a Eurydice figure, is likewise situated in the middle. At the Austrian Consulate’s party, she is seated between the Dionysian, Goodfellow, and the Newtonian, Bongo-Shaftsbury. She is already Goodfellow’s lover and later confesses her “love” for him, yet she is “enchanted” by Bongo-Shaftsbury and his association in her mind with the mysterious sphinx. The uncertainty of her position puzzles Porpentine who believes her “ideal should rightfully have been pure manhood [Goodfellow] or pure hawkhood [Bongo- Shaftsbury]; hardly the mixture” (SL 115). Porpentine is still operating on the either/or premise and would like Victoria “placed” at one extreme or the other. Her age--she “could not have been more than eighteen” --- (SL 108) and her sexual experience--she was already Goodfellow’s lover but flirting with Bongo-Shaftsbury—place her between Mildred, her innocent and vulnerable sister frightened by Bongo-Shaftsbury, and the prostitute beaten by Moldweorp, both of whom evoked compassionate and personal responses from Porpentine. Coupled with his entirely personal encounter with Victoria in the Bauhaus and the “wordless flickerings” of understanding they exchanged there, the uncertainty of Victoria’s position in a world Porpentine has helped to create evokes an Orphian-like
passion within Pompentine to redeem her (and perhaps himself and humanity as well), not from the underworld, but from the world of surface-level experience and statistical odds dominated by the likes of Moldweorp and Bongo-Shaftsbury which, he fears, will propel the new century toward an Armageddon-bound crisis.

Before he meets Victoria, Pompentine has a foot in both aspects of Egypt, the Newtonian and the mythical. He is there to play the game of espionage in the “inanimate” squares of Alexandria and Cairo, “dwarfed horizontal and vertical by any plaza’s late afternoon landscape . . . displaceable, like [a] minor chess-piece] anywhere across the board of Europe” (SL 106). Even though his public experience in Egypt is Apollonian, Newtonian, and objective, Pompentine falls asleep “reading an old and mutilated edition of Antony and Cleopatra . . . wondering if it were still possible to fall under the spell of Egypt: its tropic unreality, its curious gods” (SL 119). He has lived his life in the Apollonian/Newtonian world longing for the mystery of Dionysus and myth. He may be a “tourist” in his descent to the quantum world of personal uncertainty, but he is not exactly unprepared; perhaps he has sought it all along.

Importantly, Pompentine’s encounters with this uncertain personal world occur in the proximity of two spaces associated with the sacred, a German church and an Egyptian theatre. The turning point of the story, Pompentine’s personal encounter with Victoria, takes place the evening shortly after Pompentine, hearing “loud organ music,” enters a tiny Gothic church “on a sudden whim.” There he discovers Sir Alastair, Victoria’s father, “wrecking” Bach “on the keys and pedals.” Identifying, perhaps, with what he imagines to be Sir Alastair’s rage at Victoria’s love affair with Goodfellow as revealed in the organ playing, Pompentine was “unable to pull himself away until the music stopped abruptly” (SL 129), the music and the rose-like foliage of the church’s interior reminding him of the fine line between “wholeness and disintegration.” The next paragraph of the story begins the description of his encounter with Victoria and their “wordless” moments of understanding as if the music and the sacred space have somehow prepared Pompentine for
his unspoken connection with her and his first direct personal experience with the intuitive. The climax of his inward journey occurs in a theatre located in Ezekiyeh Gardens where the opera Manon Lescaut is being performed. There, Porpentine experiences his "sick moment of uncertainty" when he first centers "his sights on Bongo-Shaftsbury [his adversary], then let the muzzle drift down and to the right until it pointed at Lord Cromer [the man he is there to protect]" (SL 133) and realizes that "aping Bongo-Shaftbury's tactics" was no "less real than opposing them" (SL 133). When, moments later at the climax of the opera (Des Grieux looks at Manon and reads "his destiny in her eyes"), he turns to face his adversary, Moldweorp, Porpentine panics and fires blindly ("he would never be sure which one he intended as target" SL 133), thwarting the assassination attempt on Cromer with his uncertainty. And when Moldweorp warns him that he is outnumbered, Porpentine, confused by Moldweorp's descent into the personal, commits himself to it by yelling "go away and die." The interchange of words, like Orpheus' decision to look back at Eurydice, like any observation/measurement made at the quantum level, is "decisive."

The rest of the story, which consists of the chase and Porpentine's execution, is more important for Porpentine's revelation and his attempt at redemption than it is for its action. Early in the chase, when Goodfellow and Porpentine stop to pick up Victoria during their pursuit of Moldweorp, Bongo-Shaftsbury, and Lepsius through the streets of Cairo, Porpentine becomes dimly aware that "something had passed out of his hands" and he begins to "recognize . . . a quite enormous betrayal" (SL 134). Cowart and Seed might read this as Porpentine's realization that focusing on the personal in the twentieth century is self-destructive at best. However, viewing Porpentine's final personal gesture (telling Moldweorp to "go away and die") as "decisive" suggests that Porpentine has, in fact, made, if not an heroic gesture certainly a human one, an Orphean attempt to redeem the personal against great Apollonian-Newtonian odds which propel the individual toward some pre-determined end and make all actions pre-scripted and theatrical. By yelling at
Moldweorp, Porpentine descends to the personal and, in doing so, breaks the rules of “gentlemanly” behavior to expose the “gameness” of the game they all play.

Even when urged by Goodfellow to “let them go,” Porpentine insists on pursuing Moldweorp, Bongo-Shaftsbury, and Lepsius--Newtonian advocates all. During the pursuit, Porpentine sees a “bright hallucination against Cairo’s night sky”: “a bell-shaped curve--remembered perhaps from some younger F.O. operative’s mathematics text,” a symbol of the Force/Quantity which he opposes, has always opposed even when he played the game, and now aggressively seeks to eliminate. “Unlike Constantine on the verge of battle,” Porpentine cannot “afford, this late, to be converted at any sign” (SL 134). Porpentine is not converted, nor does he achieve heroic stature as a spy. However, his pursuit of the German trio, who have come to represent the Force, the Quantity that seeks to “toll down” the individual, Porpentine makes a commitment to the personal and, in doing so, crosses “some threshold without knowing” and becomes humanized. By personalizing his love/hatred of Moldweorp, by negotiating the release of Goodfellow and Victoria, by complimenting his executioners (“‘You have been good enemies,’ he said at last”), by realizing that he did have a “new role” to learn “if there had been more time,” Porpentine chooses the human role, one which prepares him for the possibility of transcendence and spiritual redemption.

Porpentine is unsuccessful both as a Dionysian and as an Apollonian in this story: he is a voyeur in the game of love and a failure as a spy. He experiences no conversion, either religious (as did Constantine on the verge of battle) or secular (to the new “group enterprise” method of espionage). Yet, as an Orphean figure who descends to the quantum level of the personal seeking to redeem, he is as successful as one can become in the Pynchonesque scheme: he is humanized and thereby centrally positions himself between the extremes where uncertainty and possibility, its corollary, flourish. He arrives at this position tentatively, as do all Pynchon seekers, and only after his encounter with Victoria, his Eurydice, who, like other Eurydices in Pynchon’s fiction, functions as a means to
move him toward spiritual redemption. This she does by discovering “the woman in him,” by awakening his intuition, and by drawing him below the “threshold for compassion.” This is his first step toward redemption and transcending the Newtonian space he has traversed as a spy, the itinerary of “transitory and accidental” events of history he has encountered. There, he begins to admit that the espionage game is played only on the map-like surface because it is “convenient” and “necessary” to do so; he begins to acknowledge the “deeper” truth that all of them operated in no conceivable Europe but rather in a zone forsaken by God, between the tropics of diplomacy, lines they were forbidden forever to cross” (SL 113).

The possibility of spiritual redemption is apparent when the title, “Under the Rose,” and some of the ramifications of its symbolism are examined with regard to Porpentine’s spiritual journey, his descent, his uncertainty, and his moment of decision. The rose, according to Steven Weisenburger in A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion, is “a principle symbol of Rosicrucianism” which represents “the dawn of the first day,” light, the renewal of life, and “more particularly the Resurrection” (254). The association of the rose with spiritual renewal is also connected to Victoria Wren who is linked to the rose imagery in several instances. After the party at the Austrian Consulate, the group (including Victoria and Porpentine) dash across the rue de Rosette to a restaurant where Porpentine learns of Victoria’s infatuation with God Whom she considers as she would “any eligible bachelor” and Whom she associates with her “wild or renegade” uncle from Australia whose yarns she “played with,” especially in Mass, a “stage,” a “dramatic field already prepared, serviceable to a seedtime fancy” (SL 112). Later, in relation to her sexual involvement with Goodfellow, Porpentine wonders “idly if she were bud or bloom; or perhaps a petal blown off and having nothing to belong to any more” and then links this thought to an image of his own generation as having “budded, bloomed, and, sensing some blight in the air, folded its petals up again” (SL 114). At the end of the story, is Porpentine’s “hallucination” of the “bell-shaped curve” with its “invisible clapper” hanging beneath it:
an inverted celestial rose, perhaps, symbol of resurrection and eternal life, under which the climax of the story is played out. *Under* is where Porpentine goes (beneath the surface of things) to find meaning in his personal life, meaning which, tragically enough, he just begins to glimpse at before he dies. The title itself is a translation of the Latin phrase, *sub rosa*, which means, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "in secret, secretly" and is related to the "ancient use of the rose at meetings as a symbol of the sworn confidence of the participants" (*Random House College Dictionary*). Although the notion of secrecy is certainly connected to espionage, an activity on which "Under the Rose" focuses, the story introduces the nascent idea that below or beneath the surface level of experience lies a secret or hidden source of connection that is available to those willing to encounter uncertainty in order to open themselves to humanizing and redemptive possibilities.

Porpentine’s recognition and conscious choice of the middle way, his quantum-Orphic descent into the personal regardless of the consequences, initiates the redemptive process. Recognition of conscious choice in a realm of uncertainty also provides a means of transcending the boundaries of Newtonian space and time much as it provided the means to escape from this life and union with the divine in the Orphic religion. Until his encounter with Victoria, Porpentine has lived a surface level existence in Newtonian space and time. The "space" of his life has been geographical, a chessboard map of Europe and Africa demarcated by horizontal and vertical lines like those of a Cartesian grid. In such a space, he "performed" his part. Together with his fellow actors, he played the game of espionage, acted out history with its irrevocable one-directional arrow of time until "the game for its own sake . . . acted as an irresistible vector aimed toward 1900" (SL 113) and the promise of apocalypse. Yet Porpentine longs to "fall under the spell of Egypt . . . [and] its curious gods"; he longs--has always longed--for it and, after his encounter with Victoria, begins to seek it in spaces religiously/mythologically sacred. On a "whim" he enters the small Gothic church the interior of which is laced with "certain intricate veinings, weird petal-shapes," where Victoria’s father plays Bach. Later that evening he encounters
and communicates intuitively with Victoria who catalyzes his movement toward redemption. His "moment of uncertainty" and subsequent decision to redeem the personal occurs in another mytho-sacred space, the theatre in Ezbekiyeh Gardens.

David Cowart is correct when he claims that Porpentine is an "inferior spy." Porpentine not only dies, but Goodfellow whose release he secures is ultimately unsuccessful in preventing the assassination of Ferdinand, the event that "sparks" World War I. Nor does Porpentine redeem Victoria who, sixteen years later, has been replaced as Goodfellow's latest conquest by a nameless "blonde barmaid" only interested in his money. Even from a purely mythical perspective, Porpentine is unsuccessful: "Unlike Constantine on the verge of battle, he could not afford, this late, to be converted at any sign" (SL 134). Still, when viewed from that hazy quantum middle ground situated between the two, Porpentine becomes a candidate for spiritual redemption and, in a subtle sense, transcends the Newtonian space and time in which he has "played the game." By having "the woman in him" awakened by Victoria, Porpentine chooses to descend to the intuitive; by enduring the "sick moment of uncertainty," Porpentine experiences a personal moment of decision wherein all possibilities are contained; and by yelling at Moldweorp, Porpentine collapses the possible outcomes and places himself (not some impersonal Force or Quantity) in control and thereby escapes the external limitations—the space (Egypt) and time (1898)—of his surface-level existence.

Though "Under the Rose" is an early story, it nevertheless contains evidence of the extremes and the means which Pynchon will employ, expand in V., and further complicate in his later novels. The extremes are present in this story in its settings and in its characters. Mythologically, Egypt is an ancient country replete with bizarre figures like the Sphinx and Harmakhis; on a Newtonian plane, Egypt is a political country which, as the Fashoda Crisis breaks in 1898, becomes the stage for an attempted assassination and potential apocalypse. The characters as well represent extremes: Goodfellow is a Dionysian; Moldweorp is an Apollonian; Bongo-Shaftesbury is a machine, a Force, a
Quantity masquerading as both. Porpentine coupled with Victoria form the nascent Golden Mean. Victoria, the Eurydice figure, is courted by both extremes, the man (Goodfellow) and the machine (Bongo-Shaftsby), and her uncertain position between the two seems to awaken Porpentine to his own unexplored possibilities. Like Orpheus, Porpentine descends against all odds, and by doing so refuses to become complicit in the pre-determined world of political espionage where the outcomes are predictable and the players replaceable. Porpentine’s descent into the quantum world of personal experience reveals to him the superficial nature of his past. As a result, in that “decisive” and singular moment, Porpentine chooses the personal over the statistical and gains control over his life, an act that, like Orpheus’ looking back at Eurydice, like measurement performed at the quantum level, has repercussions far beyond his own space and time. Thus, the final paragraph of the story is projected sixteen years beyond Porpentine’s death to another time and another place in the game of espionage, another attempted assassination—of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, 1914. History is not altered this time by Goodfellow as it was altered by Porpentine’s descent to personal uncertainty because Goodfellow is still playing his prescribed role as spy; Goodfellow does not die, but neither does he save the world from apocalypse as did Porpentine whose “sick moment of uncertainty” may well have forestalled the apocalypse for another sixteen years. More importantly, even though Porpentine dies a failure as a spy in the eyes of the Newtonian world, he does not die before other options, new roles and other times, are envisioned.

**Extremes and Means in Pynchon’s Fiction**

The espionage motif of “Under the Rose” which establishes the expectation of rivalry between the adversarial countries of England and Germany and their representative spies is a motif that is continued and complicated in *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Even so, the real extremes in both novels and Pynchon’s other novels as well are represented less by the adversarial countries than by the polarities established by Dionysian and Apollonian characters associated with both sides, by the Newtonian landscapes they traverse and their
encounters with the miraculous for which their extremist impulses and activities leave them ill-prepared. The Dionysians and Apollonians in Pynchon’s fiction experience only the macrocosmic observable world which Newtonian physics explains quite accurately—the surface level of experience in V. and Pynchon’s later novels. For them Wittgenstein’s statement that “the world is all that is the case” holds true (Grayling 33). Even though both sets of characters encounter “intrusions” of another world into this one, their extremism prevents them from recognizing the miraculous or from interpreting the world from a “median” perspective. Thomas Pynchon’s novels include two very broad extremist schemata. The first juxtaposes two sets of characters, Dionysians and Apollonians, whose perspectives and activities establish them as polar opposites as far away from median behavior as is possible. The second juxtaposes two extreme interpretations of the observable world, the mythological and the Newtonian. Both Dionysians and Apollonians traverse only the Newtonian world because that is all they are prepared to encounter. The Apollonians believe they can understand and control the world; the Dionysians have no interest in either and their frenzied activities prevent them from trying. In “Under the Rose,” the Apollonians are the German trio which includes Moldweorp, Lepsius, and Bongo-Shaftsbury who seek to control and dominate, who play the game of espionage across the chessboard of Europe and Africa. The Dionysian is Goodfellow who, in the end, is only out to seduce young women. He too plays the espionage game but with no intention of affecting the outcome. None has a miraculous encounter; none affects the outcome of the game; all are replaceable players.

In contrast to these two extremes, however, is the essential player in the “infinite game” of Pynchon’s fiction. Such a game is described by James P. Carse in his 1986 book entitled Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of life as Play and Possibility: The infinite game is played without boundaries and with rules that change in order to continue play which is the purpose of the infinite game; infinite players expect to be “transformed” rather than annihilated, and they understand nature’s “essential incomprehensibility.”1 In
"Under the Rose," V. and the later novels these characters are Orphean and as such represent a middle way between the Dionysians and the Apollonians though they are connected to both. These characters, like Porpentine, encounter Eurydice figures who cause them to "descend" below the surface level of experience associated with the observable world. During these descents, the characters are forced to encounter that which lies below the surface (the Underworld), the place where life and death connect, a world fraught with uncertainty. Here, Orpheans must make choices, and because they choose, they return to the surface changed, transformed by their experience. Their experiences and transformations often have far-reaching effects; like Orpheus they often return to sing of their experience. Orpheans traverse many landscapes. They reside in the Newtonian world which is mapped and bordered; they descend to the Quantum underworld where they encounter uncertainty and make decisions; this experience prepares them to encounter the sacred within the observable world to which they return, transform, and transcend. Even though Porpentine dies, his moment of uncertainty and subsequent decision perhaps forestalled the outbreak of World War I. However, in order to understand this very complicated metaphor which, I will argue, is central to the meaning V. and Pynchon's later novels, the extremes represented by Dionysian and Apollonian characters and Newtonian and mythological landscapes and perspectives must be examined in some detail as well as the median, the Golden Mean, symbolized by Orphean characters and their Eurydices and the "Underworld" of quantum physics which effects their transformation.

The Dionysians

The Dionysians of Pynchon's fiction have precursors that reach far back into primitive religious practices and connect the characters to Dionysus and the mysteries that celebrated him as a deity, to the Eleusian mysteries associated with Demeter the Earth goddess and her daughter Persephone, and to the even more ancient concept of feminine fertility worship the focus of which was the death and rebirth of nature and the natural world's continuous renewal. The Eleusian mysteries practiced by the Greeks c. 2500-1000
BC focused on Demeter, a fertility goddess of the “telluric earth” said to have mourned for Persephone, her daughter, who was required to stay in the Underworld with Hades six months out of each year. During this time, Demeter caused the earth to be barren to reflect her mourning for Persephone’s absence. Life returned to the earth only when Persephone returned to Demeter for the other six months. The seed-time festival of Thesmophoria, part of the Eleusian mysteries, lasted three days and included a “downgoing,” an “upcoming,” a “fasting,” and the sacrifice of pigs. The return of Persephone was associated with an ear of grain which may have been a prototype of the grain-based host of the Christian mass. Life coming out of darkness, life coming from death, the eating of the divine substance: these are mythological motifs Joseph Campbell associates with the Eleusian mysteries and also with the worship of Dionysus (Transformation 190-94). Like Demeter and Persephone who are connected with the earth and the production of grain, Dionysus is a vegetation god, the god of the vine. In at least one version of the Dionysian myth, Dionysus, like Persephone, is an offspring of Demeter and Zeus. The connection of the worship of Dionysus with the Eleusian mysteries which celebrated Demeter and her daughter Persephone is an important one in Pynchon’s Dionysian characters who often awaken various Orpheus and Eurydice figures to an awareness, like Propentine, of the need for the feminine principle and life-giving force which often leads to a transforming spiritual experience.

Pynchon also associates his Dionysian characters with the extreme forms of frenzied behavior enacted in the Dionysian mysteries. According to Walter F. Otto in Dionysus: Myth and Cult, Dionysus was the god of “most blessed ecstasy” and “enraptured love” as well as the “persecuted god, the suffering and dying god, and his worship is associated with the obsession and frenzy of his women worshippers, the miracle of wine, the proximity of death, and tragic drama. Dionysus is a god very different from the Olympians, and the worship of Dionysus is considered older than that of Apollo (49-53); Dionysian worship predates the Iliad and makes it indigenous to Greek civilization.
by the end of the second millennium BC (Otto 58). As god of the Vine Dionysus gave men wine and incited men to savagery, even to lust for blood. The Dionysian cult practiced the wearing of masks; religious ecstasy was celebrated with drums, flutes, cymbals. The world itself was seen by the followers of Dionysus as “bewitched,” as “transformed” from ordered routine to the evocation of both “infinite rapture and infinite terror” (Otto 95). Wine in endless supply was a vehicle for this epiphany. Pynchon’s Dionysian characters frequently exhibit drunk and disorderly behavior associated with the worshippers of the god in the second millennium BC.

Two more important connections between Pynchon’s Dionysian characters occur in the emergence of theatre and tragedy from the Dionysian rituals and his disbursement at the hands of the Titans in the myth. Throughout Dionysus: Myth and Cult, Otto stresses the dual nature of Dionysus: his association with ecstasy and horror, vitality and destruction, pandemonium and silence, presence and remoteness, life and death (121). Dionysus is the essence of “divine madness” associated with “the impulse to create” and has intimate connections with sex (the procreative urge) and death (135-38). In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche juxtaposes the Dionysian rites of the Greeks, “rites of universal redemption, of glorious transfiguration” which he claims furnished the basis for tragedy, against the rationality and form associated with the worship of Apollo. The “musical dissonance” of the earliest Dionysian revels, Nietzsche maintains, creates delight even as it evokes pain and anguish; the “rapture” and “excess” of Dionysian ritual suggest the unity of mankind, the unity of mankind with nature and the earth, and the unity of joy and pain, joy and terror, joy and lament over “irrecoverable loss” (26): in other words, truth in contradiction. The paradoxical nature of Dionysian worship in many ways suggests the twentieth century phenomenon of Niels Bohr’s Complementarity Principle which is essential to quantum theory and to Pynchon’s concept of the Golden Mean. The theatre and theatrical space, according to Nietzsche an outgrowth of the Dionysian mysteries, in Pynchon’s novels becomes a quantum space in which extremes are ameliorated. In addition, the myth of
Dionysus’ disbursement anticipates the disbursement of Orpheus, the worship of whom, according to Joseph Campbell, grew out of the Dionysian mysteries. In the myth, Dionysus was named by Zeus to become the ruler of a new generation of gods. However, while Dionysus was still a child, the Titans, associated with chaos, used a mirror and other play things to distract him and then killed him, tore his body to pieces, and tasted his flesh. From his limbs and heart which were saved by Apollo and Athena, Zeus first resurrected Dionysus and, in retaliation, destroyed the Titans with a thunderbolt. From their ashes, Zeus fashioned a race of mortal men who possessed a two-fold nature: earthbound (from the Titans) but tending toward immortality (the Titans, impiously ate Dionysus’ immortal flesh) (Gutherie 79-83). The tearing apart of Dionysus’ body anticipates Orpheus’ dismembering and disbursement; in Pynchon’s works such a disbursement becomes a metaphor for the elimination of one’s ego and the selflessness that is a pre-requisite for spiritual transformation. Important to Thomas Pynchon’s fiction are characters who possess Dionysian characteristics, who engage in Dionysian behavior, or who instigate activities suggestive of the frenzy of Dionysian ritual. Such characters are identified with random behavior in the extreme and are juxtaposed against their very formulated, regulated, and predictable counterparts, the Apollonians. Pynchon’s Dionysians may be associated with madness, but the madness is never divine, even though they may lead others to revelation. That Pynchon’s Dionysian characters often encounter the sacred without being changed by the experience suggests that they are deficient in their abilities to encounter the divine. As a result, sacred moments are missed, “redemptions” and “transfigurations” fail to occur. In Pynchon’s fiction, Dionysian frenzy represents the extreme of excess that Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics labels as a “vice” because it hinders the attainment of the median or mean.

The Apollonians

Pynchon’s Apollonian characters exhibit another extreme form of behavior that evokes the Aristotelian “vices” of “excess” and “deficiency.” Pynchon’s Apollonians find
their prototype in Apollo, "the typical god of the Greeks" according to W. K. C. Gutherie in *Orpheus and the Greek Religion*. Apollo was a patriarchal Olympian who, with the other Olympians, displaced the older and more primitive matriarchal fertility goddesses and described traditional Greek religion following the "heroic age" in Greece c. 1300-1184 BC. The characteristics of Pynchon's Apollonian, whom Pynchon sets in opposition to both the feminine principle and the Dionysians, are most appropriately delineated by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. As the Greek god of light and archery, Nietzsche associates Apollo with knowledge, restraint, and "scientific optimism" (104). Apollo, he says, is the "principium individuationis" (22), the principle of separation of the creation into its recognizable components. Reality in the Apollonian sense is an "empiric reality" "unfolding in time, space and causality" (33). Periodically Nietzsche speaks of the Apollonian way as "rigid," "threatening," as a "perpetual military encampment" (35). Apollo is further connected by Nietzsche to the concepts of order, science, and epic poetry which concerns the rise and fall of nations. Even though the worship of Apollo and the other Olympian gods eventual displaced the more chaotic "mysteries" that characterized the worship of Demeter, Persephone, and Dionysus, the opposition between the two, according to Gutherie in *Orpheus and the Greek Religion* was not as pronounced as it may appear. Gutherie comments on this displacement by noting the "division" in Greek religion that existed between the Olympian gods of "sanity" and "lightheartedness" and the "cults of the earth" associated with the mysteries of Demeter and Dionysus, darkness, and "mystical yearnings for union" between the gods and man; he remarks that even though the two were quite different, they were often worshipped by the same people (6-8). In Pynchon's fiction the Apollonian impulse does become a metaphor for rationalism, "scientific optimism," rigidity, and the manifestation toward control and domination that are found both in the behavior of individuals who attempt by overt or covert means to dominate others and in the activities of various countries who seek to exert their power over other countries through colonialism or war. In "Under the Rose," V. and *Gravity's Rainbow* these countries--
always opposed to each other—are England and Germany with America in the background serving its apprenticeship in the first half of the twentieth century for its position of dominance after World War II. In *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland*, the Apollonian impulse is associated with the manufacture of military weapons and land development in America, symbolized by Pierce Inverarity and his associates in *Crying*, and with the Reagan Administration and its avatars, Brock Vond, Hector Zuniga, Roscoe and other government agents in *Vineland*. *Mason & Dixon* regresses to the eighteenth century and to the precursor of the modern Apollonian will to power which emerged with the Age of Reason—the scientific power structure symbolized by Britain’s Royal Society.

Closely associated with the Dionysian and Apollonian characters in Pynchon’s novels are the two more broadly defined extreme approaches to interpreting the natural world—mythology and Newtonian science. The mythological and Newtonian perceptions of time and space establish two extreme world views in Pynchon’s fiction that are often set in opposition to each other and exhibit themselves in the settings of the novels and in Pynchon’s metaphor of colonialism. Both are most obvious in the masculine novels. In *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* Germany, the most extreme and Newtonian of the industrialized countries, and its attempt to completely dominate the primitive and mythologically-oriented tribes of South West Africa in 1904 and 1922 provide the geographical and historical context for Pynchon’s metaphor of colonialism which symbolically suggests the juxtaposition of these extreme and polar impulses. The colonizing metaphor resurfaces in his 1997 novel, *Mason & Dixon*, with Britain as the colonizing country, South Africa and America as the focus of Britain’s colonizing efforts. Another dimension of the colonizing impulse appears in the feminine novels, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland*. These novels depict an America in which the corporate power structure and government have turned colonization efforts against their own people in an attempt to dominate and victimize the feminine life force which, by its nature, is ambiguous and unexplainable. The extreme perspectives represented by mythology and Newtonian science both structure Pynchon’s
novels and are necessary, as they are in the Aristotelian scheme, in defining the mean, the
cosmos as irrational and intuitive, a view which most experts in religion and
anthropology associate with ancient and/or primitive cultures. The mythological view
perceives an order in the cosmos which is attributed to divinities or superior forces. Such
order is discoverable by but ultimately incomprehensible to human beings who are,
however, able to discern "eruptions" of the sacred into the natural world, discover the
power of divinity in ordinary matter, and perceive the organic world as full of mystery.
Most of Pynchon's characters, living in a post-Newtonian world, find themselves unable to
access such a perception. The exceptions to this are primitive tribal peoples, most notably
the Herero tribe of South West Africa in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* and the American
Indian tribes in *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*; these become the representatives of the
mythological perspective in Pynchon's fiction, a perspective that is no longer viable for
"enlightened" characters after the Age of Reason. A mythic approach to the world deifies
objects and phenomena, and it seeks to connect terrestrial and celestial events. In the
mythical description of the natural world, the wheel becomes a symbol of the revolving
celestial spheres, the moving image of unmoving eternity; the circle, a symbol of the eternal
return, the birth, death, and rebirth of nature (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 68-110).
The concept of the "eternal return" is one that has ceased to be a possibility for the
characters in Pynchon's fiction who live in countries--England, Germany, America--
enlightened by Newtonian science and the Age of Reason. Mircea Eliade explains this
phenomenon: "repetition emptied of religious content necessarily leads to a pessimistic
vision of existence," he writes; "when it is desacralized, cyclic time becomes terrifying"
(The Sacred and the Profane 107); this is the situation experienced by most of Pynchon’s characters.

In the post-Newtonian world of Pynchon’s novels, the concepts of time and space as viewed from a mythological perspective likewise become problematic. Mythical time is reversible time; it is time arrested. Though cosmic time is unmoving, humans in the mythical scheme can “reactualize” sacred events and “regenerate” time in the process. The main sacred event which is repeated or reactualized is the creation of the cosmos (order) out of chaos. This reactualization is accomplished on a human scale through ritual acts and religious festivals. During these “sacred” moments or periods, time conflates and humans become contemporary with the gods. The conflation of time and contemporaneity with the gods may occur in essential human activities (sex, planting or harvesting, building a house, settling new land) in which divine activity is reactualized; it may occur during religious festivals which emulate sacred events; it may occur in observance of the “eternal return” associated with nature’s rhythms which acknowledges the intimate connection between life and death (Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane 68-106). While both fear and delight are evoked by nature’s spontaneity and cosmic surprise, basically the mythic view of time is that of flux within stasis, time regenerated within eternity. The still point amid flux, a Pynchonesque symbol of the Golden Mean, has been rendered unavailable to Pynchon’s characters through the mythological perspective; it has been negated by Newtonian science and its avatars who, in Pynchon’s fiction, symbolically seek to annihilate the mythological perspective by dominating the cultures that hold such a perspective and by displacing the mythological view with rational explanation.

The mythic conception of space, like the mythic conception of time, however, both simplifies and complicates the concept of space, especially for Pynchon’s post-Newtonian characters. Mythical space allows no vacuum: the world is consecrated by divine infusion. Space is never homogenous but is punctuated by certain interruptions of the sacred into the natural world which delineate points of connection between the human and the divine.
These “sacred spaces,” according to Eliade, become “thresholds” which allow passage beyond the human condition and connection with that which lies beyond human understanding. Examples of Eliade’s sacred spaces may be as varied as houses which contain some kind of “cosmic axis” that allows access to the sky (i.e., a hole or chimney); mountains which represent the axis itself; temples/basilicas/churches that become transcendent models for the “sanctified cosmos;” “crossroads” which form four right angles, representing the four horizons of the universe and become sites for the founding of villages; territories which people claim, occupy, or settle (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 20-65). The theatre too becomes a space wherein meanings connect (Jones 55-7).

The very acts of construction (house, temple), of founding (village, city), of occupying or settling (territory), of performing (theatre) then become creative acts replicating the original divine creation of order out of chaos; the sacred spaces constructed, points of connection between the human and the divine. Even the earth itself, mythically viewed, becomes such a threshold connecting the underworld, the human, and the divine. Associated with thresholds is the notion of the dangerous passages and crises of initiation. The initiation passage is often a descent through a narrow gate into darkness followed by an ascent into light, a journey which mythically represents spiritual maturing suggestive of death (to the old ignorant state), followed by a period of spiritual chaos (darkness), and leading finally to rebirth (into the new, spiritually enlightened condition) (Campbell, *Transformation* 190-201). Sacred space in the Eliadean sense becomes a central metaphor in Pynchon’s novels. Although Pynchon’s sacred spaces exhibit quantum characteristics, they always recall Eliade’s “thresholds” which furnish Pynchon’s Orphean and Eurydice characters a conduit to spiritual experience all but denied those living in a “desacralized” world. Pynchon’s sacred spaces, though “quantumized,” are those delineated by Eliade and Jones: houses with openings to the sky, mountains, churches, crossroads, territories to be settled, theatres. In Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme, as in Eliade’s, the Earth becomes a threshold between the underworld (death) and the divine via human experience.
Many of Pynchon’s extreme characters, whether Apollonian or Dionysian, traverse Newtonian landscapes and encounter various instances of mythological/sacred phenomena. However, because they are extreme characters with extreme points of view, they have only a limited context within which they are able to interpret these encounters, or, as Pynchon calls them in *The Crying of Lot 49*, “another world’s intrusion into this one” (120). Instances of such intrusion pervade Pynchon’s fictive worlds; yet, most of the novels’ characters are either unaware that they have experienced such intrusions or are unable or unwilling to reflect upon or interpret them; generally speaking, these characters remain oblivious to and unaffected by their experiences primarily because, to use Aristotle’s language, they are victims of “deficiency” or “excess,” the two extremes which prevent the discovery and attainment of “the mean” which Aristotle associates with “success” and “moral virtue” (42-43). In Pynchon’s works, the Apollonians experience a “deficiency” of spontaneity, uncertainty, wonder and awe which prevents their attaining the mean; Dionysians have an excess of spontaneity and uncertainty which is evident in their erratic and frenzied behavior but are deficient in wonder and awe that could lead them to spiritual transformation. In a world of extremist characters, impulses, and activities, the sacred along with the possibility of personal redemption or transformation becomes remote, and the last half of the twentieth century becomes a frightening prospect. When the primitive conception of cosmic rhythm has been emptied of its religious content, time itself becomes “precarious and evanescent . . . leading irredeemably to death” (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 108-113): this is the “exitlessness” that Pynchon’s characters fear. V. and *Gravity’s Rainbow* depict Western Civilization at the midpoint of the twentieth century as confronting the consequences of cyclic connections lost and the terrifying nature of time and space desacralized. Technology has become inextricably wedded to daily lives, a sense of natural rhythm has diminished, time is no longer cyclical but digitalized, space is a marketable commodity or contains a marketable commodity, and human beings find
themselves disconnected and lacking the resources for finding, in Pynchon’s words, “a way back”.²

In their discussion of the mythological views of sacred time and space, both Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell comment on the change that occurred in both concepts with the advent of Judeo-Christian monotheism, a phenomenon which becomes a predominant metaphor for the paradoxical nature of religion in post-Newtonian Europe and America. Judaism, Eliade and Campbell maintain, thrust religion into history when God intervened in human activity and spoke to His “chosen people.” Christianity valorized history with God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ during a particular historical moment (Pontius Pilate’s governorship of Judaea): the event (Christ’s birth and crucifixion) itself is non-repeatable (except by liturgy); God entered history for a transhistorical purpose, the salvation of humankind (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 110-13; Campbell, *Transformation* 108-9). The intrusion of the divine into history, especially with regard to the Incarnation of Christ as a non-repeatable religious phenomenon, Eliade and Campbell suggest, raises questions concerning the mythological concepts of the eternal return associated with nature worship and the notion of flux within stasis, time regenerated within eternity. Such questions, along with an examination of the relationship between the extreme world views represented by mythology and Newtonian science--Judeo-Christian monotheism paradoxically insists upon elements of both perspectives--become central to an examination of Pynchon’s metaphor of extremes and means and the possibility of a spiritual dimension of existence. Although certain aspects of Judeo-Christian monotheism--the patriarchal authoritative nature of Judaism, Catholicism, Puritanism--associate it with the Newtonian perspective, other aspects--the mystery, awe, and incomprehensibility evoked by the Trinity and the Christian sacrament of communion--connect it to ancient fertility myths. In his metaphor of extremes and means, Pynchon explores the paradoxical implications of westernized Judeo-Christian religious tradition with its post-Newtonian mutations.
The Newtonian World View

One aspect of Thomas Pynchon's metaphor of extremes and means draws on the displacement of the mythological world view by the scientific, a phenomenon that occurred in the seventeenth century, a century central to Pynchon's metaphor because various scientific discoveries and events produced dramatic philosophical and theological changes in the perception of the relationship between human beings and the natural world which they inhabit. Because the change was so profound and irreversible and because the seventeenth century is so pivotal to an understanding of Pynchon's metaphorical scheme, the central premise of this study, I have chosen to examine the major scientific premises of the Newtonian "paradigm" which displaced the mythological view of the natural world. Sir Isaac Newton's description of his "System of the World" described in his *Principia* (1687), of course, was not his alone but depended on the principles of numerous other scientists and mathematicians who preceded him. One of the most ancient and influential of these was Euclid who in *The Elements* (c. 300 BC) presented a "nearly exact" description of the observed features of the physical world via his geometry of rigid bodies. Just as crucial to the formulation of Newton's theories was René Descartes' publication of *La Géométrie* (1637) which transformed mathematics by showing that physical problems, especially those of mechanics, could be presented in spatial terms (i.e., on the Cartesian grid) and could be solved algebraically (Gjertsen 169-71). These two concepts of geometry, according to Roger Penrose, represent an "idealization of experience" (161) and enabled Newton to conceive his "System of the World" in idealized terms. In addition, Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode* (1637) philosophically ushered in the Age of Reason and provided a framework within which Newton derived his theories and his description of the universe. Descartes emphasized reason as the chief tool of philosophical inquiry; through reason he offered a proof of the existence of God and the physical world. Descartes is also credited with separating the mind (thinking substance) from matter (extended substance). He believed that the physical world (but not the mind) was subject
to the laws of science and that events could be scientifically predicted and explained (Discourse 39-96).

Descartes' separation of mind and matter and Newton's incorporation of this concept into his theories represents in Pynchon's schemata a major schism between the mythological perception of the world which embraces the union of human beings and nature and Newtonian science which views them as separate and which relegates humans to a position of superiority over nature. Euclid and Descartes, however, were not the only influences on the formulation of Newton's "System" although they did provide a philosophical and spatial arena for delineating the natural world and suggest that human beings through their capacity for reason were capable of understanding it. Many of Newton's scientific precursors emerged from the Renaissance with its emphasis on humanism, three-dimensional perspective, and scientific investigation. According to Joseph Campbell, the publication of Copernicus' "Six Books on the Revolution of the Celestial Orbs" (De revolutionibus orbium Celestium libri VI) is the quintessential event that marked the great break between science and religion (Inner Reaches 43). Shortly thereafter Johannes Kepler discovered several laws of planetary motion that later became an indispensable part of Newton's discovery of universal gravitation. Most importantly, in the early 1600's Galileo Galilei published two books considered dangerous by the church, A Dialogue on the Two Principle Systems of the World (1632) which supported the Copernican system over the Ptolemaic and Discourse (1638) which launched the new subject of dynamics (bodies in motion) and, in Roger Penrose's words, precipitated "the transformation from ancient mysticism to modern science"(162), a transformation that consistently creates the problematic context within which Pynchon's characters attempt to function.

With these heavyweights as his intellectual precursors, Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) made four phenomenal discoveries between 1665 and 1667 which changed human perception of the world: 1) he invented a new kind of mathematics (integral and differential
calculus); 2) he devised three laws of motion; 3) he described how the universe is held together through a theory of gravitation; 4) he proposed a theory of light and color. His theories of motion and gravitation were eventually published in his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) which focuses on “principles not philosophical but mathematical . . . from the same principles,” he says, “I now demonstrate the frame of the System of the World” (qtd. in Kroes 254). The *Principia* offers definitions of absolute time, space, place, and motion: “‘Absolute, true, and mathematical time’” and “‘Absolute space’ . . . [are] presented as being ‘without relation to anything external.’” Absolute place, then, “becomes a part of absolute space taken up by a body; and absolute motion is merely ‘a translation of a body from one absolute place into another’” (Gjertsen 2). Newton also presented three famous laws governing the behavior of material objects; the first two, Penrose claims, he owed to Galileo: 1) if no force acts on a body, it continues to move uniformly in a straight line; 2) if a force does not act on it, the mass times acceleration equals that force; 3) “to every action there is always opposed an equal reaction” (qtd. in Penrose: 166).

Newton described the “System of the World” as a cosmic machine the mechanisms of which were regulated, clocklike, and deterministic. Euclidean space is the arena for all physical activity; there matter indulges in activity but is constrained by precise mathematical laws. The laws which govern the universe are time-reversible and completely calculable, predictable, intelligible; the cosmic machine allows for no chance or free will. In this universe the future is fixed by the past and the past by the future; precise measurement at a single point in time and space allows accurate rediction and prediction of events. Newtonian theory shows a predilection for a single spatial (Cartesian) metaphor which separates mind from matter, subject from object; no “mind” influences or modifies the behavior of matter. In other words, with or without an intelligent observer, the universe will tick on toward its predictable end according to certain immutable laws. Particles move around in a space which is subject to the laws of Euclid’s geometry; the observable world
is entirely stable and orderly which demands a precise and determinate system of dynamical equations (integral and differential calculus) which are time-symmetric (work no matter which side of the equation is considered first). This deterministic scheme which excludes free will, according to Roger Penrose, has had a “profound influence on philosophical thought” (167) and furnishes an extreme in Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme that appears to be antithetical to the mythological world view. Newton’s notions of absolute time and space, of a completely deterministic universe that operates on a set of laws discernible by human beings who find themselves separate from the natural world they occupy and observe with no opportunity for chance occurrences or the exercise of free will is an extreme in Pynchon’s scheme which threatens the human instinct for connection and suggests that they are in a profound sense machines themselves.

The loss of connection and the implication that human beings have become mechanized in the post-Newtonian world in Pynchon’s fiction finds additional metaphorical representation in concepts spawned by the Newtonian System of the World and the advent of the Industrial Revolution. With the invention of the steam engine by James Watt in 1787, scientific attention, particularly in the area of physics, turned to thermodynamics and resulted in the formulation of certain laws. The First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics became incorporated into classical theory initiated by Newton. The First Law, the law of energy conservation and a deduction from Newtonian mechanics, is time symmetrical (Penrose 305-6). It states that in any closed system (a system that can be isolated from the rest of the universe), the total quantity of energy is constant; the quantity of heat that disappears is constant with the amount of other kinds of energy that reappear and vice versa (Whitrow 4)—i.e., an incandescent bulb turns electromagnetic energy into light (Coveney and Highfield 150), to use an example relevant to Pynchon’s Byron the Bulb episode in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. However, in 1865, Rudolph Clausius recognized that while energy may be preserved, it may be rendered unavailable for doing mechanical work. This phenomenon he is explained by entropy, a word he derived from a Greek word
meaning “transformation.” The concept of entropy led to the formulation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics which states:

   every irreversible change in the system will increase its entropy.

Irreversible changes occur when heat passes of its own accord from one part of a system to another at lower temperature. In general, any spontaneous change in the physical or chemical state of a system will lead to an increase of its entropy (Whitrow 5).

This means that heat loss (energy transformation) is irreversible, that dissipation creates an asymmetry between energy and heat, that heat only flows from hot to colder regions not vice versa. The entropy of a system is measured by its “transformation content,” its capacity for change. When that capacity for change is exhausted, maximum entropy of the system (its most random, disordered state) or thermodynamic equilibrium is reached.

Living things attain thermodynamic equilibrium or maximum entropy at death; the universe is supposed to attain this state at heat death when entropy and randomness are maximized and life has vanished (Coveney and Highfield 150-55). An early Pynchon story entitled “Entropy” not surprisingly juxtaposes two extreme characters, a Dionysian named Meatball Mulligan and an Apollonian named Callistro, who live in the same apartment building. Callistro is preoccupied with and fears entropy and attempts to protect himself against it by sealing off his apartment from the outside world which he believes is becoming entropic while Meatball is giving a party with the windows wide open. Callistro’s fear is shared by many of Pynchon’s later characters, especially the Apollonians who adhere to a strictly Newtonian view of the world: if the universe is indeed a cosmic machine, eventually the machine will reach a state of maximum entropy; if human beings are machines themselves, then death, maximum entropy for the human organism, is the final exitless state. The fear of entropy—death of the human organism, society, the universe—is the fear shared by Pynchon’s Apollonian characters who can discover no viable alternative to the exitlessness
of such a state; fear of death/entropy is also a weapon these characters use to gain and keep control over others.

Classical physics had its beginning in Isaac Newton’s “System of the World” put forth in the seventeenth century. However, Roger Penrose’s definition of classical physics includes both Isaac Newton’s mechanics and Albert Einstein’s theories of relativity which dominated scientific thought before about 1925 and the emergence of quantum theory (149). In 1905 Albert Einstein, in his scientific paper on relativity published in the German physics journal Annalen der Physik under the title “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies” put forward two new postulates: 1) a “relativity principle” asserting that no matter what the velocity of the observer, the laws of physics must be the same throughout the universe, and 2) the speed of light is constant and independent of the motion of the light source or the observer. Taken together, the two postulates went well beyond the ideas of Newton and introduced the notion of relativity into classical theory, and Einstein’s famous formula, $E=mc^2$, established the equivalence of mass and energy in the universe. As a corollary to this idea, Einstein’s “special theory” of relativity makes predictions concerning the masses of moving bodies in space and also predictions concerning time. First, Einstein’s Theory of Special Relativity predicts that bodies moving at speeds approaching the speed of light both contract in length and increase in mass; only the massless photon actually travels at the speed of light (Coveney and Highfield 73-9). Secondly, Einstein’s Theory of Special Relativity necessitated a rethinking of the concept of time which Newton believed to be absolute. The very concept of simultaneity (events taking place at the same moment), Einstein said, depends on the relative speed of the observer who never sees the world right now because light enters the eyes only as fast as the speed of light and not instantaneously. More startling is the phenomenon of time dilation: moving clocks tick more slowly than clocks at rest; as a clock’s motion approaches the speed of light, the interval between ticks increases without limit. Time
dilation has been experimentally verified many times since the emergence of Einstein’s Special Relativity Theory in 1905. Einstein’s Theory of Special Relativity negated Newton’s notions of absolute space and absolute time. Instead, Einstein introduced the concept of absolute *space-time* suggesting, as others had before, that space and time are integrally bound together as a fundamental notion associated with the geometry of the universe, a “metric structure” that is “intrinsic” yet still “independent of any observer” (Coveney and Highfield 80-82). In relativity, space-time is four dimensional (three dimensions of space, one dimension of time). Einstein’s description of the cosmos is reversible and deterministic; it works equally well either backward or forward. Einstein’s relativity guarantees that causality is maintained whatever the observer’s circumstances.

Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity represents his ultimate formulation of “post-Newtonian Gravity.” Basically Einstein transforms gravity into the geometry (curvature) of space-time. This theory maintains that “the extent to which space-time is curved is determined by the distribution of matter in the universe: the greater the density of matter in a region, the higher the curvature of space-time” (Coveney and Highfield 89). Space-time is seen as a kind of rubber sheet stretched flat but dented by massive objects (like the sun, which, being the most massive body in the solar system, dents space-time in that vicinity the most). The new concept of curved space-time necessitated a new law of motion, which, unlike the laws of motion for flat space-time, incorporated gravity. This law states that bodies follow *geodesics*, (Figure 1.1) or lines of the shortest length connecting any two points within curved or flat space-time though at low velocities and low densities of matter, geodesic motion is reduced to the kind Newton described. One essential result of Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity is an effect he had anticipated even before he completed his theory and this concerned the bending of the path of light by matter. The Theory of Special Relativity (*E=mc²*) had established the equivalence of mass and energy, and Einstein reasoned that mass associated with the energy of a ray of light feels the gravitational pull of other matter, is “bent” around a massive body like a star, and follows a
geodesic in curved space (Coveney and Highfield 89-92). In the General Theory of Relativity, both space and time become dynamical quantities: space and time not only affect all that happens in the universe, but are affected by it was well (Hawking 33).

Einstein remained a classical physicist until his death and never accepted the principles of quantum mechanics. However, in Pynchon’s Metaphor of Extremes and Means, several of Einstein’s premises anticipate or even come to represent the Golden Mean. Most obvious is *time dilation* and the notion that as a clock’s motion approaches the speed of light, the interval between ticks increases without limit: the $\Delta t$ in Pynchon’s writings becomes a symbol expressed in scientific terms of the mythical notion of flux within stasis, time regenerated within eternity. The most memorable instance of Pynchon’s use of this symbol occurs at the end of *Gravity’s Rainbow* when the reader is positioned in the Orpheus Theatre in Los Angeles c. 1970—the mythical sacred space—with the rocket—the ultimate product of Newtonian science—fired from Luneberg Heath in Germany on Easter weekend 1945 poised overhead: it is “the last delta-t” we are told (GR 760).

Important too in Pynchon’s metaphor is the notion in Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity that both time and space become dynamical quantities that affect and are affected by all that happens in the universe. Such a notion is apparent in Pynchon’s narrative.
ordering of events which often calls into question the relationship between cause and effect—a relationship maintained by classical physics and by Einstein. Pynchon’s narrative ordering also suggests the breakdown of the relation between cause and effect that occurs at the quantum level at which events happen “without apparent cause” (Corcoran, “A Few More Comments” 2)

Yet another of Pynchon’s metaphors for the Golden Mean has its origins in Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity which predicted the existence of singularities, a prediction that essentially limited the theory itself. Singularities are space-time points which occupy zero volume and have infinite mass. At these points the Theory of General Relativity and all other laws of physics break down. Singularities are thought to exist within black holes, superdense objects in which gravitational attraction collapses matter so that even light itself cannot escape and time dilation is so extreme that time appears to stand still. Black holes are defined by event horizons that represent the points of no return for anything drawn toward them. The singularity at the center of the black hole is unobservable and is where space and time come to an end. Solutions of equations of general relativity suggest that the black hole may lead in fact to a white hole, its time reverse, which might be in another universe, or even another part of our universe, or may produce another Big Bang. This feature arises because general relativity is a time-symmetric theory and while white holes “probably do not exist in nature,” the theoretical possibility of their existence has “considerable significance” (Penrose 335) both in scientific theory and in the metaphysical premises that shape the fictional worlds of Thomas Pynchon. The “last delta-t” at the end of Gravity’s Rainbow, the “still point” amid the world’s flux, the point from which vectors emerge or which the “vectors of evil” assail, Aristotle’s median which is “a point” like the center of a circle: all are representatives of singularities which occupy zero volume and have infinite mass, the points at which all laws of physics break down, points which, in Pynchon’s fiction, suggest conduits to other dimensions of existence.
Newtonian physics emerged during the seventeenth century Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, and dominated scientific thought; it metaphysically molded and modeled a world view which has shaped western culture for three centuries and, according to some serious thinkers on the subject, continues to dominate science, technology, business, and politics. As a metaphor in Pynchon's novels, classical physics' emphasis on rational thought, determinism, cause and effect, time asymmetry in the direction of entropy becomes a metaphor for a brand of extremism that suggests human superiority over the natural world and masquerades as human progress. The Cartesian mind-matter separation in the classical view has enabled human beings to discern certain laws obeyed by external matter and control the natural world. According to Roger Jones in Physics as Metaphor, such a system has been readily embraced because it suggests evidence of order, causality, pattern and harmony that brings unexpected delight to human beings accustomed to and made anxious by the randomness of human experience; scientists who perceive and purport to understand patterns inherent in such a system are elevated to the position of a "priestly class" (35). The Cartesian separation of subject (human beings) from object (the natural world), Jones maintains, ultimately leads to feelings of alienation and fear of extinction (60-63). However, according to several scholars, Ernst Cassirer, Jean-François Lyotard, James P. Carse and Roger Jones among them, the impulse to control nature emerges from a causal view of the universe and often leads to the aggressive behavior of human beings against each other. Mechanization and technology, they say, have played and continue to play a part in human efforts to control not only nature but other human beings, and have resulted in the careless consumption of nature, the production of waste, and may, if not checked, eventually lead to entropy of the natural system. Such associations with classical physics are metaphorically apparent in certain characters, countries, governments including the military, and corporations that populate Pynchon's fiction. These attempt to control natural resources through science and technology, to dominate other characters or countries sometimes through industrial cartels and technical
weaponry, to grant a privileged and authoritative position to those who articulate the rules of what James Carse calls the “finite game”. The characters and countries who represent the Newtonian perspective and the Apollonian will to power in Pynchon’s novels are both players and perpetuators of Carse’s “finite games.” These they play within “temporal,” “spatial,” and “numerical” boundaries with players or teams who strive, through training and deception, to become “Master Players” by executing “terminal moves” that cause the “death” of their opponents as players. War, pervasive in “Under the Rose,” V., and Gravity’s Rainbow, is such a game; the power of its players, Carse suggests, is maintained by theatrics rather than by force, a concept certainly befitting the character of Porpentine who perceives himself as a replaceable player on the chessboard of Europe and echoed by the setting of Gravity’s Rainbow in the last year of World War II in which “all is theatre.”

Though Dionysian and Apollonian characters and mythological and Newtonian perspectives represent the extremes in Thomas Pynchon’s metaphorical construct of extremes and means and provide a structure for his fiction itself representative of the extremes of post-Newtonian human experience, the extremes themselves, though deficient and excessive, are not without merit. In the Pynchonesque scheme, extremes structure human experience even as they contribute to it, and they define the Golden Mean. Dionysus’ behavior may be frenzied and chaotic, but his persona was representative of the with the feminine principle, the connection of human beings with natural order, the duality of human existence, and truth in contradiction associated with Bohr’s Complementarity Principle in quantum physics, one of Pynchon’s metaphors for the Golden Mean. Moreover, out of the worship of Dionysus came the theatre, a mythological threshold and conduit for spiritual transformation in Pynchon’s fiction. Although Apollo is associated by Nietzsche with rigidity, restraint, paternalistic authority and the will to power, he is also the god of music which, in Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme, both employs and transcends ordinary time and space to become a metaphor for metaphor as a device which has the power to unite even mutually exclusive extremes. Interestingly Orpheus, Pynchon’s
median figure, possesses characteristics of both Dionysus and Apollo, and the Orphic religion incorporated beliefs and rituals associated both with the nature worship of the Dionysian mysteries and the religious practices associated with the Olympian Apollo.

The mythological perspective becomes a metaphor in Pynchon’s fiction for a view of the world which became an extreme view only in the seventeenth century when the Newtonian perspective superseded and displaced it and relegated it to the realm of mysticism and superstition. Lost to post-Newtonian enlightened peoples are the mystery and divinity which in the mythological view infused the natural world, is the possibility of nature and ritual as connecting points between the human and the divine, is the intimate connection between life and death reinforced by the telluric and celestial cycles, is the conviction that time can be regenerated within eternity—the assurance of the eternal return. In Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme, these represent connections still necessary to human experience but unavailable to human beings after the Newtonian perspective became the paradigm which rendered the natural world accessible to rational thought. Although Newtonian science displaced the mythological view of the world and severed man’s access to it, the Newtonian view represents merely an extreme view and not one that is inherently detrimental to human experience. In fact classical physics describes the macrocosmic world—both terrestrial and celestial— with remarkable accuracy. Moreover, classical theory’s basic tenets, especially those proposed by Einstein, were necessary, as was calculus, to the emergence of quantum theory, the median perspective in Pynchon’s Metaphor of Extremes and Means. Pynchon’s major metaphors for the concepts of the Golden Mean are derived from ancient Greek religious practices— the mythological character and worship of Orpheus—and twentieth century science—quantum theory. Though both are often overshadowed by the influence the extremes exert on human experience, the Golden Mean emerges in all Pynchon’s novels as the “elusive middle” which functions as a conduit to experiences that both humanize and open the possibility of spiritual transformation.
Orpheus

To the Greeks, Orpheus was both a religious prophet and a mythological character. The first mention of Orpheus as a religious figure was in the sixth century BC; the mysteries that celebrated him as a prophet, a vates, a seer postdated the worship of both Dionysus and Apollo. Both Orpheus and the Orphic religion have dual connections with Dionysus on the one hand and with Apollo on the other. Dionysus and Orpheus both are associated with the dual impulses of human nature. Both are intimately connected with primitive notions of death and dark descents into the earth; both suffer and are savagely torn to pieces (Dionysus by the Titans; Orpheus either by Thracian women or by Dionysus' frenzied women worshippers, the Maenads); both experience resurrection; both are associated with the magical power of music/incantations and religious drama. Yet Orpheus as a religious prophet is also linked to Apollo. Orphism aimed at the "purification of our Dionysian nature" so that one might, at the "crossroads" of life, make rational decisions leading to reward (the Isle of the Blest) rather than punishment (Tartaros). Orphism focused on a belief in immortality and posthumous rewards/punishments through various cycles of birth and rebirth (reincarnation) which, if successfully navigated, would result in an escape from the cycles of this life into a state of perfect union with god. Free will and personal responsibility are part of the Orphic code and life after death is seen as a personal hope (Guthrie 156-85). In its optimism and idealism that suggest the possibility of a spiritual existence, Orphism also exhibits similarities with Christianity. Orpheus' representation in the visual arts, especially those found in the catacombs of Rome, suggest iconographic syncretism between Orphism and Christianity: Orpheus is represented as the Good Shepherd; he, like David, is depicted charming all of nature with his music, the lamb lying down with the lion; on a Haematite amulet c. AD 400, he is also shown crucified on a cross like Christ (Guthrie 261-71). That Orpheus is a religious prophet associated with the worship of Dionysus and Apollo makes him metaphorically appropriate to Pynchon's characters who, through their free will make personal decisions which result in their escape
both from life’s cycles and from death to achieve spiritual transcendence. Pynchon’s Orphic characters represent the Golden Mean of human behavior which allows them both to achieve spiritual transcendence according to the Orphic code and become a means of salvation for others in the Christian sense. However, Orpheus is also a mythological character whose stories have survived most notably in the accounts of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth by two Roman poets—Virgil in his *Fourth Georgics* (c. 3-1 BC) and Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (c. AD 30)—accounts on which Pynchon draws for his Orphic characters.5

Virgil’s account of the myth is particularly pertinent to Pynchon’s treatment of his Orphic figures since he places his account of the myth at the very end of his *Georgics*, a work which focuses on farming and man’s relationship with Nature that is “living and sentient... possessing almost human feeling” (Page qtd. in Wells: 9). Interestingly, Virgil’s account of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth is “framed” by the story of a farmer and beekeeper, Aristaeus, and Virgil alters the end of the Orpheus story by having him fail to rescue Eurydice who in all other previous accounts is saved (Wells 22-23). In Virgil’s version, Aristaeus learns that he is personally responsible for the “death” of his bees and discovers this as a result of his descent to consult Proteus where receives the secret of regenerating the swarm. From Proteus Aristaeus learns that the “death” of his swarm is the result of his pursuit of Eurydice and his attempt to rape her: as she fled, she stepped on an “enormous viper,” was bitten and died, and now the “ghost of Orpheus, calling for his lost bride” demands a punishment to match his crime. Proteus tells him of Orpheus’ charming the citizens of Hades with his music and the subsequent granting of Orpheus’ request to lead Eurydice from the Underworld so that she could return to earth to live out her normal life. Yet, “a weakness” of will caused Orpheus to break the taboo and look back before Eurydice quite reached the Earth, and she vanished back into the Shade. From that moment, Orpheus’ song could no longer move the Underworld; he could play only to the world on this side of the Styx, “filling the landscape with long-drawn painful notes” (qtd.
in Wells: 94). Finally in “one night of orgy the women of Cicones, / Furious that he stood
apart from their holy lust, / Tore his young body and scattered it through the fields” (qtd. in
Wells: 94). His head they flung into the River Hebrus where it repeated the name
“Eurydice” as it rolled “through the land where he was born” until only his voice remained.
This is the story that Proteus tells Aristaeus to explain to him that he is responsible for the
death of his swarm of bees. “[T]he Nymphs Eurydice danced with,” Aristaeus’ mother
tells him, have “sent this plague on your bees;” but then she explains to him the ritual,
involving the blood sacrifice of bulls and heifers, he must perform in order to resurrect the
swarm. These he performs, and miraculously “In the rotten bowels of the cattle, in their
swollen bellies / And bursting from their sides, bees buzzed and swarmed” (qtd. in Wells:
95). Virgil’s framing of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth with Aristaeus’ story 1) juxtaposes
the results of two “crossings” from one world into another (Aristaeus’ is a success;
Orpheus’ is a failure) (Wells 22), 2) compares Aristaeus’ grief over the loss of his swarm
to Orpheus’ grief over his lost Eurydice (for which Aristaeus was responsible), 3) contrasts the possibility of Eurydice’s resurrection (thwarted by Orpheus’ failure of will
and the breaking of the taboo) with the miraculous resurrection of Aristaeus’ swarm, 4) shows the possibility for resurrection (life from death) exists in the acceptance of
responsibility and in the faithful following of “proper rites.” Nature, Aristaeus is told by
his mother, is “quick to forgive” (qtd. in Wells: 94).

Virgil’s account of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth is pertinent to Pynchon’s use of
Orpheus characters and his treatment of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth in his novels. First
Virgil’s account frames the story in an agrarian setting that emphasizes man’s relationship
with and cultivation of nature which is depicted as “sentient,” a depiction Pynchon
frequently echoes in his fiction. Aristaeus, in order to “regenerate” his swarm of bees,
must assume responsibility for their loss and make amends for his transgression; when
Aristaeus makes the “blood sacrifice,” his swarm is miraculously resurrected. In Virgil’s
account the possibility of resurrection is realized by Aristaeus who responds responsibly
whereas Orpheus’ attempt to resurrect Eurydice is thwarted by his weakness of will. Central to my argument are Pynchon’s focus on responsibility as a prerequisite to the possibility of spiritual regeneration and the difficulty Pynchon’s characters experience in their attempts to follow the middle way. Virgil’s account of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth, couched as it is in Aristeas’ attempt to resurrect his swarm, thematically connects Virgil’s account with Pynchon’s numerous treatments of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth: in some, the Orpheus figure succeeds in rescuing Eurydice from the world of death; in others, he is unsuccessful.

Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (c. 3-1 BC) dramatically modifies Virgil’s account. In Ovid’s version Hymen leaves the wedding of Iphis and Ianthe to attend Orpheus’ wedding to Eurydice. However, bad omens predict the fatal serpent’s bite, and immediately “she [Eurydice] was gone” (X. l. 11). After mourning her in the upper world Orpheus “dares to descend to Styx” and announces to the King of the Underworld and his wife, Persephone, that he comes “For my wife’s sake”; he beseeches them to “loan” Eurydice to him for the duration of her natural life (“the ripeness of her years”) after which she will return to the Underworld. Orpheus’ “music / made the pale phantoms weep” and consequently Eurydice is released to him on one condition: he cannot “Turn back his gaze.” However, “afraid she might falter,” he “[l]ooked back in love, and she was gone, in a moment.” Love then, not the fault of will, is responsible for Orpheus’ loss and “[t]he double death” of Eurydice in Ovid’s version. Driven away from the Styx by Charon, Orpheus lingers by the bank “in filthy garments,” wanders about for three years “without a woman,” and gives his love finally “[t]o young boys only.” Afterward, trees of all descriptions gather to hear Orpheus’ music and bring shade to a meadow where none existed. This part of the tale is told at the beginning of Book X, lines 1-121; the account of Orpheus’ death does not appear until Book XI, lines 1-86 after a number of other accounts of young lovers including the story of Pygmalion’s bringing to life his beloved statue and the tragic story of Venus and Adonis. The account of Orpheus’ death picks up the story from his charming of
the trees and beasts and stones with his music, but immediately (line 2) he is descended upon by the “mad Ciconian women” who, calling him “our despiser,” fling spears and stones at him which, initially charmed by his music, did no harm. However, the frenzied women’s “flutes / Shrilling, and trumpets braying loud” drown out Orpheus’ music and “at last the stones / Reddened with blood, the blood of the singer.” They follow these acts of aggression by seizing farming implements left by terrified farmers, slaughtering and mutilating cattle nearby, and at last murdering Orpheus and tearing his body limb from limb “in cruelty or madness.” For his death, all nature mourned; however, the Hebrus River “took the head and lyre” which “made mournful sounds” as they floated eventually to Lesbos. Orpheus’ ghost, we are told, “fled under the earth,” “found Eurydice,” and now they wander together in the Underworld and Orpheus, “may, with perfect safety / Look back for his Eurydice.” Ovid, then, makes Orpheus the advocate of homosexual love when his love for Eurydice (which causes him to look back) results in her “double death.” Yet his penchant for homosexual love becomes the reason for his death at the hands of the frenzied Thracian women which eventually reunites him in the Underworld with Eurydice.

Pertinent to Pynchon’s treatment of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth in his novels is Orpheus’ homosexual attraction to young boys after his failed attempt to rescue Eurydice from the Underworld in Ovid’s account. Pynchon does not limit his Orpheus-Eurydice figures to male Orpheans and female Eurydices. On notable occasions in his novels, both figures are male. In Gravity’s Rainbow the obvious male pairings are Weissmann as the potential Orphean figure whose deficiencies and excesses render him a victimizer rather than a savior of the male Eurydices, Enzian and Gottfried, one of whom--Enzian--emerges as a successful Orphean character by the novel’s end. By the end of Mason & Dixon, Mason and Dixon have exchanged roles numerous times until they are “mates,” each of whom redeems the other. In V. and Vineland, female Orphean-Eurydice figures appear. In V. the chapter “V. in love” depicts V. in a lesbian relationship with Melanie l’Heuremaudit whom she both loves and victimizes. As the Orphean figure, V. is unable to
rescue Melanie, her Eurydice, from the Underworld of Paris, 1913 or from death. On the other hand, V. is also a Eurydice figure for the novel's predominant Orpheus characters, Sidney Stencil and Fausto Majstral. In Vineland, DL and Frenesi also have a lesbian relationship and even though DL, the Orphean figure, rescues Frenesi several times, she is ultimately unable to rescue Frenesi from the clutches of Brock Vond, the novel's dehumanizing force. However, DL is able to effect an Orphean-like rescue of Takeshi, the man she loves, from the Death Touch which she mistakenly inflicted upon him.

Equally pertinent to Pynchon's Orpheus figures and their relationships to various Eurydices in Pynchon's fiction is Rilke's treatment of the myth and its themes in an early poem, "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes" (1904), in the Duino Elegies (1912-22), and in Sonnets to Orpheus (1922). In Rilke's poetry, Charles Segal says, Orpheus becomes an "archaic shamanistic figure who crosses between the living and the dead," a "magician with words" (118). According to Walter A. Strauss in Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature, Rilke's images "infold" as "world space" becomes "interiorized" in his poems and as opposites converge in "sacred space" (141-2). Because Rilke's poetry, especially the three works mentioned above, has so influenced Pynchon's use of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth, both in terms of the Orpheus and Eurydice figures and in terms of theme, some of the more obvious connections between Rilke's works and Pynchon's should be mentioned. Rilke's early poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." is focused on the Eurydice figure and adopts a female point of view; certain themes emerge in this poem that appear also in "Under the Rose" and Pynchon's novels. In Rilke's poem, Eurydice in the Underworld develops an "inward subjective dimension of existence" where death is seen as the "other side of life" and "where pregnancy and virginity coexist" (Segal 120). The legitimacy of the female perspective and the complementarity of opposite states, especially life and death, are themes that recur in Pynchon's fiction. The landscape of Rilke's poem, according to Charles Segal, represents "the passage between worlds" and suggests the "instability of the material world" as well as a "fluidity between animate and
inanimate” (121-23). Pynchon’s treatment of median spaces and times which facilitate spiritual experience often suggest the “instability” and “fluidity” of those space-times (twilight, mysterious natural phenomenon--cloud formations, waterspouts) suggestive of realms in which quantum activity occurs. In death Rilke’s Eurydice is unbounded (“loosened like long hair”); she has united with nature (“She was already root”), and, in the fullness of her experience, Orpheus becomes unimportant to her (“Who?” she asks at his turning around) (qtd. in Mitchell 53); he is left by Eurydice at the edge of Hades, a foreign world denied to him. In this early poem by Rilke, Orpheus is the failed artist, death is impenetrable, and love and art fail to communicate with the “otherness of reality” (Segal 126). Important to Pynchon’s work is Rilke’s treatment of Eurydice in this poem; here, Eurydice, a symbol of the feminine principle, is quite self-sufficient and comfortable in the World of Death which remains foreign and inaccessible to her male pursuer, Orpheus. Oedipa comes to a similar conclusion in The Crying of Lot 49: she needs no Orpheus to rescue her; in fact, Oedipa becomes the agent of her own rescue.

However, both the Orpheus and Eurydice figures and the themes associated with them become more complicated in Rilke’s Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus two poetic sequences which were interrelated in their composition. Themes from these sequences are even more evident in Pynchon’s fiction, and they are both more complex and more optimistic than those in “Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes.” Themes from the Duino Elegies which have particular relevance to those in Pynchon’s writings are several. Rilke’s Elegies suggest that in the “interpreted world” which human beings inhabit, humans create “too-sharp distinctions” especially between life and death (DEI). The Creation “mirrors” essence; lovers come close to transcending the boundaries between creation and essence (DEII) because the Lover becomes a means for evoking something “more ancient”--the “surging abyss” of “night space,” an “interior wilderness” (DEIII). The experience of animals is immediate; they move “in eternity.” Children experience immediacy/eternity temporarily; lovers are close to it. All others are merely “spectators, always,
everywhere/turned toward the world of objects.../It fills us. We arrange it. It breaks
down./We arrange it” (DE VIII). In short, we live in the world looking toward death;
unless we recover our lost nature, we remain forever spectators (Strauss 161), an idea that
frames Pynchon’s V. and Gravity’s Rainbow. The idea is inherent also in Pynchon’s
attention to children, their ability to experience the infinite in the temporal world, and their
potential for redeeming their parents and the world created by their parents’ generations
specifically evident in the characters of Paola in V., Slothrop in Gravity’s Rainbow.
Prairie in Vineland, and Dr. Isaac in Mason & Dixon. In the Elegies, the human function,
according to Rilke is clear: "we are here in order to say.” For Rilke, saying gives form to
and transforms the transient; because we are “the most transient of all,” by “saying” we
give form to and transform ourselves. In the “Tenth Elegy” Rilke suggests that the
“polished nuggets of primal grief” are essential for an appreciation of life since death is a
part of life and a part of life’s celebration. A year before his death, Rilke wrote to his
polish translator, Wilold Hulewicz, in a letter dated Nov. 13, 1925: “Affirmation of life-
AND-death turns out to be one in the Elegies... we are continually overflowing toward
those who preceded us, toward our origin, and toward those who seemingly come after us”
(qtd. in Mitchell, “Notes” 316). Especially significant to my premise that certain
“Orphean” characters in Pynchon’s novels discover in median behavior the possibility of
spiritual transcendence are two corollaries which draw on Rilke’s insistence of the
connections between life and death and his emphasis on one’s connection to those who
have gone before and those who “come after us.” Even as Porpentine’s behavior possibly
forestalls the outbreak of World War I by sixteen years, Sidney Stencil’s humanitarian
decisions in V. affect the lives of another family--the Maijstrals--and the son, Fausto,
twenty years later aids Sidney’s “love,” V., at her death; Slothrop is mythologized and
becomes the inspiration for the Counterforce’s efforts to subvert the dehumanizing effects
of the forces of war and death. Equally important is Pynchon’s emphasis on children and
the continuity of life through successive generations; children are, Dixon tells Mason at their last meeting, "a Bridge over a Chasm" (*Mason & Dixon* 751).

Likewise, in the fifty-five poems that constitute the two books of *Sonnets to Orpheus*, the prospects for love and art to influence death become even more optimistic as the power of language is exerted to impose form on formlessness by naming, classifying, and thereby fixing the fleeting moment. Here death is seen as the "subjective side"--i.e., the feminine--of the phenomenal world, and nonrational understanding and experience are validated (Segal 126). The "double realm" that Strauss speaks of in his chapter on Rilke represents the merging of the transient and the eternal in art (126). The *Sonnets* were dedicated to a young dancer, Vera Ouckama Knoop, who died at age nineteen; the poems are, Rilke says, "a grave-monument" for her. Consequently the young dead girl becomes a symbol of Eurydice, virginal beauty wedded to Death before her time. According to Segal, the girl not only becomes Eurydice, but also a "mysterious anima figure" associated with the process of "creative metamorphosis" that comes forth as a result of the poet's song (137-38); she is a symbol which hearkens back to the fertility goddesses (Demeter-Persephone and beyond) of ancient Greece, a concept which is thematically pivotal in Pynchon's work, especially in the characters of Paola in *V.*, Geli Tripping in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Prairie in *Vineland*; Dixon assumes this role in *Mason & Dixon*. In the *Sonnets* as in the *Elegies* the poet's "work" is "transformation" and the Orpheus figure, "the ordering power of the imagining, artistic mind" (Segal 129). These ideas, associated with Orpheus and Eurydice as articulated in Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, are pertinent to Pynchon's treatment of both character and theme in his fiction. The temple of sound is a civilizing force, and "True singing" must be godlike; emptiness--of one's self--is a prerequisite for singing. When Orpheus is finally evoked in I.5., he is evoked as a process, yet he dwells in "both realms" (I.6.2), is a "conjuror" who can "mix death into everything seen" (I.6.7 & 9). The "Double World" of life and death ameliorates "all voices" (I.9.13). Singing and music permeate Pynchon's writing and become a symbol of
Pynchon’s own “song,” the “process” of his fiction in which the reader, especially at the end of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, is invited to participate. In participating, the reader becomes an Orphean character in his own right and part of the process of discovering the middle way, of seeing life and death cojoined, of connecting oneself with that which allows one to transcend the limitations of self.

Rilke’s *Sonnets* 13-27 focus on the regenerating powers of nature and the forces that oppose these powers. “[R]ipe flesh” of dead fruit gives life to those who eat. Death invigorates nature as it plays its part in the ancient cycle of death and regeneration. The process of ingestion and digestion is seen as a dance, a merging of death with life. Death remains a mystery, and only song connects us as temporal beings with the eternal and the changeless. Sonnet 24 deals with a theme and symbol found also in Pynchon’s writings: neither the “unwooing gods” nor “their messengers” will be found on maps; they have withdrawn from the world. Because we have put our faith in industrial progress, we have left the gods and their messengers behind; as a result, we are “lonelier now, dependent on one another/utterly” (I.24.9-10). The final sonnet in Part I invokes Orpheus, the “divine poet”; the “lost god!” who has been “torn and scattered through Nature.” However, “we” become the “hearers,” the “rescuing voice,” i.e., death forces man to participate in the song. Pynchon’s works reveal a preoccupation with the effects of Newtonian science, especially as it manifests itself in industrial progress and as it is exhibited in the willingness to see human beings as mechanized. This phenomenon, noted also by Lyotard, Carse, and Cassirer, structures Pynchon’s novels and produces the dilemma experienced by Pynchon’s characters in his various fictional worlds.

In the second part of the sonnet sequence, Rilke both invokes and identifies with Orpheus. Orpheus and Rilke achieve more than a merging, a oneness; they achieve a “complete interchange” of inner and outer being. The vehicle that facilitates this is the impulse to poetry which both Orpheus and Rilke share and which allows participation in, absorption of and by, the natural world. The song is the integrating vehicle, the mirror-
absorbing image. This dilemma of the separation of one’s inner and outer being is one confronted by Pynchon’s Orphean characters who, through their confrontations, are able to at least partially resolve by abandoning the preoccupation with self which Pynchon’s Dionysians and Apollonians are unable to relinquish. The Orphean resolution inevitably results in some sort of articulation which seeks to integrate one’s inner life with external circumstances: Sidney Stencil’s journals, Fausto Maijstral’s Confessions in V.; William Slothrop’s “century’s forgotten” and “out of date” hymn at the end of Gravity’s Rainbow which the reader/audience is invited to sing; Rev’d Cherrypoke’s “Tale of America” which comprises the novel, Mason & Dixon. In Part 2 of Sonnet to Orpheus, especially Sonnets V-VII, Rilke focuses on the need for the feminine. The female role in the sex act becomes the metaphor for being open to infinite possibilities. The “violent ones” [men] need to become “open and receivers” like women. In “Under the Rose,” Porpentine believes that Victoria had “sought out and found the woman in him” (SL 129) which precipitates his descent below the surface level of experience; in Gravity’s Rainbow Enzian, a savior figure whose name in Rilke’s poetry means “pure word,” assumes the female role in his sexual coupling with Weissmann, an act which spiritually invigorates Enzian; Dixon is more Mason’s “Mate” than Mason’s wife, Rebekah ever was. In Sonnet X Rilke juxtaposes the machine that “threatens” to take on a life of its own (“It thinks it is life”) from the power “we” give it to “create or destroy” against miraculous existence (“existence for us is a miracle”); only those who have “knelt down in wonder” can “approach the unsayable” and through “music,” build a “deified temple” in “unusable space.” In Pynchon’s writing, the Orphean “song” become the “Counterforce” that opposes the mechanization of human beings perpetrated by those who exert the will to power in a Newtonian world that denies the existence of the miraculous. The willingness to “pour [oneself]out like a stream” can lead to enchantment, astonishment and the possibility of “transformation... in which the Thing disappears and bursts into something else” (II.12.1-2). Pynchon’s Orphean
characters must lose their sense of self in order to experience transformation, and love of another—the Eurydice figure no matter what sex—is the vehicle for this loss.

Breaking with tradition, Rilke sees hell, the underworld, as a “fortunate space,” an image Pynchon adopts in all his fiction. Rilke’s Hell is not a frightening place, but the “pivotal point where you are no longer yourself” but are “transfigured.” Through death, in Rilke’s Sonnets, the infinite enters experience. In Pynchon’s novels, as in “Under the Rose,” one’s descent to the “Underworld”—to the world below or behind surface level experience—is essential for, but no guarantee of, spiritual transformation. In Sonnet XX Rilke focuses on the distances man imposes, not just between himself and things, but between himself and other people, especially the vast distance “from the girl / to the loved and avoided man” (i.e., between Orpheus and Eurydice, Rilke and Vera, between the living and the dead). But in Sonnet XXI, Rilke suggests that “someone who wishes then fully decides: to be!” (i.e., embrace both life and death as a part of life) can become, like a “silken thread . . . woven into the fabric” of the “whole . . . marvelous carpet” of life which is, I will argue, what the Orpheus characters in Pynchon’s novels and, by extension, Pynchon’s “saying” through the novels achieve. Saying and singing are essential activities in Pynchon’s fiction; they are activities which allow characters to communicate their experiences of the miraculous—the intrusion of another world into this one—to those they will never meet, to those as yet unborn. Randolph Driblette, as a director of plays in Crying “gives the spirit [of the play] flesh [makes it immediate]” for his audiences, he tells Oedipa (79); Enzian realizes that his name—meaning “pure word”—is necessary for the Zone Hereros to continue their search for the “True Text”; the entire “Tale of America,” which is the novel Mason & Dixon, is told by Rev’d Cherryoke, “an untrustworthy Remembrancer,” from notes written into his Spiritual Day-Book (Mason & Dixon 8).

In a letter to Lotte Hepner dated Nov. 8, 1915, Rilke asserts that “there is a realm beyond the senses” and suggests that man has made death his adversary. Nature, by contrast Rilke says, “knew nothing of this banishment . . . when a tree blossoms, death as
well as life blossoms in it, and the field is full of death, which . . . sends forth a rich expressions of life” (qtd. in Mitchell, “Notes” 340); the quotation from Wernher von Braun at the beginning of Gravity’s Rainbow -- “Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation” (1)--is reminiscent of Rilke’s statement. The joining of death and life in Nature is the subject also of Sonnet XXV: earth’s rhythms are harrowing if we listen to them according to the “rhythm of men.” However, if we hear the song of life fully, “Every hour that goes by grows younger”--time is miraculously reversed. The theme of transformation, a theme that I will argue is associated with Pynchon’s Orpheus characters and pervades his fiction, is the subject of the final sonnet of the sequence. In Sonnet XXIX, Orpheus moves “through transformation, out and in.” His suffering has enabled him to “change [himself] into wine” an image that evokes the mystery of communion both Christian (the transubstantiation of wine into blood) and pagan (the eating of the god). Orpheus’ “power” here is linked to the “magic” and the “mysterious encounter” which is beyond the detection of the senses. Pynchon is a reader of Rilke; he refers to certain of the Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus and even quotes from them on occasion in Gravity’s Rainbow. In Pynchon’s translation of the last three lines of Rilke’s Sonnet XXIX in Gravity’s Rainbow the motionlessness/unmoving of the Earth is juxtaposed against the flowing of Orpheus in line 13 and the rapid flowing of the water juxtaposed against the immovable and god-like Orpheus of line 14:

    And though Earthliness forget you,
To the stilled Earth say: I flow.
To the rushing water speak: I am. (GR 622)

Orpheus is the hope for a “stilled” and “silent” earth, dismembered but still singing. Yet Orpheus in Rilke’s poem becomes a metaphor for stasis amid flux. Pynchon’s metaphors for the still point in the moving world are profuse: V. in V.; the “ritual reluctance” Oedipa experiences at the performance of The Courier’s Tragedy in The Crying of Lot 49 and her seating herself in the closed auction room to await the silent bidder; the Holy Center, the
mandala, singularities, Absolute Zero, Kirghiz Light in Gravity's Rainbow; the Zero Inn, Shade Creek, Thanatoid Village, and the Traverse-Becker Reunion in Vineland; the intersections of longitude and latitude, the intersection of the Line with the Great Warrior Path, the Tangent Point, the ampersand in Mason & Dixon.

In “Under the Rose,” Porpentine is the single Orpheus figure; Victoria Wren, the single Eurydice. However, Pynchon’s novels contain multiple Orpheus and Eurydice characters that are connected in each novel in convoluted ways. Even though Pynchon may disperse Orpheus and Eurydice traits among several characters, certain characteristics of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth and the Orpheus and Eurydice figures become metaphorical representations of Pynchon’s “way back” to the Golden Mean. Pynchon’s Orpheus figures all possess some artistic power, are associated in some way with music, singing, playing instruments, writing, performance, articulation. Even though all inhabit the Newtonian world of surface level experience, all make some sort of descent, some “crossing” from one world into another. This descent recalls the most ancient and fundamental of mysteries, requires a period of uncertainty and danger, and serves as a spiritual initiation which awakens them to the intrusion of the miraculous, the divine in the natural world. Most Orpheus figures experience an emotional encounter with a Eurydice character who serves as an impetus for their descent and spiritual awakening. The awakening is accompanied by an awareness that their decisions and actions affect the outcome of lives and events far removed from their own, and the Orpheus figures make conscious decisions to accept personal responsibility for those outcomes by acting selflessly on the behalf of others. These actions, analogous to Orpheus’ breaking of the taboo and looking back, collapse possibilities and change the outcome of future lives and events. In keeping with Rilke’s notion that creation mirrors essence and that animals, children, and lovers come closest to experiencing, recognizing, or recovering the ability to connect the flux of nature with the stasis of the divine, the inanimate with the animate, death with life, Pynchon’s Orpheus characters often encounter animals and/or children and often fall in love with,
develop a deep emotional attachment for, or become the lovers of various Eurydice figures. Because the revelations of Orpheus characters are often accompanied by articulations of their encounters with the miraculous, that articulation, like Orpheus' music, exerts enormous power over others and is capable of transfiguring those who choose to "participate" into other seekers after the Golden Mean, the middle "way back" to spiritual revelation and transformation.

Relativity and Quantum Theory

Rilke's treatment of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth and the themes he associated with it have no doubt informed Pynchon's use of the myth in his fiction. However, Pynchon's middle "way back" to the "essence," the "realm beyond the senses" wherein life and death, the animate and the inanimate become part of the same process is metaphorically connected with the subatomic world, the realm wherein the laws of classical physics break down and the principles of quantum physics apply. The formulation of the quantum theory in the 1920's is attributed to a number of physicists though the theories of Niels Bohr, Erwin Schrodinger, and Werner Heisenberg are usually thought to provide the concepts most fundamental to the "new physics." The most disturbing aspect of quantum theory occurs because its focus is the subatomic world upon which the macroscopic world, explained quite satisfactorily by classical physics, rests; at the subatomic level, the premises of classical physics either cease to operate or inadequately explain quantum behavior, a situation which Kuhn suggests has the effect of making advocates of classical physics defensive and insecure. This phenomenon, Pynchon metaphorically exploits in his fiction.

Though Immanuel Kant was not a scientific or mathematical thinker as was René Descartes, Kant nevertheless provided a philosophical framework, a departure from the Cartesian emphasis on reason and mind-matter separation, that allowed quantum theory to be formulated. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* was published in 1781 at the apex of the Enlightenment. Influenced by David Hume, Kant focused on the nature and limits of human knowledge and challenged philosophers and scientists who tended to generalize
from a few observations or experiments. These considerations, coupled with the notion that the mind is actively involved in the objects it experiences (i.e., it organizes experience into definite patterns) and therefore can have knowledge of both what we have and have not experienced have direct implications for quantum theory. In contrast to Descartes, Kant's philosophical speculations suggest an intuitive, non-rational knowledge of the natural world and, in Critique of Practical Reason (1788), Kant maintained that humans have free will even if scientists can predict what will happen.

Other precursors of quantum theory were scientists and mathematicians most of whom considered non-Euclidean concepts of space and the wave-particle nature of matter. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Galilean and Newtonian ideas of motion envisioned space as an "arena" in which physical events take place. Newtonian space in Pynchon’s novels corresponds to mappable space: geographical demarcations found on maps which delineate territories settled, establish boundaries between groups of people, become "theatres" of conflict. However, in the early nineteenth century Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky (1792-1856) proposed a "hyperbolic" geometry in which a triangle, unlike its Euclidean model containing 180 degrees, contained less than 180 degrees (Penrose 156), and the notion of space began to change (See Figures 1.2 and 1.3).

![Figure 1.2](image1.png)

**Figure 1.2**

Triangle in Euclidean space

![Figure 1.3](image2.png)

**Figure 1.3**

Triangle in Lobachevskian Space (Penrose 153)
In 1908 (following Einstein's special theory of relativity), one of Einstein's teachers, Hermann Minkowski, announced in a famous lecture that only a union of space and time will preserve "an independent reality" (Penrose 193). Minkowskian space-time is four dimensional (three dimensions of space, one of time) and depends on the notion of the "light cone." Since it is impossible for a material particle to travel faster than light, all material particles coming from an explosion at 0 must lag behind the light. This means, in space-time, all the particles emitted in the explosion must lie inside the light cone (Figure 1.4) (Penrose 194). Penrose explains this concept in great detail by suggesting particles at a single moment may be represented as a point, as a straight line if the particle moves uniformly, and as a curved line if it accelerates. The family of light cones at all points is part of the Minkowskian geometry of space-time (Figures 1.4). The concept of light

![Light Cone in Minkowski’s Space-time (Penrose 194)](image)

"Ray S represents a particle which is at the origin (x=0, z=0) at time t=0, and remains at rest. So this particle remains at the origin as time increases. Ray M represents a massive particle which is at the origin at t=0 and moves with constant velocity. As time increases, it moves away from the origin, but remains inside the light cone. The line labelled "photon" represents the path of a photon starting from the origin at t=0 and travelling outward at the speed of light. The photon always lies on the light cone. The region outside the light cone is inaccessible to any particle starting at the origin at t=0." (Corcoran, "A Few More Comments" 3)
cones, though never named by Pynchon, is fictionally expressed in his novels in the multiple narratives within a single novel which seem disconnected both spatially and temporally from each other. Essentially the characters central to the narratives have only a certain "light cone" of experience; connections between these narratives are somewhat apparent to the reader who is called upon to exercise a perspective broader than those of the characters. As readers of the novel, our "light cones" may be larger than those of any character, but, because of the limits of our vision, our perspective is still limited and information is still denied to us.

Penrose remarks that the Minkowskian triangle inequality, quite different from the Euclidean triangle inequality, can be used to explain the "twin paradox" of Einstein's special relativity which demonstrates time dilation and explains how twins traveling at different speeds can "experience" time quite differently. In Penrose's explanation of this phenomenon in terms of Minkowskian geometry, the stay-at-home twin travels from A to C arriving at point C at the same instant as his brother who travels from A to B to C—a greater distance than his stay-at-home brother—but at a speed approaching the speed of light. The twins have experienced time differently: the stay-at-home twin has actually aged (experienced time differently) more than his brother who traveled a greater distance at accelerated speeds (Figures 1.5 and 1.6). An "enormous amount" of evidence, especially at the quantum level, favors this conclusion (Penrose 193-99). Such a phenomenon is narratively rendered in Pynchon's novels and serves to reinforce the idea that "time-measured" is sometimes "at variance with our intuitive notions" (Penrose 199). Pynchon uses the idea of strange, nonintuitive behavior of time associated with special relativity and expands it to "even stranger (but in reality impossible) events" in his novels (Corcoran, "A Few More Comments 2"). When Pynchon's Orphean characters encounter this phenomenon--i.e., Sidney Stencil encounters Mehement, a time-traveler from the middle
ages; in Central Europe in 1945, Slothrop recovers his harmonica lost in Boston in 1939—
these encounters cause them to anticipate another dimension of experience.

Figure 1.5
Euclidean Triangle
AC<AB=BC

Figure 1.6
Minkowskian Triangle Inequality
AC>AB + BC

(Penrose 198)

The dual nature of matter is fundamental to the development of quantum theory; the
most significant experiment that demonstrates this phenomenon is a result of numerous
speculations on the nature of light. In 1804, Thomas Young, an English physician and
theoretician, carried out "the most famous and most instructive example of... quantum
type" when he performed the "double split experiment" which was heralded as
experimental proof of the wave nature of light (Lederman 17). However, the concept of
the wave-particle duality of light/matter was not actually formulated until Einstein published
his paper in 1905 on the photoelectric effect; for this concept, he won the Nobel Prize for
Physics in 1921. In his paper, Einstein suggested that energy associated with the light
beam came in microscopic packets called "light quanta" (Coveney and Highfield 114-15).
Einstein’s concept of the wave-particle duality opened the way for the formulation of
quantum theory. According to Penrose, the "archetypal" quantum-mechanical experiment"
which demonstrates the wave-particle duality of matter is one in which a "beam of electrons, or light, or some other species of 'particle-wave' is fired through a pair of narrow slits to a screen behind" (Figure 1.7).

![Two-slit Experiment Diagram]

Figure 1.7
The Two-slit Experiment, with Monochromatic Light

(Penrose 232)

If only one slit is open, the light spreads out due to a "phenomenon called diffraction, a feature of wave propagation." When the light intensity is diminished, the distribution of the illumination is clearly made up of "individual spots--in agreement with the particle picture--where the individual photons strike the screen (Figure 1.8). However, when both slits are open, a "waviness" called an "interference pattern" occurs with "bands on the screen" (Figure 1.9), suggesting that light is behaving like a wave, not a particle. The bands of light reinforce each other to produce the bright bands ("in phase") and cancel each other out to produce the dark bands ("out of phase") (Figure 1.10). Stephen Hawking explains the phenomenon of bright and dark bands on the screen by likening the movement of protons through the slits to the crests and troughs of two different sets of waves. When the "crests" coincide, they reinforce each other (i.e., photons produce bright bands); when the "crests" coincide with the "troughs," they cancel each other out and dark bands are produced (56-58). Penrose offers a similar explanation (234-35). Penrose calls attention to
an extraordinary fact demonstrated by this experiment which goes beyond the idea that light behaves sometimes as particles and sometimes as waves. He maintains that "each

![Pattern of Intensity at Screen with One Slit Open -- Distribution of Discrete Spots.](image1)

![Pattern of Intensity at Screen with Both Slits Open -- Wavy Distribution of Discrete Spots.](image2)

Figure 1.8
Pattern of Intensity at Screen with One Slit Open -- Distribution of Discrete Spots.

Figure 1.9
Pattern of Intensity at Screen with Both Slits Open -- Wavy Distribution of Discrete Spots.

(Penrose 233)

individual particle behaves in a wavelike way entirely on its own; and different alternative possibilities open to a particle can sometimes cancel each other out!" (Penrose 231-35).

Even more startling, when a "particle detector" is placed at one slit or the other, "the wavy interference pattern at the screen disappears." He concludes that "[i]n order for the interference to take place, there must apparently be a 'lack of knowledge' as to which slit the particle 'actually' went through" (Penrose 236). Measurement, it seems, collapses the wavefunction--the "alternatives" available to the photon and it behaves as a particle; the uncertainty which results in the photon's behavior (producing the interference pattern) can occur only in the absence of measurement at either or both slits.

This experiment and the curious behavior of photons in the presence or absence of measurement has particular significance as a metaphor in Pynchon's fiction, especially in his scheme of extremes and means and is connected to the Orpheus-Eurydice myth as well.
The Golden Mean in Pynchon's novels inevitably occurs when the Orphean character symbolically descends below the surface level of ordinary activity, willingly endures the moment of uncertainty in which "alternative possibilities"—often seemingly mutually exclusive ones such as life and death—coexist in order for the character to confront that uncertainty. Doing so opens that character's awareness of an infinite number of possibilities which suggest, in good quantum fashion, that, like the photons which under certain circumstances reinforce or cancel each other out, the "total probability is greater than the sum of the individual probabilities" (Penrose 241). In Pynchon's fiction, such an awareness necessitates the dissolution of self and assimilation into that which is larger than oneself. Such experience is metaphorically replicated by Orpheus characters who, in Pynchon's fiction can be male or female, and the role of Orpheus in the Orpheus-Eurydice myth: Orpheus descends to the Underworld to rescue Eurydice from death—i.e., he thinks of another's welfare before his own; as he is leading her back to the surface-level world, he encounters that moment of uncertainty at which her existence in the world of the living and the world of the dead are equally possible. Through a weakness of will (Virgil) or love (Ovid), Orpheus looks back at Eurydice and destroys the possibility of her return to the
surface. However, even though Orpheus mourns for his lost Eurydice, she becomes the impetus for continuing the dissolution of self; via his song and his dismemberment, he merges with that which is larger than himself—the natural world—and transcends the limitations of surface level experience which separates life and death.

Uncertainty and the coexistence of mutually-exclusive alternatives so fundamental to Pynchon’s concept of the Golden Mean are the principles formulated by Werner Heisenberg in his Uncertainty Principle and Neils Bohr in his Complementarity Argument. From these two principles, known collectively as the Copenhagen Interpretation, quantum theory emerged c. 1927 as a “new paradigm.” The formulation of Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle arose from his study of “matrix mechanics” and has come to constitute the “world’s first fully fledged quantum theory” (Coveney and Highfield 118). This Uncertainty Principle asserts that a limitation exists regarding the accuracy of measurement at the subatomic level. In this realm, Heisenberg maintained, it is impossible to know simultaneously the position and the momentum of an electron with any precision. Moreover, the more precisely we know the measured value of one quantity (i.e., position), the greater the uncertainty of the other (i.e., momentum) or vice versa. For example, if the position of an electron is measured (by bouncing a photon off it), the electron’s position can be determined but in the very act of measurement, some unknown amount of momentum is transferred to the electron and so its momentum cannot be accurately measured. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle also reflects the wave-particle duality paradox: position is a particle quality; yet, waves are spread out and have no precise location. The Uncertainty Principle has consequences for the measurement of energy and time, and suggests a limitation as to the accuracy with which energy can be measured within a given interval: the measurement of an atom’s energy in a particular quantum state can be performed only at the expense of uncertainty about the time the atom spends in that state (i.e., its lifetime) (Coveney and Highfield 125-6).
With his Complementarity Argument, Bohr confronted the dilemmas posed by the problems of measurement identified in Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle. Sharp distinctions cannot be made, Bohr suggests, between the behavior of atomic objects and their interaction with the measuring devices which become part of the conditions under which the phenomena appear. Each “phenomenon” is thus fundamentally different (an “epistemologically irreducible unit”) (119); other similar phenomena are complementary but neither identical nor repeatable. Such a view allows for ambiguity and “mutually exclusive experimental arrangements” (123). Heisenberg articulated the likelihood of objective descriptions at the microscopic level and perhaps provides a direct link to Pynchon’s fiction, especially V. in Old Godolphin’s hopeless search for a definitive account of Vheissu: “The hope that new experiments will lead us back to objective events in time and space is about as well-founded as the hope of discovering the end of the world in the unexplored regions of the Antarctic” (Coveney and Highfield 124-27). The very process of measurement assumes major importance in quantum mechanics. Although the role of the observer is completely ignored in classical physics, according to Bohr, the atomic world only becomes concrete reality when an observation is made; otherwise, in the absence of observation, “the atom is a ghost” (Davies 103).

A quantum particle (electron/photon) is thought to try out every classical path or trajectory; yet, each particle’s “history” or “world line” interferes with all others and can only be described in terms of probability distribution characteristic of the interference pattern produced in the two-slit experiment. Probability is converted into certainty by measurement. The probability distribution becomes meaningful and the interference pattern builds up only when the two-slit experiment is repeated many times. The conclusion: in the two-slit experiment, the electron/photon spreads out or is delocalized throughout space and time; it passes through both slits, interferes with itself, and then “miraculously” collapses instantaneously to some spot on the screen in entirely random fashion. “It is everywhere and nowhere at the same time” (Coveney and Highfield 123-4). An
electron/photon is neither a wave nor a particle until measurement is made. Bohr maintained that even though the observable world seems to be independently real, it is actually "suspended on an 'unreal,' microscopic world." Bohr recognized that the only "adequate tool" for describing complementarity is "a purely symbolic scheme permitting only predictions" which allows "room for regularities beyond the grasp of a description" (123). Stated in these terms quantum theory begins to sound more and more like the "fiction" a physicist--i.e., Pynchon--might write. Essentially quantum mechanics denies the objectivity of phenomena not subject to measurement: Neils Bohr asserted, "There is no quantum world. There is only abstract quantum description" (qtd. in Coveney and Highfield: 125). Neils Bohr's complementarity argument was a philosophical stance that served to explain the fact that the wave and the particle are mutually exclusive concepts in classical physics but are unpredictable manifestations of all particles at the quantum level.

Measurement apparently collapses wavefunction (the central quantity in quantum theory) which is used to calculate the probability of an event occurring when measurement is made; the act of measurement renders the phenomenon irreversible and objective. In fact wavefunction undergoes an "instantaneous transformation" when measurement is made; an infinite number of outcomes collapse into a single real event (Coveney and Highfield 128-29). According to Bohr and other of his supporters, an intimate relationship exists between the observer and the external world; consciousness seems to play an essential role in the nature of physical reality. Bohr maintains that the world has a classical part (the act of measurement, the instrument) and a quantum part (the thing measured); in the act of measurement, the classical and the quantum interface. Observation/measurement at a given point effects a collapse of all potentiality into a state of actuality and thereby has instantaneous repercussions (Coveney and Highfield 135).

Matter at the subatomic level can behave as both particles and as waves, mutually exclusive behavior patterns. That the outcome of observation/measurement of the position and momentum of quantum material is uncertain until measurement is made at which point
the infinite number of potential outcomes collapse into a single irreversible outcome (i.e., an historical event): this essential principle of quantum physics, like Minkowski’s phenomena of light cones, are principles Pynchon fictionally renders in his novels. Characters who descend below surface-level experience—geographical locations and historical time—encounter the uncertain, the unpredictable. Those who are able to accept the uncertain, make decisions based on the welfare of others, accept the consequences of those decisions, often set in motion positive transforming repercussions the extent of which those characters can never fully understand. In “Under the Rose,” Porpentine descends to encounter Victoria Wren and emotionally connects with her through their “wordless flickerings.” When he fires the shot in the theatre, he is uncertain if his target is Bongo-Shaftsbury or Lord Cromer, but the result is his decision to abandon his role as an espionage agent and to adopt a new role as a human being. As a result, he dies, but in the process, he bargains for the lives of Victoria Wren and Goodfellow and perhaps forestalls the onset of World War I by sixteen years. Other of Pynchon’s Orphian characters have similar experiences and similarly affect the lives of others in ways metaphorically similar to the faster-than-the-speed-of-light repercussions that occur when measurement is taken of an individual particle in a specific “coherent quantum state” with other particles that are affected by the measurement.

A brief description of three famous paradoxes and the role of the orthogonality associated with Hilbert space demonstrate the complex nature of Bohr’s Complementarity and Heisenberg’s Uncertainty at the quantum level as well as the role which measurement plays in the determination of outcomes. Akin to the wave-particle duality and the act of observation/measurement collapsing wave-function is Schrödinger’s famous Gedenkenexperiment (mind experiment) known as the “cat paradox,” which provides an interesting link to the Orpheus-Eurydice myth (Figure 1.11). Schrödinger imagined a cat in an opaque container with a hydrogen cyanide cylinder and some radioactive material which, when it decays, releases the hydrogen cyanide which kills the cat. Thus at any point
according to common sense, the cat is either alive or dead. But, according to quantum physics, the cat can be said to exist in two possible and mutually exclusive quantum mechanical states—alive or dead—simultaneously (thanks to Bohr’s Complementarity argument).

![Schrodinger's Cat Paradox](image)

**Figure 1.11**

Schematic Illustration of Schrodinger's Cat Paradox

Showing Ghostly Superposition of Live and Dead Cats.

(Davies and Gribbin 218)

Just as an electron/photon is neither a wave nor a particle until measurement is made, so the cat is neither alive or dead until someone looks inside the container. When someone looks, the cat will adopt one of the two possibilities: the vial is intact and the cat is alive, or the vial is broken and the cat is dead. A corollary to this *Gedenkenexperiment* illustrates the Zeno paradox and necessitates that the walls of the container be opaque rather than transparent since the Zeno paradox, an assertion which has experimental support, maintains that continuous measurement forces time to stand still: a radioactive nucleus will never decay; Schrodinger’s cat will never die (Coveney and Highfield 137-38). Because Schrodinger’s “cat paradox” raises a quantum phenomenon—the wave-particle duality—to the classical level, the *Gedenkenexperiment* is continuously and subtly referenced in
Pynchon's fiction as that median, the middle way, the still point which allows mutually exclusive alternatives to coexist; in the case of Schrödinger's cat before observation, as with Eurydice before Orpheus turns to look, the mutually exclusive alternatives are life and death. The Zeno paradox reinforces a similar metaphorical idea as time dilation in Pynchon's fiction: continuous observation preserves the moment and preserves mutually exclusive alternatives from being collapsed. This is the function of metaphor itself. As long as the observation can be continued (i.e., the metaphor continuously preserved in fiction/poetry to be read/reread), the wave-function is never collapsed.

In 1935, Einstein co-authored a collaborative paper with Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen. Together they conceived of a *Gedenkenexperiment* that came to be known as the EPR paradox (after their initials) aimed at debunking the intrinsic randomness associated with quantum physics and the notion that reality is apparently “created” by an observer. This paradox may be illustrated by two spinning particles that exist in a coherent quantum state but are separated by a vast distance. Each will have an equal yet opposite value of the property called “spin”: if the “spin” of one is “up,” then the “spin” of the other will be “down.” Thus, once the spin of one particle is noted, the other can be deduced. However, according to quantum theory, both particles are spinning both “up” and “down” until the instant measurement is made. As soon as measurement of the spin value of one particle is made, the other must immediately adopt a definite spin as well, and that spin must be the opposite of the spin of the particle measured. The measurement of one particle thus results in the measurement of both. This “ghostly action” (Coveney and Highfield 136) implies that the two particles “communicate” by a physical effect that occurs faster than the speed of light. The very choice of measurement on one particle seems instantaneously to have fixed the spin of the other (Penrose 279-83). The idea is further complicated when we realize we could have two observers each of whom have two possibilities for viewing the spin of the respective particle. If the observer moves right, he will consider the right-hand particle to jump first; if he moves left, he will consider the left-
hand particle to jump first. Thus, two different observers can form mutually inconsistent conclusions concerning causality: A caused B or B caused A. In EPR states the question of causality becomes “murky” (Corcoran, “A Few More Comments 3) as it does in Pynchon’s narratives.

The purpose of the EPR paradox was to debunk quantum theory by demonstrating that it is incomplete since it involves seemingly unphysical non-local correlations. However, various experiments performed for the purpose of searching for the “hidden variable” proposed by Einstein and his associates have shown that faster-than-light connections between distant regions of space-time do exist (Coveney and Highfield 136). Alain Aspect and his colleagues at the Institut d’Optique Theoretique et Applique experimentally demonstrated that two particles can be put in a “coherent quantum state” or “entangled state” and that this state of coherence can be maintained over tens of meters. The act of measurement on one particle affects those particles which are in the same coherent state as the one on which measurement was made (Corcoran, “Some” 2) proving that two particles do somehow constitute a single physical entity (Coveney and Highfield 136). Other experiments had similar results. The relationships of these paradoxes to Pynchon’s fiction are numerous. All of Pynchon’s major characters encounter paradoxical “Situations” as Sidney Stencil in V. calls them. Most refuse to observe these paradoxes closely, to “measure” the potential outcomes, to made a decision or assume responsibility for a decision when the outcome is uncertain. Those characters, however, who possess Orphic qualities, are willing to “descend” below the obvious self-interest, to observe and make decisions even when—or perhaps because—the outcome is uncertain, in an effort to redeem the essential natures of those they come to value beyond themselves. The consequences of such decisions in Pynchon’s writings always have far-reaching redemptive ramifications.

Because in Pynchon’s fiction decision-making becomes the singularity out of which future decisions and outcomes are made possible, because such moments often occur at
certain "crossroads" or intersections of extreme experiences, because they share similarities with measurement at the quantum level, and because these points of intersection are inevitably connected in some way with the orthogonal (right angles), some notion of Hilbert Space which is used to represent the quantum state of a system is essential to understanding the problem of measurement at the quantum level and its connection in turn with Pynchon's use of quantum principles as a metaphor for the middle way. The notion of Hilbert Space may well be the quintessential Golden Mean in Pynchon's scheme of extremes and means since it is infinitely dimensional and orthogonal. Classical physics relies on a regular Cartesian coordinate system with three orthogonal axes and three basis vectors (See Figure 1.12) for measuring vectors.

![Figure 1.12](image)

Figure 1.12
Regular Cartesian Coordinate System

(Larson 726)

Any vector in this space can be expressed as a linear combination of the three basis vectors (Figure 1.13). The most fundamental property of a Hilbert space is that it is what is called "a vector space"; in fact, it is a "complex vector space" which means we are allowed to add together any two elements of the space and obtain another such element (Penrose 257). A Hilbert space is an infinite-dimensional generalization of a Cartesian system with an infinite number of basis vectors. Any state in Hilbert space can be expressed as a linear combination of the basis vectors (Corcoran, "A Few More Comments" 3). Each Hilbert
space dimension corresponds to one of the infinitely different independent physical states
of a quantum system as defined by Bohr. An infinitely-dimensional Hilbert space arises in
the simple system location of a single particle. Every particle position defines a whole
"coordinate axis" in Hilbert Space, so with infinitely many different individual positions
for a particle, infinitely many different independent directions or dimensions exist in Hilbert
space. Also represented in the same Hilbert space are the momentum states. Momentum
states are expressible as combinations of position states. The different possible position
states of a particle are all orthogonal (at right angles) to one another as are all the different
possible momentum states. Orthogonal rays refer to states that are independent of each
other. Measurement of position requires one set of orthogonal basis vectors;
measurement of momentum requires another (Figures 1.14). In Figure 1.15 the symbol
$|\Psi>\,$ denotes a quantum state. The basis for the selected measurement is $|0>,\, |1>,\, |2>,$
$|3>\ldots$. Since these form a complete set, $|\Psi>$ can be represented linearly in terms of
them:\n$|\Psi> = z_0 \, |0> + z_1 \, |1> + z_2 \, |2> + z_3 \, |3> + \ldots$. Geometrically the components $z_0,$
$z_1,\, z_2 \ldots$ measure "the sizes of the orthogonal projections" of the vector $|\Psi>$ on the
various axes $|0\rangle$, $|1\rangle$, $|2\rangle$, ... After measurement the state of the system jumps to one of the axes of the set determined by the measurement—its choice governed by probability. An infinite sum of vectors is permitted (Penrose 257-63).

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**Figure 1.14**

Position States and Momentum States --Different Choices of Orthogonal Axes in the Same Hilbert Space

**Figure 1.15**

Orthogonal Projections of the State $\Psi$
on Various Axes in Hilbert Space

(Penrose 260-61)

While Pynchon rarely mentions the concept of Hilbert space in his fiction, certain of his fictional spaces—which I will call “quantum spaces” in this study—share similar attributes of Hilbert space. 1) When his Orphean and Eurydice characters make their descents below the surface level of experience, they encounter uncertainty and often recognize an infinite number of possibilities. 2) Having entered “quantum spaces” of Pynchon’s fictive worlds, these characters behave like particles in Hilbert space before measurement: they recognize an infinite number of possibilities inherent in their position.
before their decisions are made. 3) Once they make decisions, each behaves like a particle in a quantum state: he/she "jumps" to a position determined by probability (his/her "Situation") and encounters new dimensions of experience. 4) The best that can be done at the quantum level is to extract "one bit of information" from the process of physical measurement (Penrose 268); similarly Pynchon's characters and the reader as well only receive "one bit" of information about any given character--when that character is observed directly or indirectly in the narrative. This information alters the state of the character observed for both other characters in the narrative and reader. 5) Particles in a quantum state cannot be considered to be a quantum system on its own just as the characters do not exist in separate worlds. Instead the quantum state of a particle must generally be taken as describing a particle "inextricably entangled" with a large number of particles (Penrose 268-69); similarly the decisions of individual characters--particularly Pynchon's Orphic characters--are "inextricably entangled" with other characters' outcomes, their decisions often having ramifications both beyond the characters' ability to comprehend and often only glimpsed at by the reader during his observation and "measurement" of the character that occurs during the reading of the narrative.

Indeed uncertainty and unpredictability are fundamental to quantum theory. According to Bohr, atomic uncertainty is intrinsic to nature. Even though the term "clockwork" might apply to familiar macroscopic objects (i.e., billiard balls), the rules at the atomic level are, in Davies' words, the "rules of roulette" (102), as referenced by Pynchon many times in Gravity's Rainbow. The descent of Pynchon's Orpheus or Eurydice characters below surface-level experience to encounter the "crossroads," their moment of decision akin to measurement in quantum space with an infinite number of outcomes possible, is one which not only recurs but is often the quantum moment, the singularity on which the outcomes of the lives of numerous other characters in the novel depend. Such a moment occurs in Vineland when Frenesi sells out Weed and films the moment of his death; the moment not only affects the rest of her life, it affects the lives of
Weed who dies as a result of her choice, Rex who kills Weed, Frenesi’s future husband Zoyd, her unconceived daughter Prairie, the lives of Flash and Justin who comprise her second family, and countless others.

The problem of irreversibility is a central consideration to any description of the natural world. However, the concept of an “arrow of time,” “irreversibility,” and the tendency of systems toward an irreversible state of disorder seems to have its origins in the macroscopic world described by classical theory. Despite efforts made over a number of years by many people, “no analogue of chaos” is known to occur in small quantum systems in spite of the fact that the Uncertainty Principle guarantees an intrinsic imprecision in the values of observable quantities (momentum and position) embedded in the wavefunction describing the state of such a system. The evolution of the wavefunction as given by Schrodinger’s equation is, in fact, reversible and suggests the existence of a strong form of the “limit-cycle” behavior proven by French mathematician Henri Poincare which maintains that all finite isolated quantum systems “suffer” from the eternal return (i.e., Schrodinger’s cat would be stuck “in limbo in a combination of live-and-dead states forever” (Coveney and Highfield 286-7). Entropy can only be introduced into quantum mechanics when the scale is raised to the macroscopic level (for example, by the process of measurement). Thus we encounter once again one of the major difficulties in quantum theory—the measurement problem and the wavefunction collapse that occurs during the act of measurement.

At the quantum level, another enticing possibility arises from Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle and its treatment of time and energy. In classical physics the Law of the Conservation of Energy, the First Law of Thermodynamics, states that energy is neither created nor destroyed but is conserved. However, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle asserts that a limitation exists as to the accuracy with which energy can be measured within a given interval of time; precise measurement of an atom’s energy can occur only at the expense of uncertainty concerning the time it spends in that state. Heisenberg’s principle
suggests that the shorter the interval of time considered, the more uncertainty there will be in the measurement of energy (Coveney and Highfield 141). In very short intervals the Law of Energy Conservation is suspended. Due to random quantum mechanical fluctuations, energy can, in a sense, be "borrowed" at no cost from nowhere. This phenomenon can occur, it seems, even in a vacuum (which in classical physics means nothing is present). However, in quantum physics the vacuum seems to be "seething" with activity stemming from endless fluctuations in the energy of a field at all points within space (Coveney and Highfield 142). The "seething vacuum" concept furnishes for some a model for the birth of the universe, a sort of "cosmic free lunch" where something is created from nothing. This theory proposes an empty vacuum at the beginning where space-time was flat rather than a Big Bang where everything was condensed into a singularity. Within this vacuum quantum fluctuations in energy occur (according to Dirac when quantisation of an electromagnetic field occurs, there is no limit to the amount of energy that can be carried by the field) they are capable of producing the equivalent mass of particles. Due to the gravitational attraction of these particles space-time becomes curved. In other words the state of nothingness was unstable; energy fluctuations began a cascade of fluctuations which resulted in the spontaneous creation of all matter and energy in the universe (Coveney and Highfield 144). Versions of this hypothesis have been offered by such notables as Stephen Hawking and Richard Feynman (Coveney and Highfield 144-5). The basic premise of this phenomenon is that at the quantum level the laws of entropy and the conservation of matter and energy seem to be temporarily interrupted or suspended without apparent cause. Certain physicists (most notably Roger Penrose) believe that the suspension of the law of energy conservation at very short intervals may be linked to a thus-far unformulated theory of quantum gravity.

The bottom line is that at the quantum level events occur without causes and particles appear from nowhere. Such phenomenon is not observable because of the short interval required; in any actual experiment, energy is strictly conserved. However, the
consequences of vacuum fluctuations are observable (Corcoran, “Some” 2). Willis Lamb carried out a “brilliantly precise experiment” on the properties of hydrogen atoms, and his measurements indicated that “vacuum fluctuations” lead to “a tiny shift ... in the energy levels of the hydrogen atom,” a phenomenon known as “the Lamb shift” (Corcoran, “Some” 3). The theory that the quantum world is often unstable, that “something for nothing”--the “free lunch”---is not only possible but routine in quantum physics, and that space-time seems to be created and destroyed spontaneously and non-causally (Davies 220) are quantum notions referenced routinely in Thomas Pynchon’s fiction. Pynchon’s fictional worlds, structured as they are by extreme mythological and Newtonian perspectives, call these extreme perspectives into question. In Pynchon’s worlds, the Newtonian is inadequate because it relies exclusively upon logic and cause and effect and denies the possibility of cosmic surprise or free will in its deterministic scheme; the mythological perspective is no longer available to enlightened post-Newtonian beings who find themselves alienated from the natural world, relegated to the position of its observer, and longing for a means of connection to that which is larger than themselves. However, hints of the possibility for such a connection abound in Pynchon’s fiction and are often manifest in occurrences that suggest quantum theory, Pynchon’s metaphor for the Golden Mean. Arising from Newtonian physics, quantum theory both depends on the laws governing the observable world and recalls the mythological notions of mutually exclusive alternative states (male-female, life-death), spontaneity, and connectedness. In Pynchon’s fiction events occur without apparent cause (i.e., the multitudinous examples of hystercon proteron in Gravity’s Rainbow), characters often exhibit the behavior of particles at the quantum level, appearing, disappearing, and reappearing in the narrative without warning or explanation, events that defy logical explanation continue to occur (Slothrop finds his harp in a place and time far removed from where he lost it; Dixon is able to experience the world inside-out). In Pynchon’s narratives, as in quantum theory, classical rules do not apply: the protagonists or focal characters of novels are not necessarily the main characters;
the "effects" of certain characters' actions often seem to precede the actions which, in ordinary experience, might cause such effects; characters often gain information or insight into certain situations by means unavailable to them under ordinary circumstances (i.e., from séances, mysterious signs, time-traveling helmsmen); events which in the ordinary world do not occur (movies go on under rugs, a rocket fired in Germany in 1945 descends on a theatre in Los Angeles in 1970); the reader is invited to participate in the narrative (at the end of Gravity's Rainbow, the reader is invited to join in song with the theatre audience; the reader in Mason & Dixon is, like Rev'd Cherrycoke's nieces and nephews, a listener to his "Tale of America"). Pynchon's narratives as well as his narrative technique suggest the existence of a Golden Mean, a middle way between the extremes of myth and science, metaphorically represented in his narratives by quantum theory; the theory of a "seething vacuum," a "free lunch" at the quantum level suggests that below or behind that which is observable in the material world, the possibility of regeneration and continuous spiritual existence arises.

Interestingly both cyclical and linear aspects of time appear in the "new science," biology. Cyclical time appears in cell division and in the different rhythms of our bodies; linear time is manifested in the aging process as living organisms pass from birth to death. The notion of chemical clocks, a particular kind of chemical reaction involving feedback loops in which products formed participate in the chemical reaction that formed them or that may even catalyze their own manufacture. The biochemical reactions that occur within the synchronized rhythms of the biological process are similar to the process of chemical clocks (e.g., DNA and RNA catalyze their own production) and within the inexorable march of a system (i.e., living organism) toward entropy (death), temporal cycles and patterns occur. In the context of irreversible processes, chaos may be merely a bizarre form of order (Coveney and Highfield 36-37). In fact, both chaos and order appear to have the same physical and mathematical origins, and differential equations (mathematical descriptions of the instantaneous change of properties with time) are able to describe both
equally well. The factor that allows these time-asymmetric differential equations to describe both order and chaos is non-linearity. This happens in a system when a crisis point or instability is reached and feedback occurs. This feedback (or amplified fluctuations) is evident in chemical clocks (when the production of one chemical affects the rate at which more of the chemical is formed) as well as, according to Coveney and Highfield, the demise of lemming populations (a phenomenon Pynchon uses metaphorically in *Gravity’s Rainbow*). In biology, feedback loops are responsible for turning the genetic blueprint in DNA into a complex living organism (183-84). The springboard to self-organization within a system on its way toward entropy is non-linear feedback. Even though a myriad of instances involving non-linear feedback and self-organization occur within any living organism (i.e., they are dynamical—the processes going on within them keep them far from equilibrium; organisms possess an immense power to evolve), the organism itself contains the element of chaos and irreversibility. However, the distinctions between the animate and the inanimate appear only at the Newtonian level in the world explained by classical physics. According to Davies and Gribbons in *The Matter Myth*, “once we probe below our everyday experience—below the level accessible to our senses, especially those of sight and touch, there is no clear division... between what is living and what is not” (286). They cite as an example the difficulties of classifying the virus—or the Earth—as a living organism.

Fictionally, Pynchon treats such troublesome distinctions between the animate and the inanimate. He does so by describing characters, such as V., who exhibit increasingly inanimate characteristics as she symbolically bodily incorporates bits of inert materials into her body. Pynchon also evokes these troublesome distinctions by numerous references to certain hydrocarbon processes—most memorably his description of coal tar, an account which is spoken by the voice of Walter Rathenau, a former Nazi minister, a corporate man with a vision of the post-war corporate State, who speaks at a séance from the world beyond death. Mauve, he says, is the “first new color on Earth” and is derived from coal,
the "very substance of death." He describes as the bi-product of coal tar—an organic
compound—the production of non-organic compounds that become synthetic products
which masquerade as regeneration but which really only serve to give the "illusion" of life
to the giant corporate cartels that produce them. Pynchon is ever interested in the middle
way, the median, the point at which distinctions between mutually exclusive alternatives
blur, and this point is frequently represented in Pynchon’s fiction by quantum physics
which attempts to describe the complexity of the invisible microscopic world upon which
the observable world rests.

Pynchon’s Metaphor of Extremes and Means

Because quantum theory emerged from Newton’s “system of the world” and his
studies of light and light’s spectrum, and because quantum theory posits much that appears
“magical” and “miraculous” (non-causal events occur at the quantum level), the theory
suggests a middle ground between the scientific and the mythical. In Pynchon’s novels
this is quantum theory’s implied metaphorical position. Below the “surface level” of
human experience, the Newtonian rules of causality and determinism inadequately explain
activity or cease to operate altogether. In the subatomic “Underworld,” space is no longer a
Euclidean “arena” for activities that can be charted, defined, and predicted. Instead, like
Minkowski’s notion that space-time depends on “light cones” which limit possibilities for
the movement of particles away from an explosion, Pynchon’s characters are often unable
to experience “miraculous” intrusions into the classical world because the miraculous is
beyond the limits of their understanding, or they are unwilling to acknowledge that which
they cannot sensually confirm. Only Orpheus figures who descend below the surface level
are able to transcend the Newtonian limits of space and time. In Pynchon’s scheme,
measurement itself becomes a “crossroads” or interface between two worlds, the quantum
(the thing measured) and the classical (the measuring instrument). Moreover, at the
quantum level, infinite and mutually exclusive possibilities exist until measurement is
actually made. When measurements are taken, instantaneous “transformations” occur,
outcomes collapse, and phenomena is rendered irreversible and objective; the potential becomes actual. Measurement also has far-reaching repercussions; measuring the spin of a particle can affect the spin of another “entangled” with it but removed from it in space at speeds faster than the speed of light. This phenomena is experienced by Orpheus when he chooses to “look back” at Eurydice, an act that has a parallel in Schrödinger’s cat paradox in which the cat, inside the opaque box with the cyanide tablet, is both alive and dead before observation is made. Once observation is made, possibilities collapse and the cat is alive or dead. Once Orpheus turns to look, Eurydice is instantaneously whisked back to the world of the dead, an act that affects Orpheus and much of nature which is moved by Orpheus’ music produced by his grief over the loss of Eurydice. Pynchon’s Orphean figures all have such experiences when they descend below the surface level of the Newtonian world in which causality and determinism reign; when such “descents” are made, the Underworld becomes a fortunate space as it is depicted by Rilke in his Sonnets to Orpheus. Here Orphean characters experience moments of uncertainty; they freely choose to look and their choice of action, made because of their intense emotional connections with a Eurydice, “collapses” the outcome of the moment and renders it irreversible while influencing the outcomes of future lives and events.

At the quantum level chaos and entropy do not exist; rather, as Poincare suggested, all finite isolated quantum systems seem to “suffer” from the eternal return (i.e., Schrödinger’s cat would be stuck in its live-and-dead state forever). Only when measurement occurs, only when the quantum “interfaces” with the classical does entropy enter the quantum world. At the quantum level the differences between the animate and inanimate disappear; activity is the same for the animate as it is for the inanimate at the quantum level. Metaphorically the quantum state is connected to the process of “fully being” in both the Rilkean and the Pynchonesque scheme because in both instances the differences between life and death cease to exist and become parts of the same process. At the quantum level extremes disappear, random quantum fluctuations occur, and energy
appears from nowhere; these quantum characteristics become part of the Pynchonesque metaphor for optimism and the possibility of a spiritual “free lunch,” an escape from death, the exitlessness inherent in the purely deterministic material world explained by Newton.

The concept of time’s irreversibility is a mystery integral to human experience; the human awareness of death is the “most tangible evidence for the flux of time” (Coveney and Highfield 25). However, as we have seen, the idea of one-directional time has not always dominated human thought. To primitive cultures in which nature is of central importance, time is often regarded as circular and detectable in organic rhythms, the seasons, the tides, the circular movement of heavenly bodies as seen from earth. Mircea Eliade in The Myth of the Eternal Return suggests that most of humankind has focused on cyclical time and believed in cyclic rebirth and the renewal of life. In primitive times and cultures no conflict existed between science and religion: the priest, magician, shaman possessed guarded knowledge of the seasons and calendars, knowledge which was regarded as a sign of the divine at work in the world and which bestowed immense status on priests within their communities. Knowledge of astronomy meant power. According to Eliade, the Judeo-Christian tradition introduced the notion of linear time into the western psyche due to the Christian belief that the birth, crucifixion, and death of Christ were unique and unrepeatable events (The Sacred and the Profane 109-13). The concept of irreversible time associated with Judaism and Christianity has become inextricably linked to the ideas of progress and intellectual evolution (Coveney and Highfield 26), ideas which have underpinned modern science as it emerged in the seventeenth century. The invention of the pendulum clock by Christiaan Huygens in the mid-seventeenth century reinforced the mechanical and predictable side of nature formulated by Isaac Newton whose mathematical expressions “fused celestial and terrestrial mechanics” (Coveney and Highfield 29); these formulations showed that the bodies on earth and in the heavens were governed by the same force--gravity--which causes apples to fall to the ground and planets to maintain orbits. Newton’s derivation of mathematical expressions for the movement of heavenly
bodies and the very regularities of the motions of heavenly bodies, their orbits and repetitive cycles eventually led people to shift their emphasis away from magic, witchcraft, and divine intervention in nature and to put their faith in scientific and mathematical principles (Coveney and Highfield 40).

Pynchon often sets the Newtonian interpretation of the natural world against the mythological. In his novels the Newtonian mindset becomes a metaphor for those who seek to establish boundaries in order to gain possession and control; it emphasizes the impulse to power and leads to the wasting of human and natural resources, destruction, chaos, and death; it sees the world as finite, as closed with no possibility for free will or escape. By contrast, the mythological perspective of the natural world emphasizes flux and cycles in the Pynchonesque metaphor and recognizes the necessity of possibility and cooperation; it focuses on energy, growth, spontaneity, vitality; it views the world as a continuum which flows and contains within it the possibility of divine revelation and spiritual transcendence. Pynchon’s characters whether Dionysian, Apollonian, or Orphic, traverse Newtonian landscapes and encounter the mystery and miracle associated with the natural world. Most would welcome the possibility of revelation and transcendence, an escape from the entropy associated with death in an exitless world of material reality, but most, because of their extremist views and/or activities, are not paying attention. Only the Orpheans, those who consciously seek the middle way, the median, the Golden Mean represented in Pynchon’s fiction by quantum theory, are able to encounter the mystery and miracle which, in Pynchon’s fictional worlds, is everywhere available to those not blinded by the extremism that has come to dominate twentieth century western experience. The “way back” to “the realm beyond the senses” is the middle way; it involves a “descent” below the Newtonian surface level of experience to an Underworld akin to the subatomic world of quantum activity. The descent is often triggered by childlike wonder, by the selfless love and/or compassion of one human being for another; it is a descent to a point at which all distinctions—even those between life and death, the animate
and inanimate—disappear, infinite possibilities emerge, and revelation and spiritual transformation may occur.

Notes

1 In his book, Finite and Infinite Games, Carse articulates the contrast between the "finite" game and the "infinite" game, a contrast that is relevant to Pynchon's metaphorical scheme. Carse's players of the "finite" game exhibit characteristics associated with Pynchon's Apollonian characters and Newtonian perspectives. The finite game they play is played within delineated temporal and spatial boundaries against an opponent whom they wish to "terminate" for the purpose of ending and winning the game. Playing the finite game is a serious endeavor which necessitates specific rules, a certain theatricality requiring an audience, and play for selfish motives of possession or consumption. Carse's "infinite" game is most clearly connected to Pynchon's Orphian characters and quantum perspective, the Golden Mean which favors transformation: the "infinite" game is played without boundaries and without opponents; the goal of the infinite game is continued play of which both life and death are equally important. Moreover, the game is joyous and dramatic and invites the audience to participate in the lay. Carse's is a polar scheme, unlike Pynchon's in which the extremes—both Newtonian/Apollonian and Mythological/Dionysian—are necessary to define the means—The Quantum/Orphian—which incorporates and mediates them both. Carse essentially sees the mythological view as aligned with the infinite game although his description of its characteristics in Pynchon's scheme are aligned with the Golden Mean.

2 Mircea Eliade in The Sacred and the Profane describes "profane man" as one who lives in a world in which both space and time are desacralized. Space is "homogeneous and neutral"; "holy spaces" are purely private—i.e., a birthplace—not communal; "temporal rhythms" likewise are based on personal experience—i.e., work and play—and constitute "man's deepest existential dimension" in that it is linked to his one life which has a "beginning and an end, which is death, the annihilation of his life" with "no room for any divine presence" (71). Modern "profane" man, Eliade argues, "regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence" (203). Such is the condition in which Pynchon's characters find themselves.

3 According to Thomas Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, the concept of scientific "paradigms" is a post-Newtonian phenomenon that emerged in conjunction with the scientific method which Newton's work on physical optics solidified. The Newtonian system of the world established the first real scientific paradigm, a body of belief that result in the disappearance of all other "pre-paradigm schools" of thought. The paradigm then perpetuates its dominance by educating future paradigm advocates in its theories and beliefs so that they can engage in "paradigm-based research" that reinforces the paradigm until the scientific community accepts the paradigm without question. The introductions of competing paradigms have all the characteristics of revolution: they create a crisis among advocates of the existing paradigm who attempt to explain away the competition or to blur the rules to accommodate or annihilate it. The successful displacement of one paradigm by another, Kuhn recognizes as a "transformation of the scientists' world" (111). Such a "scientific revolution" occurred as a result of the wave-
particle paradox, an essential element in quantum physics, the twentieth century paradigm that challenged Newtonian authority.

A similar "revolutionary" threat to the "established" Newtonian power structure recurs metaphorically in Pynchon's novels: the Germans seek to eradicate the Herero point of view in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*; Slothrop and the preterite "Counterforce" oppose the British White Visitation and the German war mowers in *Gravity's Rainbow*; Oedipa penetrates and confronts Pierce Inverarity's legacy in the auction room of *The Crying of Lot 49*; the People's Republic of Rock and Roll, the 24 fps Film Collective of the sixties and the Vinelanders of the eighties seek to subvert their government oppressors in *Vineland*; the Royal Society of London, Dixon's individual activities--his frenzied Dionysian behavior, his antislavery stance, his acceptance of the miraculous into his experience--serve to neutralize the British scientific power structure.

4 Thomas Kuhn, a physicist and historical scientist, likens the acceptance of a new scientific paradigm--i.e., Newtonian physics in the seventeenth century--to religious "conversion," one that results in "quasi-metaphysical commitments" to that paradigm as revealed in both nature and society. Ernst Cassirer, linguist and philosopher, remarks on the "mythico-religious attitude" associated with a particular "closed system," which he maintains is the goal of "theoretical thinking; science, Cassirer says, "generalizes" such a closed system into being and maintains its integrity with discursive language. In the "Postmodern" world (i.e., after 1970), Jean-François Lyotard, a philosopher, argues that objective political power has become intimately dependent on and "entwined with that of scientific knowledge" (31), both of which are legitimized by equating wealth and efficiency with truth. Penrose, a physicist, asserts that Newton's deterministic scheme of the objective world lies "at the background of most serious philosophical arguments concerned with the nature of reality, of our conscious perceptions, and of our apparent free will" (225).

5 According to W. K. C. Gutherie in *Orpheus and the Greek Religion*, Orpheus is also depicted as a weakling in the *Argonautika* by Apollonios Rhodos. Because of the "magic power of his song," Orpheus is allowed to accompany the Argonauts on their quest for the Golden Fleece. According to this story, the *Argo* first resisted the heroes' efforts to launch her until Orpheus began to play his lyre, and when he did, she slid easily into the water. On the voyage, his music is said to have charmed the Clashing Rocks and caused the dragon who guarded the Golden Fleece to sleep. In this account, Orpheus was the spiritual guide of the voyage (28).

6 Orthogonality, that which pertains to right angles, is a concept that has much metaphorical significance in Pynchon's writing. Orthogonality is a feature common to mythology, to Christianity, to Euclidean and Cartesian geometric principles necessary to Newtonian physics, to calculus, and to quantum physics particularly in the concept of Hilbert space. In mythology orthogonality is particular to the concept of the "crossroads" which demarcates the cosmic axis representing the four horizons of the universe, points at which the human and the divine intersect, points at which villages may be founded or temples built. In Pynchon's fiction, the mandala in its various forms--all involving some version of perpendicular lines with a circle marking their intersection--is symbolic of such axes. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the mandala suggests the organization of the Herero village, a rocket as seen before below its firing, the rocket's target. Christianity, of course, appropriated the cross as its primary symbol of the promise of continued spiritual existence after physical death.

Yet, orthogonality is essential to Euclidean and Cartesian concepts of space and necessary for measurement of the observable world. Obvious manifestations occur in the use of right triangles to obtain accurate calculations of distances for mapping the earth and for construction of structures and utensils for human use. The Cartesian coordinates in two
or three dimensions provide a system for locating a point on a plane or in three-dimensional space. Numerous Pynchon characters find themselves preoccupied with measuring the observable world—Mason and Dixon are the most obvious examples—with possessing land or countries whose boundaries have been drawn—the colonization efforts of Germany and England in Africa and America in V., Gravity's Rainbow, Mason & Dixon; World Wars I and II in V. and Gravity's Rainbow; land development in California in The Crying of Lot 49 and Vineland, or in trying to escape the confines of those boundaries—the goal of most Orpheus and Eurydice characters. In calculus, orthogonality is an essential feature of Hilbert space and necessary for the act of measurement at the quantum level. Because it is integral to so many aspects of Pynchon's complex metaphor of extremes and means, it becomes one of the richest connecting devices in his fiction suggesting that orthogonality may be an essential feature in the human effort to understand the natural world and human existence in it.

Even though "the effects of certain characters' actions often seem to precede the actions which, in ordinary experience, might cause such effects," cause never precedes effect in either classical or quantum physics. What does occur in quantum mechanics is that "events happen without apparent cause" (Corcoran, "A Few More Comments" 2). The phenomenon mentioned in this passage—that in Pynchon's fiction effect often seems to precede cause—has more to do with the position of the observer in relation to the phenomenon observed suggested by the EPR Paradox described on pages 76 and 77. In the situation involving the spin of two particles, two observers observing the same phenomenon from different positions can form mutually inconsistent conclusions concerning causality.
CHAPTER 2

V.

A close examination of Pynchon’s first novel reveals both the complexity of his narrative method and the emergence of a distinctive metaphorical scheme of extremes and means that both structures his novels and opens them to possibilities of interpretation unavailable to a particular critical stance. Drawing on mythology, scientific theory, mathematics, philosophy and metaphysical speculation, Pynchon’s metaphorical schemata is established in this early novel and its premises formulated so as to suggest that the possibility still exists for spiritual regeneration and transcendence even in a century dominated by extremes. Writing at the midpoint of the twentieth century, Pynchon examines a world which has survived two world wars and the extremes of human experience. The events of the novel span the decades that begin with the carnage which resulted from General Gordon’s attempt to secure Khartoum for the British in 1884 and the Fashoda Crisis that erupted some fifteen years later and end on the island of Malta in 1956 with the world at the brink of another potentially apocalyptic event, the Suez Crisis. (See Appendix A, p. 353 and Map 3, p. 361). The world at mid-century when Thomas Pynchon began writing was a world driven to its midpoint by the Apollonian will to power; its perspective had been Newtonian; its focus had been world wide military conflict. In V., Pynchon fictionally renders this “Situation” which, on the surface, seems to suggest that human beings living at this time might do well to expect more of the same. However, I will argue, this is not the “Situation” as Pynchon narratively renders it. The century’s midpoint becomes a pivotal one in V., one which symbolically reflects the importance of rediscovering that which to Sidney Stencil in 1919 seems to have become “Obsolete”: the Golden Mean. Difficult to discover in a world dominated by extremes, the Golden Mean is still available in V. to those willing to seek it. Aligned with the mythological concepts of intuition, mystery, and connectedness, the Golden Mean emerges on the other side of the Scientific Revolution intact—defined by the extremes of mythology and Newtonian physics,
yet exhibiting features of both in the principles of quantum theory. This complex metaphor is further complicated by Pynchon's peopling his fictive world with Dionysian and Apollonian characters who exhibit extreme types of behavior and with the few Orpheans and Eurydices who are able to discover the middle way.

Pynchon's metaphorical scheme is complex as is his narrative method. Critics have tended only to acknowledge the extremes of Pynchon's metaphor as introduced in V. and to find confusion in his narrative method. Hanjo Berressem in Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text, views V.'s two dominant characters, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil, as symbolizing "two extreme positions: Profane's, he says, is horizontal" and chaotic; Herbert's is "vertical" and orderly (53-55). He also acknowledges, especially in the character of V. "the destruction and conversion of [the] female principle into male machines and technologies" (55). Pynchon's narrative method, he posits, makes "the text itself . . . a fetish" (75). David Seed points out in The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon that the events which involve Benny Profane take place in the "linear narrative set in 1956" in New York City while the "historical sections" spread from 1898-1943 focus on Herbert Stencil's search for "a mysterious figure called V." (71). Pynchon's narrative method, he says, creates "a margin of confusion or uncertainty" making "a clear overview [of the novel] well nigh impossible (116). In Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity Thomas H. Schaub identifies a series of opposites--i.e., "polar extremes"--that appear in V.: Inside/Outside, history/mythology, literal/abstract. However, he also acknowledges Pynchon's indebtedness to quantum theory for the "ambiguities" that are the focus of his study of Pynchon's works. Schaub probably comes closest to describing Pynchon's narrative method in V. when he speaks of Pynchon's aspiring "to the condition of simultaneity, in which contradictory possibilities co-exist" and asserts that a "poise" exists, even in this early novel, "between fragmentary experience and continuous meaning" (4) Schaub's assertion that Pynchon "is able to transcend the more narrow cause-and-effect world and write in the fourth dimension of time" (8) anticipates in
a general way what I intend to specifically explore in the emergence of Pynchon’s Grand Scheme of Extremes and the Golden Mean in V.

Characters, both extreme and Orphic, occupy and traverse V.’s Newtonian landscape and, in the process, encounter the miraculous and the mysterious. Most, however, are unable to experience the miraculous because of their extreme personalities or actions; their “excesses” or their “deficiencies,” in Aristotle’s terms, obfuscate their vision and their attainment of the virtuous and the good, which is the median. In V., the median often emerges when two extreme world views, the Newtonian and the mythological, intersect. The Newtonian world view is the easier to understand since it adequately explains the world experienced by the senses and corresponds in V. to the “surface level” experience of the characters. Its terrain is geographical, mappable on the Cartesian grid; space is delineated, bordered so that possession of this space may be established and Carse’s “finite game,” in which a winner can be declared and an opponent annihilated, may be played. Time in the Newtonian world is linear and one-directional, a time line of historical events which reinforces the Newtonian assumption of causality and determinism. All characters in V. occupy Newtonian landscapes and encounter one-directional time in the context of large historical events; their “time experienced”—their personal lives—is framed by efforts at colonialism (1884-1922) on the part of world powers, threats of war (the Fashoda Crisis in 1899, the Suez Crisis in 1955-56), war itself on a world-wide scale (World Wars I and II), and, in the 1950’s, the private sector controlled by science and industry exploiting the individual. In each instance power is gained by subduing the mytho-cultural past and by rendering inanimate the individual will.

The convoluted narrative order of V. essentially reinforces the notion of the extremes of human experience. Initially the novel seems to have two protagonists, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil, though they can hardly be labeled protagonists since neither character is dynamic; neither experiences a change in perspective or is appreciably different at the end of the novel than he is at the beginning. Their encounters and experiences occur
predominantly in New York City between Christmas Eve, 1955, and their journey to Malta in August, 1956. Their New York antics in conjunction with those of the Whole Sick Crew, account for ten of the novel's seventeen chapters (including the Epilogue) and roughly 190 of the novel's 492 pages. These episodes are predominantly Newtonian; most events in these chapters occur at street level and time passes linearly; the characters--Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, and the Whole Sick Crew--go through the motions of living but never really encounter "life" or what comes to define "life" by the novel's end. When the nature of the narrative that occupies the novel's remaining 300 pages is examined, some revealing observations concerning the nature of narrative and the nature of human experience can be made: the bulk of the novel, as the bulk of "time experienced," lies "behind," "inside," and "beneath" the surface level of events; some characters who are not the focal characters of the narrative are dynamic and undergo physical, emotional, and spiritual transformations as a result of their encounters with the intrusion of the miraculous into the material world. Most of these 300 pages involve clues Herbert Stencil has accumulated concerning V. with whom he is obsessed and with his interpretations of these clues. The exceptions are two chapters--Chapter 5 and Chapter 16--in which both Benny Profane and Herbert encounter the miraculous but do not respond either emotionally or spiritually to it--they are not transformed--and the Epilogue, narratively the Golden Mean of the novel. The title "Epilogue" itself separates it from the narrative proper and from Herbert's interpretation of V. clues. Defined as "a concluding statement; an appendix to a composition" (Holman 177), the Epilogue becomes "supplementary material" (Random House College Dictionary 65) through which the reader becomes privy to information denied other characters because the characters are confined by the narrative world of the novel. With god-like objectivity, the Epilogue's omniscient voice recounts the pivotal event that occurred on Malta in 1919. The event itself--the reunion of Sidney with V., his "tilt toward the past," his humanitarian decision, and transformation--becomes the still point, the median into which all events before 1919 conflate and from which all events after
1919 emanate. Like one who observes activity at the quantum level and by observation collapses possible outcomes so the reader recognizes the implications of the event in the scheme of the novel because the Epilogue lets the reader “in on” the Situation of the narrative which, in its complexity and complementarity, imitates human “time experienced.” The event, occurring in 1919 midway between Old Godolphin’s experiences in 1884 and Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil’s trip to Malta in 1956, becomes the mean between the extremes, the Orphean glance at Eurydice on the threshold between life and death, the quantum observation that “collapses” possibility into actuality.

The Century’s First Half

The Newtonian World and the Emergence of Myth

The personal experiences of the novel’s characters are couched in an historical context that stretches back to 1884 when General Gordon and his British forces were overrun in Khartoum by radical troops and extends to 1956 when the Suez Crisis threatens to erupt into yet another world conflict. An examination of the historical context that structures V. and frames events, both real and imagined, provides a thematic context for the novel as well as insight into the nature of the novel’s extremes and their relationship to the means. The earliest event in the novel’s historical context is the carnage as experienced by Hugh Godolphin in Khartoum in 1884. Historically the event was a result of Europe’s colonial efforts in Africa and, in order to protect British financial interests in Egypt and the Sudan, Gladstone dispatched British troops into Egypt in 1882. In 1884 General Gordon was sent to withdraw Egyptian garrisons from the Sudan where a fanatical Mohammedan declaring himself the messiah (Mahdi) was leading a bloody revolution. Instead of withdrawing the troops, Gordon decided to hold the territory. He remained in Khartoum but he and his troops were cut off by Mahdi forces and annihilated before reinforcements arrived (Jarman 52-54). In the V. narrative, Old Godolphin arrives with the British reinforcements and is overwhelmed by the extreme events he witnesses, by what “the
Mahdi had done to that city. To General Gordon, to his men... the carrion... the waste” (171). (See Appendix A, p. 354 and Map 4, p. 362).

Out of the “beastliness” Godolphin witnesses at Khartoum, the mythical Vheissu emerges. “I wanted to get away, suddenly,” Old Godolphin tells Victoria Wren fifteen years later in Florence, and he subsequently lands a job “escorting a crew of civilian engineers into some of the worst country on earth”; the expedition, he admits, was the “sort of thing” that “might have been lurking at the back of my head” (171-72). Their destination: to map a “remote region” for the Empire. Vheissu, as it turns out, is “wild, romantic” and ultimately unmappable possibly because it was never an actual place at all but rather one of the “private colonies of [Old Godolphin’s] imagination” (157) into which he escapes from the atrocities he witnessed at Khartoum. Vheissu has all the trappings of myth: the journey to the region is long and arduous; the region itself is remote and turbulent, full of “barbarity, insurrection, internecine feud” (170); music and wild protean colors pervade the land along with rainbow-colored spider monkeys, cities inside volcanoes, and “women... who give birth to nothing but sets of triplets” (193). Though the ambiguity of Vheissu’s existence is narratively maintained throughout the novel, the novel’s characters establish its existence: Evan by his boyhood skepticism; Old Godolphin, Evan at sixteen, and Victoria Wren by their desire to affirm it; the European powers Britain, Italy, and Germany by their fear that Vheissu’s existence—or the belief in its existence—might undermine their political authority and efforts at colonialism. Vheissu, one of the novel’s metaphors for myth, emerges from Old Godolphin’s inability to cope with the beastliness and death at Khartoum to become a threat to the Newtonian power structure that made Vheissu necessary. The 1884 mission to Vheissu, Godolphin tells Victoria, was officially reported as a failure, yet his knowledge of its existence, he believes, becomes in 1899 the focus of certain espionage activities endangering his life. The mystery and danger of Godolphin’s myth seduces Victoria Wren in Florence in 1899
and implicates her both in the mythology of Vheissu and in the Newtonian game of espionage.

In V. the Newtonian world and the mythological intersect at several distinct points which become medians between two extremes. The first occurs in Khartoum in January 1884 with Godolphin as the point of intersection: he enters Khartoum with British reinforcements and is overwhelmed by the carnage and waste of human life he witnesses there; perhaps from Old Godolphin's fever or from an actual "expedition" for Queen Victoria and her Empire, he encounters a miraculous and frightening intrusion of another world, mythical Vheissu, into the mappable, datable, and extreme historical events associated with the Newtonian world as he has just experienced it. He is at a loss to explain the experience logically, either to his son or to Victoria until the two worlds intersect once again in Florence in April 1899, this time dramatically. There, both father and son are pursued by members of the British, Italian, and Venezuelan consulates--Newtonians all--who suspect that they are "cunning arch-professionals" and implicated in "something bigger than a simple insurrection, bigger than a single country" (177), a plot somehow connected to Vheissu. The fact that the Newtonian "Establishment" considers Vheissu (i.e., myth) and its avatars dangerous to its own activities aimed at Empire expansion is enough evidence to ready Evan, who has dismissed his father's bedtime story of Vheissu as a "fairy tale" he "stopped believing in around the age of sixteen," for an "acceptance of miracles and visions" and convince him that indeed Vheissu is part of a "cabal, grand and mysterious" (157). Victoria Wren is intrigued as well, and even though she comes, during the course of the novel, to be identified with Vheissu since she assumes a mythical status of her own, she believes in 1899 that she has a "latent talent of her own for espionage," a skill she feels is "more effective the further it was divorced from moral intention" (198). In this early episode (narratively it occurs in Chapter 5), a pattern emerges in which the extremes define the mean or median: pivotal moments of decision occur when two worlds intersect, when extremes collide. Because Vheissu offers "a kind
of communion,” because it represents one of the “private colonies of the imagination” over which “the Establishment held no sway” (157), it becomes targeted by the Establishment in 1899 for elimination, an endeavor which Victoria Wren, much metamorphosed, will facilitate in South West Africa twenty-three years later.

V.: A Means between Extremes

From 1899 onward, V. is present at intersections where extremes meet, as she is symbolically when Evan, Old Godolphin’s son and potential Orphean character, is released from prison. At the crossroads, the intersection of Via del Purgatorio (masculine) and Via dell’Inferno (feminine), Victoria waits for Evan. Because of his earlier brush with death and his “confession” to the Gaucho concerning his father’s stories of Vheissu, Evan believes that he is at “the trembling planes of a new kind of manhood” and is ready for an acceptance of “miracles and visions such as this meeting at the crossroads seemed to him to be” (200). In a scene reminiscent of Porpentine’s “wordless flickerings” with Victoria Wren in “Under the Rose,” Evan is told by Victoria that “something trembled below its [Florence’s] surface, waiting to burst through” (201). Evan makes the descent, feels that Vheissu is the bond that makes him and Victoria “brother and sister” and that his meeting with Victoria at the intersection positions them “in limbo . . . some still point between hell and purgatory” (200). Like the young lovers, Orpheus and Eurydice, Evan and Victoria find themselves at the threshold, the crossroads between hell and purgatory, and together they observe the world of death. The “still point” of their position as Orphean and Eurydice figures at the “crossroads” represents also the moment at which quantum activity is measured or observed, Bohr’s “interface” between surface level activity (the Newtonian world, the measuring instrument) and that on which surface level activity rests (the quantum world, that which is measured). Like Orpheus and Eurydice, Evan and Victoria at the crossroads of history in 1899 move through the streets filled with musicians and “strolling chains of tourists like a Dance of Death”; they observe the Underworld—or the world—as it exists in Florence at that moment and “share that sense of the world’s
affliction, that outgoing sorrow at the spectacle of Our Human Condition” (203), a condition that will pervade the Western World for half a century.

However, before they arrive at Scheissvogel’s to meet Evan’s father, Old Godolphin is revealing to his life-long friend, Mantissa, another intersection, another collision of extremes, another chapter in the Vheissu myth. This occurred, Old Godolphin tells Mantissa, the year before (1898) when he embarked on a Southern Expedition for Queen and Empire to reach the South Pole. Driven by the memory of Vheissu’s “[c]olors, music, fragrances” (204) that had haunted him for fifteen years, he did “what no man has done”: in the “dead of winter,” he made it to the Pole, “one of the two motionless places on this gyrating world,” the “dead center of the carousel” (205). Old Godolphin’s “descent” to the Pole leads him to encounter a second intrusion of the miraculous into the material world. To “solve Vheissu’s riddle” (205), he says, he gave up “sure knighthood” and “rejected glory” for the first time in his career, and, he tells Mantissa, he found his answer: frozen in the clear ice and perfectly preserved he found the corpse of one of Vheissu’s rainbow-colored spider monkeys. Old Godolphin’s interpretation of this event is no doubt influenced by the extreme conditions that framed Vheissu’s “intrusion” into the Newtonian landscapes: the extreme carnage at Khartoum and the extreme weather conditions in Antarctica in the dead of winter. His interpretation of the discovery of the rainbow spider monkey frozen in the ice at the pole is akin to a revelation, one he shares with his old friend Mantissa: Vheissu, the memory of which had haunted him for fifteen years, he tells Mantissa, is only “a gaudy dream . . . of annihilation,” a portend of what the world of the future is to become. Old Godolphin’s conviction is powerful enough to convince Mantissa. As a result, Mantissa, whose life’s passion has been to possess Botticelli’s Birth of Venus the theft of which he has successfully orchestrated, sees his own Vheissu, his own “dream . . . about to be consummated,” in the “surface of the painting . . . flooded with color and motion” (209). In the end, Mantissa does not take his “entire love” Venus with him. Dissuaded by Old Godolphin’s annihilistic revelation, Mantissa
adopts the “approach and avoid” tactic to his own gaudy dream, a tactic others will adopt in their future encounters with the miraculous.

The initial intersection of two worlds, the Newtonian symbolized by the historical event in 1884 when General Gordon and his troops were annihilated in Khartoum and the mythological symbolized by the “expedition” to unmappable Vheissu, has a profound effect on Old Godolphin and sets into play a series of events that have ramifications which extend far beyond January 1884. At first Godolphin’s encounter with the miraculous, the exploration of Vheissu and his exotic discoveries there—of rainbow spider monkeys, of perfume distilled from “the wings of black moths,” of “men . . . with blue faces” (193)—transforms him, marginalizes him in relation to society, and renders him God-like. Even his name, Godolphin, connotes this deified status: “God” is a part of his name; dolphin comes from the French title “dauphin” which means “heir apparent.” The aura of Vheissu’s colors, the scent of its perfume, and its riddle “torture him for fifteen years” until “fury-ridden” he pursues it to a second intersection of worlds, this time to the still point, the “center of the carousel,” the South Pole. The answer he receives there he believes to be part of a plot; yet, he concludes that Vheissu, the miraculous, is what he feared all along: all skin, all surface with nothing underneath. Old Godolphin’s “gaudy dream of annihilation,” his second interpretation of the miraculous, essentially infects and shapes both Old Godolphin and the next two generations of characters some of whom converge in Florence in 1899. Old Godolphin’s two closest cohorts, Evan the Son and Victoria Wren the Intercessor, become Vheissu’s most adamant avatars forming with Old Godolphin a Trinity—Father, Son, and Paraclete—for the new century, a bond that is solidified in Florence. Evan, the Son, becomes convinced that Vheissu had been “truth all along and after all” and Victoria Wren, who has already been “deflowered” the year before by Goodfellow in Egypt, is “rapt” at Old Godolphin’s tales of Vheissu and becomes intent on “interceding” on his behalf with the British Consulate who has been ordered to pursue and
apprehend Old Godolphin and his son as leaders of “something bigger than simple insurrection” (177).

Victoria Wren in Florence in 1899 is V. at the crossroads: the crossroads of history as the Victorian age gives way to the modern; the intersection of surface level Newtonian experience and myth. The result is cataclysmic and both historically and mythically ushers in a new era, “something entirely different, for which the young century had as yet no name” (410) and for which V. herself becomes a metaphor. V.’s complicated connections with rituals associated with both the worship of the ancient fertility goddess and Roman Catholicism introduce her as Intercessor/Paraclete, a role she assumes in relation to numerous male characters throughout the novel as she is narratively transformed into a symbol of the Golden Mean. V.-as Victoria Wren’s earliest experiences as a Roman Catholic reveal a sexual ramification that connects her with rituals more ancient than Catholicism or even Christianity. In Chapter 3, a convoluted reworking of “Under the Rose,” her early experiences within the Church are imagined and related by Herbert Stencil in one of his eight “impersonations.” She had once been a “novitiate” of the Catholic Church, Herbert imagines, but had left the “great harem clad in black” because she came to view “the Son of God as a young lady will consider an eligible bachelor” and was “unable to stand” any competition for His favors. The Mass was, in her formative years, a “stage or dramatic field” for her “seedtime fantasy” (73). Even as a nubile young girl in Herbert Stencil’s imagination, V.’s association with the Church is sexual with God envisioned as a potential lover. However, the notion of the Mass as a “stage” for V.’s “seedtime fantasy” also identifies her with the earth-goddess Persephone, the Thesmophoria of the Eleusian mysteries, and the grain-based host—precursors of Eurydice, her descent, and her potential for resurrection. V.-as-Victoria Wren’s connection with God and the Son of God is reasserted in Chapter 5 in which her involvement with Old Godolphin and Evan is recounted. The connection has its origins in “ancestral memory” as well as Roman Catholicism, and Victoria’s “notion of the wraith or spiritual double” and its “natural
corollary which says the son is doppelganger to the father” (199), become the basis of Victoria’s consideration of Evan as the “young version” of Captain Hugh. “Having once accepted duality, Victoria had found it only a single step to Trinity,” (199). At the crossroads of Via del Purgatorio and Via dell’ Inferno, she awaits the arrival of the Son to complete the Trinity: Old Godolphin as the Father, Evan as the Son, Victoria as Intercessor/Paraclete. Both the polarity of the extremes and their interdependence on each other is established as part of Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme in events that predate and shape one of the novel’s pivotal moments, the turn of the century: Khartoum and Old Godolphin’s “expeditions” to Vheissu c. 1883-84, his expedition and discovery at the South Pole in 1898, Hugh and Evan’s pursuit as spies by various consulate officials and their interaction with their “Intercessor,” V.-as-Victoria Wren, in Florence in 1899. The points at which the Newtonian and mythological extremes intersect begin in these chronologically early incidents to define what some of the novel’s characters come to recognize as the Golden Mean and its value by the novel’s end.

As Victoria Wren, V. establishes herself as Intercessor, mythmaker, icon of the new era. Though her identity is rooted in the Catholic Church with which she remains connected until her demise in the form of the Bad Priest, she is seduced by Goodfellow in Egypt where she is a “tourist” and where she is associated with the threat of Armageddon in the Fashoda crisis. Her “deflowering” is already complete by the time she reaches Florence:

she’d already been connected, though perhaps only tangentially, with one of those grand conspiracies or foretastes of Armageddon which seemed to have captivated all diplomatic sensibilities in the years preceding the Great War. V. and a conspiracy. Its particular shape governed only by the surface accidents of history at the time (155).

By the time she meets Old Godolphin at age nineteen, “she had crystallized into a nun-like temperament pushed to its most dangerous extreme” (167). She has already purchased the
"ivory comb" that metaphorically weaves its way through the novel's convoluted events. Fashioned by "A Fuzzy-Wussy, an artisan among the Mahdists, in commemoration of the crucifixions of '83, in the country east of invested Khartoum," it depicts "five crucified... soldiers of the British Army" (167). Her "motives in buying it," we are told, "may have been" the "hue and shape" of fashion, but as the novel progresses, in V.'s possession the comb becomes an icon for the "beastliness," "carriion," and "waste" Old Godolphin experienced at Khartoum and out of which his "gaudy dream of annihilation," Vheissu, emerges to eventually capture Victoria's already deflowered and secularized imagination: Vheissu becomes the emblem for her of surface-level experience, like the skin of a dark tattooed woman. Victoria's penchant for violence and her unemotional voyeurism of it—which perhaps drew her to the comb and to the plot involving Old Godolphin—is apparent at the meeting between Father and Son at Scheissvogel's. Victoria watches the reunion for a moment, but then her "placid" gaze is captured by a rioter being "bayoneted again and again by two soldiers" and by the "fair of violent death" (209) between rioters and soldiers in the street. She watches with "no emotion ... inviolate and calm" as if the scene has been "framed and staged ... for her alone" (200), "as if she saw herself embodying a feminine principle, acting as a complement to all this bursting, explosive male energy" (209). Complement she becomes by attending major atrocities of the new century from the Fashoda Crisis in 1898 to the close of World War II. She is the Intercessor for the new century of extremes, a desacralized Eurydice who strolls with "chains of tourists" and seeks nothing below the surface level of experience, who becomes the primary observer of twentieth century experience intent on collapsing it into a century-long "Dance of Death" (201).

The Dance of Death that so captivates Victoria in the streets of Florence in 1899 culminates when V.-as Vera Meroving seeks to exterminate Old Godolphin's mythical dream of Vheissu, the private colony of his imagination, at Foppil's Villa in South West Africa in 1922. Evan, the Son, has vanished from the scene although not from Old
Godolphin’s memory, and Victoria Wren has metamorphosed through her identities as V. in Paris in 1913 to Veronica Manganese in Malta in 1919 to Vera Meroving. The violence V.-as-Victoria Wren watched placidly in the streets of Florence in 1899 and the decadence of Paris in 1913 are exacerbated in Foppl’s “Siege Party” which celebrates Germany’s colonial efforts to subdue the Bondel, Herero, and Hottentot tribes native to South West Africa and exterminate their mytho-cultural past. Foppl’s baroque villa and grounds are “sealed off from the outside world” like Prospero’s castle in “Masque of the Red Death.” Death is inside as well as out as the conglomeration of Europeans intermittently torture and kill natives and debauch until every night seemed like an “eternal Fasching” celebrating death without the promise of rebirth. According to Kurt Mondaugen, a young German scientist sent to investigate certain atmospheric radio disturbances, “life there . . . [was] too lavish, spectral, probably carnivorous; not in good taste” (236).

The story of Foppl’s Siege Party and V.’s role in it—which includes an account of the atrocities perpetuated by the Germans against the South West African tribes in 1904 and again in 1922—is the subject of “Mondaugen’s Story” as Herbert Stencil relates it to Eigenvalue in New York in 1956, Chapter 9 of the novel. (See Appendix A, p. 354 and Maps 5 and 5A, pp. 363-64). The account demonstrates the extreme measures human beings will resort to in order to possess land, subdue diverse mytho-cultural perceptions to a single (in this case Newtonian) point of view, and eradicate personal connections with individuals or beliefs. When Mondaugen arrives at Foppl’s Villa where he has been assigned to continue his atmospheric investigations, he meets both V.-as-Vera Meroving and Old Godolphin and discovers an inversion of activity that he had experienced in the northern hemisphere during Fasching celebrations in Germany. Early in the chapter when Mondaugen is setting up his antennae and his scientific instruments, he first sees Vera as a kind of earth goddess to whom he is sexually attracted, a “woman of indeterminate age in a negligee of peacock blues and greens” (236). Later, however, when she is dressed in “jodhpurs and an army shirt” (236), he finds himself emeshed in a dehumanizing
“conspiracy” with her as they simultaneously acknowledge the cries of a native being tortured and probably killed but make no move to investigate or interfere. Vera’s dual nature, witnessed early by Mondaugen, is revealed most noticeably in her bizarre and beautiful artificial eye: the eye is Newtonian—a watch “wound by a gold key” and run by “delicately-wrought wheels, springs, ratchets”; yet, it is mythical as well—“[d]arker green and flecks of gold had been fused into 12 vaguely zodiacal shapes” (237). Mondaugen also meets “an old Englishman named Godolphin who explains to Mondaugen that he had been in Cape Town “trying to raise a crew for the Pole” when Foppl invited him to the Siege Party for the weekend. That Old Godolphin has been trying to get together “a crew for the Pole” even though he is nearly eighty suggests that perhaps Old Godolphin has begun to question his earlier interpretation of Vheissu as “a gaudy dream of annihilation” and wishes to return to the Antarctic for another look. “Now I have to go back,” he tells Mondaugen. Mondaugen, already entwined in a conspiracy with Vera, becomes more deeply implicated in her attempt to annihilate Old Godolphin’s myth of Vheissu. The Trinity formulated around the Vheissu myth in Florence in 1899 with Old Godolphin as the Father, Evan as the Son, and Victoria Wren as the Intercessor has metamorphosed into a new and malign Trinity with General von Trotha as the Father of original atrocities against the South West African natives in 1904, Foppl as the Son who seeks to emulate his atrocities in 1922, and Vera Meroving as the Intercessor who will facilitate the suppression of myth. To further confuse matters, both time and space are distorted within the villa, a Newtonian vacuum wherein all tends toward entropy. Mondaugen’s is a journey into the “mirror-time” of “this other hemisphere” below the equator where the individual will has been usurped by the will to power. Within the villa he discovers a “parody of space” in Foppl’s own planetarium complete with solar system and treadmill to make “the wooden planets . . . rotate and spin,” a treadmill operated by Bondels enslaved by their German colonizers.
Within Foppl’s villa Mondaugen experiences the ambiguity between history—we may be “the lead weights of a fantastic clock, necessary to keep an ordered sense of history and time prevailing against chaos” (233)—and dream. Mondaugen becomes increasingly unable to distinguish waking experience from dream, history from myth because within Foppl’s villa, the two begin to merge. He dreams of Fasching, “the mad German carnival . . . that ends the day before Lent begins” (243), yet the dream seems little different that the activities in Foppl’s villa: torture, indiscriminate sexual activity, dances of the dead. From his dream of “massed weaving bodies” that resemble the “damned in some underworld,” Vera Meroving, his Eurydice, appears and beckons him to see “another Bondel [who] had been executed, this time by hanging” (244). There as voyeur, ecouter, he overhears Vera interceding for Foppl and the “Establishment” as she attempts to confuse Old Godolphin’s memory of Vheissu, the “private colony of his imagination,” with Foppl’s Siege Party and von Trotha’s 1904 atrocities. Temporarily Old Godolphin is able to defend his “private colony” Vheissu from “siege” by the “Establishment” whose avatar is now V. Imagination, he tells her, has become public property, and the War is what public imagination has produced. Vera’s trump card, however, is another “conspiracy” with Mondaugen whom she uses as a surrogate for Old Godolphin’s missing son Evan. “[T]he barren touchlessness of [Old Godolphin’s] memory” weakens her prey and finally enables her to replace Vheissu, the myth that threatened the Establishment some twenty-three years before in Florence, with “the prescribed common dream” of death and dehumanization. Even Mondaugen’s keeping Old Godolphin in his room does not prevent the usurpation of Old Godolphin’s dream of Vheissu, a dream which both grew out of the atrocities in Khartoum in 1884 and threatened to miraculously replace them. When Mondaugen recovers from his bout with scurvy, Old Godolphin is no longer in his room. When next Mondaugen sees Old Godolphin, the old man and Vera “appear to have changed clothing,” and Old Godolphin is “dancing about the body [of a Bondel] and flicking its buttocks with a sjambok” (278). V. emerges in 1922 aligned with the malignant von Trotha and with the
heir to his atrocities, Foppl, as a gross inversion of the Intercessor and of the telluric
goddess Demeter/Persephone—a Eurydice whose “downgoing” does not become a prelude
to regeneration but only the symbol of death’s finality, of myth annihilated by history and
one-directional time.

In 1922 Mondaugen is a scientist, an engineer, who is sent to South West Africa to
monitor unexplained atmospheric radio disturbances and perhaps decipher some pattern.
He is a scientist who has yet to be converted completely to Newtonian thought. His
assignment brings him into contact with the mythologically-oriented native tribes who
“believe in ghosts” and mock his amplified sferics with their pennywhistles; his job
requires that he “listen” to the sounds of “another world’s intrusion into this one” and try to
interpret them. However, because his sferics are judged to make the natives rebellious, he
is sent to Foppl’s to continue his assignment. Like Sidney whose story is not told until the
Epilogue, Mondaugen is “out of his element,” but Mondaugen encounters in the closed
system of Foppl’s villa a hell that seeks to eliminate any possibility for regeneration. There,
Mondaugen begins to function as an Orpheus figure, enamored with V.—as—Vera Meroving,
his Eurydice. He remains in hell for a time until Vera’s lover and representative of death,
Weissmann, claims to have broken the code sent via the sferics through Mondaugen’s
listening apparatus. The message Weissmann delivers—“The world is all that the case is”—a
message which once deciphered, albeit by Weissmann, collapses the chaotic disturbances
which once held infinite possibility into an affirmation of the exclusive existence of the
material world. After witnessing Godolphin’s subjugation to Vera’s version of the “gaudy
dream of annihilation” in Godolphin’s threshing of the dead Bondel’s body, Mondaugen
chooses “neither to watch nor to listen” but rather to leave the villa and ride behind a
maimed Bondel, one of the “three animate objects on the yellow road” (279), who sings a
song “in Hottentot dialect” Mondaugen cannot understand. In Herbert Stencil’s version,
Mondaugen chooses the animate—life—over its opposite, the “Fasching-white” faces of
Foppl’s European Siege partiers “dehumanized and aloof, as if they were the last gods on
earth" (279). However, Mondaugen's choice is not permanent—if indeed it was a choice and not Herbert Stencil's invention. For when Herbert discovers Mondaugen in New York City and determines that Mondaugen has some "clue to the cabal" involving V., Mondaugen is working for the Yoyodyne company owned by Bloody Chiclitz, a company that makes gryocompasses and instruments of war. In 1956, Mondaugen is an engineer firmly entrenched in the Newtonian Establishment who, in Herbert's "stencilizing" imagination, may have temporarily waxed Orphean, but who left the hell of Foppl's villa only to resurface in the hell legitimized by corporate power.

Apparent in the two incidents cited above—the meeting between V., Evan, and Old Godolphin in Florence in 1899 and V's "Intercession" with Old Godolphin a second time at Foppl's Siege Party in South West Africa in 1922—is V.'s emergence in this, Pynchon's first novel, as a Eurydice figure for many men and as a symbol of the elusive Golden Mean in Thomas Pynchon's grand metaphorical scheme. A diverse assortment of men in these two episodes find themselves captivated by her, even seduced by what they perceive her to represent; yet, she is as elusive as that electron which, in the two-slit experiment, behaves unpredictably as both particle and wave. The men who find themselves drawn to her in these two episodes are potential Orpheans all, yet none—with the exception of Sidney Stencil—is able to attain Orphean status. Evan is enraptured by her in 1899, but by 1919 he has been transformed into a grotesque parody of his former self as her "Caretaker" in Malta. Old Godolphin shares the "private colony of his imagination [Vheissu]" with her in Florence only to have it displaced by her with the "gaudy dream of annihilation" at Foppl's Villa twenty-three years later. Mondaugen at first mistakes her for an earth goddess and becomes embroiled in a "conspiracy" with her, but later is repulsed by her dehumanizing influence on Old Godolphin in which Mondaugen discovers he has played a role. Yet, by 1956, he too has been captured by the "gaudy dream" and works as an engineer for the Yoyodyne Company which manufactures instruments of war. None of these characters, however, is more captivated by V. than Herbert Stencil whose relentless pursuit of her
continues throughout the entire novel, a pursuit which ends in his inability to tolerate the uncertainty she represents as a symbol of the Golden Mean.

As a symbol of the Golden Mean, V. plays many roles. In Herbert’s imagination she is a nubile young girl who was once a “novitiate” in the Catholic church, a young woman who has already been seduced by Goodfellow and the game of espionage by the time she is eighteen, the feminine principle who is already interested in the phenomenon of male violence in Florence in 1899, an Intercessor between Evan and Old Godolphin and their Apollonian pursuers represented by the British, Italians, and Venezuelan consulates in Florence, and quite possibly Herbert’s mother even though he calls the idea “ridiculous.” In Chapter 14 entitled “V. in love,” she is involved in a lesbian relationship with Mélanie L’Heuremaudit in which she assumes the male role. The landscape of Paris, 1913, the setting of Chapter 14, is a landscape for “tourists” and full of “inanimate monuments”; it is pure surface, merely a “coordinate system” of two-dimensional streets such as those displayed on the “pages and maps” of Baedeker’s “little red handbooks.” V. partakes in the extreme decadence that permeated that city and all of Europe on the eve of World War I. An owner of a dress shop, V. is identified by what she wears, her outer apparel, her second skin: it was “her clothes, her accessories, which determined her,” and Itague, an ex-bartender-turned-cabaret manager, who knew her in Paris later wonders, “Who knew her ‘soul’?” (400). Where V. is, events are staged for her, the voyeur of and Intercessor for the atrocities of the twentieth century. In Chapter 14, V. becomes enamored with fifteen year old Mélanie l’Heuremaudit” (cursed hour). Mélanie has been sodomized repeatedly by her “Papa” whom she identifies as a German in her dream; her personal abuse seems to foreshadow France’s future ravaging by the German patriarchs who seek to control Europe’s destiny. V.’s love of the inanimate begins to define V., and by 1913 in Paris she has begun to appropriate the inanimate into her person: “From the ring there sprouted a slender female arm, fashioned in silver. The hand was cupped, and held the lady’s cigarette” (402). The “woman” (no one in Paris knew her name), “expressionless, poised
like one of her own mannequins” (401) comes to the cabaret-theatre to watch, voyeur-like; with her black cigarettes she burns “ma fétiche, in black-rimmed holes” into Mélanie’s dress. Mélanie, reduced to a dead-eyed wind-up doll by her sodomizing father and then to “Mlle. Jarretière” (the garter) by Satin and Itague who regard her as a sex object for the stage, becomes the “object” of V.’s “love,” and by the chapter’s end, the very embodiment of V.’s love of the inanimate. “A decadence,” as Itague defines it, “is a falling-away from what is human, and the further we fall, the less human we become” until “we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories” (405). According to Porcépic who tells Herbert Stencil of the lesbian relationship between Mélanie and V., V., who perhaps intends to “foist off the humanity” she has lost onto Mélanie whom she deems an “inanimate object,” suddenly finds herself “excommunicated” from the inanimate, and in the “null-time of human love” with Mélanie, the “still-life of love at one of its many extremes.” From this extreme version—or perversion—of love a complicated and symbiotic “pattern of three” emerges: “V. needed her fetish, Mélanie [needed] her mirror” image as voyeur as well as a “real voyeur” who was also “her own double” (410).

The extremity of V.’s love for Mélanie becomes “a variation on the Porpentine theme, the Tristan-and-Iseult theme,” and an extreme version of Romanticism itself: the belief that in death lovers become “one with the inanimate universe and with each other.” In V.’s adaptation of this romantic theme, “love-play until then becomes an impersonation of the inanimate, a transvestism . . . between quick and dead; human and fetish” (410). Symbolically this notion is realized in Mélanie’s performance as Su Feng in L’Enlevement des Vierges Chinoises, the Rape of the Chinese Virgins, Satin’s finest ballet and Vladimir Porcépic’s greatest music. Amid male and female dancers and German-designed dancing automatons, Mélanie herself becomes inanimate. In the final moments of the ballet, “[a]dorned with so many combs, bracelets, sequins,” she “neglected to add to herself the one inanimate object that would have saved her [a protective metal device, a species of chastity belt]” (414), and she is impaled on a pole, raised above the audience, and dies,
reducing herself completely to an inanimate status. This, evidently, is the only instance in which V., attracted by the inanimate nature of Mélanie, is “bounced” into love with another, “the fetish of Mélanie and the fetish of herself” (410) becoming one. It may have been “a variation of the Porpentine theme” in which “the act of love and the act of death are one” (410), but it is a variation on the Orpheus-Eurydice myth as well. However, in this chapter, “V. in Love,” Mélanie is the Eurydice figure and V. the Orpheus who could not bring her back from Death, or who perhaps loved her because she most resembled death. V.’s experience of being in love with Mélanie, one of the extremes of love at a moment of extreme historical events--Europe at the brink of world war--does not redeem V. although it may have conditioned her for her Eurydice role as the means of spiritual awakening and transformation for the novel’s two fully-actualized Orphian characters, Sidney Stencil and Fausto Maijstral. As the “means” of transformation, V. becomes Aristotle’s median defined by the extremes she embodies, the regenerative “points dimensionless” of the novel, “the Good.” Like Eurydice and quantum phenomena with which she is associated, possibility, once observed, is collapsed into actuality and in turn becomes the point from which future possibilities may emerge. That V.’s relationship to Mélanie is viewed as “a variation of the Porpentine theme” in “Under the Rose” and that Porpentine’s theme is a version of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth alludes to Victoria’s meeting with Sidney Stencil, Porpentine’s colleague, in Florence, an encounter that is the impetus for events which expand to include the entire novel.

**Sidney Stencil and V.: The Novel’s Golden Mean**

The meeting between Sidney Stencil and Victoria Wren in Florence 1899 is merely alluded to in Chapter 7, “She hangs on the western wall,” an episode told to Eigenvalue by Herbert toward the center of the novel. That a meeting occurs is ambiguous and not until the Epilogue is the significance of the meeting understood. Sidney Stencil is in his forties when he first meets the nineteen-year-old Victoria Wren. He is a veteran British spy who is disenchanted with the Establishment and surface-level experience. He is imagined by
Herbert to be “sitting bemused in a deep leather chair” hurling penholders “like darts, at the large photograph of the current Foreign Minister”; with his “single hit” in the center of the minister’s forehead,” he Orpheus-like transforms the minister and member of the Newtonian Establishment into a “benevolent unicorn” (188). In connection with the political situation involving Old Godolphin and his son, Sidney has developed a “subliminal ill will” because the investigation is being run by Italians, and he considers the “Mediterranean/Roman Catholic/irrational” at odds with the British “northern/Protestant/intellectual” (190) pose he has adopted as a member of the British foreign service. In Herbert’s account, Demivolt first mentions Victoria to Sidney who, as a British agent at the consulate in Florence, is disgusted with “The Situation” involving Old Godolphin and the fact that he is being forced to deal with it. “A young girl,” Demivolt tells Stencil, “A young English girl. Has him locked in . . . . Don’t you want to see her?” When Sidney finds out she is pretty, he defers to Demivolt saying, “Things are bad enough as it is,” (188) but, having second thoughts says, “Perhaps I will see her later, when you’re done” (189). That the meeting takes place and is the novel’s pivotal personal event, that she “seduced him on a leather couch in the Florence consulate” (488), that she becomes the mother of Sidney’s son Herbert who ends up trying to piece together the mystery and meaning of V. fifty-seven years later, is not revealed until the Epilogue when it becomes the Golden Mean of the V. narrative, the literary singularity out of which all the novel’s events materialize. Immediately after the “young English girl” is mentioned to Sidney in Chapter 7, Sidney immediately begins to muse on “the Situation”:

He had decided long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment . . . . The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three (189).
Once the outcome of events is revealed in the Epilogue, his musing takes on a much larger significance. "The Situation" he first believed involved only Old Godolphin and his son quickly expands to implicate both him and western civilization on the brink of the twentieth century in ways he can never fully grasp. Initially "The Situation" is believed by the Newtonian Establishment to be a political one: the Italian and British consulates fear that "something bigger than simple insurrection" (177) may threaten to overthrow the political equilibrium of Europe; when all the clues are gathered (they include the entire novel), the "insurrection" does prove to be one that is "bigger than a single country" (177). In fact, the cabal associated with Old Godolphin and Vheissu becomes a metaphor for "The Situation" of twentieth century civilization: myth, religion, a view of the world that includes the miraculous threatens to upset the equilibrium established by the Newtonian "system of the world" which insists upon causal explanations and predictable outcomes. In Carse's language, the "infinite game" of myth, besieged by the "finite game" of Newtonian reason, threatens the plausibility of the "finite game" which requires winners to annihilate their opponents and control the material world. However, "The Situation" also implicates Sidney in a personal experience that occurs, like the quantum world of activity on which the observable world rests, below the surface level of political and historical activity. His encounter with Victoria Wren not only involves him in the Vheissu cabal but allows the miraculous to penetrate his surface-level existence: love, the Golden Mean of existence, changes his life forever. Because Victoria Wren seduces him "on the leather couch in the Florence consulate" in 1899, he falls in love with her and fathers a child, Herbert Stencil. However, Sidney's transformation does not occur until 1919, twenty years after he meets Victoria Wren and eighteen years after the birth of his son; when it does occur, it takes place on the island of Malta with V.-as-Veronica Manganese in attendance. Before and after the meeting between Sidney and Victoria Wren in 1899, V. has many identities. She is the essence of both ambiguity and the Golden Mean, and yet is inextricably entwined with the extremes that define both her and the first half of the twentieth century. Her many
identities emanate from the initial discovered by Herbert in Sidney Stencil’s journals:
“There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who but what: what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report” (53). From this initial Herbert stencilizes a variety of identities for V.: Victoria Wren, V. in love with Mélanie, Vera Merovering. However, Herbert merely chooses the identities that fit his pattern of V. which depicts her metamorphosis from the human toward the inanimate as she bodily incorporates more and more “bits of inert matter.” The pattern toward inanimation is the only pattern Herbert is willing to see. He fails to grasp the larger pattern for which she is a metaphor. Herbert refuses to admit that V. might be his mother, an idea he calls “ridiculous.” Yet information revealed in the Epilogue suggests not only that this is so, but that for Herbert’s father, this pivotal personal event was the singularity out of which Sidney’s life gains significance. V. did seduce Sidney on the “leather couch of the Florence consulate” (488) the day of their meeting, and the seduction evidently resulted in a love affair that ended in the birth of Herbert in 1901 and Sidney’s “loss” of V. following that event: 1901 was “the year Victoria died” (52). Even though Herbert was “raised motherless” with “[n]o facts on the mother’s disappearance. Died in childbirth, ran off with someone, committed suicide: some way of vanishing painful enough to keep Sidney from ever referring to it in all his correspondence with his son which is available” (52), Herbert never makes the connection between his absent mother and V. Connected with Queen Victoria’s death in 1901 which marked an end to an era and the beginning of the less humane and more horrific modern age is Victoria’s metaphorical death as she abandons her role as Sidney’s lover and leaves their child, Herbert, motherless. In her first discernible role as Eurydice in the novel, V. is lost to her Orphean counterpart, Sidney, during the years between her disappearance in 1901 and her reunion with him on Malta in 1919.

The only account of V.’s activities during this time is an account in which V. herself falls in love and Orpheus-like loses her Eurydice, Mélanie l’Heuremaudit, to death
in the Parisian "Underworld" in 1913. The world itself between 1913 and V.'s reunion with Sidney in 1919 becomes a living hell as it is catapulted into world conflict the goal of which is entropy and death. V. becomes its appropriate metaphor. She is the earth goddess Demeter who is unable or has no desire to resurrect Persephone from the Underworld, no desire to regenerate life; she is in love with the inanimate nature of death as all of life is reduced to its entropic non-living state from which new life fails to emerge. V. is the prevailing spirit of the world as it was in the first half of the twentieth century, a world that more resembled the Underworld where Death and his bride reigned than it resembled earth, the crossroads between hell and heaven. In a time less preoccupied with the finite game of war and the possession of territory, V. might have been the embodiment of a "feminine principle" which favored life over death, which brought life out of death, which allowed for the miracle of rebirth. By the end of Chapter 7 and after she seduced Sidney on the leather couch, V. finds herself at the crossroads of purgatory and hell because those are the only choices in 1899--there is "no Via del Paradiso anywhere in Florence" or "in the world" (201)--and then, watching passively the bloodshed and rioting in the streets of Florence, she becomes the embodiment of "a feminine principle" which acted as "complement to all this bursting explosive male energy . . . the fair of violent death, framed and staged . . . for her alone" (209). V. does not fulfill her role as Sidney's wife and nurturing mother of her son Herbert as nature might dictate. Instead, she seduces fathers and sons and succubus-like possesses them. The more the feminine principle mutates into the masculine, the more inanimate and representative of spiritual death she becomes until at last many of her body parts are artificial and inanimate, and she has assumed the role of the Bad Priest counseling young mothers to abort their babies.

If, however, this were V.'s only role--the degeneration of the feminine life-giving and life-affirming force into its opposite--Pynchon's first novel would be far less complicated and optimistic than it finally is. For V. also functions in her various Eurydice roles as a catalyst not only for the spiritual regeneration of her Orphean counterparts but for
the far-reaching effects of their regeneration. As such, she does become, in the Rilkean
sense, the source of the life-force regenerated. The accounts of these various instances are
interestingly reserved for the two chapters in the book which focus on V. but are not a part
of Herbert Stencil's attempts to stencilize a notion of her, the "Epilogue 1919" and Chapter
11, "Confessions of Fausto Majstral." Only a brushstroke in Herbert Stencil's account
suggests a meeting between Sidney and Victoria. The objectified account of the incident
and its implications for Sidney's personal life are given in the Epilogue. As an "appendix"
to the novel, the Epilogue is separated from the novel; it gives information to which Herbert
Stencil is never privy. In relation to his parents' lives, Herbert remains "at the bottom of
the fold," where, Eigenvalue concludes, "it's impossible to determine . . . pattern" (155) in
history's fabric. The reader of V., however, gains a sense of dramatic irony and an
understanding of "The Situation" from the Epilogue that Herbert Stencil can never know
because the Epilogue gives the reader access to Sidney Stencil's private life, one Sidney
chose not to share with his son or commit to his journals. Essentially the Epilogue as the
literary singularity from which all the novel's events unfold is the novel's median, the point
at which the Situation in the novel becomes a metaphor for the Situation that is the novel,
the point at which the reader is "in on it" and the Situation of the novel exists "in the minds
of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment"; the novel assumes a fourth
dimension, gives another perspective, one larger than any of the characters in the novel are
allowed to see. Orphean characters, however, do achieve an insight to which other
characters are unable or unwilling to aspire, and this insight facilitates their spiritual
awakening and transformation. Ironically the characters who experience this status are not
those who are the focal characters of the novel--i.e., Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil;
they are minor characters who become, by virtue of their humanitarian acts, the
protagonists of the novel.

Sidney Stencil is such a character. Sidney's connection with Orpheus is initially
established in Chapter 7 where his "'music hall' days"--before his involvement in
spionage—are referenced. He has been dubbed by his colleagues as “Soft-shoe Sidney” because of his ability to be “at his best working in front of a chorus line” (189). The connection between the “performance” and the staging of musical theatre and the “performance” and staging of espionage activities is likewise made. He thinks of the Vheissu cabal as “a show . . . too big, too serious, to be carried out by any but the top men in the field” (emphasis added 190). He “stages” the interrogation of young Evan and the Gaucho and tells his colleague Moffit to “give him [the Gaucho] an hour. Then if he wants to escape, let him.” When Moffit questions Sidney’s decision, Sidney says, “Enough, Moffit. Back in the chorus line” (191). In the Epilogue, Sidney relives the “‘music hall’ days” by singing a tune from “before the war” (465). The tune is about fatherhood and family—the family Sidney never had. Sidney is not only associated with music as a music hall performer, but like Orpheus, he has lost the woman who, in a more ideal “Situation,” would have been his wife. V. has been lost to him for eighteen years. Like Eurydice, she has been a dweller in the underworld; like Rilke’s version of Eurydice in “Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes.,” she perhaps preferred hell. However, at the beginning of the Epilogue, Sidney is about to be reunited with his lost love. Like Orpheus who had to descend to the Underworld to retrieve Eurydice, Sidney too must be removed from familiar surroundings and get out of his comfort zone. He must leave Europe where he “feels at home” and descend to Malta, the “cradle of life” where he is sent by the British Foreign Service to keep tabs on the civil disturbances that were expected to erupt on the British-controlled island of Malta and possibly disrupt the fragile Armistice following World War I. Malta is symbolic of everything Sidney distrusted—the “Mediterranean/ Catholic/ irrational—and this is where he, “northern/Protestant/intellectual” (190), finds himself; even before he is reunited with V., he feels “The Situation” he experienced twenty years before in Florence about to be reenacted. Moreover, Malta is an island with mythological connections which are related to Sidney by a Charon-like figure, Mehemet, a Moslem sailor said to belong “to the trade routes of the Middle Ages” who “had in fact sailed the xebec
[which carries them both to Malta] through a rift in time's fabric" (459). Mehemet not only guides the "green xebech" through the rain, both symbols of renewal, but he relates the myth of Mara, the feminine "spirit" of Malta who, according to legend was "constrained to live in...[t]he inhabited plain," a symbol of surface level experience, surrounding the capital city of Valletta which is "her domain." (See Appendix A, p. 354 and Map 6, p. 365).

Focusing on the mean is difficult for Sidney, accustomed as he has been to living in the Newtonian world of three-dimensions and surface-level experience represented by Europe and by a life of foreign service. Like his good friend, Pompentone, he is familiar with the finite game of espionage which depends on "feints, distractions, falsifications" and the annihilation of one's opponents to win the game (Carse 18). Into his journals Sidney articulated the crux of his dilemma, one evidently overlooked by Herbert as irrelevant. In it he laments the "intolerable double vision," marked by the extremes that define "this century." Metaphorically he names them "the hothouse of the past" and the "street" which is full of "mob violence." "What of the real present," he asks, "the once respectable Golden Mean?" He fears it may be "[o]bsolete; in any case, lost sight of" (468).

However, even as these comments are recalled from his journals, he is making his descent to encounter in the character of V. his Eurydice, the very Mean he feels has been lost. He follows Old Majstral, an informant he believes to be a double agent through Valletta's "Disreputable Quarter" to "Strada Stretta; Strait Street" (468), a location that serves as a point of connection in the novel. By definition, a strait is "a narrow passage of water connecting two large bodies of water," a "position of difficulty, distress, or need" (Random House College Dictionary). Strait Street in Valletta is characterized by "topographical deformities" that seemed to be "a succession of music-hall stages, each demarcated by a curve or slope, each with a different set and acting company but all for the same low entertainment, Stencil, old soft-shoe artist, felt quite at home" (468). The street is full of seamen, "shoeshine boys, pimps, hawkers of trinkets, confections, dirty pictures"
(468). Sidney is wandering through hell. When he catches sight of “a Greek pope or parish priest” there, Stencil wonders “what a man of God [is] doing in this territory? Seeking perhaps to reclaim souls” (469). Stencil is both mistaken and not mistaken: the priest is actually Demivolt, the fellow spy in Florence in 1899 who introduced Sidney to Victoria. He seems to have “popped up again” causing Stencil to fear that “the same chaotic and Situational forces at work in Florence twenty years ago” (470) might be reactivated.

What Sidney does not yet realize is that his descent into Strait Street is the beginning of a narrow and difficult passage through an Underworld which will result in the reclamation of his spiritual nature and by no means is his journey complete. Sidney laments his--anybody’s--inability to understand “the Situation” and recalls an article he had written and pseudonymously submitted to Punch, the Establishment’s organ of communication; the title of the article is reminiscent of quantum phenomenon--“The Situation as an N-Dimensional Mishmash.” In the article he had written that “[s]hort of examining the entire history of each individual participating . . . short of anatomizing each soul what hope has anyone of understanding a Situation?” (470), a statement which focuses on the uncertain nature of any “Situation-in-the-process-of-becoming” whether the Situation is political, personal, spiritual, or quantum. Sidney’s article was rejected by the Establishment. Of course, it was: Sidney had, in it, rejected the very notions on which the authority of the Establishment rested--the notion that every outcome is causal and predictable, that all causes and effects can be determined, that the game is always finite and its rules always known. Sidney questions this premise--the Newtonian one--even as far back as Florence 1899 when he throws darts at the Foreign Minister’s photograph. Like Orpheus, Sidney has partaken of both worlds--the Apollonian as spy and the Dionysian in his theatrical endeavors. Most importantly, he has encountered V., the earth goddess perverted, the Maenad frenzied, an Intercessor adept at espionage. And so he is on Strait Street, Orpheus descending to recover that which is lost. Yet his descent goes beyond the
merely Orphean. In the Epilogue, the penultimate and climactic episode, hell is transformed into a quantum place as in his “fever dreams” he is “shrunk to sub-microscopic size and entered a brain.” Here he searches the hell-like labyrinth of synaptic “lightning bursts” for a “soul” that may be his. He was “a stranger in this landscape . . . chasing dead ends, following random promises, frustrated at every turn” (471). Sidney’s Orphean descent is into a quantum-like hell; the Eurydice he searches for is connected to his soul, a soul lost perhaps as V. has been lost to him for twenty years. Sidney’s search becomes the search of all Orpheans in Thomas Pynchon’s fiction: the search for one’s soul via the Golden Mean. His personal descent and the chaos of the underworld that may be his own brain he associates with the mob violence expected in the streets of Malta, a violence which he connects with the Church, with the Paraclete—the “Third Person of the Trinity”—and with V. “Especially on Malta, a matriarchal island. Would the Paraclete be also a mother?” Sidney wonders, and at the same instant, Demivolt the spy-priest says, “Don’t turn around now . . . but she’s at Majistral’s table” (472). The “she” is Veronica Manganese, “a troublemaker”: V. resurfaced. Together Sidney and Demivolt follow V. to her Villa de Sammut, yet encounter not V., but a grotesque version of Evan Godolphin injured in the war and rebuilt with inert material who identifies himself as “her caretaker.”

Much as Eurydice becomes the objective of Orpheus’ descent into the Underworld and the means of his regeneration, so too does V. become the objective of Sidney’s descent and the means of his regeneration. She is Sidney’s connection to his spiritual nature and the means of his spiritual recovery. This connection is implied by her name, Veronica Manganese, the identity which she has assumed for her reunion with Sidney. Manganese is used in dry cell batteries to prevent polarization, and this is precisely how V. functions for Sidney on the island of Malta: by containing the extremes of twentieth century experience (i.e., the mythological as earth goddess, the Newtonian as spy), she neutralizes them for Sidney and allows energy to flow. On Strait Street, Veronica Manganese materializes from Sidney’s thoughts on the Paraclete—“It was the Paraclete he feared”
(480)—and becomes the Intercessor who facilitates his miraculous transformation. The numerous references that connect V. with Christianity and the Church, especially those in the Epilogue, emphasize this idea. Sidney’s notion that “Violent overthrow is a Christian phenomenon” (472) and his identification of the Church with a promiscuous woman further reinforces V.’s ongoing connection with the Church. When he confesses “his theory of Paracletian politics” to Fr. Fairing, his description of the transformations of the Church sounds like a description of V.’s metamorphosis from Victoria Wren to V. to Veronica Manganese: “The Church has matured after all. Like a young person she has passed from promiscuity to authority . . . . An old dame trying to cover up a flaming youth” (479-80). In the Epilogue, V. continues to be identified with the Church. When Sidney’ glance first meets Veronica’s, she is emerging “from the confessional” at Father Fairing’s church; when they actually meet, they meet in the same sanctuary in the “soul-kissed” Valletta spring. This time Sidney recognizes her as “the balloon girl” of Florence 1899 even though she “wore an elaborate hat and veil” and her “face was a generalized as that of any graceful woman seen in the street” and even before she reveals to him the ivory comb in her hair. Yet, V. is also connected to Mara, the Maltese fertility goddess whose myth Mehemet relates to Sidney on their rainy journey to Malta in the green xebec. Like Mara, V. is a mistress of disguise yet her image has “remained constant” over time “no matter what the prevalent fashion in females” (462). Like Mara, V. is “a quaint hermaphrodite sort of deity” to whom “magical talents” have been attributed. Like Mara, V. unleashes an “epidemic of sexual perversion” and has known “the luxury of a woman’s love.” Like Mara, V. is associated with both peace and violence, with extremes at their most extreme. And like Mara, V. “provide[s] . . . the means” (463) to mediate the extremes, to depolarize them in favor of more benign possibilities.

The meeting is the turning point for Sidney who has already begun to give up any pretense of control over the finite Newtonian game of espionage he is expected to play. This occurs after his eyes meet Veronica’s in the church, an event which triggers a
tremendous nostalgia... and melancholy" (481), a backward glance to the woman he loved, lost, and found. Already Malta has begun to affect him. Malta is an island, the center of Mara’s circle of influence, the cradle of civilization, a still point “where all history seemed simultaneously present”; in Valletta, V.’s “remembrances seemed almost to live” (481). For Sidney Malta becomes the center of the circle, the Golden Mean wherein extremes—Newtonian espionage and myth, the masculine and the feminine, Situations political and personal, finite and infinite—are contained. Even more disturbing, these extremes converge in Malta, in Valletta where there is “[n]o history, all history at once...” (484) and Sidney realizes as he submits to Veronica Manganese that “what he thought was an end had proved only to be a twenty-year stay.” He admits that the cause of their meeting and mating in “the hot house of a Florentine spring once again” is ultimately unknowable and will remain unexplained. Sidney has, with V., entered “the heart’s landscape” and in her presence the “street [violent upheaval, political struggle, the Newtonian three-dimensional experience] and the hothouse [the past complete with emotional and mystical ties] merge; “in V. were resolved, by some magic, the two extremes” (487). She is the very embodiment of extremes with her “live eye dead,” “the clock-iris,” the “star sapphire sewn into her navel,” her “obsession with bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter” (488). More importantly, in spite of her metamorphoses, she is still “the same balloon girl who’d seduced him [Sidney] on a leather couch in the Florentine consulate twenty years ago (488); V. changes but the pattern of V. he loved and continues to love remains. V. is Sidney’s Eurydice; she is “his old love”; she is the Golden Mean found. In V. he discovers a still point, a stasis amid flux, and “an alienation from time, much as Malta itself was alienated from any history in which cause precedes effect.” Sidney’s experience in the Maltese Underworld results in “a tilt toward the past so violent he found it increasingly more difficult to live in the real present” (488-89) he associates with finite political games.

In Malta and in conjunction with his reunion with V., Sidney is confronted by a personal decision which recalls the decision forced upon Porpentine in Egypt in 1898
during the Fashoda Crisis by Victoria Wren's plea that he "understand" her love for Goodfellow in "Under the Rose." Sidney's decision, like Porpentine's, involves the collision of two worlds; in both cases the personal intrudes into the political. In Sidney's case, the personal appears in the character of Carla Maijstral, the wife of one of Sidney's informants whom he believes to be operating as a double agent for the British government on the one hand and for the politically restless Maltese shipyard workers on the other. Carla, who is pregnant, appeals to Sidney by asking him to "sack" her husband so that he will not be killed or continuously endangered and might instead care for his family. In her second plea, she threatens to kill herself and her unborn child if Sidney does not release her husband. Carla's plea causes Sidney to muse again on "the Situation" much as he did twenty years before in Florence. This time, however, he acknowledges what before he merely suspected: that "the Situation is always bigger than you," that "[a]ny Situation takes shape from events much lower than the merely human" (483), that the "Situation," like quantum level activity, can be neither predicted nor controlled. He begins to realize that even though the "inert universe may have a quality we call logic... logic is a human attribute after all" (484); he begins to realize that the "inert" and the human are inextricably entwined.  

"The Situation"--the human situation--as Sidney describes it in the Epilogue suggests that while certain premises of quantum theory explain the material world at the subatomic level, these same premises may be relevant to human experience and may have metaphysical implications as well. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle asserts that the limited ability to measure accurately events at the quantum level applies when one tries to determine the causes or predict the outcomes of human events. Bohr's Complementarity Argument suggests that measurement or observation at the quantum level provides an intersection between the macrocosmic world of the senses (i.e., the measuring instrument which involves human consciousness) and the microscopic world that remains hidden until it is actualized by observation. Bohr's argument stresses the role of conscious observation
in determining physical reality. This mode of thinking causes Sidney to speculate as to
whether or not there is “a way out” of the material world besides death. Because in
between Carla’s pleas Sidney has been reunited with his “old love,” V., because they have
entered “the hot-house of a Florentine Spring once again,” this time “hand in hand,”
because he has found at last “the street” and “the hothouse,” the extremes of his existence
“resolved, by some magic” in V., Sidney responds to Carla’s “inference to a humanitarian
instinct he’d abandoned before entering the service” (489) and he resolves to “complete a
circle begun in England [where Herbert was born] eighteen years ago.” His final political
act is a humanitarian one which unselfishly grants Carla, Old Maijstral, and their unborn
child Fausto the life V., Sidney, and Herbert never had. Forcing himself “into the real
present, perhaps aware it would be his last time there,” Sidney collapses the moment by
releasing Maijstral from his duties as informant, and by doing so, actualizes for the
Maijstrals a life that was lost to his own family. Sidney’s “backward glance” is toward a
time eighteen years past when his own “moment” was full of uncertainty and mutually
exclusive possibilities. Even though his own “moment” in 1901 seems long since
“collapsed,” in the “null-time” of love recovered on Malta in 1919, the arrow of time is
suspended, the moment recaptured, possibilities renewed. The ramifications of Sidney’s
“backward glance” are profound and far-reaching much as experiments at the quantum level
have shown that though observation at a particular point collapses the potentiality of a
situation into a state of actuality, such observation also has instantaneous repercussions.8
Most obviously, Sidney finds himself unwilling to reside in the “real present” the political
situation requires and retires from the foreign service feigning health problems. His
decision to release Old Maijstral has an effect revealed in Chapter 11, “Confessions of
Fausto Maijstral”: Old Maijstral ceases to be an informant, retires from the political arena
thus sparing the lives of his wife Carla and their unborn son. Old Maijstral will live in the
future the life that Sidney, looking backward, would have liked to have lived. Less
obviously, Sidney’s dismissal of Old Maijstral, assuming he was a double agent, may have
verted the “blood bath” expected in Malta and reduced the June Disturbances to a “minor eddy in the peaceful course of Maltese government” (491). These, however, are the “causal consequences,” those that can be at least partially explained by logic.

Other ramifications of Sidney’s backward glancing remain unexplained, most notably the “unknown circumstances” under which he disappears from the surface of the sea surrounding Malta. Earlier in the Epilogue, Mehemet is said to have “sailed the xebec through a rift in time’s fabric” (459) displacing him from a dangerous passage on the Mediterranean in the middle ages to the same location on the sea hundreds of years later. Presumably the same xebec guided by Mehemet now carries Sidney away from Malta and from V., both symbols of the center of the circle, the Golden Mean, the quantum space in which all possibility exists until observation is made. The observer of Sidney’s disappearance has characteristics of both V. the Intercessor and her “caretaker,” Evan Godolphin the Son. The figure emerges from the Benz and gazes out at the ship. The figure has a “mutilated face” like Godolphin’s and is referred to as “he”; yet “he” waves, “with a curious sentimental feminine motion of the wrist” and “[h]e was crying” (492).

Curiously, Evan never reappears after 1919. Though V. is present as Vera Meroving in South West Africa in 1922 with Old Godolphin, Evan exists only in His father’s memory reinforcing the idea of V.’s association with the Paraclete who, in the absence of the Son, intercedes between man and God. Also Sidney’s disappearance takes place within a circle inscribed with Malta as the center, Lampedusa as a point on the circle’s circumference, an area already delineated by Mehemet as Mara’s circle of influence. “Beware of Mara,” Mehemet tells Sidney upon their arrival; “She will find ways to reach out from Valletta, city named after a man but of feminine gender . . . there are more ways than one to consummation” (465). Within Mara’s circle and observed by V.-Evan “a waterspout appeared and lasted for fifteen minutes.” It lifts “the xebec fifty feet” and slams “it down again into a piece of the Mediterranean whose subsequent surface phenomena . . . showed nothing at all of what came to lie beneath, that quiet June day” (emphasis added 492). The
waterspout is a natural phenomenon; it is basically a tornado on water, a cloud mass
whirling over an ocean which draws up seawater at the base of its rotating column (Golden
1-4). Yet this waterspout has no natural or explainable cause since the sky off the coast of
Malta on 10 June 1919 is said to be “cloudless” and the day “quiet.” The event, observed,
suggests in a very literal way the intrusion of the miraculous into surface level experience,
an intrusion Sidney was prepared to encounter because of his dangerous “descent” to
Malta to discover V. and because of his own backward glance which renders the “real
present” of surface level experience no longer a possibility. Having encountered the
miraculous and the mystical in his love for V., he responds to Carla’s plea because he does
“understand” that her “Situation” is tied to events both “bigger” and smaller than he can
comprehend, and that it, like all “Situations,” is connected to his own.10 In a selfless,
humanitarian gesture, he releases Old Maijstral and in doing so, gives a second life to Old
Maijstral, Carla, triggered by the Golden Mean of human experience—here, his love for V.-
-and their unborn son, Fausto. He gives himself a second life as well. Traveling perhaps
through another “rift in time’s fabric” with Mehemet via the waterspout, Sidney disappears
from the surface level experience he has outgrown and into another dimension of existence-
possibly spiritual—for which he has come to be better suited. His vehicle: V. on Malta; “a
point, dimensionless—good” (338); Aristotle’s Golden Mean.

Fausto’s Confessions

That Sidney’s transformation is spiritual in nature and has spiritual ramifications
becomes clear when the “Confessions of Fausto Maijstral,” Chapter 11, is examined.
Sidney’s biological son may be Herbert Stencil, but his spiritual son is Fausto Maijstral,
the novel’s second Orpheus. Fausto’s very existence depends on Sidney’s love for V., his
reunion with her on Malta, his violent “tilt toward the past” which triggered the recovery of
his humanitarian instinct that led to his decision to “sack” Fausto’s father and to Fausto’s
birth. Born in 1919 following the June Disturbances, Fausto shares many of Sidney’s
Orphean traits. Like Sidney, Fausto “loses” his wife when their child is quite young. Like
Sidney, Fausto "suffers" through the hell of a world war. Like Sidney, Fausto possesses a dual nature which eventually fragments. Having been involved with the theatre in his music hall days and later in espionage. Sidney, like Orpheus, has both Dionysian and Apollonian connections. His dual nature is not only reflected in his professions, but in the characteristics his "sons," Herbert (flesh) and Fausto (spirit) exhibit. Recognition of this very duality in himself--the Faustian dilemma--is what precipitates Fausto's spiritual crisis. However, each of Sidney's sons experiences a fragmentation of personality as Sidney, like Orpheus, is metaphorically disbursed: Herbert performs "8 impersonations" in order to pursue V.--as-Victoria Wren; Fausto "confesses" that he has taken on four "successive identities" in his thirty-seven years which he treats in his confessions as "separate characters"; life, he calls "a successive rejection of personalities" (306).

Fausto's Confessions, written in 1956, represents his attempt to reconcile his dual nature and make sense of the fragmenting of his personality by gaining insight into the spiritual crisis he experienced during the war years, 1939-45, when Malta was under siege by the Germans. That his Confessions is spiritual in nature is evident especially when the work is examined in relation to Sidney's journals. Sidney's journals, at least as Herbert interprets them, are cryptic at best and reveal no information concerning his relationship with V.--of "who" or "what she is" or was to Sidney. To Herbert they are merely an "unofficial log of an agent's career" (53). By contrast, Fausto's Confessions is specifically addressed to his daughter, Paola, as part of her "spiritual heritage" (310). In his introductory remarks to Paola, Fausto refers to his confessions as an "apologia pro vita sua," a pointed reference to Cardinal John Henry Newman's Apologia in which Newman explains the successive steps in his conversion to Catholicism. Fausto dismisses the notion that his Confessions is based on fact and remarks that any apologia must "see past the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with 'reason'" (306). Into his Confessions, Fausto intersperses "The Journals . . . of Fausto I and II" written between 1939-43--Fausto IV's "look backward" to a past
articulated by those journals. His goal: her spiritual legacy. He wishes to resurrect for Paola a past she may not understand and articulate as best as memory and language will allow, her spiritual legacy. In doing so, Fausto simultaneously interprets his own spiritual past and Paola’s childhood, the present (1956) in terms of the past (1939-43), and renders the past present.

Even though initially Fausto introduces his four successive identities, Fausto II is the main character of the Confessions and Fausto IV is the author. Fausto’s dual nature is apparent in Fausto I, the character he was during the “prewar University years” when, as a poet who was “slated to be the priest,” he found himself “dithering between Caesar and God.” When he falls in love with Elena, he again feels pulled between flesh (sex) and spirit (the priesthood). His duality does not become fully apparent to him until the war and its extreme circumstances involve and encompass Malta about the time Paola is born.

“All our babies have had only one father, the war; one mother, Malta her women” (325). These two events—the war and Paola’s birth—mark the emergence of Fausto II and precipitate Fausto’s spiritual crisis. His crisis begins in 1939 when Elena is impregnated and when the paternity of her child is questionable. Her pregnancy also recalls V.’s pregnancy thirty-eight years earlier. However, Fausto is much more explicit than Sidney in recounting his personal dilemma and much more considerate of his offspring. To Paola he admits his feelings of “intense jealousy,” when he believed Elena may have “lost her faith” and that the child she carried may have been his friend Dnubietna’s, who had vowed “he would find a virgin someday and ‘educate’ her to sin” (312). Even though Elena is not technically a virgin since Fausto has had sex with her and possibly impregnated her, Fausto still thinks of her as a “virgin” Dnubietna may have seduced. Rather than admitting the “miraculous” nature of Elena’s conception, he becomes “more inanimate” like Malta under siege and moves “closer to the time when like any dead leaf or fragment of metal [he would] be finally subject to the laws of physics” (321), i.e., reduced to a totally inanimate state. He speculates on the material and accidental nature of conception rather than on the
miraculous and, in doing so, both connects Elena’s conception with the Virgin Mary’s and
draws an analogy between the “happenstance” of conception and of death:

Mothers are closer than anyone to accident. They are the most painfully
conscious of the fertilized egg; as Mary knew the moment of conception.
But the zygote has no soul. Is matter . . . [B]abies always seem to come
by happenstance; a random conjunction of events . . . [These are] the same
forces which dictate the bomb’s trajectory, the deaths of stars, the wind and
the waterspout have focused somewhere inside the pelvic frontiers without
their consent, to generate one more mighty accident (emphasis added 321-
22).

Yet Fausto II in World War II is still unable to admit that conception, like death, may
involve the miraculous intruding into human experience. “Mothers close ranks,” he writes,
“and perpetuate a fictional mystery about motherhood. It is the only way of compensating
for an inability to live with the truth [i.e., that conception is merely “mechanical”] (321-22).
The “waterspout” reference also aligns Sidney’s physical disappearance with the
phenomena of conception and birth suggesting the connection between death and birth as
passages to other dimensions of existence.

Fausto eventually learns his “rival” for Elena’s “soul” and life of her unborn child
was never Dnubietna nor even “accident” itself, but V.-as-the Bad Priest. The Bad Priest
“lives in an old villa past Sliema, near the sea” (313)—the Villa di Sammut where Sidney
experienced with V., his “old love,” the “hothouse of a Florentine spring once again”
(486). By 1939 V. in “her own progress toward inanimateness” (410), enraptured by the
“conspiracy leveled against the animate world” (411) and an icon of that conspiracy, has
metamorphosed into the Bad Priest called by Fausto II in his journals “the Dark One.”
According to Elena, the Bad Priest is “a sinister figure . . . but with the mouth of Christ”
(313). Even though V.-as-the-Bad Priest seems to be the force against regeneration, she
possesses Christ-like characteristics, implying once again the mutually exclusive extremes
embodied in the character of V. For Elena, the Bad Priest “began to take on the shape of an evil spirit: alien, parasitic, attached by a black slug to her soul” (314) and Elena begins to know the “duality” of existence already recognized by Fausto; like Fausto’s mother, she begins to contemplate aborting her child. Shortly before Elena’s death, Fausto learns from Elena that the Bad Priest “told me not to have the child” (341); she would have terminated the pregnancy she says, but she met Father Avalanche (Father Fairing’s replacement during Sidney’s time in Malta) “[b]y accident”; he subsequently intercedes and convinces Elena and Fausto to marry and have the child. Paola’s “miraculous” conception and birth, along with her dubious paternity associates her with Christ, an association which will position her as another “means” of spiritual redemption for the future generation. Like Christ, she enters the hostile environment of a world that threatens to exterminate her. Malta’s bombings fracture both the world and the personalities of Elena and Fausto who do in fact live two levels of existence: the world of death and destruction at the street level, the surface where bombs drop and people die; the world of life and “communion” in the Maltese sewer system which Fausto likens in his journals to the “catacombs” of early Christians. The duality and extremism of the “20th Century nightmare” is conflated into both Carla’s decision in 1919 and Elena’s in 1939: “To populate, or not to populate” (324). The duality and extremism of such an existence is replicated throughout Fausto’s “Confessions,” and the novel itself: the street, the “kingdom of death,” and “under the street,” the kingdom of life”; war as the “father” and Malta as the “mother”; the “universe of things” and the human which inhabits it; the inanimate and the animate.

After the “bombing of ’42,” another dimension of Fausto II’s duality becomes apparent and is more profound than his earlier “dithering between Caesar and God” (306). Into his journals Fausto II writes “British colonialism has produced a new sort of being, a dual man, aimed two ways at once: toward peace and simplicity on the one hand, towards an exhausted intellectual searching on the other” (309). Fausto II is torn between being Maltese which “meant to live at the threshold of consciousness . . . a hardly animate lump
of flesh . . . almost mindless, without sense of time” (309) and being English which meant being forced “to think continuously . . . to be too aware of war, of time, of all the greys and shadows of love” (309). He is Carla’s son; he is Sidney’s. In no other character are the extremes so obvious and so obviously debilitating. Fausto is Maltese by birth which ties him to the almost mindless but animating power and pull of myth; yet Fausto is educated in a University and taught according to British pedagogical standards which ties him to the Apollonian Newtonian power structure. Fausto II’s journals reflect this dichotomy. In order to cope with the “hostile world” of war, Fausto confesses that through his journals he “retreated into abstraction” (310). Without explanation, he says, “sudden shifts” occur in his journals “from reality to something less” (310). The example he includes was written “during a night raid.” In one paragraph he describes the abandoned sewer and the situation he, Elena, Paola and others find themselves in due to the raids. The next paragraph, “for no apparent reason,” shifts to an imagined description of Malta during the Great Siege of the Middle Ages, and then to a prehistoric Malta infused with sacred experience. This first paragraph is the denotative exposition of an historical moment; the second is a retreat into the poetic narrative of myth.

The Means: Mediating the Extremes of Human Experience

Malta: The Geographical Means

The crux of Fausto’s spiritual crisis, as was Sidney’s twenty years before, is the “intolerable” absence of a means by which the extremes of experience can be mediated. Malta has all the characteristics of the Golden Mean and functions as such for Fausto even as it does for Sidney. As an island, it is a point of land surrounded by the sea. Fausto repeatedly describes Malta’s dual nature. “Malta is a noun, feminine and proper” (318) he writes early in the war, “an immemorial woman” whose “flesh . . . [has been] vulnerable” to various Sieges over time. Yet Malta is also an island, a “rock,” solid, inanimate, masculine. Malta is a “womb of rock” as Fausto describes it, a quantum complementarity in which feminine and masculine, animate and inanimate are contained. There, Fausto and
his family are forced to live subterranean lives because Death dominates surface level experience. Even more of a "point, dimensionless" is Valletta, Malta's capital. (See Appendix A, p. 355 and Map 7, p. 366). A mere point on a map, Valletta is "named after a man, but of feminine gender" (465). Within the city is the room in which Fausto IV writes his confessions in 1956. In fact his Confessions begin with a very detailed description of the room emphasizing its measurements and its approximate position on the Cartesian grid. The room may be shaped like a triangle with the three dimensions given as 17' X 11.5' X 7'. The positions of the room's scant furnishings are likewise given with the chair and small writing table facing inward toward the WSW wall, not outward toward Valletta. As Fausto turns inward for answers to his dilemma, he turns the "room into a confessional" by the act of writing; "sealed against the present," it becomes "a hothouse" in which Fausto attempts to deal with the past. "The facts," he writes, "call up emotional responses, which no inert room has ever showed us" (305).

The Act of Writing: The Metaphorical Means

Within this room Fausto engages in the act of writing, another of the "means" by which the extremes of experience are mediated and contained. However, Fausto's spiritual crisis--his loss of faith in spiritual regeneration--seems tied to his loss of faith in the power of language to interpret the material world he inhabits. Early in his Confessions, he admits his doubt concerning his first attempt in over a decade to articulate his spiritual crisis. "The word," he cautions Paola at the beginning of his Confessions, "is meaningless, based as it is on the false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous" (307). The association of "the word" with spiritual experience, of course, references Christianity: language connotes the creative power of God who speaks the universe into existence; Christ is "the Word" made flesh, God entering the material world. When Fausto embarks on his Confessions, however, he doubts the power of language to adequately or effectively articulate the spiritual crisis he experienced during the war years, one that is intimately
connected with the death of two Eurydice figures, Elena and V.-as-the Bad Priest.
Articulation is also associated with the creative powers of Orpheus who has also been identified as a Christ-like figure as well as a median between the extremes of Dionysian and Apollonian behavior and who, as a poet/singer possesses the means of spiritual transformation. In Rilke’s Sonnets to Orpheus, Orpheus becomes a symbol of the poet who, inspired by the loss of Eurydice to death, is able through “the ordering power of the imagining, artistic mind” (Segal 129), to evoke the “unsayable” and allow the infinite, the miraculous to enter experience. To be godlike, Rilke says in his Sonnets, “true singing” requires emptiness. Thus, Fausto’s bare room. “The room simply is,” Fausto writes. His task: “To occupy it, and find a metaphor there for memory” (304).

Fausto’s loss of faith in the power of poetry parallels his loss of faith in God which he attributes to “an accumulation of small accidents” over time (330). Fausto’s spiritual crisis seems exacerbated by his insistence on explaining the miraculous—human conception and childbirth, death, and the regenerative power of God—in terms of the mechanical “accidents” of the material world, an insistence which negates the power of poetry to animate. The poet’s tool, metaphor, is the mediating device which enables the poet to perform his task, to animate the material world. Yet Fausto is skeptical of the metaphor’s ability to function properly in a world moving toward the inanimate. The poet, Fausto says, “feeds on dream” that originates below surface level experience, but he must also explore the surface, “the other kingdom, even if only as a kind of tourist” (325). The poet must therefore live in “a world of metaphor.” Yet the metaphor, he believes, has ceased to function as a means which connects the dream and “the street” and has become merely a “device, an artifice” that embues “a universe of things” with “human motives, personal traits and fits of contrariness.” The “role of the poet” in the twentieth century, Fausto says, is “[t]o lie and comfort the ‘practical’ half of humanity” so they can “continue in the Great Lie” (326). The lie to which Fausto refers is the suggestion that humanity and the material world are compatible. Dnubietna, an engineer and fellow poet, was perhaps better able to
express the relationship between the human and the inanimate world, Fausto believes, possibly because he had access to two languages: the language of the poet whose focus is on the animate and whose language consists of words, and the language of the engineer whose focus is on the inanimate world and whose language is mathematics. The key passage expressing this relationship is found in a poem written by Dnubietna; the passage is articulated in the language of mathematics: “the truth behind the catenary: the locus of the transcendental: \( y = a / 2 ( e^{x/a} + e^{-x/a}) \)” (326). Translated from the mathematical, the lines might read: “the truth behind any series of related events is beyond ordinary experience to explain because it has no rational explanation.” To illustrate this point, Fausto relates an incident in which he and Dnubietna were drunk and in the street during a bombing raid. They should have been killed, but they survived. “I’ve not been able to get it out of my mind that we were given a dispensation that night,” Fausto writes, “That God had suspended the laws of chance” (330). “The truth behind the catenary: the locus of the transcendental.” Perhaps Dnubietna, engineer-poet, discovered a metaphor, a means of expression for the twentieth century in the language of mathematics.

Perhaps Pynchon, an engineer-poet himself, has discovered such a metaphor in the language of quantum physics. The mythological and the Newtonian world views are the extremes which cause Sidney and Fausto so much anguish. Sidney finds the “double vision” he confronts in the world “intolerable”; the extreme “duality” Fausto encounters on Malta during the war precipitates a spiritual crisis that almost destroys him. That neither extreme view of the world is adequate in the first half of the twentieth century driven toward the inanimate by two world wars is evident in the personal crises of Sidney and Fausto. Whereas the method of mythology is poetic and the language narrative, the method of scientific knowledge is mathematical and the language denotative (Lytotard 25). Quantum physics, however, provides both a means and a metaphor for the Golden Mean that offers a “way out” of the “intolerable” “Situation” in which the characters in V. find themselves. In Pynchon’s fiction quantum physics becomes a metaphor for the Golden
Mean, the point of intersection between the deterministic Newtonian world and the mystery and magic of myth. In V. the “real world” is metaphorically located below “the street” or the surface of the sea. It is an Underworld like the quantum world on which the observable, the mappable, the historical rests. It is Strait Street in Valletta, Malta, where Sidney encounters V. in 1919; it is the catacomb-like sewer system in Valletta in 1939-43 where Fausto and his family must dwell in order to escape death from the German bombs; it is a bombed out cellar in Valletta where Fausto encounters V.; it is the New York sewer system in 1956 where Benny Profane chases alligators and encounters Father Fairing’s Parish and where Herbert Stencil looks for V.-clues; it is Fausto’s empty room in Valletta where he writes his confessions and where he reveals to Herbert the key to the mystery he pursues. Because the Underworld is metaphorically associated with quantum physics in Pynchon’s writing, it becomes the crossroads between Newtonian physics and myth, the meeting place for Orpheus and Eurydice, the quantum space wherein the opposites of feminine and masculine, life and death, animate and inanimate merge, where the “hot-house” and “the street”—the past and future—conflate. At the quantum level, a version of “sacred” space and time re-enter descriptions and explanations of the natural world; Hilbert space becomes infinitely and orthogonally (at right angles) dimensional and time is always symmetrical. Both space and time regenerate themselves at the quantum level.

Children: the Temporal Means

In Fausto’s Confessions children also represent another means of mediating the extremes of human experience. They are able to do so because they are “poets in a vacuum, adept at metaphor” (331). Fausto IV, writing to his own child, Paola, is very emphatic on this point. He recalls the “roistering crew of children whom Paola had fallen in with . . . whose chief amusement was a game called R. A. F.” (330-31), a game designed “to veil the world that was” (331). The “kids of Malta,” he says, served “a particular [poetic] function” because “the kids themselves were all ‘in’ the secret [the metaphor—i.e., saw the connections]” (331-32); being “in” the metaphor allows them to
live in the immediate present removed from the “deficiencies” and “excesses” of past and future and enables them to mediate the hostile extremes of history and one-directional time. The “combination of a siege [of Malta], a Roman Catholic upbringing and an unconscious identification of one’s own mother with the Virgin all sent simple dualism into strange patterns indeed” (338). The children’s Manichaean understanding of the abstract struggle between good and evil is translated first into the language of mathematics and then metamorphosed into the medieval image of Fortune’s Wheel. The struggle between good and evil for the children, Fausto IV writes “would not be as two equal-sized vectors head to head--their heads making an X of unknown quantity” (338)--i.e., the adult view by which the significance of the struggle is simplified into an algebraic symbol for the unknown which also resembles the Cartesian grid with its x-y axes. Instead, the children’s view of the struggle is symbolically represented by the complex concept of vector fields described by calculus (Figure 2.1). In the children’s view “good” is “a point dimensionless . . . surrounded by any number of radial arrows--vectors of evil--pointing inward” (338), a concept identical to that which in calculus describes the inverse square force field “similar to the gravitational field of the sun” (Larson 1009).
The children's metaphorical image of "good, i.e. at bay" emerges as one of the novel's central metaphors. Good is associated here and elsewhere with "the Virgin," "the winged Mother" (i.e., the Paraclete)\textsuperscript{13} "the woman passive" (i.e., the feminine principle) and "Malta" (338). V., of course, is connected to each of these and to the children as well. The image of Good as a point assailed by "vectors of evil" is metamorphosed by Fausto into the medieval symbol, "Fortune's wheel," a metaphor for stasis amid flux:

A wheel, this diagram: Fortune's wheel. Spin as it might the basic arrangement was constant. Stroboscopic effects could change the apparent number of spokes; direction could change; but the hub still held the spokes in place and the meeting-place of the spoke still defined the hub. (338)

However, the children's version of the wheel, interpreted by Fausto IV in his look backward to the pivotal moment of his own spiritual crisis, is not vertical as is the medieval metaphor but horizontal, symbolic perhaps of the "discrete world" created for the children by war waged by adults. The wheel is "dead level, its own rim only that of the sea's horizon" (338) The children "seemed to be the only ones conscious at the time that history had not been suspended after all" (338). The children "also knew about the Bad Priest" (338) and eventually become the means by which the Bad Priest is neutralized and humanized, his feminine aspect revealed. Because the Bad Priest is "ubiquitous as the night," the children assign him "no opposite number" yet understand that "one parishless, an alien" must be placed "Outside" the wheel "along with leather-winged Lucifer, Hitler, Mussolini" (339). "They merely watched, passive"; their awareness was collective, a "group awareness" of the Bad Priest's alienated presence, his "sinister uncertainty," and apostatic ministry.

Fausto IV interrupts his observations about the children of Malta and their power to mediate the extremes of existence with an extended journal entry recounting a day when Fausto II and Elena "ascended to the street" even as Orpheus and Eurydice ascended from the Underworld. The entry is relevant and revealing because it recounts a brief moment
when, with the raids suspended, Elena and Fausto were able to be “children again.” Symbolically the day is idyllic; the sun, shining. “There were children everywhere in Valletta” (333). Children attend them while they masquerade as “English tourists” and follow them to “that garden or park . . . in the heart of the city . . . a park . . . we’d never find again” (333-35). The “garden” references Eden even as it becomes another quantum space where, amid bombed out buildings, the death and destruction of war is interrupted. There, they are able to look backward and recover, if temporarily, their childlike innocence which prepares them for a brief encounter with the miraculous. The site of the encounter is “a band pavilion . . . supported miraculously by only a few upright beams” (334). “It was there we awoke,” Fausto II writes, “there the children closed in on us” (335). The tiny garden complete with a performance space to ritualize the experience becomes another median, a still point, a crossroads, a threshold between war and innocence, a place where the miraculous comes in the form of a celestial event:

And then the sun met its cloud, and other clouds we’d not noticed at all began it seemed to move in radically towards the sun-cloud. As if winds were blowing today from all thirty-two points of the rose at once to meet at the centre in a great windspout to bear up the fire-balloon like an offering—set alight the undershorings of Heaven. (335)

Fausto’s description of the event in his journals burgeons with religious symbolism, symbolism Pynchon expands in Gravity’s Rainbow. Thirty-two is “significant in Kabbalistic mythology,” Steven Weisenburg writes in reference to Pynchon’s writing; it is associated with the “acquisition of wisdom,” “Jaweh,” he says, “is thought to have inscribed his being in thirty-two paths of knowledge” (149). The rose, it may be remembered from the previous discussion of “Under the Rose,” is a “principle symbol of Rosicrucianism” and is connected with the Resurrection and renewal of life (Weisenburg 254). Beneath the spectacle, Fausto and Elena sit, “shoulders hunched for the wind, facing the pavilion silent, as if waiting for the performance to begin” (335). In the garden they
had “reached a threshold” like Orpheus and Eurydice where the miraculous promised to materialize. However the clouding of the sky, the “sudden fall in the barometer,” and “night ‘gathering’ outside” causes the promise to vanish for Fausto and Elena even as it did for Orpheus and Eurydice. Elena, like Eurydice, retreats; she prays a Maltese prayer and “[h]aving reached a threshold, slipped back into what was most sure. Raids, the death of a parent, the daily handling of corpses had not been able to do it. It took a park, a siege of children, trees astir, night coming in” (337) to awaken her need for the spiritual. Fausto II denies that they experienced a “moment of truth” in the garden beneath the “undershorings of Heaven” -- “there are no epiphanies on Malta this season,” Fausto II writes in his journal. Only Fausto IV’s look backward to this time enables him to recognize it as a spiritual experience.

Fausto IV returns to the time when, with childlike wonder he and Elena experienced the intrusion of the miraculous into their lives and he begins to see the moment as a prelude to and a preparation for the Day of the Thirteen Raids: the day of Elena’s death; the day of Fausto II’s attendance at the Bad Priest’s disassembly; the day that precipitates his own symbolic death and resurrection. The night before Elena’s death, she reveals to Fausto II the nature of Paola’s birth and the role the Bad Priest played in her pregnancy. The Bad Priest, he learns from Elena and records in his journal, “told [her] not to have the child” (341). Only her “accidental” meeting with Father Avalanche, Elena says, prevented her aborting it. The “mighty accident” which causes life to be engendered and dictates “the bomb’s trajectory” eventually reclaims Elena to the Kingdom of Death. On the morning of the Thirteen Raids, the day following Elena’s revelation of the Bad Priest’s efforts to abort her pregnancy, the ambulance in which Elena rides “apparently suffered a direct hit” (341) killing her. Grief-stricken like Orpheus, Fausto wanders aimlessly through the streets of Valletta when he hears “hostile shouting” and sees swarms of children among the ruins of a cellar. This time, Fausto follows the children to discover, as he peers through holes in the roof of a ruined house, “a figure in black. The Bad Priest. Wedged under a fallen beam”
 Feeling “like a spy,” Fausto watches as the children disassemble the Bad Priest who is V. The children dismantle her inanimate parts: long white wig, ivory comb, black shoes, gold slippers, artificial foot, robes, shirt, gold cufflinks, black trousers, star sapphire from her navel, false teeth, “glass eye with the iris in the shape of a clock.” After the children disassemble her, take away the “little bits of inert matter,” Fausto II looks down “at what the children had left” (343) and recognizes in V.’s mutilated body, her humanity, and the image “foreshortened on the bare skull” of the “suffering Christ.” When the sirens sound and the children disperse, Fausto makes his descent. “I went down into the cellar to kneel by her,” Fausto IV writes in his Confessions and is surprised to find that she is alive. With night coming in and her death imminent, Fausto assumes the role of priest and initiates the process of spiritual regeneration. “I will pray for you,” he tells V. and then he administers to her what he remembers of the sacrament of Extreme Unction and attends her confession which he cannot hear because her teeth were gone and she must have been past speech. But in those cries—so unlike human or even animal sounds that they might have been only the wind blowing past any dead reed—I detected a sincere hatred for all her sins which must have been countless; a profound sorrow at having hurt God by sinning; a fear of losing Him which was worse than the fear of death. (344)

This descent, foreshadowed by his “subterranean life” in Malta’s tunnels, is the crux of Fausto’s spiritual crisis and the climax of his Confessions to Paola; his account of it reveals his anguished desire to understand that which is beyond rational explanation—i.e., life, death, and spiritual redemption—and to relate this understanding to Paola. He dismisses the idea that he had “forgotten [his] understanding with God in administering a sacrament only a priest can give” or that he had “‘regressed’ to the priesthood” after losing Elena. Instead he recognizes the human in V. and his actions seem selfless and humanitarian even as Sidney’s release of Fausto’s father was selfless and humanitarian. He writes as if to discover an explanation for his actions which he does not understand: “I knew only that a
dying human must be prepared” (344) for death, he says. He anoints “her organs of sense” with “her own blood” and when she is dead, he kneels by her and begins “to pray for myself,” recognizing at some level that in attending V.’s spiritual needs, he is attending his own.

Fausto is prepared for his spiritual transformation by a series of events that are mediated by children and V. Narratively the events foreshadow Sidney’s experience in the Epilogue although chronologically the events are precipitated by Sidney’s own spiritual transformation mediated by thoughts of his own child, by his assumption of a childlike attitude, and by his love for that goodness which is constant in V. despite her many changes. Initially both Sidney and Fausto attribute their situations to “happenstance” and “accident.” However, because of the intensity of their experiences on the island of Malta, they come to recognize the inadequacy of “accident,” even convoluted series of accidents, to explain the mysterious and miraculous nature of their encounters. Sidney comes to Malta in the winter as he is approaching the winter of his life at age sixty. He tells Mehemet, his helmsman, “I see nothing but a dead end for myself . . . for my society as well” (460-61). In terms of the northern/Protestant/intellectual world which operates on Newtonian principles, a world he has occupied for more than twenty years, society is driven toward entropy which is what he has conditioned himself to expect. Yet, he comes to Malta in a “green xebec whose figurehead is Astarte, goddess of sexual love” (456) and his guide Mehemet, a time traveler, tells him of the island’s “spirit” Mara, who “taught love to every invader” (461). As a British agent, Sidney is such an invader. During his stay in Malta, Sidney gradually comes under Malta’s and Mara’s mystical powers which “tug” him away from the Newtonian world of espionage and adulthood where he has lived ever since his “music hall days” ended and nudge him toward “the wizened adolescent he was always apt to turn into” (465). In this “adolescent” state, Sidney begins to assume an Orphic role by singing a “tune . . . from his ‘music hall’ days” about the “change of eart” he experienced with the birth of his “bouncing baby boy . . . Herbert blithering Stencil”
(466). The emergence of a cast of characters from the pivotal moment in his past--when he fell in love with V.--forces him to reconsider the “Situational forces at work in Florence twenty years ago” (470) which led to the birth of his son. In the “textual stillness” of Valletta, Stencil begins to feel that he is “now ready to succumb to the feathery tentacles of a nostalgia that urged him gently back toward childhood” (475). His newly-acquired childlike state, a state that prepares Pynchon’s characters for their encounters with the miraculous, prepares Sidney for his reunion with V., for the experience of love, and for the acceptance of love’s miraculous nature. Sidney’s acceptance of love and of “an alienation from time” (489) he experiences during his reunion with V. on Malta places him in a childlike position between the extremes, between the future violence of the street and the hothouse of the past. There, unfettered by the constraints and certainty of the Newtonian world, Sidney is poised for his transformation.

V. as the Golden Mean

V. is the novel’s ultimate symbol for the Golden Mean and functions as such on four distinct levels: 1) as a Eurydice figure, especially as Rilke portrays her in his Sonnets to Orpheus; 2) as the personification of certain quantum physics principles, namely Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle and Bohr’s Complementarity Argument; 3) as the “means,” an Intercessor, by which both Sidney and Fausto are transformed; 4) as a literary metaphor, an initial from which the entire novel springs. In her most primitive form she is associated with both Demeter and Persephone “embodying a feminine principle” (209). In other less extreme circumstances than those of the twentieth century, she may have been a symbol of life regenerated. However, in Pynchon’s novel she is life degenerated, an inversion of the feminine principle, as evidenced by her obsession with the inanimate even to the extent that she acquires the habit of “incorporating little bits of inert matter” into her body. Yet she also possesses attributes of Eurydice of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth, especially as Eurydice is treated by Rilke. In Rilke’s early poem “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes,” Eurydice is associated with the union of opposites, especially of life and death.
In his *Sonnets to Orpheus* where death is seen as the "‘subjective’ side of the phenomenal world" (Segal 126-27), Eurydice becomes a "mysterious anima figure" that connects life and death, the power that transforms Orpheus by evoking the mysterious and the magical. V. metamorphoses during the course of Pynchon’s novel and assumes a number of identities: she is nubile if deflowered Victoria Wren in 1898, Sidney’s lover and unnurturing mother of Herbert in 1901, the decadent lesbian V. in love with Mélanie l’Heuremaudit in 1913, Sidney’s “old love” in 1919, the terminator of Godolphin’s private myth at Foppl’s villa in 1922, the Bad Priest whose apostatic ministry is aimed at aborting fetuses and converting the children of Valletta to an inanimate state. In each of her “separate identities,” V. is present at or connected with a number of violent events which like a vortex draws individuals into it: the Fashoda Crisis of 1898, Queen Victoria’s death in 1901, the Parisian Underworld on the eve of World War I, Malta and the June Disturbances where her Italian connection with Mussolini is also implied, German colonial atrocities against the native tribes of South West Africa, the German raids on Malta during World War II. At the crossroads of history V. represents Eurydice at the threshold between life and death. V. is a woman who, in her early years as Victoria Wren, is connected with the feminine principle; however, during the course of her maturation, she becomes man-like as she assimilates more and more inert bits of matter into her body. Her last identity--at least before she is “disassembled” by the children--is as the Bad Priest. The progression of her identities is away from the feminine and life-giving and toward the masculine and mechanized forces of destruction. In *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Rilke maintains that men, the “violent ones,” must become “open . . . receivers” like women in order to experience the miraculous. Interestingly, V. not only regains her femininity shortly before her death when the children who disassemble her inanimate parts discover “It’s a lady” (342), but she is able to animate Sidney and Fausto to become “open and receivers” like women and receptive to transforming experience. Like Victoria Wren who, in “Under the
Rose,” had “sought out and found the woman” (SL 129) in Porpentine, V. seeks out and finds the feminine in Sidney and Fausto, and in doing so, facilitates their transformations.

V. is also the personification of certain quantum physics principles, namely Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle and Bohr’s Complementarity Argument. An electron/photon at the quantum level is thought to try out every classical path or trajectory; it spreads out or is delocalized throughout space and time (Coveney and Highfield 123-24) and is only “collapsed” into irreversible and objective reality when measurement is made.

As readers we observe V. only at certain points in the narrative; at these points possibility is collapsed, and she assumes her various identities. Characters in the novel encounter her even less frequently and so have a much more limited sense of both her possible and actual states of being. Observation of her at these strategic moments collapses the potential for V. into the actual and renders her like some quantum phenomena, irreversible and objective at these points—both for the characters who encounter her and for the reader whose glimpses of her are not chronologically ordered. In fact, the reader’s observation, though broader than any of the characters including Herbert Stencil—who is merely gathering information after it occurs not engaging in observation himself—is thus narratively ordered: Victoria’s “death” in 1901, Victoria Wren in 1898 in Egypt, Veronica-the-Rat in New York in 1955, Victoria Wren in 1899 in Florence, Vera Meroving in South West Africa in 1922, V.-as-the-Bad Priest in 1939-43, “V. in love” in 1913, Veronica Manganese with Sidney in Malta 1919. Each observation marks V.’s “instantaneous transformation” both as a time-bound presence and as a mythical one. Her “obsession of bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter” shows her progression toward the inanimate; her propensity for assuming many identities associates her with Mara, the mythical “spirit” of Malta for whom “disguise is one of her attributes” (462). Uncertainty and unpredictability are intrinsic to nature according to Bohr, and V. exhibits these qualities: she appears in a different guise each time she surfaces in the novel. In the Newtonian world such changes would lead irreversibly to entropy of the system and, in the case of characters or humans, to death. Indeed, at one level this
seems to be the case. In 1898, Victoria Wren is eighteen; in 1919 when she refers to herself as a “girl,” Sidney thinks, “She was nearly forty” (488) which suggests that she is aging. Yet when Fausto watches the children disassemble V.-as-the Bad Priest in 1943, he recalls that the “nude body was surprisingly young. The skin healthy looking” (343) and Sidney remarks to himself in 1919 that “aside from a body less alive, how much in fact had she changed? Wasn’t she the same balloon-girl who’d seduced him on a leather couch in the Florence consulate twenty years ago?”(488). That V.’s identities seem to change yet certain aspects of V. remain static is both reminiscent of the flux-in-stasis associated with the mythological concept of the eternal return and suggestive of three quantum phenomena.

The many ramifications of Sidney’s selfless act—his “sacking” Old Maijstral from his role as a British agent—recall the “inextricably entangled” quantum state of a particle with other particles and their behavior which measurement of the single particle influences at speeds “FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF LIGHT.” These ramifications occur because Sidney is able to recognize the individual yet eternal pattern of V. as that which, untouched by space or time, he has continued to love. Though he comes to realize that “any situation takes shape from events much lower than the merely human” (483), Sidney cannot possibly imagine the far-reaching effects of his release of Old Maijstral. Sidney’s unconditional love for V. prompts him to “sack” Old Maijstral to give Maijstral and his family the possibility to live the life denied Sidney, V., and Herbert. Politically, the sacking may have averted the “Blood Bath” expected from the political unrest in Malta and reduced it to “a minor eddy in the peaceful course of the Maltese government” (491). More far-reaching, however, is the birth of Sidney’s “spiritual” son, Fausto, whose spiritual crisis comes to parallel Sidney’s. Fausto’s birth and eventual fragmentation into four distinct characters coupled with Herbert Stencil’s numerous identities suggest that Sidney, like Orpheus, is dispersed all over the western world from the Middle East to Europe to America. Moreover, Sidney’s “descent,” his renewed relationship with V., his unconditional love for her awakened his humanitarian and selfless decision with regard to
the Maijstral family: these become the “Means” for a variety of spiritually transforming experiences. First Sidney is “opened” to the possibility of miraculous transformation that occurs via the water spout that, from all indications leads Sidney with Mehemet to another-- perhaps spiritual--dimension in time and space. Secondly, Fausto, Sidney’s “spiritual” son attends V.'s death and facilitates her spiritual redemption even as doing so facilitates his. Finally, Fausto’s daughter, Paola (one of the children who disassembled the Bad Priest) becomes the new “spirit” of a new age (the second half of the twentieth century), the antithesis of V.: Sidney’s--and Fausto’s and the western world’s--payoff for the miracle of unconditional love and selfless human gesture.

That V., Sidney’s love and the means to Sidney’s spiritual regeneration, becomes the means in Fausto’s as well, and he the means in hers, is not merely ironic but miraculous in itself. The interconnections between V., Sidney, and Fausto are beyond any of their understandings: only the reader is privy to enough information to make these connections; only the reader is “in on it.” However, the effects of Fausto’s spiritual crisis, his humanitarian gesture toward V., his eventual transformation and his articulation of these experiences to his daughter, Paola, in his Confessions are as far-reaching as Sidney’s even as they were made possible by Sidney’s. Knowing that the Bad Priest attempted to convince Elena to abort their unborn child, knowing that the bad Priest tried to convert “the children” to her apostatic religion of the inanimate, on the day of Elena’s death, Fausto descends in order to minister to what is left of V. once she is disassembled by the children. He does so because he recognizes her humanity which is what the children left and he recognizes the “suffering Christ foreshortened on the bare skull” (343)--he recognizes in her human suffering the suffering of Christ. Perhaps Fausto responds to it because he is experiencing such spiritual suffering himself. In this sacramental moment, the moment of her death, Fausto acquires a priestly attitude, selflessly ministers to the needs of another human being, and prepares her for death by hearing her confession and administering Extreme Unction with her own blood. The moment is spiritually pivotal for Fausto II.
"[O]ut of Elena’s death, out of a horrible encounter with one we only knew as the Bad Priest" (306), Fausto III is born, "the closest any of the characters [Fausto’s identities] comes to non-humanity" (306-07). Essentially Fausto dies to his old sense of self as a dual man and is reborn. Following his experience with V., he slowly returns to "consciousness of humanity" via poetry. Fausto IV emerges as the "man of letters" who tries to make sense of his miraculous experience some twelve years after its occurrence. Although the act of writing his Confessions is much less dramatic than Sidney’s miraculous disappearance from the "surface" of experience, the act is nevertheless part of the process which constitutes Fausto’s spiritual transformation. At the time of his writing in 1956, the process is still incomplete: "That curve is still rising," he writes to Paola.

V. is a Eurydice figure in Pynchon’s first novel, the personification of certain quantum physics principles, and is the "Intercessor" by which both Sidney and Fausto are transformed: all are metaphors for the Golden Mean in Pynchon’s great scheme of extremes and means which emerges with such complexity in this novel. However, in V., V. is a symbol for the Golden Mean on a much broader scale: because she becomes the impetus for and subject of numerous literary endeavors, because she connects the extremes that define her, she functions as a literary metaphor; she is the essence of myth. First, V. is an initial in Sidney’s journals, "a number of manuscript books" which come to Herbert in 1922 as part of his "estate" three years after his father’s death. However, in spite of the fact that Herbert studies his father’s journals, he never notices "the passage on V." written by Sidney in "Florence. April, 1899" until 1939 when "the sentences on V. suddenly acquired a light of their own" (54). He memorizes them: "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report." (53) Not only is V. the impetus for Sidney’s single journal entry but for Herbert’s quest which is, at least in one respect, literary. He thinks of it variously as "a scholarly pursuit," "an adventure of the mind in the tradition of The Golden Bough or The White Goddess," a
“simple-minded literal pursuit” all of which are associated with some “forbidden form of
sexual delight” (61). These adventures are literary: “[a]round each seed of a dossier . . .
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” (62). He fabricates and
fabulates identities, personalities, and scenarios for V.: he stencils these into some pattern
of his own making. V.—as-the Bad Priest becomes a character in Fausto’s journals written
during his Fausto II years (1939-43) and the impetus for his Confessions written to Paola
in 1956 after he emerged as Fausto IV, as a “man of letters” (307). Before he embarks on
the Confessions, Fausto admits that as Fausto IV he “had accumulated a number of poems . . . [some] monographs on religion, language, history; critical essays” (307) on literary
figures and works. He admits at the close of his confessions that the question as to “why
he did not stop the children [from disassembling the Bad Priest]: or lift the beam” to save
V. caused him “to write this confession” (345). Within the novel itself are a number of
literary endeavors, all stemming from attempts to try to articulate “who” or “what she is”
(53). Such endeavors are connected to the music and song of Rilke’s Orpheus and to the
Orphean impulse, inspired by the desire to recover his lost Eurydice, to “pour [oneself] out
like a stream” in order to open oneself to the possibility of “transformation . . . in which the
Thing disappears and bursts into something else” (Rilke, Sonnets II.12.1-2)

V.—as-Eurydice Lost becomes for any number of Orphean characters in the novel
the metaphor for metaphor itself, the very device that connects extremes and provides the
linguistic means for animating the inanimate. Early in his Confessions, Fausto is not yet
ready to admit that language empowers human beings and becomes a means of their
spiritual transformation. In fact, Fausto denies that this is so. The “word is . . .
meaningless,” he cautions Paola; that “identity is singular, soul continuous” he says, is a
“false assumption” (307). However, in his assertion that the power of language is
undermined by the fragmentation of the human “soul,” Fausto suggests that the very act of
meaningful utterance requires a spiritual identity on the part of the speaker, that language
and spiritual existence are connected. Fausto assertions are akin to Rilke’s lament in *Sonnets to Orpheus* that the “divine poet,” Orpheus, is the “lost god.” Because he is “scattered through nature,” Rilke says, “we [humans] are called upon to become “the rescuing voice” (1. 26) because the human function is “to say” and by “saying we give form to and transform ourselves” (*Duino* IX). Otherwise we remain only “spectators” living in a world looking toward death (Strauss 161). As he begins his Confessions, Fausto is skeptical both of his own ability to articulate and of the power of language to transform although he gives much attention in his Confession to linguistic endeavors—both his own and others of the Generation of ‘37. As a “man of letters” he seems to be the “only survivor of the Generation of ‘37” since the other have succumbed to the extremes of the twentieth century: Dnbietna is now (1956) only an engineer “building roads in America” and Maratt is “organizing riots among our linguistic brothers the Bantu” (307). Only Fausto has survived as a poet though his Confessions focus on his loss of faith in both the power of language and the power of religion to reanimate the inanimate, to regenerate life from death.

About midway through his Confessions, Fausto speculates on the essence of meaningful utterance, the poet’s device and that which animates the inanimate—the metaphor. Yet he is still unwilling, unable, or unprepared to admit that metaphor can serve this function in the twentieth century, a century of extremes that tend to reduce the human to the inanimate. The situation had its dangers for Fausto. Living as he does much of the time in a world of metaphor, the poet is always acutely conscious that metaphor has no value apart from its function: that it is a device, an artifice . . . [W]hile others may look on the laws of physics as legislation and God as human form . . . Fausto’s kind [poets/men of letters] 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. (325-26)

The "only useful purpose they [poets] to serve in society," he concludes midway in his Confessions, is "To lie" (326). Two passages immediately follow his speculations on metaphor: the first is his quotation from Dnubietna's poem which asserts both linguistically and mathematically that the "truth behind the catenary [series/sequence of events]" is "the locus of the transcendental [beyond rational explanation]:

\[ y + a/2 (e^{x/a} + e^{-x/a}) \] (326); the second is a description of an event which illustrates this point, a moment when "God . . . suspended the laws of chance," and he and Dnubietna were "given a dispensation" from death (330). Fausto's speculation on metaphor, his quotation of Dnubietna's metaphor in mathematical language, and his "dispensation" from death in the street that night mark the turning point in Fausto's Confessions. The focus of the rest of his confessions is on the children, on his becoming a child again with Elena, and on V.-as-the Bad Priest--all of which become metaphors for metaphor's function. By the end of his Confessions, the children, Fausto, and V. converge: all are "in' the secret," immersed in the metaphor in which V., the embodiment of the inanimate and the human, has her inanimate parts disassembled by the children and her soul redeemed by Fausto who, by attending her passage through death, experiences his own death (as Fausto III) and resurrection (as Fausto IV). "There are no records of Fausto III except for indecipherable entries. And sketches of an azalea blossom, a carob tree" (345). Language was not available to Fausto III, "the closest any of the [Fausto's] characters comes to non-humanity" (307). Fausto IV's "return to life" is marked by "his slow return to consciousness or humanity" (307) and the regeneration of his poetic voice: he has written some poems, including in Rilkean form a "sonnet cycle," "monographs on religion, language, history," critical essays," and, most importantly, his Confessions to Paola.

These Confessions demonstrate the power of language to mediate between life and death,
to animate the inanimate, to discover "the truth behind/the catenary" at the "locus of the transcendental" (326) and articulate it via the Golden Mean of language, metaphor. These Confessions are Paola's' "spiritual heritage" (310).

As a metaphor V. is the Golden Mean of the novel, Pynchon's own literary endeavor. Delineated by an initial, she is the essence of language, the "point, dimensionless" from which the entire novel emerges. Like Fausto, her "successive identities [are] taken on and rejected by the writer [Pynchon] as a function of linear time" and, in a sense, are "treated as separate characters" (306). Discovered in Sidney's journals by Herbert after some seventeen years of perusing them, V., true to her function as metaphor, "animates" Herbert as she animates numerous other characters in the novel. Two--Sidney and Fausto--assume Orphean roles and are transformed by the backward glance she, as Eurydice, evokes. Others--Evan Godolphin, Mondaugen, Herbert Stencil--possess Orphean potential but experience no spiritual regeneration. As a metaphor V. has the potential to animate and she functions as well to connect the animate and the inanimate, life and death. She is a character who is Sidney's love, and from their union many of the novel's pivotal characters arise: Herbert, Fausto, Paola. Even though she is obsessed with "bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter" (488), her "identity is single, soul continuous" (307) for Sidney who loves her, contradicting Fausto II's assumption to the contrary. Her embodiment of the animate and the inanimate, her multiple-yet-singular identity firmly associates her with both Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and Bohr's Complementarity Argument since she embodies mutually exclusive concepts and requires "a purely symbolic scheme permitting only predictions . . . beyond the grasp of a description" (Bohr 123). As such, she also is intimately connected to the assumption that death is a part of life and a means for the infinite to enter experience as it does when Sidney disappears in the waterspout and when Fausto attends V.'s death. Like the goddess of telluric earth, her ancient predecessor, V. contains the extremes of life and death and the potential for life regenerated out of death. Those characters who, in Rilke's words, decide
not to be merely “spectators . . . turned toward the world of objects” (Duino VIII) but who
decide to live life like children in the immediate and mediating present acquire the power to
be transformed and to transform others. One way they do this is to become lovers as
Sidney and V. did; the other way is to “say” since by saying we give form to and
transform the transient, we give form to and transform ourselves. In V. V. is the metaphor
for the impulse to seek out the still “point, dimensionless,” the stasis within the flux, the
eternal amid the transient, and to give form to such phenomena by articulating it. In
Pynchon’s articulation, V. as a metaphor encompasses myth and the eternal return at one
extreme and Newtonian science and the Apollonian way at the other. She is the mythical
“white goddess” symbolized by Demeter, Persephone, Venus and their nature-bound
rituals which come to be associated with Vheissu and Mara; yet her penchant for
Machiavellian virtù implicates her in the apocalyptic upheavals and political violence of the
first half of the twentieth century. Yet she is also identified as an Eurydice figure, as an
Intercessor who mediates and becomes the impetus for transformation and for “song.” The
song is nascent—a mere sentence—in Sidney’s journals, fractured/fragmented in Herbert’s
dossiers, maturing in Fausto’s journals, fully realized in Pynchon’s V.

The Century’s Midpoint

Pynchon’s first novel deals with the events that shape the first half of the twentieth
century and the personal lives of those who lived during this period. Evan and Hugh
Godolphin, V., and Sidney Stencil are the characters who “surface” in the novel and whose
lives intersect at certain pivotal moments. The decisions these characters make and/or the
ramifications of these decisions is information accessible to the reader who, by the act of
reading narratively “observes” and “measures” the consequences of these events. The
Godolphin’s V., and Sidney Stencil in some ways are victims of the extreme circumstances
that order their lives: unrest in the Middle East, espionage activities in Florence at the turn
of the century, German colonization maneuvers and atrocities in South West Africa in
1904 and 1922, World War I and its aftermath in Malta, 1919. The personal decisions they
make during these extreme times shape the world succeeding generations inherit. Fausto Maijstral seems to have inherited a world even more extreme than the one experienced both by his real parents, Old Maijstral and his wife Carla, and by his surrogate father, Sidney Stencil—the world of Malta under siege by the Germans in World War II. Fausto’s experience, however, and his “look backwards” at it via his Confessions written to his daughter, Paola, in 1956 marks another pivotal moment among the novel’s many pivotal moments. A year before his death, Rilke wrote to his polish translator, “Affirmation of life-AND-death turns out to be one . . . we are continually overflowing toward those who preceded us, toward our origin, and toward those who seemingly come after us” (qtd. in Mitchell, “Notes” 550). This theme is a recurrent one in V. and has particular relevance when the novel’s new generation of characters is considered. The new generation has three predominant representatives: Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, and Paola. Even though they are different ages and nationalities—Profane is American in his twenties; Herbert Stencil is British and fifty five; Paola is Maltese and about eighteen—they converge in New York City in 1956 and become integrally entwined in each others’ lives. In New York City at the century’s midpoint, they each personify a version of looking “both ways”—back toward their origins and forward toward those who come after—before they journey together to Malta. Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil represent new versions of the extreme impulses encountered by the previous generation—the Dionysian and Apollonian respectively. Whereas the extremes for the previous generation are located in the external world—in the military confrontations, colonization efforts, and world wars, by mid-century these impulses have become internalized and are exhibited in two of the novel’s major characters neither of whom is able to interact adequately with others: Benny Profane refuses all attempts by women to engage him in a meaningful relationship—even with his own nurturing mother; Herbert Stencil is so detached that he adopts a technique he calls the “forcible dislocation of personality” and speaks of himself in the third person. Together, they represent Aristotle’s extremes—“excesses” and “deficiencies” that define Eliade’s
"profane man" at the midpoint of the twentieth century. Only Paola, the youngest—and the
feminine—member of the new generation, emerges at mid-century able to connect with
others on many levels; she thereby becomes Eurydice renewed, the earth goddess
regenerated, the Paraclete—for-a-new-age—the Golden Mean redeemed.

**Benny Profane: Inanimate Man**

Benny Profane, introduced on the novel’s first page, is Eliade’s Profane man. For
Benny “all vital experiences . . . have been desacralized” (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 178); it transmits no message. He seems to be the emblematic result of the process of desacralization that Eliade finds in
“modern societies of the West” (*The Sacred and the Profane* 203). Like Eliade’s
“nonreligious man,” Benny prides himself on the “schlemiel” he has made of himself, and
as such belongs to a world of things which excludes personal involvement. “Nobody
wanted a schlemiel,” he thinks (214). He thinks of himself also as a yo-yo (217), an
inanimate object dangled on the end of a string. Even his movements are yo-yo like.
When he appears at the Sailor’s Grave on Christmas Eve, 1955, he has been “traveling, up
and down the east coast like a yo-yo” (10). His path, like that of a yo-yo, is always
dictated by roadways, buslines, subway trains, even the plans and whims of others.
“[L]ike a yo-yo” he spends his days in New York City “shuttling on the subway back and
forth underneath the Street, from Times Square to Grand Central and viceversa” (37); while sleeping on the subway Profane has a nightmare that suggests he is inanimate enough “to make the fact of his own disassembly plausible as that of any machine” (40). Furthermore, Benny insists upon disorder. He is the frenzied Dionysian devoid of any spiritual
significance. He believes accident and chance rule his life: Benny “happened to pass
through Norfolk, Virginia” on “Christmas Eve, 1955” (9); “Women had always happened
to Profane the schlemiel like accidents (emphasis added 134); in late September 1956, he
prepares to sail with Paola and Stencil to Malta, and, believing himself to be “Fortune’s yo-
yo,” he is convinced that “[h]e was here by accident” (367). Two of the few characters
Profane feels “a certain kinship with” are machines made to resemble men: SHROUD, a “synthetic human, radiation output determined” and SHOCK, a “synthetic human object, casually kinematics,” both of whom he encounters in his job as night watchman for Anthroresearch Associates which tests the effects of subatomic particles and auto crashes on the human body with the aid of mannequins made from body parts and synthetic materials. In spite of the fact that Profane begins to have “imaginary” conversations with SHROUD, that SHROUD becomes his father-confessor, that SHROUD gives him the “watchword” for an alternative to his inanimate existence—“Keep cool but care” (369)—Profane refuses to recognize either the miraculous nature of the incidents or the message he receives.

Benny Profane seems parentless since his parents are hardly mentioned; Benny does, however, have parents and, on an impulse shortly before he leaves New York for Malta, he decides “to look in on” them. The door to their apartment is unlocked—they live “down around Houston Street”—and on the kitchen table his mother has left a virtual feast because “she had this compulsion to feed”; however, the “inside was empty” (379). Profane spends an hour or so “making bits and pieces of it [the “inanimate food”] animate, his own.” Then he leaves. Aside from thinking that “the world would be worse off without mothers like that [i.e., nourishing] in it” (379), Profane is physically full but emotionally unaffected by his very indirect contact with his parents. Profane has no direction in his life, no goals for his future. He is perfectly willing to let other factors outside himself decide his direction, like the hand which controls the yo-yo. Profane works at detachment—from his past, from his future, from women who desire emotional commitment—and prides himself on his ability to maintain it.

Profane and Fina. The mysterious and miraculous frequently intrude into Benny’s experience but his insistence that such intrusions are “accidents” precludes his awareness that any existence besides the profane is possible. These intrusions most often occur when women—especially women associated with sexuality, spirituality, or both—enter his life.
One such woman is Fina who “awakens” him while he is yo-yoing on the subway from Times Square to Grand Central determined to “help him.” She is a Puerto Rican girl “with tropical birds peeking from her green dress” (41), an earth mother who, when Profane is caught in the closing subway doors, takes Profane’s hand and tugs, “and a miracle happened. The doors opened again. She gathered him inside, into her quiet field of force. He knew all at once: here, for the time being, Profane the schlemiel can move nimble and sure” (41). In Fina’s presence, Profane’s outlook is altered, at least temporarily. She takes him home and introduces him to her brother, Angel, and to another dimension of life below the Street, in the sewers of New York City. Even though Profane’s first encounter with Fina hints at the miraculous intruding into his life, Benny prefers to think that she, like other women, “happened” to him like an accident. However, after he and Fina end up together in a phone booth “discussing love” and she seems to romantically attach herself to him, Profane “came to tally his time in reverse or schlemiel’s light: time on the job as escape, time exposed to any possibility of getting involved with Fina as assbreaking, wageless labor” (136). Profane resists human contact and struggles to maintain his status as an object. “Why did she have to behave like he was a human being. Why couldn’t he be just an object of mercy” (137). Fina, like other women in V. who function as Eurydice figures and have the potential to serve as the means of men’s transformations, has a dual nature: she is “warm and viscous-moving, ready to come” (137) and she is a “spiritual leader” for the Playboys, a youth gang, who are “all . . . crazy for Fina, in a spiritual way” (137-38). Profane is “sure any love between her and the Playboys was for the moment Christian, unworldly and proper” though he knows that, in Fina, there is “the wanton behind the saint” (145). Fina possesses that same convergence of extremes that characterize Eurydice-like women who have the potential to lead men toward a spiritual existence. She is the earth goddess and the saint, of this world and another. Profane, however, will have none of it. When Fina comes to him and asks him to deflower her, he turns her away. He negates his close sexual encounter with her just as he negates his close
encounter with the miraculous he experiences while hunting alligators in the New York City sewers, an encounter he was led to indirectly by Fina.

Early in the novel—Chapter 5—shortly after Fina "awakens" Profane and "saves" him by gathering him "inside, into her quiet field of force" (41), Profane is beneath the New York City street on Alligator Patrol and pursuing the "pinto beast," an alligator "pale white, seaweed black" that assumes mythical proportions. The conditions are conducive for a transforming experience: Profane's descent to the Underworld (New York City sewer) has been implemented by a woman half earth-goddess, half saint; he is "out of his territory" (117) and on the East side in a position appropriate for a rebirth; he is about to enter Father Fairing's Parish which resembles an "early Christian catacomb" (121) and which is the subject of "apocryphal" stories. The contents of Father Fairing's journals and stories of his Underworld Parish have all the trappings of mytho-religious experience. Disillusioned by his efforts to help the poor during the Depression and convinced that the rats will inherit New York City, Father Fairing descends to the sewers to convert the rats to Catholicism bringing with him several "holy texts": a Baltimore Catechism, a breviary, a copy of Knight's Modern Seamanship. Naming the rats after saints of the church, he sets out to convert them and become their "spiritual leader" taking particular sexual and spiritual interest in a female rat he names Veronica and identifies in his journals as V. All of these details Profane seems familiar with through his acquaintance with "sewer stories. They just are. Truth or falsity don't apply" (120). The details also eventually connect Profane's encounter with the miraculous with Sidney's encounter: both occur in the presence of a version of V. and with some aspect of Father Fairing in attendance. Here Profane pursues the "dichotomous beast." When Profane enters the Parish, he moves "across the frontier, the alligator still in front of him" (120) and enters the sacred domain. "Scrawled on the walls were occasional quotes from the Gospels, Latin tags (Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem--Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, grant us peace)" (120). There in Father Fairing's Parish which Profane refers to as a
“sepulchre,” Profane encounters the uncertain, the otherworldly, the miraculous. In “a wide space like the nave of a church, an arched roof overhead,” Profane witnesses “a phosphorescent light coming off walls whose exact arrangement was indistinct” (122). The alligator “turned to face him. It was a clear, easy shot” (120). At the brink of his transforming experience, Profane waits.

He was waiting for something to happen. Something otherworldly, of course. He was sentimental and superstitious. Surely the alligator would receive the gift of tongues, the body of Father Fairing would be resurrected, the sexy V. tempt him away from murder. He felt about to levitate and at a loss to say where, really, he was. In a bonecellar, a sepulchre (122) Profane is at the threshold, the crossroads of experience where quite literally the Sacred intrudes upon “Profane” experience. However, Profane is not prepared, not open to the intrusion, and unwilling to be transformed. “Ah, schlemiel,” he whispers, “into the phosphorescence” and, refusing that which tugs him toward animation, symbolically kills the alligator rendering the beast as inanimate as he.

Profane and Rachel. By his very schlemiel-like inanimate nature, Profane is naturally attracted to characters who either exhibit inanimate characteristics or are attracted to Profane for the same reason. The main “object” of Profane’s attraction is Rachel Oswald whom he met “back in ’54” when her MG “clipped [Benny] in the rear” (23). He goes for a ride with her to an “abandoned rock quarry” where “it was all inanimate” (25); “the dead rocks that were here before us and will be after us,” Rachel tells him, is “the world” (26). Because she talked “nothing but MG-words, inanimate-words he couldn’t really talk back at,” because his rival for her affection is the inanimate MG, Profane “finagled himself into love for Rachel” (27). Though they never call it “a Relationship,” Profane unwittingly finds himself “visited” by Rachel “at night, like a succubus” (30). In fact, shortly after he thinks of her, she miraculously has him paged at a bus station in Norfolk. She becomes “the hand” that tugs at the “invisible, umbilical string” attached like
a yo-yo string to "his midsection" (34). The yo-yo image and controlling hand are likened to a planet orbiting the sun.

If you look from the side at a planet swinging around in its orbit, split the sun with a mirror and imagine a string, it all looks like a yo-yo. The point furthest from the sun is called aphelion. The point furthest from the yo-yo hand is called, by analogy, apocheir (35).

The image here is elliptical not circular, and it is not the eternal return because Profane is intent on perpetuating his inanimate existence in a desacralized world. He arrives at an "apocheir" by distancing himself from the women who "love" him--Fina, Rachel and Paola--although they "love" him in different ways. He does, however, put Paola in contact with Rachel, the woman he is trying not to love. "She's a good woman," Benny tells Paola. "Don't ask me if we're in love. The word doesn't mean anything" (36).

Determined to maintain his inanimate yo-yo-like status, Profane spends most of his time and energy trying to avoid any encounter that might remotely connect him with the animate world or human emotion. He thinks about Rachel, travels to New York City where she lives, but instead of "coming home" to her, Benny sends Paola whom he refuses to see as an Intercessor between them. Paola even asks him "What are you afraid of?" (36). Profane resists love's great humanizing and transforming power. Even though Rachel's love of the inanimate and Benny's inanimate condition triggers their attraction to each other, Benny fears that Rachel's "love" could well change him from his "schlemihlhood," his inanimate condition, as it changes Rachel. Rachel is a force to be reckoned with by Profane. Even though Profane does not actively seek her out, he nevertheless allows sex, his only animating attribute, to lead him directly to Rachel and the Space/Time Employment Agency for which she works. He thinks "himself into an erection" and, having done so, decides to chose an employment agency based on the intersection of "inanimate schlemiel"--himslef with his erection--and "inanimate paper"--a fold in the New York Times created by his erection. Despite the miraculous nature of the
sequence of events leading Profane to the woman he loves, he prefers to call their encounter "pure chance." Just as "Profane felt that he'd come to the dead center in Nueva York; had found his Girl, his vocation as watchman against the night" and "his home" (368) with Rachel, the "field-of-two" he and Rachel have formed is undermined by the intrusion of the inanimate world: Rachel's alarm clock malfunctions, he oversleeps, loses his job, and returns to Rachel determined to avoid all commitments and retreat into his inanimate existence as a schlemiel. "I don't love anything," he tells her, "not even you . . . All a schlemiel can do is take" (368). Rachel's transformation into "two-way" thinking--i.e., love as a reciprocal state of being--frightens him. When Rachel asks him "What about love? When are you going to end your virgin status there, Ben?" and says "People can change. Couldn't you make the effort?" he retreats into his stock schlemiel response. "I don't change," he tells her. "Schlemiels don't change" (381). Profane reveals his real fear--the fear of all Profane men--to Rachel, the woman who loves him in spite of himself:

You know what I always thought? That you were an accessory. That you, flesh, you'd fall apart sooner than the car [Rachel's MG]. That the car would go on, in a junkyard even it would look like it always had, and it would have to be a thousand years before that thing could rust so you wouldn't recognize it. But old Rachel, she'd be long gone (383).

The means of transformation in V. is the experience of love. As evidenced by the transformations of Sidney Stencil and Fausto Maijstral, love has a humanizing effect on the lover who experiences a transformation from a profane and selfish existence into one in which selfless acts open spiritual possibilities. Such a transformation is connected to the loss (actual or possible) of the beloved coupled with the belief in her continued existence.

This concept is associated with pagan and Christian notions of regeneration and resurrection, the Rilkean version of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth, and the spontaneous regeneration of order out of chaotic fluctuations at the quantum level. All require an acceptance of risk and uncertainty which are existentially terrifying if one lives in a
desacralized world in which time's passage leads inexorably to extinction and dissolution of self. Benny Profane can accept neither the possibility of Rachel's "singular" and "continuous existence" nor the possibility of his physically losing her. Consequently he refuses to risk the uncertainty associated with the unconditional personal commitment love requires. Benny Profane's refusal to love Rachel marks his refusal to participate in that which could miraculously transform him from schlemiel to human being and universalizes his decision into that of Profane Man's refusal to accept the possibility of spiritual transformation because he lives a Dionysian existence in a desacralized world which defies both logical explanation and ritualized renewal; the profane world is an entropic world in which flesh disappears before most inanimate objects; Benny Profane cannot take a "chance" that love can redeem and animate such a world beyond its material existence. True to his commitment to the profane way of life, Profane's plan of action is always the same: "Approach and avoid" (55).

Profane and Paola. Profane refuses to accept this possibility a third time when he accompanies Paola and Herbert Stencil to Malta in late September 1956, a journey he once again attributes to chance and the whims of others, a journey which insures at least temporarily, that he will not have to confront Rachel Owlglass and subject himself to her "two-way" thinking. Benny, due to his profane ways, is never able to understand either Paola's message--or for that matter the messages attached to any of his miraculous experiences--or her motives. He has already encountered the miraculous in Fina, half-earth-goddess-half-saint, who first saved him and then entrusted him to Angel who, as his Underworld guide, leads him to the threshold of sacred experience. He has encountered the miraculous in his love for Rachel: her summons in the bus station to "come home" to her; their "accidental" meeting at the Space/Time Employment Agency; her desire to change him from a schlemiel into a human being. In both cases, Profane's tactics have remained the same: approach and, when the miraculous gets too close, avoid it at all costs. His relationship with Paola is no different. She seems to be an emissary from another world--
Malta—a world he has been to and to which he will return though his experiences in
between—with Fina and with Rachel and the Whole Sick Crew—will have taught him
nothing. Benny labels his meeting with Paola an “accident” because “[w]omen had always
happened” to him, but the fact that he arrives on Christmas Eve, 1955 in Norfolk, Virginia
with “one foot in the Grave” (10) and immediately runs into Paola who is tending bar there
makes their meeting seem more miraculous than accidental. Paola’s first words to him
come as “a voice behind Profane’s left ear”: “Why can’t man live in peace with his fellow
man” (10-11), she says. The message she brings may not be for Profane alone but for the
Western world, particularly America, at the midpoint of the century and for the profane
who occupy it. Paola is a mystery to Profane: her age, her nationality, the difficulty of
telling “what Paola wanted,” and the Miraculous Medal she wears around her neck cause
him to wonder “What sort of Catholic was she?”

On New Year’s Eve, Paola teaches them from a song Dewey sings in French:
“‘That’s it,’ Paola said. ‘Je suis né. Being born. That’s all you have to do’” (30). The
cycle of the year is ending; it is a time for renewal. “For religious man of archaic cultures,”
Eliade writes, “the world is renewed annually . . . with each new year it recovers its
original sanctity” (The Sacred and the Profane 75). Perhaps Paola suggests an Eliadian
“second birth” which occurs when one dies to his profane condition and is reborn into a
spiritual existence such as the real protagonists of the novel, Sidney Stencil and Fausto
Maijstral, experience. However, being Profane Man, Benny not only fails to understand
Paola’s message, but he does what Profane men do: he makes a god of himself.
“[S]uppose I was God,” he tells the sea gull on the deck of the Susana Squaducci on New
Year’s Eve. When, as God, he proceeds to “zap” an SP and commands the paddy wagon
into the sea and Patsy Pagano to “grow wings and fly out of here” (31), his god-like
powers have no influence on the activities he watches, kilroy-like, happening below him.
But when he commands Dewey Gland to sing, Dewey gives “a bass string intro and began
to sing Blue Suede Shoes, after Elvis Presley” (32). The significance of the power of song
over the impulse to destroy, however, is lost on Benny Profane, as always; he “flopped over on his back blinking up into the snow and was soon asleep” (32).

Profane and Brenda Wigglesworth. Profane accompanies Paola and Herbert to Malta but his journey is a result of Herbert’s coercion rather than Benny’s choice. Herbert needs Profane “to serve as a buffer zone” (387) between him and Paola because Herbert is afraid of Paola, Valletta, Malta, and V.—all emblems of the median, the alternative to the extremism to which he is accustomed, the possibility of “submersion” into “a different order” (388). Profane provides the perfect “buffer” against encounters with the miraculous because Profane has become, during the course of the novel, an expert schlemiel, never changing his inanimate status no matter how obviously the miraculous intrudes into his life. Even being situated on Malta—the “clenched fist” that draws the yo-yo to it,” the center of Mara’s circle of influence, the hub of the wheel, with Paola the Intercessor and means of transformation—has little effect on Profane. In fact, upon his arrival at Valletta over which was a “sunshower . . . and even a rainbow,” Benny checks into the Phoenician Hotel and has a “a loud argument” with Paola. With all the means to miraculous transformation converging, Profane refuses to change. “Tell Paola’s father,” he says to Herbert Stencil, “I’m just along for the ride” (449). “Approach and avoid” are the watchwords of his profane existence; Profane’s refusal to accept the miraculous possibilities offered to him cause Paola, once again in her father’s house, to weep for Profane’s spiritual loss.

When Benny recuperates, he finds amusement in Brenda Wigglesworth, an American WASP and totally vacuous co-ed from Beaver College. Together they agree that Valletta, the center, the midpoint, the geographical mean where Sidney’s and Fausto’s spiritual awakenings occur, is “nowhere.” Yet, when Profane realizes that the Scaffold, his old ship, has left Valletta, he experiences a moment of realization concerning Valletta, Paola, the possibilities they offered and he refused:

It made him sadder: as if all his homes were temporary and even they, inanimate, still wandering as he: for motion is relative, and hadn’t he, now,
really stood there still on the sea like a schlemiel Redeemer while that enormous malingering city and its one livable inner space and one unconnable (therefore hi-valu) girl [Paola] had all slid away from him over a great horizon’s curve comprising, from this vantage, at once, at least one century’s worth of wavelets? (453)

Instead, he is left with Brenda Wigglesworth reading her phony college-girl poem, “I am the twentieth century” which Profane says “sounds about right.” The real crux of Profane’s profane existence is reached when Brenda admires “all these fabulous experiences” Benny has had. “Haven’t you learned?” she asks him. “Profane didn’t have to think long. ‘No,’ he said, ‘offhand I’d say I haven’t learned a goddamn thing’” (453).

The last image we have of Profane is the two of them--Profane and Brenda--hand in hand running down the street in a part of Valletta where the buildings

   eleven years after war’s end, had not been rebuilt. The street, however, was level and clear . . . Presently, sudden and in silence, all illumination in Valletta, houselight and streetlight, was extinguished. Profane and Brenda continued to run through the abruptly absolute night (455).

With countless opportunities to encounter the miraculous, to be humanized and perhaps redeemed, with three possible Eurydices--Fina, Rachel, and Paola--who might have provided the means of his transformation, Benny Profane loses them all and chooses instead Brenda and the dead-level street of ruin and darkness.

**Herbert Stencil: Profane’s Doppleganger**

In V.’s world in which extremes dominate human existence, Profane’s doppleganger is Herbert Stencil. Initially they seem to exhibit opposite kinds of extreme behavior. Profane is the inanimate schlemiel and human yo-yo who insists upon the accidental nature of his existence; he is the Dionysian who thrives on chaotic activity, frenzy, and noise. For Profane, the world is devoid of spiritual dimension and when the miraculous threatens to intrude, he runs in the opposite direction away from Valletta
“toward the edge of Malta, and the Mediterranean beyond” (455). By contrast Herbert is obsessed with his quest for V. whom he has pursued since 1945. Before the war he says he had been slothful, inert; his movements random. Even as the war ended, Herbert “flirted with the idea of resuming [his] prewar sleepwalk” (54). Believing that the quest for V. animated him—perhaps it was the war—he makes “Work, the chase” his “grim, joyless” obsession. To sustain “this acquired sense of animateness . . . he had to hunt V.” (55); an end to his search, he convinces himself, would thrust him back into the realm of half-consciousness from which the discovery that “V. was there to track down” had awakened him. Stencil’s name, like Profane’s, describes his metaphysical stance: he is obsessed with devising his own version of V. to fit a pattern constructed from the clues he has amassed as a “world adventurer” looking for pieces of the “V.-jigsaw.” In spite of the fact that Herbert is fifty-five years old in 1956—almost as old as Sidney was when he disappeared in the waterspout—Herbert is still referred to as “young Stencil.” He has the potential of following in his father’s spiritual footsteps, but Herbert is of a different generation. He prefers extremes to the ambiguity required by both personal relationships and the discovery of V.’s real nature. In order to deal with the ambiguity that surrounds V., Herbert objectifies himself to “put off some part of the pain of dilemma” (62). He does this by assuming various “impersonations” and by referring to himself, “like Henry Adams in the Education. . . . in the third person.” “Forcible dislocation of personality” is what he calls this technique, and it keeps him distanced from his goal—V.—and from personal relationships as well. To augment the seeds of his dossier on V., he utilizes a “nacreous mass of inference, poetic license” (62); in Eigenvalue’s words, he “Stencilizes” the clues he collects, forcing them to fit a two-dimensional pattern of his own. Whereas Profane insists upon disorder and convinces himself that accident and chance rule his life, Stencil insists upon activity that could lead to an end he never wants to reach—i.e., finding V.—and he waits “aimlessly [in New York] for a coincidence” (56). If Profane is a Dionysian with no spiritual dimension, Stencil is an Apollonian without enlightenment. The order Stencil
constructs is empty of any religious or trans-human meaning. Stencilized, V. becomes Herbert’s own “private mythology” (Eliade 211), not the means that can open him to the miraculous and the spiritual as she did for Sidney and for Fausto. Even as Profane refused to be “changed” from his profane existence into a new, richer life by the earth-mother/saintly women who “happened” to him, so Stencil refuses to take full advantage of the legacy his father left him. Believing his only legacy to be Sidney’s journals and some postcards, Herbert fails to recognize as part of that legacy the “good will” Sidney had generated “in nearly every city in the western world” (54) and the spiritual legacy attached to V. who facilitated the transformations of Herbert’s father, Sidney, and his surrogate “brother,” Fausto, whose Confessions and priest-like counseling furnish enough information to facilitate Herbert’s transformation as well. Herbert may be the biological offspring of V. and Sidney, but at last he is “the century’s child” (52). He pursues V. with no intention of resolving or tolerating the ambiguity which surrounds her beyond his attempts through “inference and poetic license” to “stencilize” a notion of her—without the benefit of metaphoric “observation” which requires the unconditional acceptance of the ambiguous that provides the “means” of spiritual transformation. When Herbert “approaches” V. too closely, he “avoids” observation at all costs because “something there [at the median, the means, the point at which observation occurs] . . . frightened him” (62). The means that frighten Herbert most are V., Malta, and Paola. Herbert fears what they represent: “some submersion, against his will, in a history too old for him, or at least of a different order from what he’d known” (emphasis added 388-39).

Herbert’s “Stencilized” version of V. V. could have spiritually transformed Herbert. Herbert, like Benny Profane, has protagonist potential. He is, after all, his father’s son, and V., the object of Herbert’s pursuit and his mother, leads at least two characters out of their inanimate profane selves and into a new dimension of existence. However, by April 1956, Herbert has regressed into a state of “vegetation”; he is lethargic and un receptive to change. As he waits for “Paola to reveal how she fitted into the grand
Gothic pile of inferences," he becomes “lackadaisical” in hunting down his leads; part of
his apathy hinges on the barely-conscious notion that there was “after all something more
important he ought to be doing” (226) and that the “something” might be spiritual. “What a
joke,” he thinks to himself, “if at the end of this hunt he came face to face with himself
afflicted by a kind of soul-transvestism” (226). Herbert does not want to admit the
possibility that “the century’s master cabal” into which V., his “quarry,” fit, that “the
Ultimate Plot Which Has No Name” for which “she continued active today and at the
moment”–at the century’s midpoint–might not be a sinister political plot at all, but
“something more important,” something related to his own spiritual awakening and his
century’s as well. Born in 1901, Herbert is “the century’s child,” the offspring of Sidney
and V. However, Herbert seems unable--or perhaps unwilling--to connect with either
parent and calls the question of whether he “believes her [V.] to be his mother”
“ridiculous” (54).

That he was “[r]aised motherless” is indicative of his century. The mother--
symbolically the earth-mother, the goddess of fecundity and growth--seems to have “[d]ied
in [Herbert’s, the century’s] childbirth” or “committed suicide” (209). Or, perhaps like
Victoria Wren, she may seem to have seen “herself embodying a feminine principle” that
serves “as complement to all this bursting explosive male energy,” and, watching the
events of the first half of the twentieth century--“the spasm of wounded bodies, the fair of
violent death”--“inviolate and calm” believes they had been “framed and staged . . . for her
alone” (209). For the first half of the twentieth century, the earth goddess--associated with
Demeter, Persephone, Eurydice--who is supposed to embody renewal, bring life out of
death, has been distorted almost beyond recognition and her powers besieged by the
masculine forces of death and destruction. V. becomes the symbol of this distortion. V. is
not a “who” but a “what,” not a nurturer of life but its corrupter and aborter. Her
obsession is not with life-giving activities but with inert objects; her “natural habitat” is “the
state of siege” (62). This is the pattern Herbert imposes on the clues he has accumulated
during his eleven-year quest, and he is less than willing to admit the possibility that there
might be "after all something more important he ought to be doing," that a pattern not of his
own making might exist which might be to his benefit--and his century’s--to explore.
Whereas Sidney finds the century’s extremes, the century’s "double-vision" "intolerable"
and longs for the "Golden Mean" which he fears has become "[o]bsolete . . . lost sight of"
(463), Herbert finds the Golden Mean which V. comes to symbolize, its paradoxes and
uncertainties "intolerable." Herbert is desperate for pattern and goes to extremes to insist
that the pattern he discovers is his own. He relies on "self" for the establishment of pattern
and refuses to "open" himself to new and other possibilities.

In New York Herbert awaits coincidence but is receptive only to those coincidences
that promise to fit into his predetermined scheme. Those that do not, those which suggest a
design that lies beyond his own, frighten him even though several times in the narrative
Herbert has second thoughts about the legitimacy of his obsessive pursuit of V. Early in
his quest Herbert admits that his "pursuit of V. was merely a scholarly quest . . . an
adventure of the mind . . . [a] simple-minded literal pursuit [as opposed to metaphorical]"
(61). It merely moves him from "inertness" to "activity"; it does not vitalize or humanize or
transform him. In 1946 when he confesses his obsession with V. to Margravine di Chaive
Lowenstein, he reveals that pursuing V. exclusively in "the network of white halls in his
own brain . . . would be the lunacy . . . of any self-appointed prophet" (53). Before
Herbert launches into his "eight impersonations" designed to reconstruct the circumstances
surrounding the murder in Egypt of Porpentine, his father’s colleague, circumstances that
seem to foreshadow his father’s own mysterious demise, we are told that Herbert has never
been to "the island Malta, where his father had died . . . because something kept him off,
because it frightened him" (62). This fear of Malta and the mysterious circumstances
surrounding his father’s death materialize when Paola "whom he had been trying to avoid"
(303) intrudes into Herbert’s life and quest, hands him the Confessions of Fausto
Maijstral, and tells him "I ought to go back" (303). Herbert immediately becomes
defensive. "Stencil has stayed off Malta," he tells her, "[a]s if she'd asked him to go" (303). Much upsets Stencil about his reading of Fausto's Confessions. First, he believes the reading itself to be the "coincidence," he had been waiting for in New York City; it seems to shatter "the surface of this stagnant pool and send all the mosquitoes of hope zinging away to the exterior night" (345). The "surface" that Herbert's reading of the Confessions shatters is the notion that "death and V. had been separate for his father" (345), a notion Herbert has clung to during his search. After he reads Fausto's Confessions, Herbert becomes convinced that Paola has, "by her refusal to tell him, been all this time forcing him closer to the day when he'd have to admit Valletta [where his father died] as a possibility" for both his own enlightenment and the end of his search. He also admits that he "didn't know which he was most afraid of . . . . Or whether they were two versions of the same thing" (346).

By the time he reads Fausto's Confessions, Herbert has amassed enough clues concerning V. to fill four chapters and some 170 pages of the novel. He has pieced together information concerning the young Victoria Wren and her relationships with Goodfellow, Porpentine, and Bongo-Shaftsbury in Egypt in 1898 during the Fashoda Crisis. He has placed Victoria in Florence in 1899 when his father worked for the British Consulate there and has connected her with a "Situation" involving Vheissu, Hugh Godolphin and his son Evan which Sidney was investigating. Herbert has gleaned from Porcépic the tale of "V. in love" with Mélanie l'Heuremaudit in Paris, 1913, of Mélanie's death and V. 's disappearance with Sgherraccio, "a mad Irredentist." From his interview with Kurt Mondaugen, Herbert has "Stencilized" the story of Vera Meroving and Old Godolphin at Foppl's Siege Party in South West Africa in 1922 when genocide and moral decadence were the rule, ritual and myth the exceptions to be subdued and conquered. By 1956 Herbert has come to "an impasse" in his search for clues, but is waiting for "a vital piece of the V.-jigsaw" from Schoenmaker, a plastic surgeon whose connection is with Evan Godolphin, from "Chiclitz the munitions king" for whom Mondaugen works, and
from Eigenvalue, a psychodontist who specializes in prosthetics, becomes Herbert's "father-confessor," and possesses a set of dentures "wrought from all precious metals" (391) which Herbert says "would be something she'd [V. would] wear" (154). Even with all his clues amassed, in April 1956 Herbert still does not "know what sex V. might be, nor even what genus and species. To go along assuming that Victoria the girl tourist and Veronica the sewer rat were one and the same was not at all to bring up any metempsychosis," Herbert convinces himself, "only to affirm that his quarry fitted in with the Big One, the century's master cabal, in the same way Victoria had with the Vheissu plot and Veronica with the new rat-order" (226). These sweeping connections imposed upon the clues he has collected serve to reassure Herbert not only that the V.-pattern he has constructed is accurate, but that patterning for its own sake is metaphysically purposeful as well.

**Herbert's encounter with the miraculous.** Paola's intrusion into his life with Fausto's Confessions and his trip with her to Malta both force Herbert to confront the validity of his assumptions and provide the means for the possibility of his--and his century's--spiritual awakening. By reading the Confessions Herbert is introduced to a spiritual aspect of V. as well as to a new spiritual dimension of existence both of which he has avoided during his search. When Fausto acknowledges in his Confessions his several "identities," Fausto reveals his dual nature which led to his spiritual crisis, his death to the profane as Fausto III, and his rebirth into spirituality as Fausto IV. By contrast, Herbert's have been merely "forcible dislocations of personality," a "trick" to avoid "the pain of dilemma" created by circumstances that do not fit into his predetermined pattern. In his Confessions Fausto focuses on precisely those human experiences into which the mysterious and miraculous intrude and which defy logical explanation: conception, birth, love, death. Fausto describes his subterranean existence on Malta which, during the bombing raids of World War II, represented life, community, and the growth of his daughter. Though the war years were years of extreme circumstances involving life and
death, Fausto’s Confessions reveal that life and death are not necessarily the extremes that they seem to be. Rather, through the articulation of his war experiences culminating in the loss of Elena, his Eurydice, and his descent to minister to the dying V., he begins to see them as connected and the “means” of their connection--V.--becomes the conduit to his redemption. Fausto’s Confessions are permeated by “means,” points at which the division between the inanimate and the animate, death and life blur, and he begins to intuit some larger pattern connected to God and a spiritual domain in which death and life become part of a single process. This process, according to Fausto’s Confessions, is analogous to metaphor, a mediating device designed to animate the inanimate world. At this point Herbert begins to glimpse at possibilities he has heretofore in his quest ignored. Fausto’s Confessions along with Paola’s silence on the subject of Herbert’s father and V. cause Herbert to admit “Valletta as a possibility” which in turn causes him to question the validity of Fausto’s account of V.’s demise and of his own personal construction of the V.-myth as well. Going to Malta causes Herbert considerable angst. He is, Herbert tells Profane, “quite simply afraid” (386) to go to Malta, afraid that his father’s “meeting V. and dying” are somehow connected, afraid that war will erupt in the Middle East out of the Suez Crisis, afraid to experience “some submersion, against his will, in a history too old for him, or at least of a different order from what he’d known” (388-89). He is also afraid of Paola and the uncertainty surrounding V. she threatens to expose. “If he [Herbert] must go to Malta,” he tells Profane, “it can’t be only with Paola. He can’t trust her. He needs someone to--occupy her, to serve as a buffer zone” (387).

Profane provides Herbert some comfort because profane existence is Herbert’s comfort zone. His obsession for eleven years has been with V.’s inanimate nature. The suggestion in Fausto’s Confessions that she may have a spiritual dimension, that Herbert himself may have a spiritual dimension, catapults Herbert to the brink of panic. Profane brings Herbert back from submersion in the “different order” which he fears and situates him firmly in the desacralized world. “You are expecting to find this chick [V.] in Malta?”
Profane asks him. “Or how your father died. Or something? Wha” (386). Herbert accompanies Paola, the Intercessor he fears but does not understand, to Malta. He goes reluctantly and with great trepidation, and when he arrives, his fears are only exacerbated by his several interviews with Fausto, Paola’s Father. Herbert’s experiences in Valletta, Malta provide him with much new information concerning V., the “coincidences” surrounding her various “identities” which suggest to Herbert that indeed Herbert may be experiencing “submersion, against his will, in a history too old for him, or at least of a different order form what he’d known” (389). Herbert begins to identify with V. and feels he “had left pieces of himself--and V.--all over the western world” (389). Herbert discovers as he questions Fausto how much he and Fausto have in common. Fausto reveals that both owe their existences to “the good offices of one Stencil” and that such a tie makes them “brothers.” Moreover, they have “heard one another’s confessions”; Herbert, like Fausto, has the potential for priesthood. Because they both have experienced a fragmenting of their personalities in their assumption of various identities, both have metaphorical associations with Orpheus’ dismemberment. Likewise they have both “lost” their Eurydices to death, “an adulterer or rival” (445): Fausto lost Elena to the war; Herbert learns from Fausto that V. “is dead.” For both, their confrontations with V. represent “the point dimensionless--the good,” the means by which each may gain access to his spiritual being like their “father,” Sidney.

In Valletta, Malta, the geographical “point” of Sidney’s and Fausto’s symbolic deaths to their profane existences and spiritual regenerations, Herbert is poised for “submersion” into a “different order” from that which he has previously known. And Herbert comes very close to being transformed. While hunting down a clue concerning V.’s glass eye and the girl who may have taken it, Herbert believes “Something was wrong with the light” (447). Herbert travels “through a sea-phosphorescence to Maijstral’s” at four in the morning to announce to Maijstral that V. “cannot be dead,” that he “feels her in the city,” that her presence has “to do with the light.” “If the soul is light. Is a presence?”
Maijstral asks him drawing Herbert ever nearer his quarry and to access to his spiritual existence; he begins to suspect what both Sidney and Fausto discover, that “identity is single, soul continuous” (307). The crux of Herbert’s eschatological dilemma occurs when he encounters coincidences too overwhelming for logical explanation. The first occurs during an interview with Father Avalanche; Father Avalanche mentions his “predecessor” Father Fairing who went to America in 1919 when Sidney was on Malta and of whom Herbert has already heard. The coincidence thrusts a phrase which “kept cycling round and round” in Herbert’s preconsciousness “just under the threshold” of utterance: “Events seem to be ordered into an ominous logic” (449). The phrase, once uttered, plagues Herbert and drives him to the threshold of spiritual awakening. Herbert confides his existential panic to Profane. “Only Providence creates,” Herbert declares. “If coincidences are real then Stencil has never encountered history at all, but something far more appalling” (450). Coming upon Father Fairing’s name twice, he tells Profane “only could have been design” (450). Expecting perhaps a rebuttal from Profane, Herbert receives instead a reaffirmation of the possibility that Design beyond his comprehension exists. Profane tells him of his miraculous encounter, “of his nights with the Alligator Patrol, and how he’d hunted one pintle beast through Father Fairing’s Parish; cornered and killed it in a chamber lit by some frightening radiance” (450). This, coupled with the fact that Herbert was shot in Fairing’s Parish, sends him running to Fausto to have V. exorcised from his world, his inanimate world that V. threatens to animate. Fausto refuses, saying to do so would be impossible because the world to which Herbert refers is the inanimate world, and the V. who continues to “possess” his “soul” is animated and continuous, her inanimate parts disassembled. Evidently this is more possibility than Herbert can tolerate. Even admitting that he “should have been more careful” and should not have gone “out of his way to bring Profane here” (451), Herbert, like Profane, refuses to be changed by his encounters with the miraculous. Though he comes closer to transformation than Profane, in the end, existential uncertainty which is the median, the
point like the center of a circle, is beyond Herbert’s ability to tolerate and he reverts to his familiar tactic of “approach and avoid.” Leaving a note to Fausto instructing him to “Dispose as you will of Profane,” as if Profane were the inanimate object he asserts himself to be, and by declaring “Stencil has not further need for any of you” (451-52), Herbert severs all human ties and escapes from Malta, the womb of rock, the cradle of life, to chase yet another V.-clue, the inanimate glass eye, to Stockholm and avoid Paola and Fausto who offer him the possibility of “a different order form that which he’d known”—the possibility of spiritual animation.

Paola: History of a Different Order

Metaphorically this is exactly what Malta and Paola represent: “a history . . . of a different order” (emphasis added 388), the place and the person interwoven as symbols of the Golden Mean which Herbert Stencil, “the century’s child” chooses in 1956, the midpoint of the century, to “approach and avoid.” As an island, Malta is literally a point on the map. In V. Malta is said to be the center of Mara’s circle of influence with Lampdeusa on its circumference. Malta is likewise a melting pot for numerous polarities. It is the “cradle of civilization” variously occupied by ancient conquerors: the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs; during the V. narrative, it is a British colony involved in two world conflicts because of its colonizer, Great Britain. Its myths are ancient and based on the feminine fertility principle associated with Mara; yet, it was Christianized by its Roman invaders (its population is almost entirely Catholic) and intellectualized by the British. Fausto Maijstral is the character most acutely aware of this duality since he feels tied to nature worship by his Maltese heritage but has been intellectualized by his British education. During World War II, Malta becomes for Fausto II a “womb of rock” symbolic of the cradle of life under siege by the animating forces of death, the Germans and their bombs. Malta is the place where conception, birth, and death as well as physical and spiritual regeneration occur. Fausto’s daughter, Paola, is Malta’s child. As the positive legacy of V. and Sidney’s union, she embodies whatever possibility for spiritual
redemption still exists in the decade following the Second World War. Paola becomes V.'s successor, metaphor for the Golden Mean for the second half of the twentieth century with all possibility restored. Paola contains all of Malta's inherent contradictions: "She could be any age she wanted. And you suspected any nationality, for Paola knew scraps it seemed of all tongues" (14). In 1955-56 Paola is young as was Victoria Wren in 1899 when V. becomes a metaphor for the new century. Paola is perhaps sixteen in 1955, "but no way of telling because she'd been born just before the war and the building with her records destroyed like most other buildings on the island of Malta" (14). Throughout the novel, V. assumes different identities and different names. Paola, on the other hand, seems to contain all identities and even suggests different ethnic backgrounds to different characters: Mafia thinks she is German; Roony believes she is Puerto Rican; for McClintic Sphere, she is "a Negro girl named Ruby" (350). "Is that what you are," Roony asks her, "something we can look at and see whatever we want?" (350). Exactly. Like V. Paola is the "point, dimensionless--good." She contains all possibilities, all contradictions and all extremes because, like Aristotle's median or mean, she is defined by them. She is a mediating presence in ways that V. could never be, coming of age as V. did at the century's beginning, shaped as she was by the "explosive male energy" which dominated western culture for the first half of the twentieth century in the form of "beastliness," "carrion," and "waste" only hinted at in the atrocities Old Godolphin witnessed at Khartoum.

**Paola as a child.** Through Fausto's eyes and in his Confessions, we see Paola as a child. Conceived before the war reached Malta, Paola began her life underground in the Maltese sewers. However, her "subterranean existence" associated her with an "island wide sense of communion" (315) which carries with it "an illusion of immortality"; "we've become, after all, one another," Fausto writes. "Parts of a unity. Some die, others continue" (319). Fausto II equates "living on an island" during that time with living "in timeless Purgatory"; Paola's growth, he suspects, "has nothing to do with time" (316). Not only is Paola's early childhood associated with timelessness and immortality, but her
falling in with "a roistering crew of children" whose "chief amusement" was to serve "a poetic function" by devising metaphors to "veil the world that was" and animate the world of death they had inherited. Their function connects them with the immediate experience Rilke associated with "eternity" in his *Duino Elegies*. Children, Rilke says, experience immediacy/eternity temporarily; lovers come close to it. Metaphorically then in V., the Maltese children escape the throes of history they have been thrust into by the "accident" of their births because they are "in" the secret, the metaphor which veils the world; they attend Elena and Fausto who, as lovers, attempt to recapture the immediacy of childhood by their backward glance to that Edenic time. The children also devise a new metaphor for good and evil in which good becomes a "point, dimensionless" besieged by "vectors of evil"--an image identical to the inverse square force field in calculus (see Figure 2.1 p. 140). They transform the image into "Fortune's wheel," a medieval symbol, and mediate its extremes (science and myth) by changing its orientation to "dead-level... the sea's horizon" (338-89). And then, "being poets in a vacuum" (339), they disassemble evil by disassembling the Bad Priest's inanimate parts and exposing the human and the feminine for Fausto to redeem. Paola was a member of the "roistering crew" who followed "private routes, mostly underground" and was always "at the edges of the field of vision" watching, observing with a "group awareness" the whereabouts of the Bad Priest to insure his containment. Paola leaves the scene of disassembly with V.'s earliest inert acquisition: the ivory comb, an artifact born out of the beastliness of Khartoum in 1884 and transformed by Paola in 1956 into a love token for her husband.

**Paola as a Life-Force.** When Paola emerges at the century's midpoint as V.'s successor, she embodies a life-force which has the potential to become the new metaphor for the last half of the twentieth century. Paola is first of all Malta's child, Valletta's child. As such, she shares with Malta and Valletta an association with the extremes of existence. Metaphorically war is her father; Malta, her mother. Biologically Fausto the British-educated intellectual is possibly her father; Elena, the native Maltese woman, her mother.
Paola, however, seems to have been “neutralized” by the extreme forces surrounding her existence: “Did the two forces neutralize and leave you on the lonely promontory?16 between two worlds?” Fausto writes to her. “Can you still look both ways, child?” (331) The mystery surrounding Paola’s conception and her growth as a child coupled with the notion that she is able to “look both ways” suggests that she may be an Intercessor of a different dimension than her predecessor, V. Already we have seen that she can “be any age she wanted,” represents “any nationality . . . knew scraps . . . of all tongues” (14). Moreover, she appears to Benny Profane on Christmas Eve and tells him, “Peace . . . Isn’t that what we all want, Benny?” (16). Benny notices the “Miraculous Medal” she wears and wonders what “had led her to come away with him, refuse to share a bed but still ask him to ‘be good’” (19). And, at a point, he thinks, “Madonna” when he thinks of her. Mystery is definitely associated with Paola’s conception. Elena, a Maltese “virgin,” is her mother, but Paola’s paternity is not so clear. While Fausto is still deliberating on the priesthood, Elena becomes pregnant. Fausto believes the child to be Dnubietna’s but Father Avalanche “came in as the intermediary,” the “faceless . . . foil to . . . the Bad Priest,” and convinces Fausto by insinuation that Paola is Fausto’s child: “the Father said mine” (313), he writes. Later Fausto learns that his real rival was never Dnubietna but the Bad Priest who urged Elena to abort her unborn child; Father Avalanche, whom Elena met “By accident,” intercedes again and Paola is born. Fausto assumes responsibility for Paola even though he attributes her conception and all conceptions including the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception in terms of the “accidental” in much the same way Joseph assumed responsibility for Jesus even though neither could fully comprehend the miraculous circumstances surrounding the conceptions of their “children.” The dual nature of Paola’s experience is suggested again by Paola’s role in the children’s R. A. F. “game”/metaphor: Paola is an “Italian dirigible,” the “most buoyant balloon-girl . . . that season” who is able to “escape subjugation . . . by surrendering” (331). The “balloon-girl” image links Paola
to V. as Victoria Wren; escaping subjugation by surrendering connects her to religious doctrine.

The implications of Paola’s name, like V.’s identification with an initial from which many separate characters spring, further situates Paola in a mediating position and suggests her function as a metaphor for the elusive Golden Mean between the extremes of “Caesar [the profane] and God [spirit]” which so preoccupied Fausto II. Her “given name” is “Maijstral-Xemxi” (Father-Mother) which Fausto calls “a terrible misalliance” (314). This “misalliance” is neutralized by the single name, Paola, evidently given to her by her husband and second father, Pappy Hod. “May you be only Paola,” Fausto writes to her in 1956, “one girl: a single given heart, at whole mind a peace” (314). The place where Pappy and Paola met in 1955 becomes a strategic one with reference to metaphorical means in the novel: “the Metro Bar, on Strait Street. The Gut. Valletta, Malta” (14). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *strait* first in terms of space and then in terms of behavior. In spatial terms the word means “tight, narrow,” of “inadequate spatial capacity,” a “way, passage, or channel . . . so narrow as to make transit difficult.” As a pattern of behavior the word means “strict, rigorous,” a “mode of living . . . Involving hardship or privation.” In Acts 9.11 during Saul’s conversion to Christianity, he is commanded by God to “go to the Street called Straight.” When he does, he regains his sight,” is “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and begins his ministry as the apostle Paul. (For a discussion of the relation of Paola to St. Paul, see pp. 187-91). The differences in age between Pappy Hod and Paola is reminiscent of the differences between Sidney (in his forties) and Victoria Wren (nineteen): Pappy was forty-five; Paola, sixteen. Immediately after their meeting, Pappy seems aware that mystery surrounds the young woman. Describing her “for the deck apes’ amusement” he speaks “with a peculiar tenderness, as if slowly coming aware, maybe even as the yarn un laid, that sex might be more of a mystery than he’d foreseen and he would not after all know the score because that kind of score wasn’t written down in numbers” (15). Paola’s name is a bastardization of the American slang expression “payola” which means,
according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “a secret or indirect payment or bribe to a person to use his position, etc. to promote a commercial product, service, etc., especially a payment to a disc-jockey for plugging a record or song.” Such a definition connects her to the Orphic song that, in Rilke’s sonnets, joins death and life, miraculously reverses time, and has the power to transform. The “song” also overflows “toward those who preceded us, toward our origin” (“To Witold Hulewicz” qtd. in Mitchell, “Notes”: 550) and connects her to old soft-shoe artist and Orphic figure Sidney Stencil, that “mysterious being” responsible for Fausto’s existence as well as her own.

**Paola as an Intercessor for the next generation.** The song overflows as well in the direction of “those who seemingly come after us” (Rilke, To Witold Hulewicz, Nov. 13, 1925). Having come to America in 1955, Paola becomes involved with the Whole Sick Crew and begins to minister to them. They are, like Fausto IV, inheritors of the “physically and spiritually broken world” (307) which remain after two world wars; yet, they most resemble Fausto III’s “non-humanity.” They all partake of “the same lethargy.” Though many of them strike a “bohemian, creative, arty” pose and are connected with the entertainment industry, they are actually contributors to “non-communication,” “Romanticism in its furthest decadence . . . an exhausted impersonation of poverty, rebellion and artistic ‘soul’” (56). They survive, Herbert Stencil surmises, because they are not alone: “God knew how many more there were with a hothouse sense of time, no knowledge of life, and at the mercy of Fortune” (57). Paola becomes involved with the Whole Sick Crew—she becomes “the third roommate” with Rachel Owlglass and Esther Harvitz—but not of them. The Whole Sick Crew is attached to things; Paola, to “proper nouns. Persons, places. No things” (51). She offers an alternative to the moral and spiritual “lethargy” that dominates the experience of the Whole Sick Crew, heirs-apparent to the world Sidney Stencil and V. helped to shape.

Such is the world to which Paola, new Paraclete for a new generation, comes to minister. The world is New York City; the time, 1955-56. If the Whole Sick Crew is
emblematic of the moral and spiritual decline of artistic and humanizing endeavor, Shale Schoenmaker, M.D., Clayton ("Bloody") Chiclitz of Yoyodyne, Inc., and Dudley Eigenvalue, DDS are emblematic of the post World War II power structure signified by the union of science and industry. All three are implicated in the lives of the novel's would-be protagonists, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil who, for the duration of the novel, exist at the Crew's periphery. Schoenmaker is a plastic surgeon who came to his career as an airplane mechanic through his "feudal-homosexual" (97) acquaintance with one Evan Godolphin, a victim of World War I whose face was unsuccessfully reconstructed with inert materials. Schoenmaker emerges in New York as a plastic surgeon, "trafficking in human vanity . . . propagating the fallacy that beauty is not the soul, that it can be bought" (47). As it turns out, he is both literally and figuratively the "screwer"; the "screwee" is Esther who, because of the "ideal of nasal beauty established by magazine illustrations, movies, advertisements," wants her Jewish nose replaced by its "diametric opposite," an Irish one. To Rachel Owlglass, who is footing the bill for Esther's new nose, Schoenmaker rationalizes his victimization of Esther: "Cultural harmony, Schoenmaker called it" (103). Clayton ("Bloody") Chiclitz is president of Yoyodyne, Inc., a company that once made toy gyroscopes but converted its operations after World War II to make "instruments of war" (227). Benny Profane, in fact, works as a night watchman for a while at a Yoyodyne subsidiary, Anthroresearch Associates. Here Benny Profane meets the two "characters" with whom he forms "a certain kinship"—two automatons, SHROUD and SHOCK, used in testing the effects of radiation and car crashes on human beings. Dudley Eigenvalue. DDS, 17 is not only a dentist and "bloody" Chiclitz's friend, he aspires to befriending the Whole Sick Crew in order to acquire a footnote in some art history book as a patron of the arts of the period. As a dentist he seems to have inherited the "role of father-confessor," usurped from psycho-analysis which had usurped it from the priesthood. Eigenvalue, a man firmly aligned with science and prosthetics whose prized
possession is “a set of false dentures each tooth a different precious metal,” has become Herbert’s choice for “father-confessor”—psychodontist over poet priest, Fausto Majjstral.

Paola comes to illuminate them all: Whole Sick Crew, the industrial-scientific power structure, the would-be protagonists Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil. Her “handiwork” includes a note on Rachel’s kitchen wall announcing a “PARTY, illuminated by pencil caricatures of the Whole Sick Crew” (51), caricatures which reduce members of the Whole Sick Crew to cartoon figures, their two-dimensional characteristics exaggerated perhaps for their own edification. The “illuminated clock near Paola Majjstral’s bed [which] stood near six-o’clock” (51) begins to represent for Rachel an alternative to the “real-time” she is experiencing as a Crew member:

No ticking: the clock was electric. Its minute hand could not be seen to move. But soon the hand passed twelve and began its course down the other side of the face; as if it had passed through the surface of a mirror, and had now to repeat in mirror-time what it had done on the side of real-time.

(51-52)

The “PARTY” the Whole Sick Crew attends is “inanimate” and “unwound like a clock’s mainspring toward some equilibrium” (52), but the clock by Paola’s bed is “electric. Not ticking.” Paola enters the Crew’s world and immediately offers an alternative to their lethargic and inanimate existence, an alternative to “real-time” in which the three-dimensional Newtonian world ticks clock-like toward entropy and death.

Paola has the power to animate the Whole Sick Crew, Benny Profane, and Herbert Stencil, heirs to V.’s world whose legacy is annihilation. They are, however, unprepared for the alternative Paola offers. Only Rachel Owlglass who has, prior to her meeting with Schoenmaker, begun to glimpse at an alternative to the inert world Schoenmaker represents and markets, a world with which she has, in the past, been enamored. Waiting in Schoenmaker’s office to make a payment on Ether’s “retoussé nose,” Rachel notices “a turn-of-the-century clock” on a shelf beneath a mirror. From her vantage point in the room
she is able to look “into the mirror at an angle of 45°” (46) and view both faces of the clock: “here were time and reverse time co-existing, canceling one another exactly out” (46).

Her particular perspective results in some metaphysical meanderings concerning the world of real time and the possibility of an alternative and open her to the potential of transformation suggested by Paola’a arrival:

> Were there many such reference points, scattered throughout the world, perhaps only at nodes like this room which housed a transient population of the imperfect, the dissatisfied; did real time plus virtual or mirror-time equal zero and thus serve some half-understood moral purpose? Or was it only the mirror world that counted (46)

These meanderings along with her confrontation with Schoenmaker in which she assumes the position of Esther’s “Jewish mother” cause her to maintain that altering one’s physical and cultural attributes sets up a “chain reaction” of events which leads to interior changes. And Rachel comes to recognize that her feelings for Benny Profane go beyond her attraction to his inanimate characteristics: She begins to experience the miraculous power of love to transform. During the course of the novel, Rachel attempts to win over Profane to her “field-of-two” (368), to introduce him to love’s transforming power, but without success. Even SHROUD’S watchword, “Keep cool but care” (369) has no impact on Profane’s insistence on maintaining his schlemihlhood in spite of his encounter with Rachel’s miraculous love for him. “There’s nothing inside,” he tells her. “Isn’t this--’ he waved at her an inanimate schmuck-- ‘enough?’” (384). “It can’t be,” Rachel tells him.

Having been animated by love and its possibilities, Rachel aligns herself with Paola. “Not for me, nor Paola” (384). By his refusal to accept the miraculous and humanizing power of love, Profane negates his Orphean potential and loses Rachel, his Eurydice who has been transformed, without a backward glance.

> The man Paola chooses to become romantically involved with in New York already has Orphean qualities. Introduced in the second chapter entitled “the Whole Sick Crew,”
McClintic Sphere stands in direct contrast to the Crew's vacuous notions of art. Though Winsome Rooney and Pig Bodine both have "a letch for Paola," Paola freely gives herself to McClintic Sphere. McClintic is a Negro musician who plays at the V. Note, a bar in Greenwich Village frequented by the Crew. He is an alto sax player whose "sound was like nothing any of them had heard before" (59); some small percentage of his audience believed him to be "a kind of reincarnation" of Bird, Charlie Parker. For McClintic Sphere, Paola claims to be a black whore named Ruby, "but he didn't believe that" (281). McClintic is a modern day Orpheus who reads "fakebooks" and receives technical explanations concerning "stochastic music and digital computers" and begins to think of his musician's brain--and the world itself--in terms of electronic sound: set or reset, flip or flop" (293). Flipping, he equates with the extremes of love and war; flopping, with "no love, no hate, nor worries, no excitement" (293). Unlike Benny Profane who is determined to remain a "flop," McClintic Sphere has "flipped" into love with Ruby. McClintic's love for Ruby is reminiscent of Sidney's love for V. Even when Paola reveals to him her real identity as Paola Maijstral, he continues to love that identity which is "single" and "continuous" even as Sidney loved V. He comes to the realization that "the only way clear of the cool-crazy flipflop" is the median love. Pre-empting SHROUD's advice to Profane, McClintic Sphere reveals to Paola that he has received the alternative--slow, patient, biding love--that she brings to New York from the island of Malta: "Keep cool but care" (366), he says revealing to her his recognition that love which requires "slow, frustrating . . . hard work" (365) is the alternative, the Golden Mean, that neutralizes the extremes of magic and war as solutions to personal and public problems, a concept Benny Profane and the Whole Sick Crew refuse to grasp.

Paola as an image of St. Paul. Paola is connected to the mystery of faith and the intrusion of the miraculous into human events by yet another manifestation of her name which suggests that the extremes of logic and faith are capable of coexisting. Changing the "o" in Paola's name to a "u" renders her name "Paula" and connects her with the Apostle
Paul, especially since St. Paul was said to have been “shipwrecked” on the isle of Malta c.
55 AD and “nursed” by Mara, Malta’s feminine “spirit”; he supposedly brought
Christianity to the island during his three month stay there. Paola’s connections with Paul
are several since, of all the apostles, Paul’s duality is most obvious as is his containment of
the extremes of human existence in a single human being. Paul’s duality was so extreme
that he, like Fausto, had different names. Initially, he was Saul, a scholar and member of
an elite intellectual group. He was a Jew and Roman citizen who actively persecuted
Christians—most overtly when he held the garments of those who stoned Stephen. Then he
experienced a miraculous intrusion of the Divine into his life when, on the road to
Damascus, he was struck blind by “a light from heaven” and directly addressed by Jesus
who said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9.3-4). After three days of
blindness, the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight” (Acts 9.11)
which he did; there he was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” “regained his sight,” and was
baptized. Such was Paul’s conversion experience. Afterward, Paul—a new man with a
new name,—begins his Christian ministry, embarks on three different missionary journeys
to Asia Minor, and is finally arrested in Jerusalem, tried in Rome and beheaded, a martyr
for his faith. Another aspect of Paul’s duality is also evident in his first letters to the
Corinthians in which he articulates a number of Christian tenets which are linguistically and
narratively referenced in V., especially as they relate to Paola’s function as a means to the
spiritual regeneration of her age even as Paul was a means of spiritual regeneration to his.
“I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (emphasis added 1
Cor. 9.22,). Paul writes; Roony says of Paola that she is “something we can look at and
see whatever we want” (350). Paul writes to the Corinthians, “[W]e who are many are one
body . . . . And if one member suffers, all the members suffer” (1 Cor. 10.17 & 26).
Paul’s language is echoed by Fausto when, in his journals, he describes the “communion”
he and Paola as a child experienced in their “subterranean existence” in the Maltese sewers:
“We’ve become . . . one another. Parts of a unity. Some die, others continue” (319).
Paola, the child nurtured by the principle of communion, has, in 1955, matured. She is the embodiment of the ancient flux-in-stasis doctrine Paul describes in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 in terms of the Holy Spirit: “now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . .

But to each one is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:4 & 7). In 1955-56 at the century’s midpoint, Paola emerges as the new “spirit” for her age as yet uncorrupted by the male disruption and violence that so fascinated V. She is all possibility conflated into a single character who looks “both ways”—to the past and to the future—and who is defined by both and by neither. In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, especially Chapters 10, 11, and 12, Paul uses his skills as a logician to appeal to rational human thought as a basis for following the teachings of Christ. However, he departs from this logic in Chapter 13 to make the “leap of faith” necessary for the revelation of God’s truth. He describes the process in terms of maturation with love as its means:

1 Cor. 13. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paola is the child matured.

Finally in Chapter 15 Paul addresses the issues of Christ’s resurrection, the spiritual transformation available to Christians through faith, not logic, and he sees physical death as a prerequisite to spiritual life. In a passage reminiscent of the ancient rituals enacted for Demeter, Persephone and other fertility goddesses, Paul says,

That which you sow does not come to life until it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat . . . . But God gives it a body just as he wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own (1 Cor. 15. 36-38).
This “natural” phenomena Paul likens to a spiritual phenomenon. “So also is the resurrection of the dead . . . ; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15. 42 & 44). Paul’s promise to all, Jews and Gentiles alike—for he was a Jew who preached salvation for all—is rooted in the mystery of transformation and the transforming power of love: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed . . . . For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15. 51 & 53). Paul’s ministry offers salvation to all who will hear and receive the message but in II Corinthians, he even goes a step further. “Jesus Christ is in you,” he says. To fail to recognize this, he writes, is to “fail the test” of faith. Fausto recognizes the “suffering Christ foreshortened on the bare skull” (343) in V.—as-the Bad Priest and he passes this information along to Paola as part of her “spiritual heritage.” Thirteen years later, Paola recognizes the same possibilities in Benny Profane whom she loves in a Christian sense. This is why she weeps for him at the novel’s end when he fails to recognize the divine in himself and the miraculous in the world around him. Paola is the embodiment of Pauline Christian doctrine which seems to be a part of her Maltese heritage connected both to St. Paul’s shipwreck on the island and to the ancient fertility goddess Mara, the rock’s “womb” and feminine principle. Paola is the masculine feminized, the union of Christian doctrine and sacred myth, the forces of death ameliorated as death becomes the source of life regenerated. This is the median, the Golden Mean, which Paola represents for the second half of the twentieth century. Like her predecessor and namesake, Paul, she goes on a mission. From “the Metro Bar, on Strait Street . . . Valletta, Malta” and sponsored by a “husband” with a “father’s” name, Pappy Hod, Paola comes to America. At the Sailor’s Grave in Norfolk Virginia on Christmas Eve, 1955, she begins to minister to Benny Profane; her ministry is extended to New York City, to Sidney’s son, Herbert Stencil and the Whole Sick Crew.
If Paola emerges on the American scene in 1955 as an emissary from another world (Malta) as an Intercessor for her age and the means of its redemption, she has little success with the novel’s potential protagonists, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil. While various metaphors--mythological, scientific, literary, and Christian--suggest that the middle way, the Golden Mean, functions as a conduit to spiritual regeneration, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil fail to recognize the possibilities inherent in the “point, dimensionless—the Good” situated midway between the extremes, a point for which Paola is both symbol and guide. Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil exclude middles from their experience because the uncertainty and ambiguity they associate with middles are frightening. They prefer the extremes because extremes are easier to identify and simpler to understand. Consequently, though each encounters the intrusion of the miraculous at particular “thresholds” of his experience, both insist on the same tactic with these encounters: they “approach” the miraculous, but they “avoid” the means of experiencing it, preferring instead to retreat into their extreme patterns of behavior. Both main characters have the potential for change. However, neither character becomes a protagonist in the novel because neither character is transformed or undergoes any kind of revelation. They are the same two-dimensional characters at the novel’s end as they are at the beginning, and, in final analysis, few differences exist between the two because each becomes a metaphor for the extremism he enacts.

**Pynchon’s Metaphorical System: the Golden Mean Revisited**

In his first novel, Pynchon establishes a complicated metaphorical system that continues to structure and inform the novels that follow V. Though a myriad of sources inform this system, the structuring metaphors feature two extremes and a Golden Mean which is defined by the extremes it mediates. The extremes in V. represent the extremism that dominates the first half of the twentieth century in the western world. At one extreme is Europe, of which England and Germany are emblematic, with its intellectual, industrial, and military power structure which emerged from the Age of Reason and which has as its
basis Newtonian determinism and the Apollonian way. At the other extreme are the ancient
and/or primitive non-European countries symbolized by Egypt and South West Africa with
their mytho-cultural pasts which have as their basis the repetitive cycles of nature and
whose cultures Europe seeks to dominate. Pynchon aligns the European will to power
with the inanimate, with the "bursting explosive male energy" from which the "carrion and
the waste," the "beastliness" of two world conflicts emerged. By contrast, the primitive
cultures are aligned with the animating power of the feminine principle associated with
nature and the generation of life from death. However, neither of these extremes in and
of itself, presents an adequate—or acceptable—model for human experience in the twentieth
century, at least in Thomas Pynchon's view. The western world has outgrown its ability to
acknowledge the intrusion of the miraculous into either personal or public experience and
threatens to annihilate the mythocultural past of the more primitive countries who refuse to
follow suit. However, Pynchon does offer an alternative to these extremes. The "Golden
Mean" symbolically becomes the ideal toward which twentieth century human beings must
strive if they are to personally and publicly escape physical and spiritual annihilation. It is
characterized by its ambiguity, its uncertainty, and its complementarity—that is, its ability to
paradoxically contain "mutually exclusive... arrangements" (Bohr 123).

V. establishes a variety of metaphors for the Golden Mean. The basis for the
notion is Aristotle's concept of the "median" which he defines as "a point equidistant from
both extremes"; he describes the median as a point like the center of a circle as a
representative of "good." This elementary mathematical and geometric concept of the
median is given ethical significance by Aristotle as a pattern of mediated behavior which
excludes the "vices" of "excess" and "deficiency" that he claims are present in extremist
activity. From the kernel of Aristotle's mathematical and ethical premise of the median,
Pynchon evolves both a geographical median—with Malta as the center of Mara's circle of
influence—and the median as a point which represents the center of a vector field in
calculus. As an island Malta is a point on a map located by its longitudinal and latitudinal
coordinates. However, it is also a country in which cultural extremes collide and coexist: it is an ancient country said to be "the cradle of life" with Mara its ancient fertility goddess; it has been christianized by St. Paul, colonized and intellectualized by England, and besieged by Germany in World War II and by other world powers throughout the ages. The point at the center of a vector field is Aristotle's median, "the good" metamorphosed: in Pynchon's metaphor--articulated by Fausto in his Confession--"good" is "a point, dimensionless . . . surrounded by any number of radial arrows--vectors of evil--pointing inward. Good, i.e., at bay" (338). This point, surrounded by "vectors of evil," comes to represent and be represented by V., both character and initial. V. the character from her appearance in 1898 as the eighteen-year old Victoria Wren to her demise in 1943 as the Bad Priest has been besieged by forces of evil; "Absolute upheaval" has become her "way," "riot . . . her element" (487). Yet the good, the point, the essence of V.--that which Sidney comes to love--continues; once her inert parts are disassembled and her femininity revealed, her soul is redeemed by Fausto in the cellar of a bombed out Maltese building. The letter itself is formed by a point from which two vectors extend outward to create what is known as vector space (Figure 2.2) a concept that is integrally connected to quantum physics and

![Diagram of vector space](Figure 2.2 Vector Space)

(Penrose 258)
to the notion of Hilbert space necessary for measurement at the quantum level. Hilbert space is defined as complex vector space and is necessary to define the infinite possibilities that exist when measuring either the position or the momentum of a single particle (see Figures 1.14 and 1.15 p. 81).

V. herself behaves as such a particle, located in the novel’s space and time only when she is observed, most often by the reader, less often by various other of the novel’s characters. Also, Hilbert space is orthogonal, that is all axes that define either position or momentum are at right angles to each other (see Figure 1.14 p. 81). Interestingly, this diagram, two-dimensionally rendered, looks very much like the mythological “crossroads” where the divine and the human are thought to intersect, or like the Christian crucifix.

Many characters in V. as well as Pynchon’s later novels, find themselves either at both literal and figurative crossroads. V. and Evan Godolphin meet at the intersection of the Via del Purgatorio and the Via dell’Inferno, “some still point between hell and purgatory” and exist for a while “in limbo,” like quantum particles before measurement. Quantum physics and the principles on which it was founded--Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle and Bohr’s Complementarity Argument--represent in Pynchon’s fiction a kind of crossroads or intersection itself. Founded on the rational principles of Newtonian physics and depending on calculus for its explanations, quantum physics reintroduces the mystery and magic of myth into its description of the natural world by maintaining that the world we experience on the macrocosmic level which behaves in a predictable way explained by cause and effect rests on an unseen world on the microcosmic level which often defies logical explanation. In this sense quantum physics thus restores a sense of the miraculous intruding into the natural world. Quantum physics and its principles as well as the behavior of quantum phenomena become a primary metaphor for the Golden Mean in Pynchon’s V. and in his later novels as well. In V. Pynchon makes a marked distinction between “surface phenomena” (492) or “the street” and that which occurs beneath the street. Surface phenomena is related to occurrences in the world that can be sensually experienced and
explained by the Newtonian system. It includes historical events that can be put on a time
line and causally explained, occurrences that seem in retrospect predetermined if all
statistics are known. However, surface level phenomena and its explanations prove
inadequate measure of human experience as engaged in by many of V.’s characters.
Revelations are available only when one descends below the surface and suspends the
necessity for absolute answers. Below the surface exists uncertainty, paradox, the
coexistence of mutually exclusive opposites which represent the “means” of revelation and
transformation. There, one can expect the unexpected and be open to the intrusion of the
miraculous into one’s life. Symbolically this “Underworld” is represented in V. by the
New York City sewer system in which both Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil experience
the intrusion of the miraculous but remain unchanged by it, by the Maltese sewers which
give life and offer communion to the Maltese citizens during the German bombing of World
War II, the bombed out cellar to which Fausto descends and redeems V.’s soul and his
own, the sea surrounding Malta into which Sidney disappears on “that quiet June day” in
1919. The Underworld is also the personal level to which one descends when one comes
to love another and, by doing so, transcends one’s self and becomes selfless in one’s
actions.

Selfless love for another human being becomes the ultimate “point dimensionless,”
the ultimate escape from time and the conduit for spiritual transformation. This is evident
in the characters who most overtly represent Orpheus and Eurydice figures in the novel.
The most obvious Eurydice figures are V. and Paola. Both come to be identified with the
feminine principle and its attachment to the Demeter-Persephone myth and the ancient
notion of death and a dangerous underworld journey as a prerequisite for life regenerated.
Even as Eurydice is claimed by death, she becomes the means by which Orpheus’ message
of regeneration is disseminated to enlighten and transform the living. Even Orpheus’
dismemberment at the hands of the Maenads is not sufficient to destroy either the notion of
Orpheus or his song which tells of life and death as facets of an existence that is both
“singular” and “continuous.” V., like Eurydice, is claimed by the forces of death. She is the animating feminine principle who becomes enamoured with the masculine forces of death and destruction and symbolically incorporates “bits of inert matter” into her body. However, it is the essence of V., her ability to magically resolve “the two extremes” (487) and Sidney’s recognition that in spite of all her physical changes, she is still “the same balloon-girl who’d seduced him on a leather couch in the Florence consulate twenty years ago” (488). The recognition that Sidney loves in V. the identity which “is single” and her “soul” which is “continuous” is what animates Sidney and redeems him.

The continuation of the effects of Sidney’s love for V. is seen in his dispersal via the many ramifications of his selfless act toward Carla Maijstral. His selfless act was a result of this love for V. who was “lost” to him for twenty years and found in Malta in 1919 only to be “lost” again. One of these ramifications is Fausto’s descent and ministry to V. when he recognizes her humanity and her spirituality symbolically rendered in the “suffering Christ foreshortened” on her bare skull. Even with the loss of his own Eurydice, Elena, only hours before—or perhaps because of it—Fausto descends to aid “a dying human,” V. In ministering to her spiritual needs—she repents and is saved—he ministers to his own. This crisis he articulates to his daughter, Paola, who emerges at mid-century as V.’s successor. If V. is the feminine principle masculinized by the events of the first half of the twentieth century, Paola is the masculine feminized, the feminine principle regenerated. She travels to America to minister to Sidney’s son Herbert and to become the “means” of his regeneration even as V. was the “means” of Sidney’s and Fausto’s.

However, Herbert and his friend Profane are unprepared and unwilling Orpheus figures. Perhaps this is because of their inability/unwillingness to love another although each has an opportunity to do so. Profane is “loved” by Fina, Rachel, Paola—Eurydices all—but he refuses to love them in return. He refuses Fina’s sexual love; he refuses Rachel’s human love; and he refuses to recognize Paola’s role as “hi valu” girl and intercessor for divine love. He refuses to admit that the “otherworldly” can and does miraculously intervene to
offer an alternative to the extreme of "absolute night" into which he runs. Herbert Stencil refuses as well the possibilities offered for his redemption by his Eurydices, V. and Paola. Paola leads him, lamb-like, to the brink of recognition in Malta. However, even reading Fausto's Confessions and therein learning of the circumstances of V.'s "death" and redemption and Fausto's role in them, even confronting "coincidences" involving Father Fairing and his parish that are too miraculous to be labeled "coincidental" fail to convince Herbert that Providential design is operating in his life.

Consequently neither Benny Profane or Herbert Stencil, one of whom appears in every chapter in the novel but two--Chapter 11 "The Confessions of Fausto Maijstral" and the Epilogue--emerges as the protagonist of V. Neither are they dual-protagonists or anti-protagonists. They are failed protagonists because they each are offered countless opportunities for transformation; yet, they refuse them all. Each continues on past the novel's end, a victim of the extremism he espouses. Sidney Stencil and Fausto Maijstral are the real protagonists of the novel even though they seem to be minor characters. Both are Orphean figures who follow their Eurydices into the Underworld and, because of their dark and dangerous journeys, emerge enlightened, redeemed, and connected to a spiritual dimension larger than themselves. Like Orpheus, the ramifications of their enlightenment which involves a recognition of the intimate connection between life and death in human experience--that they are in Rilke's words "the same"--is dispersed; its ramifications, change a potential "blood bath" into a "minor political eddy," a potential suicide into a birth, annihilation of the self into the "soul continuous." Other characters have the potential as well. Old Godolphin, Evan Godolphin, and Mondaugin all in some way experience the miraculous intruding into the surface level experience of their lives; in fact, they are on the brink of transformation. But, like Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil, they refuse to change, refuse to accept the Golden Mean with all its ambiguities and paradoxes. They accept instead the Apollonian way but without enlightenment (Herbert Stencil, Kurt
Monaugen) or the Dionysian-mythological but without hope of spiritual regeneration (Benny Profane and Old Godolphin). Evan is subsumed out of existence by V.

Paola remains a presence, a hope, a metaphor and Golden Mean for the second half of the twentieth century. She is a symbol of Aristotle's median poised at the century's midpoint. She is able to "look both ways," back to the past and forward to the future. She is the product of two "spiritual" fathers, Sidney and Fausto, and intercedes for the fathers to bring their story to the new generation in America--Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, and the Whole Sick Crew--who are so desperately in need of it. She has her priorities straight: "peace" is her message and love the vehicle by which to accomplish it. She illustrates this when, on Malta, she is reunited with her "husband," Pappy Hod. As a token of her love, Paola gives him the ivory comb. Born of the "beastliness" of Khartoum in 1883, purchased by V. as her first inanimate addition, retrieved at her disassembly by Paola who was one of the attending children, and transformed by her into a love token, the comb is an inanimate object depicting an image of atrocity and death revitalized by love. "All that's gone on" since Paola left Pappy for America the week before he sailed, Paola declares will be transformed into a "sea-story," a yarn she will spin, Penelope-like, for his "home-coming" in Norfolk where the novel began. The yarn will be, no doubt, one like V., a novel which emerges from the still point of a single initial and burgeons into a 492-page articulation, a Rilkean song whose saying miraculously reverses time, whose powerful language evokes the possibility of continuous spiritual existence.
Notes

1 In *Finite and Infinite Games*, Carse argues that human beings’ exercise of power over nature “masks” the desire “for power over each other.” They approach nature as a “hostile Other” in an effort to “harness” it. Machines used to facilitate control over nature necessitate humans becoming machine-like in order to operate them (117-35). Carse equates such a use of machinery and the “social” and “political” impulse to possess property by the imposition of boundaries by force if necessary with the impulses of the Master Player of the Finite Game who seeks to eliminate all opponents from the field of play (37-64).

2 Often in Pynchon’s fiction his characters take on the paradoxical nature of photons or other kinds of particles at the quantum level. Observation of the photon can “collapse” the photon into behaving as either a particle or a wave. Likewise in the measurement of the “spin” of an electron *instantaneously* fixes the spin state of another, sometimes at speeds faster than the speed of light. Such a phenomenon is the result of a theorem put forth in 1951 by David Bohm (Penrose 282-83) proving the EPR “thought experiment” aimed at debunking quantum theory. Raised to the classical level in the Schrodinger’s cat “thought experiment” (see pp. 75-76) the importance of the act of measurement at the quantum level is confirmed: when the quantum world of photons and particles interfaces with the classical world via measurement, the infinite number of potential outcomes collapses--a photon behaves as either a particle or a wave, the electron and the positron (depending on which is observed and from what angle) spins either up or down, Schrodinger’s cat is either alive or dead. Porpentine and other of Pynchon’s characters who descend below the surface level of events and “observe”--confront alternatives--collapse events which do have repercussions beyond the “light cone” of understanding.

3 In her study, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Marina Warner suggests that in eastern Christianity, the “Holy Spirit’s gender was unclear.” She cites the Apostle’s Creed wherein Jesus Christ is said to be “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary” as behaving “like a mother” who “conceived the child and then took possession of Mary until the day of the child’s birth” (38) thus associating the Holy Spirit with the feminine principle. The Holy Spirit, she points out, is likewise invoked as feminine in an apocryphal work, the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, in which the apostle invokes the Holy Spirit as “the hidden mother.” In addition, Warner points out that the “Spirit of God, the shekinah, was feminine in Hebrew, neuter in the Greek pneuma, feminine as sophia (wisdom), invariably feminine in Syriac, but in Latin it became incontrovertibly masculine: spiritus sanctus” (38). Whether or not Thomas Pynchon knew of the connection of the Holy Spirit, Third Person of the Trinity, Spiritual Intercessor and Comforter for humankind after the Crucifixion and ascension of Christ, with the feminine earth goddess principle is unclear. However, historical and linguistic connections do exist and reinforce the notion that various feminine characters in Pynchon’s novels serve such a function: V. in *V.*., Frenesi in *Vineland*, even Rebekah in *Mason & Dixon* are desacralized or failed Intercessors; Paola in *V.*., Geli Tripping in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Prairie in *Vineland*, and even Oedipa in *The Crying of Lot 49* emerge as Intercessors for a new era, the Intercessor transformed, the earth goddess renewed.

4 The message Weissmann deciphers is the first proposition of Wittgenstein’s *Tractus* and, according to A. C. Grayling in *Wittgenstein*, it is the basis of Wittgenstein’s account of the world’s structure. According to Grayling, Wittgenstein argues that “philosophical problems are not problems which can be solved by empirical means” but by
an understanding of language which is "the underlying logical structure" (13-14). Wittgenstein’s famous assertion that "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must consign to silence" (I, p. 3 and cf. T 7 qtd. by Grayling: 14) is a premise upon which Wittgenstein’s Tractatus is based.

5 Batteries produce electrons by electro-chemical reactions. In a dry cell battery manganese dioxide is one of the chemicals that prevents polarization (the formation of hydrogen which does not conduct electricity). After zinc has been ionized, the excess electrons enter the dry cell through the carbon rod to combine with molecules of manganese dioxide and molecules of water. As the substances are reduced (gain electrons) and react with one another, they produce manganese oxide and negative hydroxide ions. This reaction constitutes the second half of the cell’s discharge process. A secondary reaction produces molecules of ammonia and molecules of water. The various chemical reactions by which a carbon-zinc cell produces electricity continues until the manganese dioxide wears away. After this cathode material has been used up, the cell can no longer provide useful energy and is dead (Brain 1 and Macaulay 288).

6 Roger Penrose in The Emperor’s New Mind asserts that while quantum descriptions are very precise, they are "radically different" from familiar classical descriptions and that probabilities arise from "some mysterious larger-scale [larger than minute quantum particles] action connected with the emergence of a classical world that we can consciously perceive." He argues that sentient beings "must live in a quantum world" rather than an "entirely classical one." The quantum world, he posits, may be "required" so that thinking, perceiving creatures, such as ourselves, can be constructed from its substance" (225-26).

7 According to Roger Penrose in The Emperor’s New Mind, Neils Bohr proposed that "there is no objective picture at all. Nothing is actually 'out there,' at the quantum level"; reality, Bohr maintained "emerges only in relation to the results of 'measurements'" (226). Penrose and others attribute "objective physical reality" to the quantum state (226).

8 See note 2 above.

9 According to Joseph Golden, particular cloud formations and atmospheric conditions are pre-requisites for the formation of waterspouts. A "cloud ring" is attached to the base of "parent clouds" which are generally around 18,000-22,000 feet high although the bottoms are usually only a few hundred to a couple of thousand feet above the surface. Waterspouts are likely to form when the clouds are growing upwards (1-4).

10 This connection is reminiscent of Rilke’s observation that "We of the here-and-now are not for a moment satisfied in the world of time, nor are we bound in it; we are continually overflowing toward those who preceded us, toward our origin, and toward those who seemingly come after us" (To Witold Hulewicz, Nov. 13, 1925 qtd. in Mitchell, "Notes" 550-51). Such an observation and awareness of this connection--established here in Pynchon’s first novel--becomes essential in one’s experience of the Golden Mean which opens the way to spiritual regeneration and transformation in Pynchon’s novels.

11 The equation given corresponds to the shape of a catenary, after the Latin word for chain. The shape described is that of any "uniform flexible cable or chain whose ends are supported from the same height, such as a telephone or power line (Larson 256). The equation describes mathematically the uniform shape which results when any series of point form a uniform curve between two extremes or end points (Vandiver) (Figure 2.3).
The letter V. itself can be seen as a representation of two vectors whose initial point is the origin of the x-y axis of the Cartesian grid. The space in between the vectors in a plane forms a vector space. Figure 2.1 page 137 represents an inverse square force field, a vector field (Larson 993 and 1009). Complex vector space is the most fundamental property of a Hilbert space. Hilbert space, allowing for an infinite sum or vectors, is infinitely dimensional and orthogonal and is explained in some detail in Figures 1.13 and 1.14 on page 79 (Penrose 258-63). Vectors, force fields, and orthogonality are frequently used metaphorically in Pynchon's fiction.

According to The Mary Knoll Catholic Dictionary, “Paraclete,” which in Greek means “advocate,” is a name applied by Christ to the Holy Spirit. John also used the term to describe Christ (429). The Holy Spirit is symbolized by the dove (275) who descended on the head of Christ at his baptism. The dove was also sacred in the Greco-Roman world to the goddess of love (Warner 37-38). See also note 3 above.

In both Cosmos and History and The Sacred and the Profane, Mircea Eliade stresses the importance of “the Center” as an archetype. In Cosmos and History he formulates it in this manner: the “Center of the World” is where heaven and earth meet. This is the “Sacred Mountain,” which may also be every temple or palace or city; as an axis mundi the Center is regarded as the “meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell” (12). In The Sacred and the Profane Eliade stresses the importance of the Center, “the true world” always being “in the middle . . . for it is here that there is a break in the plane and hence a communication among the three cosmic zones” (42), an “opening has been made,” either upward to “the divine world” or downward to “the underworld, the world of the dead.” At the center the “three cosmic levels--earth, heaven, underworld--have been put in communication” (36). In this instance Benny Profane, being a “profane” man in the Eliadean sense, fails to recognize the Center when he finds it. Countless other Pynchon characters have similar difficulties locating the Center, the middle, the Golden Mean as a conduit to spiritual existence.

Rainer Marie Rilke’s Duino Elegies were begun in the winter of 1911-12 at Duino Castle on the Adriatic Sea where he stayed as a guest of his friend, Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, and are dedicated to her (Mitchell, “Notes” 549). However, the Elegies were not completed until 1922 after a burst of creative energy in which Rilke produced Sonnets to Orpheus. In a letter to his Polish translator, Rilke expressed the creative and thematic connection between the Elegies and the Sonnets: in the “work of the continual conversion of the beloved visible and tangible world into the invisible vibrations
and agitations of our own nature. . . Elegies and Sonnets support each other constantly."
(To Witold Hulewicz, Nov. 13, 1925 qtd. in Mitchell, "Notes" 550-51).

16 According to Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, a promontory is both "a high point of land or rock projecting into a body of water" and "a bodily prominence."

17 "Eigenvalue" is a term used in classical (Newtonian) mechanics. It is derived from the German eigenwerte meaning "proper values" and is associated with problems involving rigid body motion. The problem of finding vectors for a given matrix is called an "eigenvalue problem" and is referred to as the "eigenvalue equation." The vector solutions are the "eigenvectors." These concepts are used to prove Euler's theorem concerning the rotation of rigid bodies about a fixed point or axis and depends on orthogonality for its proof (Goldstein 158-59).

18 This concept of "time" and "reverse time" has several connections with quantum physics and, according to Roger Penrose in The Emperor's New Mind, is related to the "quantum field theory." Each particle has its antiparticle and a "massive particle and its antiparticle can annihilate to form energy, and such a pair can be created out of energy" (289). The reality of antimatter proposed by Paul Adrien Maurice Dirac in 1928 was confirmed in 1932 by Carl Anderson proving that matter could be created and destroyed at will. Based on the mathematical description provided by Dirac, "the positron has been interpreted as its antiparticle--an electron--moving backward in time" (Coveney and Highfield 138-39). Related to the concept of "time" and "reverse time" is the "multiworld concept" that holds with each observation or measurement a new "parallel" universe is created resulting in "the infinite propagation and budding of new branching universes" (Coveney and Highfield 132-34). Particles and their antiparticles are known to exist; the multiworld concept is pure conjecture.

19 In Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus Sonnets I.21-23 deal directly with the feminine-masculine paradox. The "little girl" of Sonnet I.21 is associated with poems, songs, Springs, and "the deep secrets of life." The "Young men" of Sonnet I.22 are cautioned against "hurrying" and putting "trust" in "trials of flight." In Sonnet I.23 the "boyish boast of how much machines can do," the masculine drive to "gain" is contrasted to the "pure destination" which requires no will to "power." This paradox between the masculine and feminine impulses--associated also with the Dionysian and the Apollonian--is used again and again in Pynchon's novels.
VOLUME II

Orpheus and Eurydice in Hell and Other Quantum Spaces: The Golden Mean and Spiritual Transformation in Pynchon's Fiction

by

Mary Kay Patrick Jennings
CHAPTER 3
The Extremes in Pynchon's "Masculine"
and "Feminine" Novels

The necessity of choosing the Golden Mean as a conduit for spiritual transformation and an alternative to the apparent exitlessness of human existence emerges as a major theme in both "Under the Rose" and V. The median is juxtaposed against extremes in these two early works, and the median becomes a viable alternative. The metaphorical scheme of extremes and means is found in the various characters of the short story and first novel—those who come to represent the extreme Dionysian and Apollonian impulses in human nature and those who stand in contrast to these extremes and exhibit mediating Orphic tendencies which require that they descend below surface level experience to redeem those they love from the extremes that threaten them. The metaphorical scheme is revealed as well in the settings of these two early works as the concepts of time and space are explored and brought into question; the eternal return of mythology proves to be not entirely satisfactory as a world view nor does its successor, Newtonian science. The redemptive path is associated instead with the subatomic realm of quantum physics which, like the Underworld to which Orpheus descends in order to redeem Eurydice, exists below the geographical world mappable on the Cartesian grid and apart from the one-directional time line of history which demands cause and effect. Like the Orphic characters who exhibit characteristics of both Dionysian and Apollonian extremes, the quantum realm possesses traits associated with both the magical and mysterious world of mythology and the rational and calculable world of Newtonian science.

As Pynchon's metaphorical scheme of extremes and medians evolves in his novels, the relationship between them becomes increasingly more convoluted and complex suggesting that either/or choices are only two of a myriad of possibilities that exist in any given instant. Pynchon's metaphorical scheme evokes the notion of the Large Picture, the Grand Design that can be glimpsed at but not fully revealed because it is beyond the scope
of human understanding. Fictionally Pynchon's scheme allows this glimpse to occur. Certain characters in his novels who choose the "middling life" between desire and duty (M & D) can discern that "identity is single, soul continuous" (V. 307). This insight, however, is only arrived at through "slow, frustrating and hard work . . . . It didn't come as a revelation" (V. 365-66). The individuals who become privy to this insight become aware that the physical world harbors an invisible power which offers a "plan for survival" (M & D), an "alternative to the exitlessness" (COL 49 170). The complexity of Pynchon's scheme may be partially discovered in an overview of the extremes as they present themselves in his novels that, by virtue of their protagonists, suggest--albeit superficially--that extremes are inherent in Pynchon's narrative method. His novels are "masculine" novels--those that feature male protagonists (V., Gravity's Rainbow, Mason and Dixon)--and "feminine" novels--those that feature female protagonists (The Crying of Lot 49, Vineland). Beginning with a "masculine" novel, Pynchon has alternated the sex of his protagonists in each successive novel and in doing so seems to have alternated the focus of the novels as well. This focus in many ways connects the Apollonian impulse and the Newtonian perspective with the masculine, the Dionysian impulse and the mythological perspective with the feminine. The male propensity for the rational, the logical, the will to power and war juxtaposed against the female propensity for the irrational, the intuitive, the subjective, and the fecund are among the extremes of human existence that Pynchon evokes in order to call them into question. Alternating "masculine" novels with "feminine" novels seems designed to suggest extreme Newtonian and mythological perspectives and Apollonian and Dionysian impulses evoked in Pynchon's metaphorical scheme. However, I will suggest in Chapter 4 that by delineating these extremes, Pynchon is also able to define the median, the Golden Mean which, I will argue, becomes of more obvious importance in each of his successive novels.
The Masculine Novels

Newtonian Perspectives: Charted Time and Space

The three masculine novels focus on significant historical events in specific geographical locations; most of these events dramatically changed or enlarged the boundaries of countries either by war or by colonization. By using historical events and geographical locations as points of reference which structure these novels, Pynchon recalls "the interesting question underlying" the short story, "Under the Rose," the question of whether history is "personal" or "statistical" (Intro. SL 18). Such a question structures V. as well as Gravity's Rainbow and Mason & Dixon and, in fact, calls into question the validity of individuals trying to live personal lives amid extreme events the impetus of which is to subdue or annihilate the individual will. Of Pynchon's three masculine novels, the focal events and locations of V. are the most numerous and geographically expansive, partially because the novel encompasses events that either occur or influence those that occur in the first fifty-six years of the twentieth century. In chronological order, these include the confrontation between the British and the Egyptians in Khartoum in 1893-94, the impending Fashoda Crisis of 1898-99, the brutal colonization tactics of the Germans in South West Africa in 1904 and 1922, the pre- and post-World War I temperaments in Paris 1913 and Malta 1919, World War II as experienced by the Maltese in 1939-43, and New York City and Malta at the brink of the Suez Crisis in 1955-56. The primary events of Gravity's Rainbow (1973) are much more focused even though the novel is some two hundred seventy pages longer than V. Most of these events take place during the nine month period between December 18, 1944 and September 14, 1945 in England, Monaco, and the occupied Zone of Central Europe with a few analepses to the German extermination efforts upon the Hereros in South West Africa in 1922 and to Massachusetts in 1939 before America entered the war. Whereas the characters in V. encounter apocalyptic events both real and potential throughout the first half of the twentieth century and over several generations, the experiences of the characters in Gravity's Rainbow are confined to a
specific nine month period at the end of World War II and the apocalyptic event of the twentieth century, the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. However, in his third masculine novel, *Mason & Dixon* (1997), Pynchon departs from the events of the twentieth century when America emerged as a world power and returns to the eighteenth century, to a time when America was still a British colony and the Newtonian paradigm had just begun to legitimize the will to power Britain was exerting over its colonial possessions. The main events of the story that Reverend Wicks Cherrycocke tells take place first in British-dominated Capetown, South Africa in 1761 when Mason and Dixon traveled there to observe the celestial phenomenon, the Transit of Venus (Part I). The majority of the story occurs in Part II, “America,” between 1762 and 1767 when Mason and Dixon surveyed and marked the boundary between Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware, the implication being that their endeavor was to enhance England’s control over colonial America. Part III deals with Mason and Dixon’s observation of the Last Transit of Venus in 1769 from two different locations in the British Isles and ends with Mason’s death in 1786. Although the American Revolution is a major historical event that occurs during the course of events in the novel, it is only alluded to in the novel.

Initially the settings of these masculine novels appear Newtonian: historical events are duly noted; geographical features including towns, cities and countries are precisely named and located, sometimes with longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates. With each successive masculine novel, plotting, charting, measuring, and mapping increasingly become the preoccupations of the novels’ characters, particularly those who exhibit the Apollonian will to power, who seek to control or dominate others, who desire to possess the land. The plotting and charting impulse seems passive in V. and is most obviously recognizable in the mass transit and sewer systems in and around New York City. Benny Profane yo-yos along the various systems of mass transit—bus routes, subways, streets—all routes preconceived for him; even though “the street had claimed a big fraction of Profane’s age,” it “had taught him nothing” (V. 36-37); his movements are random or
dictated by others. Even underground—in the subway or the sewer—where, in Pynchon’s scheme, revelation may occur, Profane remains profane, and Herbert Stencil remains stenciled; both are unchanged and unenlightened by their experiences even though both seem to have traversed the western world. In Gravity’s Rainbow, mapping and plotting become sinister endeavors. Initially Slothrop is harmlessly plotting his sexual conquests with rainbow-colored stars on a map of London. However, the map is being photographed by Teddy Bloat for Edward Pointsman, an Apollonian who works for the “White Visitation” and who, as a behaviorist, has a theory that Slothrop’s sexual escapades may be causally related to the bombs being dropped in and around London at the same sights as Slothrop’s sexual exploits. Later Slothrop learns that, in fact, he had been the object of some prewar experiment; his education at Harvard was insured when he, as a small child, was consigned—“sold”—to the I.G. Farben cartel, a company associated with the German military and manufacturer of Impolex G., in a deal made by Slothrop’s uncle, Lyle Bland, and his father with Laszlo Jamf. Slothrop discovers that his being a victim of a malign plot to program his behavior and his plotting of sexual conquests may be connected. Slothrop’s victimization by the military and corporate power structure makes him a victim too of modern science which, since its inception in the seventeenth century, has enabled men with scientific knowledge to gain control over those who do not possess it. “Knowledge . . . is like property” (Carse 106) and has allowed scientists to gain control over the military and over industry through their specified knowledge. This, coupled with the border disturbances which occur during war—in this case World War II—call into question the various boundaries imposed on human beings and on nature in an effort to possess the land and control the people who live on it.¹ In Gravity’s Rainbow, mapping, charting, plotting become equated with destruction and death, both in the trajectories of the bombs and in the attempts to gain control over those from whom knowledge is kept. Mason & Dixon is a novel that at first glance seems to be exclusively about mapping and charting. The title itself calls up the notion of Mason and Dixon’s Line, a line that divided the North and the
non-slave states from the Southern slave states in the Civil War. However, the survey of the line was arranged a century earlier by the Royal Society of England in order to settle a boundary dispute between Pennsylvania and Maryland; Mason and Dixon’s Line determined the east-west boundary between Pennsylvania, Maryland, and part of West Virginia, and the north-south boundary between Maryland and Delaware (Papernfuse and Coale 40-41). The very context of the novel is historical and geographical, two criteria associated with the Newtonian world view. Numerous details of terrestrial and celestial charting and surveying are referenced and much geometric terminology is evoked in Cherryoke’s telling of his “Tale of America.” His tale is framed by the charting of two different celestial events—the Transits of Venus—one from South Africa in 1761 and one eight years later from two different points in the British Isles, but focuses on the terrestrial mapping of boundary lines in America by two Englishmen, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon between the years of 1762 and 1767, a line which, because of the slavery issue, became the most famous boundary in America.²

Because historical events and the geographical locations in which they occur so structure Pynchon’s masculine novels and the lives of characters portrayed therein, the warring factions and the colonizing efforts that precipitated the events and changed the boundaries—that drove the impulse to acquire power over land, people, and nature—becomes important in these novels. In “Under the Rose,” V., and Gravity’s Rainbow the two factions are represented by England and Germany, two countries that opposed each other from the late nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth. Even in the early story, the possibility is raised that the countries, like their agents, were “cut from the same mold”; few differences exist either between the countries or the men who represent them. In both “Under the Rose” and V., whether the will to power is manifest in war or colonization, the game is finite and players win the game by annihilating their opponents.

Gravity’s Rainbow, of course, elevates the British-German rivalry to the apocalyptic proportions it reached in World War II and the “finite game” takes an
astoundingly sinister twist. While the German atrocities against the Herero tribe in South West Africa again become an emblem of colonization and efforts at cultural extermination as they were in V., in Gravity's Rainbow the British “Intelligence” Agencies have begun victimizing individuals who are allies. Most significant among these victims is Tyrone Slothrop, an American; Slothrop works at ACHTUNG Headquarters--achtung means “watch out” in German (Collins German Dictionary)--and has become the target of Edward Pointsman, a British behaviorist who works for “The White Visitation.” Pointsman believes he has discovered a link between Slothrop’s personal sexual conquests and the locations of German bombs dropped in and around London. The most extreme of the novel’s culprits, however, are neither the British nor the Germans; instead they are the large corporations like Shell Oil and Dupont and I.G. Farben whose loyalties are to the business of making money and whose controls extend beyond the borders of any country.

In Gravity’s Rainbow large corporations profit from world conflict no matter who wins; thus, they owe their loyalties to no single country. In fact, the most malign of the German “Master Players,” Weissmann/Blicero, and those like him not only survive the war but thrive in the power structure of America and the World: “If you’re wondering where he’s [Weissmann/Blicero’s] gone, look among the successful academics, the Presidential advisors, the token intellectuals who sit on boards of directors . . . . Look high, not low” (749). By no means does America emerge unscathed from the “finite game” of World War II in Pynchon’s second masculine novel; the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 which marks the end of Part III of the novel and the beginning of Part IV is America’s trump card as Master Player in the “finite” conflict and secures its place as the world’s most powerful player. Post World War II America becomes the academic, political, and corporate mecca of power in the last half of the twentieth century.

In Mason & Dixon, his third masculine novel, however, Pynchon regresses in time to a point just before the American Revolution when America was still a British colony, when the land was mostly unsettled by white men, when America was still the “New
World,” Edenic and full of possibility. The culprit in this novel is England whose quest for power has resulted in subduing and exploiting the natives of South Africa, particularly those in and around Capetown to which Mason and Dixon travel to view and chart the celestial phenomenon, the Transit of Venus, for the Royal Society, the scientific power structure of the Crown. (See Appendix A, p. 356 and Maps 10 and 11, pp. 369-70).

Mason and Dixon’s encounters with the injustices of colonialism in South Africa is given in Part I of the novel, “Latitudes and Departures” which acts as a kind of prelude to the bulk of the novel contained in Part II, “America.” In this massive second section — some 460 pages — Mason and Dixon again travel to one of England’s colonies but one it has only begun to exploit. Still remaining and untouched by the political and scientific power structure of England is all the land that lies west of the Ohio River Valley to which Mason and Dixon’s survey takes them. (See Appendix A, p. 357 and Map 13, p. 372). Implicit in their endeavors is the notion that measurement is an instrument of power, control, and ownership. Seen from Zhang the Chinaman’s point of view, the Line which Mason and Dixon exact not only scars the land but is a conduit for “bad luck” because it does not take into consideration nature which, with its rivers and mountains, should dictate boundaries.

Linear time (i.e., history) and straight lines are equated with finite Master Players who wish to perpetuate their power and control over others. Control over both space and time is the objective of the Royal Society, the scientific brain trust which not only funded and directed Mason and Dixon’s chartings of the two Transits of Venus and their five-year survey expedition to America, but finally voted to accept the Gregorian Calendar (dictated by Pope Gregory XIII in the sixteenth century) in 1752, an act that required the elimination of eleven days from “linear” time. In this novel the Royal Society is depicted as the source of British Colonial power, an organization of scientists who, because of their scientific knowledge, are able to control the measurement of both space and time which, after the Scientific Revolution, become commodities that can be bought, sold, won, lost, and
possessed: after the seventeenth century, these become the stakes for which the "finite" games of the future will be played.

An interesting corollary to the notion of linear time/history which so preoccupies and dictates the activities of the characters in Pynchon’s three masculine novels is the attention paid to the Christian liturgical calendar associated with the Roman Catholic Church, another authoritarian patriarchal institution aligned with the Apollonian way. All three novels begin in the winter during the Advent Season, the liturgical season that serves as preparation for the celebration of Christmas. The Advent of Christ refers to both the first advent of His incarnation and birth in Palestine and to His gradual manifestation that will be perfected at the end of time in His Second Coming which, it is believed, will result in “the transformation of this world, the resurrection of the dead, and the vindication of God’s sanctity” (Knoll 13). V. begins when Benny Profane arrives in Norfolk, Virginia on Christmas Eve, 1955; almost immediately he bumps into Paola Maijstral who functions as an Intercessor or Paraclete for a new era and ministers to Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, and the Whole Sick Crew. Gravity’s Rainbow also opens during the Advent Season; the events of Part I of the novel occur between December 18 and December 26, 1944. However, the Liturgical Calendar in this novel assumes great importance and furnishes a secondary temporal structure for the novel, the primary being the historical events of World War II between December 18, 1944 and September 14, 1945. Part II also begins around Christmas 1944 and ends on May 20, 1945 which, according to Weisenburger, function as the two key moments on the Christian liturgical calendar: “the birth of a savior,” Jesus Christ at Christmas, and “proof of his resurrected glory” (105) on Whitsunday, the day Christians celebrate the descent of the Holy Ghost to Christ’s disciples (141). Part III begins a few days before the end of Part II on Whitsunday and ends on August 6, 1945, the Feast of the Transfiguration when Christians celebrate the radiance of Jesus’ divinity as revealed to his disciples Peter, James, and John, on the mountain top (149). Part IV begins on and shortly after the Feast of the Transfigurations
and, on September 14, 1945 the Herero rocket raising occurs in conjunction with another feast day, the Feast of “Exaltation or Raising of the Holy Cross.” Blicero’s “noontime sacrifice of Gottfried” is made during Easter weekend of 1945--Easter Sunday in 1945 was also April 1, April Fool’s Day (Weisenburger 263). Even though the liturgical calendar assumes considerably less importance in Mason and Dixon, the “Tale of America” that Rev’d Wicks Cherryoke tells to his nieces and nephews in Philadelphia, the city of Brotherly Love—a tale about Mason and Dixon—is told during the Advent season in 1786, the year of Mason’s death. Although Roman Catholicism plays a role in this novel, especially concerning time and the “Calendar Reform of 1752,” Mason is an Anglican, Dixon is a Quaker, and those who comprise the Royal Society of the time are Deists, an organization which offered membership to neither Dixon nor Mason in spite of their contributions.

**Apollonian Impulses: Players of the Finite Game**

Countries are pitted against countries in Pynchon’s three masculine novels, and systems of various kinds—social, political, intellectual, military, and economic—vie for power and control over time, space, and that which occupies time and space including human beings. The real perpetuators of these finite games are the players, characters in this masculine fiction who exhibit most overtly the Apollonian Impulse and Will to Power. In “Under the Rose” the finite players are the British agent, Porpentine, and the German agent, Moldweorp, described along with their protégés as “displaceable, the minor chess-pieces, anywhere across the board of Europe” (SL 106). The espionage game intensifies in V. in which identities are manipulated and the “apocalypse” feared in “Under the Rose” materializes in the “finite games” of World Wars I and II. Espionage and concealed identities furnish the framework for V., a novel named for a character whose identity remains the novel’s central ambiguity. Herbert Stencil is a key player in this novel as he assumes eight different identities in order to discern a single identity of V. as she was in 1898-99. The theatrical nature of the espionage game is hyperbolized in Chapter 7, “She
hangs on the western wall,” and the absurdity of the game becomes apparent to Sidney Stencil when he is first directed to apprehend the father-son duo, Hugh and Evan Godolphin, believed to be involved in a plot that threatens the power structure of Europe, and then ordered to let them go. More frightening, however, are the atrocities perpetrated by von Trotha in 1904 and Foppl in 1922 as representatives of the German colonization efforts in South West Africa and in the deliberate corruption and exploitation of the innocent by parental figures such as Mélanie l'Heuremaudit’s “papa.” The new generation of victimizers finds representation in the medical professionals, Schoenmaker and Eigenvalue, and in the industrial-military czar, “Bloody” Chielitz, who intrude into the personal lives of Herbert Stencil, Benny Profane, and the Whole Sick Crew.

In Gravity’s Rainbow the Apollonian characters become more sinister and the “plots” they devise more malign. The entire novel, except the very last episode, is set in the last nine months of World War II and focuses primarily on the German-British antagonisms which provide the structure for the conflicts in “Under the Rose” and V. In Gravity’s Rainbow, however, the Apollonian characters achieve a more elevated status as representatives of inanimate forces which seek to obliterate the individual will and which have been catapulted to mythological status by world conflict. Ned Pointsman is one such character. A representative of the “White Visitation,” a psychological warfare division of British “intelligence” operations, Pointsman has targeted the American Slothrop who also works for British Intelligence at ACHTUNG Headquarters in London. A “behaviorist,” Pointsman, in good Newtonian fashion, believes he has found a “causal” relationship between Slothrop’s sexual encounters and the locations of German bombs dropped in and around London. Even though Pointsman’s motives for making this connection are personal—he envisions himself winning the Nobel Prize—Pointsman himself becomes an extension of the “White Visitation” which is intent on using Slothrop as a human guinea pig for some of its mind control experiments. For the first half of the novel, Slothrop becomes
a victim of the system—the "they" who attempts either to control or to eliminate the individual will.

Pointsman’s German counterpart is Blicero-Weissmann. A reader of Rilke as a young man, Weissmann, like Conrad’s Kurtz, is symbolically seduced by the very people, the Hereros, that he is sent to subdue. Traveling to the southern hemisphere—a frequent symbol in Pynchon’s novels for being “out of one’s element” and therefore vulnerable in the wake of new experiences—to South West Africa where “the constellations...had become all unfamiliar and the earth’s seasons reversed” (99), the young Capt. Weissmann becomes disoriented and alarmed when a Herero boy comes to him in the desert night wanting “to f**k” and “using the Herero name of God” (100). In South West Africa, Weissmann is confronted by that which he does not understand: that Ndjambi Karunga, the Herero God of Creation, is a dual god within whom “all sets of opposites are brought together, including black and white, male and female” and that by coupling with Weissmann the boy becomes “in his innocence, Ndjambi Karunga’s child” (100). In a country the Germans are trying to colonize, Weissmann engages in homosexual sex with the boy and, as a result, finds himself seduced by the very mythology he was sent to annihilate and transformed into the boy’s antithesis, the most extreme of the novel’s characters. When he returns to Germany, Weissmann becomes a “Wandervogel,” a member of one of the idealistic youth groups that romanticized the mythical connection to the Fatherland Germany, created “a powerful air of homoeroticism,” and willingly followed “one of their own, Adolf Hitler” (Weisenburger 64-65). Thus Weissmann, a potential Orphean, is transformed into Blicero-Weissmann whose code name, Blicero, “is one of the many Germanic nicknames for death” (Weisenburger 31). A Newtonian advocate of symmetry, Blicero-Weissmann emerges twenty years later, the inquisitor, the physical and sexual abuser of Enzian’s German doppelganger, Gottfried, whose name, Pynchon tells us, means “God’s peace” (465). Blicero-Weissmann is the God of Death, a victimizer of youth and innocence, who, in his own private perversion of the Hansel-Gretel
tale, becomes the witch who victimizes Gottfried (Hansel) and Gottfried's feminine double, Katje (Gretel). Weissmann's sacrifice of Gottfried is implemented via the most advanced rocket of World War II from Luneburg Heath in Germany with Gottfried enshrouded in a suit of Impolex G, the synthetic symbol of the post-war world.

In *Gravity’s Rainbow,* innocent children, the real victims of war and the Apollonian will to power—and whose nature metaphorically gives access to the Golden Mean in Pynchon's novels—are repeatedly victimized by their parents or parental figures such as Weissmann-Blicer. Franz Pokler is a member of the scientific community, a “cause-effect man” whose wife, Leni, leaves him but whose daughter, Isle, visits him once a year. Her yearly visits become a parody of the “eternal return”; during these Pokler sexually victimizes Ilse before they make a yearly pilgrimage to Zwolfkinder, a German Disneyland. Margherita Erdmann, herself a victim of the system, trains her daughter, Bianca, to be a sex-victim at an early age and even orchestrates her escapades. Margherita also accuses Bianca of “having an affair with Thanatz,” Marghertia’s husband, and though Bianca denies this to Slothrop just before she “seduces” him, the implication that she has had an affair with Thanatz is supported both by Bianca’s promiscuous behavior at her mother’s tutelage, by the connection of Thanatz’s name with Thantos, the Greek God of Death, who is said to “take possession” of the feminine soul (Weisenburger 213), and by the fact that Thanatz was present when Blicer-Weissmann’s surrogate son, Gottfried, is sacrificed in the Rocket 00000 firing. In a subepisode of Episode 16 entitled “Ensign Morituri’s Story,” Margherita is revealed as an inversion of the White Goddess who has a “homosexual mania for children” (Weisenburger 217). The victimizations of the young girls, Ilse Pokler and Bianca Erdmann, by their parents or surrogate parents are revealed in Part III, Episode 11, the center of the novel suggesting that the victimization of innocence is not only a condition of war, but is often perpetrated by parents who in normal circumstances would be protecting their children. Slothrop’s father and uncle likewise victimized him when they sold him to Jamf.
In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon's Apollonian characters are neither as numerous as they are in Gravity's Rainbow, as obviously victimizers of the young and the innocent, nor annihilators of the individual will. The real victimizers in *Mason & Dixon* are the British whose will to power is visited upon those they colonize: the African natives in South Africa, the Native Americans and the colonists in America. Their main representatives who dominate and orchestrate the events of *Mason & Dixon* are members of the Royal Society, a group of scientists whose mission seems to be the perpetuation of the Newtonian world view. Father Maire, a Jesuit in charge of some observatories in Canada, is aligned with this view and with the Roman Catholic Church which is the power structure responsible for dictating the loss of eleven days from the calendar (which the Royal Society adopted in 1752) and the hypothetical dropping of 5.25° from the Chinese circle. Instead of huge and malign Apollonian forces at work in this novel, perspectives or world views are juxtaposed, exchanged, blurred. *Mason & Dixon*, as its title implies, has two protagonists. Initially, Mason and Dixon seem to represent the Apollonian and Dionysian extremes, much as Pynchon has represented them in *V.* with Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane and in "Under the Rose" with Moldweorp and Porpentine. Mason and Dixon, however, have both much and little in common with these pairs of characters. Throughout the novel they seem to present opposite perspectives. Mason is an Anglican and a Newtonian who longs for admission into the Royal Society; he is an astronomer by profession who measures the movement of celestial bodies; he is a dour man who excessively mourns for his lost Rebekah and blames his youngest son, Doc Isaac, for her death since she died when Doc was born. In this respect Mason victimized Doc, but through Mason's own weakness rather than by design. Dixon, on the other hand is a Quaker who, as a surveyor, is more connected with telluric concerns; he is clad in a "red coat of military cut . . . and a matching red three-corner'd Hat" (16)--in contrast to Mason's "Buff's and Grays" (17)--and he is mirthful. However, as the novel's most obvious Newtonian, Mason has few aspirations to power in terms of the previous novels aside from those that would admit him to the inner
sanctum of the scientific community of the time, the Royal Society, the community to which he was perpetually denied access. Unlike the Apollonian characters in Pynchon’s previous two masculine novels, Mason’s Newtonian tendencies seem to have been ameliorated by Dixon’s Dionysian behavior until, by the end of the novel, the two are seen as mirror images of each other, “light and dark Sides of a single Planet” (707), life-long “mates” who comprise a single entity.

Pynchon’s masculine novels emphasize the attributes that both Pynchon and Rilke associate with masculinity: one-directional time, historical events, the Apollonian impulse to possess land and dominate people. However, this emphasis mutates with each successive masculine novel. V. depicts the threat of apocalyptic events that dominated human experience in the first half of the twentieth century and, ending in 1956 with the Suez Crisis, threatened to dominate the rest of the century as well. The feminine represented by V. was masculinized though not entirely subsumed. At her death, her inert parts are disassembled to reveal her femininity still intact. The children are the agents of her disassembly and they come to represent, in Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme, the promise of a new order, a promise that materialized in the character of Paola. The apocalyptic nightmare of the final months of World War II which provides the setting and historical framework for Gravity’s Rainbow depicts the most extreme circumstances encountered by human beings in human history ending as it does with the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Rockets and bombs— instruments of annihilation and the ultimate threat of death— represent the culmination of Newtonian science and the will to power to which the Apollonian impulse ultimately leads. The feminine principle again has been masculinized— Margherita Erdmann victimizes children, even her own child, and children seem to offer but a feeble hope for the future. Even though the feminine has been masculinized, it does not disappear all together. It emerges in the character of Geli Tripping who is not only youthful but a witch who, through her mysterious and intuitive connections with and savvy of nature guides Slothrop, the novel’s redeeming child, toward
his spiritual awakening and the emergence of the Counterforce which seeks to follow his lead by putting itself against the ultimate male act of force, war.

Of Pynchon’s three masculine novels, Gravity’s Rainbow represents the most sinister and horrifying image of Newtonian science and the Apollonian will to power gone mad. This image is, in fact, ameliorated in Mason & Dixon, Pynchon’s last masculine novel to date. Perhaps because Pynchon sets the bulk of the novel in eighteenth century America, before Newtonian notions of “progress” had established themselves in the New World. England is still trying to colonize the country and the land remains virtually unexplored. Thus, the masculine forces and sources of power are neither as overtly threatening to individuals nor as malign as they were in either V. or Gravity’s Rainbow. Mason and Dixon may be employed by the Royal Society to establish a permanent boundary between the colonies of Pennsylvania and Maryland, but neither man is a member of that Society. Instead, the pair is afloat on America’s terrain and though they execute the will of the Royal Society, they remain open to the possibilities suggested by the mysterious telluric forces they encounter there. In addition, the feminine principle, which has in the other two novels, been identified primarily with a feminine character, in Mason & Dixon comes to be embodied in the character of Dixon, Mason’s real “mate.” This feminine “life-force” Dixon comes to represent in the novel not only mediates Mason’s propensity to look toward death, it awakens in Mason the redemptive possibilities associated with his children who eventually settle in America.

The Feminine Novels

The Mythological Perspective: Cyclical Time and Boundless Space

In contrast to the masculine novels which begin in the winter and are structured by significant historical events in specific geographical locations, Pynchon’s two feminine novels, The Crying of Lot 49 and Vineland begin in the summer and the main events of the characters’ lives take place in America on the West Coast—not the East Coast as in V. and Mason & Dixon—in indeterminate regions of northern California which have mythological
names and/or which exist either within or at the periphery of specific cities. These spaces--San Narciso in *Crying*, Vineland in *Vineland*--furnish opportunities for various Orpheus-Eurydice figures to encounter the uncertainties and possibilities associated with quantum space. Whereas the time lines which structure the masculine novels are linear and one directional and guided by specific historical events which affect the personal lives of the characters, the time frames for *Crying* and *Vineland* are more general. The feminine novels reference the sixties' experience in America, a Dionysian time characterized by child-like idealism and frenzied behavior. Published in 1965, *Crying* is set at the cusp of the sixties as the century itself began to take a different direction. Featuring the music of a Beatle-like group of four rock and rollers who call themselves the Paranoids and mental states altered by the drug-of-the-decade, LSD, *Crying* depicts the searcher as feminine, a woman trying to free herself from the masculine forces of the mid-century represented in the novel by Pierce Inverarity and the world of the dead. *Vineland* likewise looks back to the sixties but from a perspective of the eighties--1984 to be exact--and a time when the idealism of the sixties was in danger of succumbing to government control represented by the Reagan administration. Pynchon's two feminine novels to date, like the masculine novels that preceded each, share a space--unbounded and indeterminate regions of northern California--and a time--the sixties--both of which metaphorically represent the feminine principle which, in Pynchon's metaphor, is characterized by a mythological perspective and the Dionysian impulse. In addition, both novels have referents that assume both political and literary significance. The key to the mystery surrounding Pierce Inverarity's will of which Oedipa Mass is the executrix hinges on the Trystero System which "might be something's secret title" (44) and which appears to be connected to a political situation involving the Thurn and Taxis' postal monopoly in the Holy Roman Empire from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and with a fictional seventeenth century Revenge Tragedy, *The Courier's Tragedy*. Such references suggest that events occurring some three hundred fifty years before have had a significant impact on the characters living in the last half of the
twentieth century, especially those, like Oedipa who search for meaning and connections. In *Crying* the importance of the seventeenth century occurrences serve both to obfuscate and to enlighten Oedipa’s search. Similarly, the events of *Vineland*, set in 1984, have both literary and political implications. The literary, of course, is George Orwell’s novel, *1984*, the political implications of which are connected with the Reagan administration’s attempts in the 1980s to suppress the individual will by assimilating individuals into one all-encompassing “political family” whose patriarch is Ronald Reagan. In *Crying* and *Vineland* political and literary events inform the setting of each novel.

While the events of Oedipa’s personal life lack an historical context, they do seem connected to the possibility of the continuing influence of seemingly insignificant occurrences in the seventeenth century—the century in which Newtonian science changed the way the world was viewed: an “800 year old . . . postal fraud” (98) aimed at undermining the postal monopoly of the Holy Roman Empire and the hypothetical writing of a seventeenth century play. The connection of the two events and their periodic resurfacing at specific moments in history suggest both the appearance and disappearance of particles at the quantum level and cyclical time associated with the mythological perspective. In *Crying* the notion of cyclic time is integrally connected to the process of communication. Although Trystero is only “a sound, a word” (109), for Oedipa it holds together certain coincidences and clues. Trystero, it seems, had opposed the Thurn and Taxis postal system in Europe before it was transported to American where its members, disguised as outlaws or Indians, “fought the Pony Express and Wells, Fargo” (109). Oedipa comes to believe that it survives in California in the 1950’s and 60’s “serving as a channel of communication for those of unorthodox sexual persuasion, inventors who believed in the reality of Maxwell’s Demon, possibly her own husband, Mucho Mass” (109). And when she sets off on a night-time expedition through the streets of San Francisco to prove herself wrong, she finds its symbol, a muted post horn, everywhere. In several lines spoken in the performance she attends of *The Courier’s Tragedy*, she also
discovers references to the Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly, the “gold once-knotted horn” (75), and Trystero, the “irregular” and alternative postal service aimed at undermining the monopoly Thurn and Taxis exercised. Oedipa investigates many versions of the play’s text which include the performance directed by Randolph Driblette in the early sixties, the play in a textbook published in 1957 which included a reference, glossed perhaps by a student, to the “1687 ed.” These “coincidences,” Oedipa begins to believe, are “signals” of some “central truth” which also seems connected with Inverarity’s stamp collection and symbolized by the dandelion wine Ghengis Cohen, philatelist, gives to her made from dandelions picked two years before. The wine, Cohen tells her, was quite cloudy some months before but cleared in the spring when dandelions normally bloom “[a]s if they remembered” (98). Moreover, he says that these dandelions were nourished by the bones of those buried in a cemetery upon which they grew before the cemetery was displaced by the East San Narciso Freeway. For Oedipa, the details Cohen tells her about the dandelion wine is yet another signal that “the dead really do persist” (99) in the wine, in the play—Driblette says as a director he takes Wharfinger’s “words and a yarn” (80) and gives them life, gives “the spirit flesh” (79), and in the continued existence and resurfacing of Trystero.

A similar sense of cyclical time exists in Vineland. The events of Oedipa’s personal life are set in the early 1960’s as sex, drugs, rock and roll begin to sweep across America. In Vineland many of the characters who came of age during the 1960’s as members of the People’s Republic of Rock and Roll or the 24 fps film Kollective that invaded the ultra conservative College of the Surf somewhere in northern California, find themselves living in the very world they dreaded: California in 1984 with Ronald Reagan in charge. The date of most of the novel’s events, 1984, is, of course, an icon that references Orwell’s depiction of a totalitarian dystopia in his novel, 1984. Many of the characters who find themselves in “1984,” however, look back to the sixties and to a time before their childlike idealism was taken advantage of by the government. Frenesi, whose name evokes the
“frenzy” associated with the Dionysian mysteries, is the elusive female focal character in *Vineland* whom many of the other characters seek. Both Zoyd, her first husband, and Prairie, her daughter, are obsessed by her absence. Zoyd fancies himself periodically “haunting” her over the years:

Now and then, when moon, tides, and planetary magnetism were all in tune, he went venturing out, straight up through the third eye in his forehead, into an extraordinary system of transport whereby he could go, gliding right to wherever she was, and incompletely unseen, sensed just enough to be troublesome, he then would haunt her, for as long as he could, enjoying every squeezed-out minute (39-40).

Prairie has similar fantasies concerning her mother. Sometimes Prairie secretly fantasizes herself as one of the perfect “junior-high gymnasts in leotards, teenagers in sitcoms, girls in commercials learning from their moms about how to cook and dress and deal with their dads” (327). “Sometimes,”” she tells her best friend, Ché, en route to Shade Creek shortly before her reunion with Frenesi,

“when I get very weird, I go into this alternate universe idea, and wonder if there isn’t a parallel world where she decided to have the abortion, get rid of me, and what’s really happening is that I’m looking for her so I can haunt her like a ghost.” The closer they got to Shade Creek, the more intense this feeling grew (334).

These “hauntings” of Frenesi by Zoyd and Prairie are connected with longings for a return to some kind of idealized family situation that none of them has ever experienced due to Frenesi’s abandonment of them, a scenario that recalls Sidney and Herbert Stencil’s situation in *V.* when V. was the abandoning mother. However, when Prairie tells Ché of her “perfect” TV-version family, Ché, the voice of reason, says, “Best forget it, Prairie. All looks better ‘n it is” (327). The “family reunion” nevertheless does occur in *Vineland*
where "the Yurok and Tolowa people . . . not known for their psychic gifts" had the sense of "some invisible boundary" marking "territories of the spirit," where the redwoods were "too red to be literal trees—carrying therefore another intention" and stayed "alive forever" (317). Here, in "Vineland, the Good," at the Traverse-Becker "wingding, "Frenesi's second family—Flash and Justin—are reunited with her first—Zoyd and Prairie. Even though Frenesi is metaphorically equated with the queen of spades--"the Mother of Doom"--for Prairie meeting her is "like meeting a celebrity" (375), and the reunion of Zoyd and Prairie with Frenesi and her second family is successful in spite of Frenesi's inability to orchestrate it. The Reunion, a yearly affair, is the major symbol in Vineland of cyclic time, the Eternal Return, an annual event at which "the level" is restored by "divine justice" (369).

The settings of the three masculine novels are precise and capable of being located on a map, and the characters who people those novels are often preoccupied with or engaged in charting, measuring, and plotting activities. Not so in the feminine novels. Although the towns and counties that become the primary settings of the two novels, Crying and Vineland, are found on no existing maps, they seem to be located north of Los Angeles (Crying) and north of San Francisco (Vineland) in California. (See Appendix A, p. 355-56 and Map 8, p. 367). Also, many of the locations, both specific and general have obviously mythological names. When Oedipa first hears that she is to be the executrix of Pierce's will, she immediately places herself in a mythological setting by imagining herself imprisoned in a tower Rapunzel-like, such as the one painted by Remedios Varo in the central panel of a triptych entitled "Bordando el Manto Terrestre," Tapestry of the World. The city to which Oedipa must go in order to execute Pierce's will is "San Narciso" which evokes Narcissus, a Greek youth who is in love with himself. Like "many named places in California it [San Narciso] was less an identifiable city than a group of concepts" (24), and it is the place Pierce "had begun his land speculating" (24) ten years before where "everything . . . had been built, however rickety or grotesque toward the sky" (24). Even
as the city is ‘invisible at first glance’ (2), so is Oedipa’s awareness of the fact that her own ego--her own Narcissism--is responsible for her “encapsulation”: she is imprisoned in the tower of self. Oedipa’s awareness begins when she meets Metzger and attends a theatrical performance. There, at a motel called “Echo Courts,” Oedipa meets her contact, an actor-lawyer named Metzger who is to facilitate Oedipa’s execution of the will and notices that the “face of the nymph” Echo “was much like” her own. Accompanied by Metzger, Oedipa becomes involved in two theatrical experiences. In the first she watches Metzger perform as Baby Igor in a movie he starred in as a child--Cashiered--which is being shown on TV. Later, she and Metzger attend the performance of a seventeenth century Revenge play by Richard Wharfinger, The Courier’s Tragedy, at “a small arena theatre” in San Narciso where she experiences the “promise of hierophany” (131). The play’s plot is convoluted and includes incest, violence, and sadism; Oedipa, after five minutes is “sucked utterly into the landscape” (65). What most fascinates Oedipa is that which is not said in the play, events that are not shown on stage. These she believes constitute a “new mode of expression . . . a kind of ritual reluctance” (71) and strengthens her suspicions that “revelation [is] in progress all around her” (44). This suspicion is reinforced by the dark and dangerous journey she undertakes by herself, without the aid of an Orpheus figure. Her journey is reminiscent of Eurydice’s journey to the Underworld and evokes the “dowgoing” and “upcoming” of the ancient Eleusian Mysteries that celebrated Persephone’s descent and return, life coming out of death, and Demeter as a fertility goddess. Oedipa’s “journey” includes a “dowgoing” to San Narciso, a dangerous passage through the streets of San Francisco as “voyeur and listener” (123), and her discovery that she “was back where she’d started” (131) twenty-four hours later. Her journey is circular. Her journey is also a search for connections between the spoken and the unspoken, the seen and the unseen which were suggested by her attending the performance of The Courier’s Tragedy. Throughout the novel, Oedipa looks for evidence
that another America, "a separate, silent, unsuspected world" (125), a "secret richness," a "real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life" (170) exists.

The title of Pynchon's second feminine novel, Vineland, evokes its setting: most of the novel's events take place in Edenic Vineland County; the name "Vineland" recalls its own mythology. "Vineland" (Vinland or Wineland) is the name the early Scandinavian explorers gave to a region on the east coast of North America when the Norwegian Vikings visited this coastal area some 500 years before Columbus sailed to America. Early Norse sagas tell of the explorers' voyages and these tales describe a fertile land with a mild climate ("Vikings" 1-2).  

Pynchon transports this mythological Eden to the West Coast and specifically to Northern California. The Vineland of the novel was once inhabited by the Yuroks, an Indian tribe native to the area; out away from "the lights of Vineland," all the natural landmarks—"fishing and snaring places, acorn grounds, rocks in the river, boulders on the banks, groves and single trees"—had its own name, "all alive, each with its own spirit" (186). The Yuroks called the creatures that inhabited Vineland "woge"; they were "like humans but smaller" and "had been living there when the first humans came" (186). With the "influx" of humans some withdrew eastward, others to the sea, still others "into the features of the landscape" (186). The Yuroks believed that a journey up the river from the ocean was a "journey through the realm behind the immediate" (186) wherein trails "without warning" descended into the earth toward Tsorrek, "the world of the dead" (186). The woge, some said, were waiting to "see how humans did with the world. And if we started fucking up too bad" they would return and "teach us how to live the right way, save us..." (187). Vineland County is rich with its own mythological landmarks. Thanatoid Village is located at "the confluence of Shade Creek and Seventh River" (172) and is populated with Thanatoids, "victims...of karmic imbalances" such that they exist in a kind of limbo between life and death, "not living but persisting, on the skimpiest of hopes" (173) as they try to advance "further into the condition of death." The Cucumber Lounge and the Zero Inn are favorite hangouts of Thanatoids and humans alike. In
Thanatoid Village "all the streets are irregular and steeply pitched" (173). In Shade Creek Vato (meaning "prophet") and Blood (flesh) have a twenty-four hour towing service. There is located Rick and Chick's Born Again Auto Conversion Shop. There Takeshi and DL set up a Karmic Adjustment Center as part of their attempt to reverse the Death Touch put on Takeshi. "Vineland, the Good": the site of Thanatoid Village; the place where Zoyd brings up his daughter Prairie; the location of the yearly Traverse-Becker Family Reunion; the setting for second chances. The landscape which constitutes the setting of Vineland is pastoral, Edenic, mythological. The association of Vineland with chthonic concerns, with the novel's protagonist, Prairie, and with the human need to bond with the earth connect the landscape of Vineland once again to the ancient Elusian Mysteries and to Eliade's "archaic man" who respects the mystery of nature which brings life out of death.

The Dionysian Impulse: The Frenzied Revelers

Even though Pierce Inverarity's "Will" demands Oedipa's attention throughout The Crying of Lot 49, numerous "revelers," Dionysians all, both distract her from her inquiries and contribute to her discoveries. Metzger, a child actor-turned-lawyer is one such character. He has been appointed co-executor of Pierce Inverarity's will. He comes to Oedipa at the Echo Courts motel, "so good-looking" and with "a debonair bottle of French Beaujolais" (28). Oedipa and the "rollicking lawbreaker" watch a movie Metzger performed in as a child star whose stage name was Baby Igor. The movie, Cashiered, is being shown on TV with the reels out of order and is being further interrupted by commercials advertising Fangoso Lagoons, a new housing development, "One of Inverarity’s interests" (31). In a comment on the connection between actors and lawyers, Metzger tells her: "I'm a former actor who became a lawyer" who "becomes an actor" in front of the jury; "Manny DiPresso, a one time lawyer who quit his firm to become an actor" is to play Metzger in a TV pilot loosely based on Metzger's life. "[I]t can be repeated endlessly," (33) he tells her. The entire night is full of frenzy, sex, and music from a group of four teenage rock and rollers who call themselves the Paranoids: Oedipa makes a
wager on the outcome of the Metzger movie they are watching, plays “Strip Botticelli” with him, has sex with him to “a fugue of guitars” which blow a fuse at their sexual climax. Her “sexual infidelity with Metzger . . . logically” seems to mark for Oedipa the “starting point” for Trystero’s bringing “an end to her encapsulation in the tower.” What “would come to haunt her most, perhaps: the way it fitted, logically, together. As if . . . there were revelation in progress all around her” (44). That Dionysian frenzy is a contributing factor in Oedipa’s process of discovery is evident in her interaction with another Dionysian, Dr. Hilarious, Oedipa’s psychotherapist. Dr. Hilarious is prone to calling Oedipa in the middle of the night to see if she is taking her “tranquilizers” and to try to persuade her to participate in an experiment to chart the “effects of LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs on a large sample of suburban housewives” (17), a proposition Oedipa declines. Hilarious is full of “delightful lapses from orthodoxy” (18), a propensity which culminates with his barricading himself in his clinic where he is armed against imaginary terrorists on the day that Oedipa goes to tell him of her unexplainable encounters with W.A.S.T.E. (We Await Silent Trystero’s Empire) and with the myriad of allusions to Trystero itself. In this scenario, Oedipa becomes Hilarious’ therapist as he reverts to being a small boy who is afraid of noises that go bump in the night and who makes faces at the monsters he fears. The source of his breakdown: his work in Nazi prison camps with “experimentally induced insanity.” Just before the “cops” break down the door he tells Oedipa to “hold it dear,” the fantasy (involving Trystero) she came hoping that he would dispel. “[W]hen you lose it,” he tells her, “You begin to cease to be” (138). While the Dionysians in Crying of Lot 49 seem to distract Oedipa from her quest to “pierce” Inverarity’s will, both Metzger and Dr. Hilarious provide additional evidence that actually facilitates her discovery.

The Dionysians in Vineland are not so easily identified. Initially Zoyd Wheeler seems to be a Dionysian who, in order to receive his “mental-disability check,” must do “something publicly crazy” (3) within the week in order to continue to qualify for benefits.
After eating Fruit Loops with Nestles Quik on top, he dons a dress, rats his hair, and with a "tailor-made lady's chain saw" crashes through a sugar-glass window at the Cucumber Lounge for the TV cameras. However, by the end of Chapter 1, Zoyd emerges as no frenzied Dionysian but as a professional lunatic whose Dionysian behavior is aimed at subverting the Apollonian power structure by qualifying him for his mental disability check and by putting off Hector Zungia, a DEA field agent, who hopes each year at Zoyd's public display of insanity to win him over as a resource for the Federal Government. One Dionysian of the novel is Weed Atman who

looked exactly like the kind of college professor parents in those days [the 60's] were afraid would seduce their daughters, not to mention their sons . . . . . His hair was approaching shoulder length, and . . . he wore a cowrie-shell necklace, white Nehru shirt, and bell-bottomed trousers covered with four-color images of Daffy Duck" (210).

A professor at the conservative College of the Surf, Weed seduces students to sex, drugs, and insurrection, and, as leader of the People's Republic of Rock and Roll, becomes a target for Brock Vond, a Federal Prosecutor who intends to use the woman they share, Frenesi—the novel's Dionysian follower and the instrument of his demise. Her name itself connotes the frenzied behavior which was often performed by women in the worship of Dionysus. Throughout the novel her activities are often erratic because she is unsure of her position. Initially she is a filmmaker—thus associated with theatre, and member herself of that loosely-defined group of subversives known as the 24fps Film Kollective. Yet she is seduced by Brock Vond who manipulates her into selling out Weed and those with whom she sympathized by implementing and filming Weed's death. When, after she married Zoyd and becomes pregnant, she waivers between childbearing and abortion only to abandon Zoyd and their daughter, Prairie, soon after Prairie is born. In Vineland, as in Crying, Dionysians catalyze or facilitate the discoveries of the median character, Prairie. In her search for Frenesi, Prairie eventually encounters Weed, first via the Pitzah film and
later in his Thanatoid state at the Traverse-Becker Reunion where Prairie is at last reunited with her mother. Prairie's encounters with the Dionysian Weed and Frenesi, both failed Dionysians, Prairie begins to discover herself. After "having just spent hours with Frenesi's face" at the Reunion, Prairie "found it easier now to make out . . . as clearly as she ever would in Zoyd her own not-yet-come-to-terms-with face" (374)--she discovers she is more Zoyd than Frenesi.

Pynchon's feminine novels focus on the feminine principle and life force. The plots of both novels are set in regions of northern California and seem removed from the central historical event of the sixties, the Vietnam War. Only the Thanatoid, Ortho Bob, of *Vineland* exists as a reminder of the war's spiritual victimization. Instead the interior lives of the two novel's focal characters are revealed; the emphasis on their personal responses to the extremes they encounter both in the sixties and the eighties provide an interesting contrast to the barrage of "statistical" information that permeates the three masculine novels. Yet, differences exist in the interior lives of the focal characters, in their personal situations, and in their responses to the extremes they experience. Oedipa is the single focal character of *Crying*. Published in 1965, Oedipa is married but has no children. That she separates herself from her husband and other men who people the world she traverses seems a prerequisite to the success of her journey. That she recognizes preoccupation with self as the primary factor responsible for her encapsulation becomes her essential discovery. However, *Vineland*, published twenty-five years later has several focal characters, all of whom are involved in demanding personal relationships involving the novel's central but ultimately unchanged character, Frenesi. Like Sidney Stencil in V., Zoyd loses the woman he loves to the Forces of Death symbolized by Brock Vond; unlike Sidney, Zoyd's transformation comes from his entirely selfless love—not for Frenesi but for his daughter, Prairie. DL who likewise loves and loses Frenesi to Brock Vond is transformed by her love for Takeshi which liberates her from selfish motives of revenge directed at Brock Vond; Prairie's recognition, however, is more like Oedipa's because it is based on her
emerging self-awareness that she is responsible for her own identity. However, Prairie’s self-awareness carries with it family connections—with Zoyd and Frenesi, with her grandparents, with her “[d]istantly related sleazoids and the occasional megacreep” (367) at the family reunion, with her half-brother Justin. Oedipa’s recognition is solitary; Prairie’s is communal.

The Other Extreme

Implicit in the extremes which structure Pynchon’s masculine and feminine novels is the notion that even though one extreme may dominate each novel, it is not the only extreme operating in that novel. Although the Apollonian will to power perpetuates the historical events that frame Pynchon’s masculine novels—World Wars I and II in V. and Gravity’s Rainbow, the marking of the Mason and Dixon’s Line in Mason & Dixon—cyclical time and unbounded space persist in those novels, and Dionysian characters subvert events that seem entirely prescribed. The feminine principle which drives the action in the feminine novels—most of which occurs in unmappable locations—emerges within the context of historical time and operates in northern California; characters preoccupied with exerting power and controlling that feminine principle motivate the protagonists of the feminine novels to search for an alternative to that control. Essentially each novel contains the extremes which define, for that novel, the Golden Mean, the real alternative to the “excesses” and “deficiencies” of both extremes.

The Masculine Novels: Cyclical Time, Unbounded Space, and Dionysian Revelers

Though historical events and dates dominate and frame the masculine novels and provide a context within which the characters experience time on a personal level, a sense of cyclical time as perceived from the mythological perspective of archaic man does not cease to operate. In fact, the mythological resurfaces as a necessary counterbalance to the devastation that results from the Apollonian will to power that drives the one-directional time line of historical events. In V. the mythological sense of cyclical time is associated with primitive cultures which powerful European countries—particularly Germany and
Great Britain—are attempting to subdue through their colonial efforts. Vheissu emerges from Old Godolphin’s harrowing experience at Khartoum in 1884 and resurfaces periodically throughout the novel: he rediscovers fragments of it in his “expedition” to Antarctica in 1898; in 1899 Old Godolphin and his son are considered dangerous to the British, Italians, and Venezuelans in Florence because they are believed to have knowledge of Vheissu and the plot it represents poses a threat greater than “simple insurrection”; Vheissu is finally subdued in 1922 in South West Africa by V.-as-Vera Meroving when she wins the eighty-year old Godolphin over to the “public dream” of death and annihilation. With regard to Vheissu—which is a private myth—the eternal return may not be so eternal. Not so with Mehemet’s tale of Mara told in the Epilogue, the subtitle of which is ironically a date—1919. Juxtaposed against this historical moment is taller and tale. Mehemet, the helmsman who steers Sidney Stencil to Malta is himself a time traveler who “sailed the xebech through a rift in time’s fabric” (459) to emerge in the twentieth century in the same Mediterranean he had left in the fifteenth. The tale he tells is of Mara who also has traversed time: she “nursed the shipwrecked St. Paul . . . [and] taught love to every invader from the Phoenician to French. Perhaps even to the English” (461); she was captured by Turks in 1565 and, like Mehemet, re-emerges in 1919 to teach love to the Englishman, Sidney Stencil, at the cusp of an unsettling disturbance among the Maltese labor force against their colonizer, Great Britain, which Sidney represents.

Cyclical time takes another form in Gravity’s Rainbow in which astrological signs conjoin with historical dates and the liturgical calendar to structure the novel and suggest that remnants of the eternal return persist even amid the final nightmare days of World War II. The events in Part I, according to Weisenburger “unfold beneath the sign of Pisces” even though the actual sign is Sagittarius. A fictional acronym for an agency within “the White Visitation” PISCES, Weisenburger maintains, is a symbol “for death and dissolution, for contact with the supernatural, as well as for warfare and strife” (340). Leni’s “Piscean husband,” Franz Pokler, “the cause effect man” whose “seas of fantasy,
death-wish, rocket-mysticism” (154), and passivity both alienate him from his wife and make him an easy pawn of the German rocket community. Aries, the Ram, dominates Part II. Aries is a “fire sign . . . an omen of spring” and “a sign of strong personal identity” (Weisenburger 105) which sets the stage for Slothrop’s loss of his papers and his own identity and his assumption of the identity of British war correspondent, Ian Scuffling, in this section. Another fire sign, Leo, guides the thirty-two episode Part III according to Weisenburger (149) and seems particularly associated with the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in Part IV (292). The primary astrological sign of Part IV, however, is Virgo, “a common earth sign” and symbolic of assimilation and the maneuvering of people into new and practical configurations. Part IV also has twelve episodes, the number of astrological signs “organized mandala-like around the astrological year” (Weisenburger 263). Allusions to the eternal return and cyclical time abound in Gravity’s Rainbow, particularly in the proliferation of circular symbols: the color wheel with its complementary colors across from each other, the mandala formed by the complementary Yin and Yang in Chinese Buddhism, the mandala around which the Herero village is organized, and the most pervasive circular symbol, the rainbow which, when observed from above and not interfered with by the earth, becomes perfectly circular. The tendency of the rainbow toward a perfect circle is always juxtaposed against the parabolic trajectory of rockets.

If the rainbow with its propensity to become a perfect circle is the dominant metaphor for the eternal return in Gravity’s Rainbow, the dominant metaphor in Mason & Dixon is contained within the historical Calendar Reform of 1752 when England adopted the Roman Catholic Church’s Gregorian Calendar.8 The Reform itself necessitated the “loss” of eleven days between September 2 and September 14, 1752 which, Rev’d. Cherryoke maintains, inflicted a “chronologick Wound” upon those living at that time. Mason, however, obsesses over the occurrence and explains to Dixon his own personal theory of the eternal return. He envisions ordinary linear time as a one-directional arrow akin to the Newtonian notion of causality and the eleven lost days as a loop or circle tangent
to the linear path of “Ordinary Time.” As the loop rotates, Mason believes that it becomes a “Vortex, of eleven days, tangent to the Linear Path of what we imagine as Ordinary Time, but excluded from it, and repeating itself,—without end” (555). Mason senses that he was caught in “that very Whirlpool of Time . . . . Alone in the Material World” (556) while everyone else, including his beloved Rebekah, moved on to September 14. Even as Mason and Dixon pursue “the Line’s End” they experience curious eleven-day cycles which reinforce Mason’s notion that he and Dixon are periodically caught in such temporal loops or vortexes during which they experience a dimension of time different than that which drives them toward completion of their survey. This phenomena is linked as well to the “simple Diurnal Rhythms” (466) they experience as they travel westward which connect them to the rhythms of nature apart from the deadlines projected by the Royal Society.

If cyclical time persists in the masculine novels, so does unbounded space in spite of all efforts to define it. Most predominantly in V. is Vheissu which seems to emerge for Hugh Godolphin when he is overwhelmed by the “carrion and the waste” (171) he witnesses when he enters Khartoum in 1884. Vheissu becomes the major metaphor for unbounded space into which Old Godolphin escapes, an exotic but private place of which no maps were ever plotted. Yet it is real enough that Old Godolphin becomes “fury-ridden,” and memories of its “faded murals, depicting old battles and older love affairs among the gods . . . would appear without warning” (169). It is real enough to become a “Situation” in 1899 for the British, Italian, and Venezuelan Consulates in Florence to consider it “something bigger than simple insurrection, bigger than a single country” (177). It is real enough to make the German Foppl distract Old Godolphin from his second expedition to the Antarctic in 1922 with an invitation to stay at his Villa in South West Africa and loose V.-as-Vera Meroving on him in an attempt to assimilate Vheissu into the public domain of destruction and death from which it offers escape.

Even as Vheissu seems to emerge as an alternative to the death and destruction at Khartoum in V., pockets of unbounded natural space remain untouched by the travesties of
World War II in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. (See Appendix A, p. 356 and Map 9, p. 368). Slothrop encounters one of the more memorable when he connects with Geli Tripping, a very youthful good witch who is in love with Tchitcherine, a Soviet Intelligence Officer, "another rocket maniac" whom Slothrop vaguely resembles. Slothrop and Geli have sex in her "roofless room" which functions as a kind of *axis mundi* for Slothrop; through the hole in the roof "he can see a long tree-covered mountain ascending" and "the spring of saplings [is] in the wind" (290-91); Slothrop remains there in spite of the threat of Tchitcherine’s return; he “even falls asleep, presently, in her [Geli’s] bare and open arms” (295). Episode 1 in Part IV opens with yet another allusion to uncharted space with Pirate Prentice, the novel’s primary Dionysian whose special talent is for "living the fantasies of others" (620). In this episode Pirate is in a “more or less hijacked P-47 on route to Berlin” (620) after V-E Day. From his vantage point above the earth, no boundaries are visible; "the green countryside" is in the process of reclaiming what men sought to possess. In the plane, he passes over "the time softened outlines of ancient earthworks, villages abandoned during the Great Dying, fields behind cottages whose dwellers were scythed down without mercy by the northward march of the black plague" (621). And via the fantasies of Katje’s Dutch ancestor Frans van der Groov, “dodo killer and soldier of fortune,” Pirate has a windmill vision in which "each wind had its own cross-in motion . . . bringing opposites together in the spin" (621). The plane Pirate flies is "painted Kelly green"—"gray was for war" (620); the green countryside renews the land even after “the Great Dying”; the wind is the great joiner of opposites. The most striking instances of unbounded space are experienced by Slothrop. Shortly after he escapes the raid of the village for whom he has functioned as Plechazunga—the Pig Hero—and as such renewed the village for another year, Slothrop meets Freida, Franz Pokler’s pig. Freida leads him through a pastoral countryside to a "wooded stretch" where they sleep amid “a whole forest of Christmas trees” decorated with "shreds of tinfoil" like "tinsel rippling in the wind" (575). Slothrop begins to experience the miraculous in the mountains of Central Europe where he wanders
at the end of the war. Awakened by Pirate’s Kelly green plane in 1945, Slothrop finds his old Horner, lost in 1939 down a toilet in the Roseland Ballroom in Boston, Massachusetts. Baskets of food are left for him, and in a startling scene, he merges with unbounded nature and the “primal dream.” He lets his hair and beard grow and “likes to spend whole days naked, ants crawling up his legs, butterflies lighting on his shoulders, watching the life on the mountain, getting to know shrikes and capercaillie, badgers, and marmots” (623).

In V. and Gravity’s Rainbow unbounded spaces seem to emerge either in response to or in spite of human beings’ inhuman attempts to demarcate and possess the land. In Mason & Dixon the spaces Mason and Dixon encounter essentially are uncharted: they are the agents of its charting. However, their efforts meet with constant resistance which seems to come from the earth itself. They first encounter such resistance below the equator. Near the coast of South Africa Mason and Dixon find themselves on the island of St. Helena which seems to have defied all mapping attempts. (See Appendix A, p. 356 and Maps 12 and 12A, p. 371). On the island, their experience is instead “reduced to geometry and optical illusion” (106) and dominated by the “Brutal Pulse” of the Ocean which they “hear . . . everywhere” (107). The “Windward Side” of the island, Maskelyne tells them—believing the island to be “a conscious creature” (128)—has had an “Effect” upon his “Nerves. Causing me to imagine things” (161). There Mason begins to feel isolated from the Age of Reason; there, Rebekah begins to haunt him; there, because of their nocturnal star-gazing activities, the sun becomes less important than the Darkness in “the Astrology of the island” (107). Their experiences on the island, however, are merely a prelude to their encounter with the great unbounded spaces of America where they are sent “[t]o mark the Earth with geometric scars” (257). During their journey into the West, they encounter a variety of people who believe, as Maskelyne did of the island, that the Earth is a living being who resists attempts to contain it by charting it with unnatural boundary lines. During their journey into the West they meet a man from the East, a Chinese fabulator named Zhang, who believes like Maskelyne that the “Earth . . . is a Body . . . [a]
living Creature" (602). A similar notion espoused by Stig is the Hollow Earth Theory which holds that the Earth is like a human body with "an outer and an inner surface" (602), a "great dark cavity" the entrance to which is at the North pole and "Funnel-shap'd, leading inside the Earth . . . to another world" (603). They also meet the "possibly unstable Captain Shelby" (597), a Surveyor like Dixon, who remarks that America is "pure space . . . no previous Lines, no fences, no streets to constrain" where "properties may possess hundreds of sides,--their angles pushing outward and inward" (586).

However, the farther westward they go in charting their line, the more animated the Earth becomes. (See Appendix A, p. 357 and Map 15, p. 374). In their "last spring out" they cross "the Summit of the Alleghenies," the Continental Divide from which point "the water flows west" (635), and they hear the "great fluvial Whisper" (634). In October, they reach the Indian's Great Warrior Path which runs north and south and marks the western boundary beyond which their line may not extend. The Path is settled by Indians on both sides in order to protect it. At this point the "Westering" "gets" them. "Forest life" presents a mystery to them" (675), and "they both dream of going on, unhinder'd" (677). Finally they are almost seduced by the very unbounded space they have been charged to chart:

they travel thro' the Night, trans-Terminal America whirling by, smelling of wildflowers and Silt, and immediate Lobes of Honeysuckle-scent apt to ambush the unwary Nose, amid moonlight, owls, smears of nocturnal Color somewhere off-center in the Field of Vision,--they make it to the great River just at Dawn,--the Rush of the Water loud as the Sea,--stunn'd by the beauty of it they forget, they linger, they over-stay all practickal Time . . . .

(680)

Tempted by the "Terrestrial Knowledge" (683) that beckons them, they give in to Reason and "Retreat Eastward" (684), never "quite able to make out" or bind the "Engine" that keeps unbounded nature cycling.
The Apollonian will to power drives the masculine novels, dictates the circumstances that shape the lives of the novels’ characters, and threatens to annihilate their individuality and their personal lives. Even so, the Dionysians are not absent and function as representatives of the opposite extreme, a contrapuntal impulse that undermines and subverts the will to power which dominates all three novels. In V., the obvious Dionysians represent one of the extreme alternatives available to the young generations of characters who find themselves at the century’s “crossroads” in 1956. Benny Profane and the Whole Sick Crew lead similar vacuous existences. Profane prides himself on the total lack of direction in his life and depends on the whims of circumstance and others to move him through time and space. In spite of his chaotic existence, he does encounter coincidences that border on the miraculous, but, dedicated to his schlemilhood, he refuses to be transformed; he refuses to learn “a goddamn thing” from his Dionysian escapades. The Whole sick Crew is even more vacuous than Profane. They adopt a pattern in New York City—“bohemian, creative, arty”—except that they represent “Romanticism in its furthest decadence” with “no knowledge of life, and at the mercy of Fortune” (56-57). They bring no one to spiritual awareness nor do they achieve it themselves.

Being set in England, France, and Germany during the last days of World War II, Gravity’s Rainbow is so driven by the will to power and by the extreme efforts of characters like Pointsman and Blicero to annihilate individuality and innocence that little space seems to exist for Dionysian revelers. However, they do persist in spite of the Forces Pointsman and Blicero represent. Like the Dionysians in the feminine novels, the Dionysians in Gravity’s Rainbow facilitate the redemptive efforts of the Orphean Slothrop who, at first glance—like Zoyd in Vineland—seems to be a Dionysian himself. Pirate Prentice is the dominant Dionysian figure in Gravity’s Rainbow and ironically the novel opens inside his dream of an Evacuation which begins and ends with a “screaming” that “comes across the sky” (3). However, the dream may have well just been someone else’s since Pirate’s “strange talent” is for “getting insider the fantasies of others” (12). The
“spectacle” of his dream—The Evacuation—is “all theatre” (3), a feature that immediately connects him to the theatrical aspect of Dionysian ritual. Also, Prentice awakes amid his passed-out reveler-comrades who include Dionysians Teddy Bloat and Osbie Feel. Pirate immerses himself in his “bananery” that grows in a “hothouse” atop his London flat and begins to prepare his famous “Banana Breakfast” as a counter measure against the rockets falling around his London apartment. In the middle of death and dying, in the middle of one of Europe’s most populous cities, Pirate has found a way to connect himself with the Dionysian secrets of nature’s renewal. The “banana fragrance” from Pirate’s concoctions acts as a “conjuror’s secret,” “a spell against falling objects” (10)—rockets—and against death. Pirate’s Dionysian activities much later in the novel serve to awaken Slothrop to his own redemptive role. At the beginning of Part IV, Pirate’s “more or less hijacked P-47 en route to Berlin . . . sounding like a kazoo” (619) is what awakens Slothrop who arises, “moseys down the trail to a mountain stream” (622), retrieves his recently found harmonica “he’s left . . . to soak all night in a mountain stream” (622), and assumes his Orphian role as harpsman.

Dixon, the Dionysian in Mason & Dixon, both represents an alternative to the Newtonian ideals of the Royal Society and participates in the Society’s endeavors. Dixon is hired by the Royal Society to observe two Transits of Venus and to chart the Line designed to settle a boundary dispute between two of England’s colonies, Pennsylvania and Maryland. He is a Dionysian who functions within the system. He is an outsider, a Quaker who, unlike Mason, has no ambitions to be a Royal Society member. His gaudy attire—“red coat . . . matching red three-corner’d Hat”—make him “the first to catch the average Eye” (16). He is a rollicking, fun-loving, bodice-ripper whose escapades often astound Mason. As a Surveyor of the land he is tied, like Dionysus, to terrestrial concerns. Eventually, Dixon becomes a Hollow Earth Enthusiast, a theory which he defends “like a tree-ful of ravens” (603) to Mason, and he remains an Enthusiast until his dying day. The Earth, he tells Mason, is like the human body, with an outer and an inner surface. At their
last meeting Dixon tells Mason about his amazing and miraculous “Transit” to the “North Magnetick Pole” at the beckoning of a strange visitor who reminded Dixon of Stig.

“[S]omewhere between eighty and ninety degrees North,” Dixon tells Mason, “the Earth’s Surface, all ‘round the Parallel began to curve sharply inward”’ (739). Then, in great detail, Dixon describes his journey into “Terra Concava” where he learns of miraculous “Tellurick Forces” of which Magnetism is only one. “The Wines,” he tells Mason, “are as austere as anyone can imagine” (741). Frenzied bodice-ripping escapades, Tellurick Forces, wine: Dionysian attributes all. Dixon’s “Transit” brings him to a recognition that the senses and the body (including the body of the Earth that humans observe and measure and chart) grow “less and less trustworthy till at last they are no more” (742). Such a recognition leads Dixon to a kind of spiritual enlightenment that other dimensions of existence beyond the rational are not only possible but probable as part of a “Global Scheme!” (669) he suspected all along. And he brings Mason close to such a recognition as well.

Finally a minor but memorable Dionysian weaves his way through all three of the masculine novels. Pig Bodine’s first appearance is in an early short story, “Low-Lands.” “Looking like an ape in a naval uniform, squat and leering” (SL 60), Pig Bodine is the quintessential Dionysian. In “Low-Lands,” Pig’s Dionysian behavior is responsible for the Orphic descent of the story’s main character, Dennis Flange. When Pig shows up at Flange’s doorstep after having been AWOL for nine days and having stolen “a .51 MG,” Flange, Pig, and Flange’s garbage-man drinking partner Rocco are kicked out of the house by Flange’s wife who has never forgiven Pig for hijacking Flange the night before their wedding and taking him on a two-week drunk. Pig accompanies Flange to the garbage dump where Flange tells “sea stories” and, at Pig’s recommendation, Flange makes his Orphic descent through a “network of tunnels” deep within the landfill after his Eurydice, Nerissa, a three and a half foot tall gypsy girl. Pig reappears in V. at the Sailor’s Grave where Profane, his former shipmate, and Paola meet. “[A]s voyeur,” Pig watches the
chaos and “carnage” of Mrs. Buffo’s “Suck Hour” where beer on tap gushes from rubber breasts. Pig attends, develops a “letch for Paola”—recognizes perhaps her value—but does not get involved. The only time he gives direction to any character occurs toward the end of the novel when he meets Herbert Stencil and Profane in Washington just before the two of them leave for Malta with Paola: Pig warns Profane that “Stencil is a fake” (418), a warning that has no effect on Profane. Toward the end of Gravity’s Rainbow Pig’s Dionysian role enables him to “save” Roger Mexico from being symbolically “roasted” at a dinner party given by “Them”—the Force, the power structure—and shortly thereafter facilitate Slothrop’s dispersal and transformation into the Counterforce’s spiritual leader.

In order to “save” Roger, Pig attends the party in a “paint-blue” “Zoot suit of unbelievable proportions”—a “subversive garment, all right” (710). Just as Roger is about to become the victim of a surprise roast at the “intimate informal party,” Pig and Roger join in disgusting remarks about the food being served at the dinner, remarks aimed at Them, the Force, which results in “overt Nausea” and “spasms of yellow bile” (717) and thwarts Their plans to nab Roger. The incident involving Roger, however, is merely a foreshadowing of his role in “saving” Slothrop and facilitating Slothrop’s transformation into a spiritual leader for the Counterforce which organizes in order to actively oppose the Forces of death and the fear of death with death’s alternative—belief in continued spiritual existence. At the novel’s end, Seaman Bodine is “one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature” (740). At one of their last meetings, Pig gives Slothrop a T-shirt soaked with John Dillinger’s blood when Dillinger was shot in front of the Biograph theatre in Chicago. To Pig, Dillinger is a symbol of subversion against the Apollonian Power Structure and the blood-soaked T-shirt a symbol of “grace to keep it going” (741). This—“grace to keep it [the subversion] going”—Pig believes to be Slothrop’s mission.

Afterwards, Pig begins “to let Slothrop go” (741). With his Dionysian understanding, Pig facilitates the dispersal of Slothrop into “fragments” and recognizes that they “have grown into consistent personae of their own” (741). Seaman Bodine, or at least his ancestor,
Fender Bodine, reappears at a brief but important moment in *Mason & Dixon* and assumes his Dionysian role as facilitator of transforming experiences. As a Dionysian representative, he becomes a participant in the “Ritual of the Crossing Over,” a ritual of initiation for first timers crossing the Equator. The Ritual, Rev’d Cherrycoke explains to the children, is a “Grand Event, prepared for weeks in advance” (55) in which the “Pollywogs”—namely, Mason and Dixon—will participate when they cross the equator en route to South Africa for observation of their first “Transit.” The ritual involves the members of the crew taking the parts of “King Neptune and his Mermaid Queen, and their Court, and the Royal Baby.” As the line is crossed, the “pollywogs must crawl to the Royal Baby,” played traditionally by Fender Bodine “whose Paunch, oozing in Equatorial Sweat” will be “most nauseating for a Pollywog to crawl to and kiss” as part of their “Schedule of Humiliation” (56). The importance of the Crossing, Rev’d Cherrycoke explains, and the humiliation of kissing the Royal Baby are “Tolls exacted for passage thro’ the Gate of the single shadowless Moment, and into the South, with a newly constellated Sky, and all-unforseen ways of living and dying” (56). Pig, the pervasive Dionysian in the masculine novels, is a facilitator of transitions, of Orphean descents, of the possibility of transformation from one sphere of experience to another.

The Feminine Novels: Historical Time, Charted Space, and the Will to Power

Even though the time frames for *Crying* and *Vineland* are in some ways more generalized than those specific historical dates and events that structure the masculine novels, the historical settings are not unimportant in the feminine novels. The sixties with their emphasis on sex, drugs, rock and roll, and child-like idealism is an important historical reference point for both novels. In *Crying*, the specific historical dates involve the Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly which seems to have been organized, Cohen the philatelist tells Oedipa, around 1290. From various clues and various sources, Oedipa is able to “fit together” an “account of how the organization began” dating from 1577 and the Protestant struggle led by William of Orange against the Catholics. The clues Oedipa
discovers indicate that the Taxis monopoly changed hands, included family squabbles that bordered on guerrilla warfare and disinheritance, underwent an unofficial period from 1628 to 1650 in which the wife of a Thurn and Taxis count took over as postmaster, emerged as a subversive postal service that was transplanted to America in the 1850's, became a rival of the Pony Express and Wells, Fargo mail systems, and survived to the 1960's in California, still a subversive means of communication. This fusion of historical dates and fictional speculation is more obvious in the feminine novels than in the masculine. The dates associated with the European Thurn and Taxis monopoly seem accurate; that the monopoly crossed the Atlantic to America, pure speculation. Moreover, verification of various incidents both real and imagined associated with the Thurn and Taxis family is searched for by Oedipa and sometimes substantiated by multiple versions, footnotes, and addendums (often dated) of the fictional text, The Courier's Tragedy, whose fictional author Richard Wharfinger is associated with real seventeenth revenge tragedians, Ford, Webster, and Turner and books published by actual presses. Dates are authenticated as well by various stamps, "that were almost Kosher-looking, but not quite" (174) about which philatelist Gengis Cohen tells her.10

In contrast to the multiplicity of references to dates of minor historical events encompassing a three-hundred year span, with particular focus on the seventeenth century Age of Reason identified in Crying, a single date structures the events and shapes the personal lives of the characters in Vineland. 1984 is the year; Reagan "Repression" the atmosphere. The characters, mostly children of the sixties, find themselves grown up with children of their own and living in a world they had learned in the sixties to fear; most of them feel victimized and experience great difficulty trying to cope. Some, of course, like Frenesi, have sold out to the system. Others--Zoyd, DL, and a number of the Thanatoids--have managed to hold fast to a few of their ideals. Behind the surface activities of the characters in 1984 is the idealism of the sixties, an idealism which Brock Vond, Hector, and other representatives of the repressive Reagan administration wish to obliterate even as
they attempt to obliterate the marijuana fields in California with their persistent burnings. The date, 1984, however, does exist in the novel as both an historical referent and a literary one. Reagan is President and his conservative policies attempt to control the private lives of the characters: with his uniform, Brock Vond seduces then possesses Frenesi; Hector, the DEA agent, stalks Zoyd and Prairie; the “Reaganomic ax blades” in fact “ax” Frenesi and Flash from both the Federal and Bank computers; the “political family” attempts to replace the natural family. This phenomena is referenced by the extreme version of these tendencies as envisioned by George Orwell’s fictional vision of 1984 in his novel of that name: the existence of a great totalitarian state in which all family ties, all individuality, and all human emotions are annihilated and the only allegiance and love is for Big Brother and the State.

Though most events in Crying and Vineland take place in uncharted and mythologized landscapes, the generalized settings for both novels do exist on maps. The primary events of both novels are set in Northern California with the city of San Francisco common to both novels. In Crying, however, mappable San Francisco and even some of its landmarks exist as a framework within which mythologized pockets of uncharted space and time exist. Oedip’s descent, the dark night of her soul, occurs as she traverses the streets of San Francisco. There she encounters a proliferation of Post Horn symbols. In Golden Gate Park, she comes upon “a circle of children in their nightclothes, who . . . were dreaming the gathering . . . warming their hands at an invisible fire” (118-19) as they play a game which includes references to Trystero and the post horn. More importantly, within San Francisco she comes to a space in a doorway containing a mattress on which a grief-stricken old man ill with D.T.’s lies smoking and crying for his lost wife who lives—lived—in Fresno. The mattress itself is not bound by space or time; it is “the memory bank to a computer of the lost” (126) containing “vestiges of every nightmare sweat, helpless overflowing bladder, viciously, fearfully consummated wet dreams” (126)—a container for vital bodily functions—and thereupon Oedip selflessly takes “the man in her arms,
actually [holds] him," comforts him in his sorrow. He has a post horn tattooed on his hand and a letter for the W.A.S.T.E. depository beneath the freeway. When Oedipa crosses the Oakland Bay Bridge in pursuit of a mysterious mail carrier with letters from the W.A.S.T.E. can, the "landscape lost all variety" (130). When she ends up back at her hotel, another unbounded space, she enters a party of deaf-mutes one of whom "waltzed [her] round and round" to "some unthinkable order of music; many rhythms all keys at once" (130) without collision, music which to Oedipa remains unheard. Another landmark of San Francisco, the Golden Gate Bridge, likewise becomes a conduit to uncharted space in Vineland. "Crossing the Golden Gate Bridge represents a transition, in the metaphysics of the region" (314); this is the region, uncharted, in which Zoyd chooses to raise Prairie; it is a region pervaded by "the smell of redwood trees" with which Prairie as a baby communes, "as if this were a return for her to a world behind the world" (315) of "invisible boundaries," of "redwoods alive forever." One is called upon "to attend to territories of the spirit" (317) in Vineland. The mappable in Vineland, especially San Francisco, represents charted space with uncharted Vineland at its periphery, Vineland's "sea coast, forest, riverbanks, and bay . . . not much different from what early visitors in Spanish and Russian ships had seen" (317). Vineland is just one of the worlds behind the world, and bridges, in Vineland, connect them.

Those who represent the Apollonian Will to Power in the feminine novels attempt to subdue the individual will and exert absolute control over the activities and emotions of others much as they do in the masculine novels; however, in the feminine novels these also provide the impetus for the Orpheus and Eurydice figures in each novel to search for ways to circumvent such control and to discover an alternative to the exitless world they represent. The driving force of Oedipa's quest is Pierce Inverarity whose will to power over Oedipa reaches her from beyond the grave by his naming her executrix of his will. Even his name, Pierce Inverarity, suggests the process of discovery: Oedipa is to "pierce" the "not truth" to discover the "rarity" of existence. The process begins in the mythical San
Narciso where Pierce’s Yoyodyne plant is the city’s “big source of employment” (25). The plant itself is a fortress representative of the aerospace industry: “miles of fence topped with barbed wire and interrupted . . . by guard towers,” its entrance flanked by “two sixty foot missiles on either side” (25), an emblem of the tower constructed by the Apollonian will to power that Oedipa initially dreams of escaping. The city itself is the place Pierce had “begun his land speculating in ten years ago” (24), and looking at it from a vantage point above the city, the “vast sprawl of houses” looked “like a well-tended crop”—Pierce’s harvest—that had grown “from the brown earth.” However, from Oedipa’s vantage point, the city also looked like the circuitry of a transistor radio. Even at the beginning of her quest and spurred on by Pierce’s will, Oedipa detects “a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning,” the sense that “a revelation . . . trembled just past the threshold of her understanding” (24). Later she will wonder if Pierce had devised a plot “too elaborate for the dark Angel to hold at once,” if he had “beaten death” (179) by perpetuating “some headlong expansion of himself” through “his need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new skyline, personal antagonisms, growth rates into being” (178) which Oedipa fears may be not only Pierce’s legacy but America’s. Pierce’s will, his legacy and threat of control, is exactly what motivates Oedipa to search for clues and connections to other possibilities for existence apart from those Pierce represents, what causes her to confront Cohen whom she suspects is “in on something”—a conspiracy perhaps with the deceased Pierce—and to invade the sanctuary of men like Pierce in the closed auction room where Loren Passerine, auctioneer-priest of the gathering, will “cry” the sale of Pierce’s stamp collection, and where Oedipa hopes to confront the “mysterious stranger” who wishes to buy it.

Similarly in Vineland Brock Vond is the force that drives the main Orphean and Eurydice figures into action: Zoyd, Frenesi, and their daughter Prairie. Brock Vond is the very emblem of anti-radical government forces which sought to disperse the subversive group, the People’s Republic of Rock and Roll, from the conservative College of the Surf
(surely a parody of Pepperdine) in the sixties, to burn the marijuana fields, and finally to demoralize and dehumanize the hangers-on to the idealism of the sixties in an effort to annihilate any views that oppose the conservative stance of 1984 which was dominated by Reaganomics. Brock Vond is the very personification of power with his uniform, penis, gun, and camera, all of which he uses as weapons. With these he seduces Frenesi to “sell out” to his side by implementing and filming the death of Weed, the leader of the subversive group and also Frenesi’s lover. Even though Frenesi attempts to escape Vond’s influence, she is too weak and indecisive to do so. These factors in turn eventually motivate Zoyd, who loves Frenesi in spite of all her shortcomings, and their daughter Prairie to pursue her in an effort to reunite the family. Their pursuits and final reunion at the Becker-Traverse “Wingding” in Vineland result in changes of perspective for both Zoyd and Prairie, especially when Brock is expelled from Vineland at the end of the novel.

Brock is a separator of families and an advocate of the “political family”; he is an emblem of Death for the individual will; he is the invader of Vineland, the Good. All of his attempts to exert control over others in the name of the Reagan Administration and to perpetuate the idea of death as an end—it is impossible to “control a population that knows it’ll never die” (314)—are purged in Vineland. The “adult fantasy”—that love wins out over death—is what the People’s Republic of Rock and Roll believed in the sixties, what Zoyd and DL (not Frenesi) continue to believe in the eighties, and what Prairie begins to suspect as she moves toward womanhood in the nineties. The belief in this fantasy enables them to oppose Brock Vond and to escape, sometimes narrowly, coming under his control.
Notes

1 Both James Carse in *Finite and Infinite Games* and Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* articulate this idea. Carse suggests that human beings mistakenly attempt to speak as “supernatural intelligences and power, masters of the forces of nature” but in doing so “read into nature” what they want to discover (101-2). He also asserts that “we control nature for societal reasons” and that our attempts to “exercise power over nature” in actuality “masks our desire for power over each other” (117). Kuhn reinforces this idea by asserting that the scientific community attempts to perpetuate its position of authority and the authority of its “paradigm” by circular means: it rewrites scientific textbooks and educates its student followers in order to perpetuate its world view and equates science with “progress.” By establishing its members as “sole possessors of the rules of the game” (168), the scientific community maintains its position of control.

2 Mason and Dixon were engaged to settle a boundary dispute between Maryland and Pennsylvania. The survey was begun in 1763 and extended 244 miles west from the Delaware River in latitude 39°43’ and lacked only 36 miles of completion when their survey party was stopped by Indian Opposition in November 1767 (Romeo 1). The Mason and Dixon journals give a daily account of their survey which began on November 5, 1763 and the journals end in September 1768 when they departed for England. They began by determining the latitude of the northern line at its terminus near Newcastle. They then located the midpoint of the transpeninsular line and ran the north-south line between it and the eastern terminus of the northern line. They surveyed the northern line westward for 230 miles until they were stopped by Indians and permitted to go no farther. (Papenfuse and Coale III 40-41).

3 According to the *Mary Knoll Catholic Dictionary*, the “Christmas Cycle” is the liturgical period that begins the First Sunday of Advent and extends through the Saturday after the last Sunday of Epiphany. It has four “subcycles”: 1) Advent, a time of preparation; 2) Christmas, a time of celebration; 3) Epiphany, a time of thanksgiving; 4) Time after Epiphany (127). Christmas, according to Catholic tradition, celebrates the birth of God into the world in the Person of Christ, the birth of Jesus the Son of Mary who assumed a “weak nature” in order that “mankind might not be blinded by His splendor,” and the day of “potential birth for all men” (120).

4 Ranier Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* were begun at Duino Castle where Rilke was a guest of Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe during the winter of 1911-12 (Mitchell 549-50). They are dedicated to her in gratitude, and Rilke wrote numerous letters to her some of which are excerpted by Stephen Mitchell in his “Notes” at the end of *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Marie Rilke*. Pynchon’s use of the Thurn and Taxis family name and legacy is another indication of the influence Rilke’s poetry, especially the *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, had on his novels.

The Thurn und Taxis postal monopoly is factual. Convinced that he needed an effective communication system in order to govern the expanding Habsburg lands, Emperor Frederick III of Germany offered a communication monopoly to the Thurn und Taxis family in the 1490s. For the next three centuries Thurn und Taxis “held a monopoly over imperial communications and post between Vienna and the far flung Habsburg possessions that formed the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.” The family achieved nobility in 1512, were made Barons of the Empire in 1608 and Counts in 1624.
The family used a horse relay system that allowed for "uninterrupted travel from one European capital to another" (Beèche 1-5).

5 Remedios Varo (1908-1963) was born in Spain where she became associated with the Surrealists early in her artistic career. During World War II she fled to Mexico and there developed her unique artistic style which demonstrates a duality in which "the spiritual is intertwined with the scientific" as though she were attempting "to find the common ground between the metaphysical and the machine." The "autobiographical triptych," especially the central panel that Pynchon's describes in The Crying of Lot 49, depicts "Varo's escape from the confines of the convent . . . as a magical awakening and rebirth." However, according to P. DeBauche, even though "spiritual transcendence" permeated her work, Varo was never able to satisfactorily resolve the "struggle for spiritual transformation in the face of scientific uncertainty" (1-5).

6 Vineland (or Vinland) is the name given to the southmost of three North American coastal areas settled by the Vikings c. AD 998-1002 as a last phase of westward expansion from Norway and Denmark across the Atlantic. Evidence of Norse contacts and settlements in North America come from several Icelandic Sagas and archeological findings. The sagas suggest that Vineland was rich in grapes, timber, and wheat; archeological findings locate the Norse settlement in Newfoundland ("Vikings" 1-2).

7 The idea of the endless repetition mentioned by Metzger has several mythological and scientific implications. Mythologically is suggests the Eternal Return that Eliade so aptly describes in Cosmos and History: The Eternal Return, an idea frequently in Pynchon's novels. The idea of endless repetition has several scientific counterparts as well. At the classical level it is suggested in bifurcation diagrams for chemical reactions. Far from equilibrium, numerous "crisis points" occur and beyond these, organized behavior sometimes occurs rather than entropy proving that "spontaneous creation of order is not forbidden by thermodynamics" (Coveney and Hightower 164-69). Similar spatial repetitions are seen in the "fractals" described by Benoit Mandelbrot to describe "the peculiar geometry of irregular shapes which look the same on all scales of length . . . ad infinitum" (Coveney and Hightower 204) although Mandelbrot did not coin this phrase until 1975. Feedback processes "abound in biology" and can spawn self-organization in 1) temporal organization, corresponding to oscillations 2) spatial organization, corresponding to patterns and 3) a combination of the two (Coveney and Hightower 221). According to Coveney and Hightower cell division is a process involving both "irreversible and cyclic time" (227). The emergence of order from chaos and the paradoxical coexistence of "irreversible and cyclic time" become metaphors in Pynchon's novels for the possibility of spiritual transformation. As a facilitator of Oedipa's search for spontaneity and attentive to exitlessness in this life, Metzger subtly leads Oedipa in this direction. Henri Poincaré proposed a theorem that, given a long enough interval of time, any isolated system, even the universe, will return to its initial state. Poincaré's "eternal return," undermines the "essential notion of time's arrow," and "negates the concept of evolution" according to Coveney and Hightower (65).

8 In 1582 Pope Gregory introduced a reform of the Julian Calendar (Mary Knoll 92). This Calendar was adopted in England in the British Calendar Act of 1751 for the year 1752. On September 2, 1752 eleven days were omitted with the "Day following to be accounted 14 Sept." (British Calendar Act 3). This adoption of the Gregorian Calendar by the British represents the "chronologick wound" that causes many of the characters, especially Mason, great angst in Mason & Dixon.
9 The image Mason conjures up to represent his experience of the eleven missing days is reminiscent of the "Tangent Line" used by Mason and Dixon in their survey of the line. The Problem of the Tangent Line is discussed in Chapter 4 Note 7, p.324.

![Tangent Line to a Circle](image)

**Figure 3.1**
Tangent Line to a Circle

Mason's image of the "eleven missing days" replaces the circle with a vortex.

![Arrow of Time and Eleven Missing Days](image)

**Figure 3.2**
Mason’s Image of Eleven Missing Days

The tangent line problem on which European mathematicians were working in the seventeenth century was one of four major problems which calculus, as introduced by Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz, solved (Larson 105-6).

10 The two stamps Genghis Cohen shows Oedipa as described on pages 95-96 of *Crying* are shown below. Included is Pynchon's description of the two stamps:

"He rolled over to her a small table, and from a plastic folder lifted with tweezers, delicately, a U.S. commemorative stamp, the Pony Express issue of 1940, 3¢ henna brown. Canceled." After Cohen shows Oedipa the watermark on the back of the stamp, he shows her another. "From the same plastic folder he now tweezed what looked like an old German stamp with the figures 1/4 in the centre, the word *Freimark* at the top, and along the right-hand margin the legend *Thurn und Taxis* . . . . Decorating the corner of the stamp, Oedipa saw a horn with a single loop in it. Almost like the WASTE symbol. 'A post horn,' Cohen said; 'the Thurn and Taxis symbol. It was in their coat of arms.'" See Figure 3.3 p. 248.
Figure 3.3
Stamps: 3¢ Pony Express Issue 1940
and
German Stamp with Thurn und Taxis Post Horn Symbol
("Trystero 5" 1)
CHAPTER 4

The Golden Mean in Pynchon’s Later Novels

Pynchon’s alternating masculine with feminine novels in his oeuvre to date emphasizes the dominance of extremes which are far easier to detect under any circumstances than is the Golden Mean: extremes often seem to exist without any mediating component; the excesses and deficiencies inherent in the extremes demand attention. Pynchon’s metaphorical scheme acknowledges this assumption made centuries ago by Aristotle. However, similar to Aristotle’s emphasis on attainment of the median as a means to virtuous behavior, Pynchon’s scheme insists on the Golden Mean as a conduit to a spiritual dimension of existence which can free human beings from a time-and-space-bound world in which physical death signifies entropy and annihilation of the individual. However, as is evident in “Under the Rose” and V. from which Pynchon’s metaphor of extremes and means emerges, discovery of and participation in the Golden Mean—though available to all Pynchon’s characters—is achieved by only a few and only, according to McClintock Sphere, by “slow, frustrating . . . hard work” (V. 365). Only those Orpheus and Eurydice characters who, in Rilke’s words, are “open” and receptive to the “Superabundant being” (Elegies VIII and IX) equated with the Golden Mean in Pynchon’s scheme are able to transcend the physical boundaries and limitations to achieve a spiritual dimension of existence.

These aspects of Pynchon’s Great Metaphor are apparent in all five novels. The Golden Mean is metaphorically equated with certain “quantum spaces” which are experienced by characters who exhibit Orphean and/or Eurydice affinities, characters who are open to and receivers of the mysterious uncertainties and complementarities inherent in these spaces. These characters often encounter intrusions of another world into this one in uncharted natural spaces or marginalized natural phenomena, in theatrical or linguistic spaces, or in certain “underground” journeys which are dark and dangerous but which lead to spiritual enlightenment. These attributes of the Golden Mean and the process of its
attainment were initially delineated in \( V \) to which Chapter 2 is devoted. The basic metaphor of the Golden Mean and its attainment continues in Pynchon’s later four novels. However, even as the extremes are modified in these later novels, the Golden Mean undergoes a number of permutations which will be the concern of this chapter. The most noticeable of these occur in the continuously more profound impacts encountered by characters who have experiences within quantum spaces and in the increased blurring of Orpheus-Eurydice roles assumed by various masculine and feminine characters. These characters, like their precursors—Porpentine and Victoria Wren in “Under the Rose,” Sidney Stencil, Fausto Maijstral, V., and Paola in \( V \)—initially perceive the existence of the “world behind [or beneath] the world” in pockets of uncharted natural space or in marginalized natural phenomena they encounter, often quite by accident, as they navigate their ways through delineated time and space; they often discover the same hidden world in theatrical experience or in space linguistically evoked; and they must descend beneath the surface level of experience to encounter that which is neither causal nor rational and lose their focus on self in order to restore their sense of humanity. Pynchon’s pervading metaphor for the “space” in which “the world behind the world” is encountered is quantum physics: it represents the Golden Mean between the essence—that unseen and mysterious animating force—and the world of the senses so neatly explained by Newtonian physics. In the Pynchonesque scheme, quantum physics has attributes of both scientific investigation and religious belief, has its roots in the physical as well as the metaphysical, and serves as an appropriate metaphor for that which is central to Pynchon’s metaphysical fiction: the Aristotelian median, the Golden Mean, the middle way which not only enables ethical behavior in the physical world but which may provide human beings thirsty for a higher order, a conduit to a spiritual level of existence.

*The Crying of Lot 49* (1965)

Oedipa’s first experience with another dimension of existence occurs “in her first minute of San Narciso”—an uncharted space with a mythological name—as she looks down
on the "vast sprawl of houses" from a "high angle" before she enters the city. "Smog hung all around the horizon, the sun on the bright beige countryside was painful; she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant." There she has a "sense of concealed meaning" and feels that "a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding" (24). The experience begins to nudge her from an existence that heretofore had been marked by "the absence of an intensity" (20) Oedipa had failed to recognize. She dismisses this experience as she later dismisses the "circle of children in their night clothes" she encounters in Golden Gate Park. The children tell her they are "dreaming the gathering" and that their dream is really "no different than being awake." Oedipa, realizing that "the night was empty of all terror for them, they had inside their circle an imaginary fire, and needed nothing but their own unpenetrated sense of community" (118), retaliates by refusing to believe in them. Oedipa's initial inklings that another dimension exists occur in natural settings that are marginalized by her perspective--on a hill high above San Narciso--or by what she perceives--a circle of children in the middle of a night "dreaming the gathering"--but cannot penetrate.

The theatrical experience in Crying, another metaphor for quantum space, serves to reinforce Oedipa's notion that a "revelation [is] in progress all around her" (24). This reinforcement initially occurs when she watches the movie Cashiered on television with Metzger in the motel room at Echo Courts where the question of the evening becomes for the trio of characters in the movie, "Are they going to get out of it, or not?" (34)--the key question of Oedipa's quest. This prepares Oedipa to be "sucked into the landscape" (60) of The Courier's Tragedy she attends presented by the Tank Players of San Narciso. The play, a seventeenth century Revenge Tragedy, ambiguously references "Trystero" at the end of the fourth act. What captivates Oedipa is the "peculiar . . . ambiguity [that] begins to creep in among the words" as "a new mode of expression takes over . . . a kind of ritual reluctance. Certain things . . . will not be spoken aloud; certain events will not be shown onstage" (71). To complicate matters, Driblette insists that the play is more than "words,"
and that he, as director, gives the words “life,” gives “the spirit flesh” (79). The theatrical experience in *Crying* occurs within a quantum space: within this space more is suggested than can be defined. From her first theatrical encounter, Oedipa becomes obsessed with the language of the play in spite of Driblette’s warnings about “words,” and she believes if she can find the “true text” of the play she will also find the definitive Trystero. She does not yet understand what Driblette tries from the shower to tell her and of which she has already received an indication in the play: that meaning is ultimately unutterable. Such understanding requires a descent into the Underworld, the world behind or beneath surface level experience, and a direct encounter with that which lacks causality or rational explanation.

Oedipa’s descent is into San Francisco and what proves to be the dark night of her soul. “Amid rush hour traffic and “looking down at San Francisco . . . from the high point of the [Bay] Bridge’s arc” (108), she sees smog which she attributes to “the angle of the sun” (108). Poised there before her descent into the city, Oedipa believes she is “faced with a metaphor of God knew how many parts . . . coincidences blossoming . . . nothing but a sound, a word, Trystero, to hold them together” (109). Trystero is, in a sense, a “metaphor of God” or that which holds the parts, the coincidences together and, like her namesake Oedipus, Oedipa descends with the hope that “there still might be a chance of getting the whole thing to go away and disintegrate quietly” (109). Toward that end, she decides to “drift tonight . . . and watch nothing happen” (109). However, like her namesake, she discovers evidence of coincidences and of Trystero’s existence everywhere: a proliferation of posthorns on gang jackets, bus and shop windows, badges, chalk drawings; graffiti with the initials WASTE (We Await Silent Trystero’s Empire) and DEATH (Don’t Ever Antagonize the Horn). As “voyeur and listener” Oedipa has “safe passage” through the night; “nothing of the night’s could touch her” (117). At the end of her journey, she is convinced that “there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world” (125) from which she feels alienated. She begins to experience it when she
selflessly befriends “an old man huddled, shaking with grief she couldn’t hear” (125) with a faded post-horn tattoo on the back of his left hand. Imagining him and the soiled mattress “Like a memory bank to a computer of the lost” upon which he sleeps engulfed in some future flames,

She was overcome all at once by the need to touch him . . . [and] hardly knowing what she was doing, she came the last three steps and sat, took the man in her arms, actually held him, gazing out of her smudged eyes down the stairs, back into the morning (126).

Later “[s]he knew, because she had held him, that he suffered DT’s” and that “[b]ehind the initials was a metaphor” (128), that “‘dt,’ God help this old tattooed man, meant also a time differential, a vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last for what it was” (129). Because of her dark and dangerous journey and her selfless act of kindness toward the old tattooed man, Oedipa, her humanity restored, emerges prepared to encounter “anarchist miracles,” prepared to penetrate the auction room filled with the “pale, cruel faces” of the black-clad men, prepared to confront “the bidder” when he “revealed himself” (183).

In spite of the similarities she shares with her ancient namesake Oedipus, Oedipa is most definitely a Eurydice figure with an Oedipal curiosity. Oedipa’s curiosity is aroused when Pierce Inverarity, one of her former lovers and wielder of the Apollonian will to power, summons her from the World of the Dead to become “the executrix of his Will.” Until that time Oedipa had remained buffered, insulated “as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus” and had “conned herself into . . . the . . . Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically [a] prisoner” (20). This image of her as a captive maiden in a tower is connected to the central painting in a triptych by Remedios Varo entitled “Bordando el Manto Terrestre” (see Appendix B, p. 376) which depicts a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces . . . prisoners in the top room of a circular tower embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit
The captive maiden waiting for some man to help her—Rapunzel, heart-shaped maiden, or Eurydice—escape from her prison, Oedipa "was to have all manner of revelations" (20). One of the most fundamental of these is her realization "that her tower . . . is like her ego" and to "examine this formless magic" that keeps her there, "to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition" (21-22), a revelation that seems like a quantum description of what holds together the material world. The Trystero system, she soon discovers, begins to emerge as a *means* "to bring to an end her encapsulation in the tower" and begins to suggest that "revelation [is] in progress all around her" (44). As a Eurydice figure, Oedipa hopes that some Orpheus will rescue her from that encapsulating tower associated with Death and the exitlessness of existence. Throughout the novel every clue she receives concerning her search for the connecting system, Trystero, comes from a man: Mucho, Metzger, Genghis Cohen, Randolph Driblette, Stanley Kotex, John Nefastis, Mike Fallopian, Professor Bortz, Arnold Snarb, Jesus Arrabal, the old tattooed man, Mr. Troth, and, of course, Pierce Inverarity, her lover from the world of Death. Only two of the male characters emerge as *Orphian* figures: Mucho Mass, Oedipa's husband, and Ralph Driblette, director of and actor in *The Courier's Tragedy*.

Mucho has many Orphian characteristics. He is, after all, Oedipa's husband whom she leaves when summoned from the World of the Dead by Pierce's Will. Mucho, once a reluctant used car salesman, was "too sensitive," too "thin skinned" for the job. What bothered him most was the refuse, the "salad of despair" found in the cars he was forced to clean before he sold. He viewed "each wreck as miraculous" like "death, up till the moment of our own" (14); the sign on the lot, "N.A.D.A.," an abbreviation for the National Automobile Dealer's Association of which the car dealership was a member, to Mucho "said nada, nada, against the blue sky" and gave him nightmares. However,
Mucho escapes the car lot and begins to assume his Orphean role when he becomes a disk jockey. He communicates with Oedipa significantly by sending her a “newsless” letter the envelope of which carried the mysterious “blurb” that read “Report All Obscene Mail to Your Potsmaster” (46). Coupled with the stamp collection Pierce left—“thousands of little colored windows into deep vistas of space and time (45)—and Oedipa’s discovery that Trystero was possibly an alternative system of communication, the blurb suggests that the word “Potsmaster” on Mucho’s envelope might be a meaningful hint to Oedipa early on in her quest that such a communication system not only was in operation but that Mucho had tapped into it. Toward the end of the novel when Oedipa seeks out her psychotherapist, Dr. Hilarious, at his clinic only to discover that he has had a mental breakdown and that she must become his therapist in order to survive, Mucho appears as an on-the-spot reporter covering the shooting episode and the doctor’s arrest. When she accompanies Mucho to the radio station, she discovers from his boss that Mucho, in Orphic fashion, is “losing his identity,” that, according to his boss, when he “enters a staff meeting . . . the room is suddenly full of people” (140). Moreover, Mucho has acquired a heightened sense of hearing that can only partially be attributed to his having taken LSD: he can “break down chords and timbres and words too into all the basic frequencies and harmonies, with all their different loudnesses, and listen to them, each pure tone, but all at once” (142). “[T]he human voice,” he tells Oedipa, “it’s a flipping miracle” (143). Mucho’s ability to tune into “pure sound. Something new” (144) has changed his dreams, eliminated his NADA nightmare. That night when Oedipa kisses “all of them”—all the fragments of Mucho—good-bye, she “could not quite get it into her head that the day she’d left him [Mucho] for San Narciso was the day she’d seen Mucho for the last time. So much of him had already dissipated” (144). Mucho: a supersensitive disk jockey with expertise for the “Spectrum analysis” of music in his head. While he doesn’t rescue her from Pierce’s Will, he does give her clues suggesting that “time is arbitrary,” that all voices are the same voice in the
music of the spheres. Mucho-Orpheus in this scenario has escaped the NADA which still, through Pierce’s Will, encapsulates Oedipa.

As an Orphic character, Mucho contributes to Oedipa’s revelation, redemption, and transformation; Randolph Driblette, director of the Tank Players’ *The Courier’s Tragedy* and another Orphic character, likewise facilitates Oedipa’s passage from Pierce’s world of exitlessness. “Oedipa found herself after five minutes sucked utterly into the landscape of evil” Richard Wharfinger had fashioned for his seventeenth century audiences perhaps because in California in the early sixties, she, like the seventeenth century English folk, was “so preapocalyptic, death-wishful, fatigued, unprepared” (65). When Oedipa first meets Randolph Driblette backstage in his dressing room, he is still dressed as “Gennaro the Winner,” the character he assumed in the play. Soon, however, Orpheus-like he is in the shower and “his body was wreathed in steam, giving his head an eerie, balloon-like buoyancy” (78). As Driblette’s head remains “suspended” in the “shower-steam,” he explains to Oedipa that her search for the “original” text of the play aligns her with the Puritans’ insistence on a literal interpretation of the Bible: “she is ‘‘So hung up with words, words,’’ he tells her; ‘‘I give the spirit flesh’’” (79). Driblette is a master of “ritual reluctance” and faithful “to the invisible field surrounding the play, its spirit” (152). “‘Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn,’” he explains, “‘I gave them life’” (80). When Randy walks into the Pacific in his Gennaro-the-Winner suit, Oedipa feels “a fluttering curtain . . . moving . . . out over the abyss” (152-53). After attending Randy’s burial, she returns “at night to sit on the grave” waiting for “any stubborn quiescence” of him to “scramble up through the earth . . . for the winged brightness [his spirit] to announce its safe arrival” (161-62) and suggest that Driblette somehow survived death.

Feeling that her men, “one by one” are being stripped away, Oedipa finds herself “between the public [phone] booth and the rented car, in the night, her isolation complete” (177). Later in the night she stops “a minute between the steel rails of “stretch of railroad track” (179). Alone with “no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning” (21) to guide
her, she waits "for another set of possibilities . . . for a symmetry of choices to break down." (181). There in the night between the rails, Oedipa feels like she is "walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twined about" (181); Oedipa is experiencing the "excluded middle," the quantum space, the connection between the spirit and the flesh. As a result of her encounters with the Golden Mean, Oedipa--protagonist, Eurydice figure, and curious "busy body"--penetrates the sacred auction room to experience her revelation of "the bidder"--"her target, her enemy, perhaps her proof" of a "secret richness," "a real alternative to the existlessness, to the absence of surprise to life" (170). Oedipa, like her namesake, must make that discovery herself. No Orpheus will rescue her or tell her the answer; "nobody . . . could help her. Nobody in the World" (171). Oedipa's confrontation is completely personal; she has encountered enough clues to convince her that the miraculous, "another world's intrusion into this one," does occur. And, by descending to the Underworld, by experiencing the dark night of her soul, by selflessly befriending the old tattooed man on the mattress, she is prepared for her final encounter in the last quantum space of the novel. The closed auction room becomes the singularity, the delta-t of Oedipa's discovery, the point of intersection between extremes: "transcendent meaning, or only earth" (181), "an accommodation . . . with the Angel of Death, or only death and the daily tedious preparation for it. Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none" (182). Oedipa, the Eurydice figure who has become Death's lover, who is summoned by the will of Death, chooses to admit the possibility of an alternative to death and chooses to assume responsibility for her admission. The novel ends with her poised at the quantum moment, ready to look.

*The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon's second novel and his shortest, is the novel of which he says he seems "to have forgotten most of what I thought I'd learned up till then" (Intro., SL 22). However, in light of his metaphor or extremes and means, Oedipa provides a departure from the very complicated V. and her successor, Paola. Oedipa may represent the feminine principle encapsulated, but her prison is one of her own making,
“the tower . . . is like her ego.” Only when she has completely “lost her bearings” (177), broken down all “barriers” of self, is she prepared to confront the great uncertainty, “another set of possibilities to replace those” (181) she had been conditioned to accept. Oedipa’s character represents a new dimension of the blurring between Orpheus and Eurydice figures in Pynchon’s novels. Oedipa is Eurydice who, at the novel’s beginning, hopes for an Orpheus to rescue her; she is, at the novel’s end, poised at the quantum moment of uncertainty to confront the possibility that the two alternatives she once considered mutually exclusive extremes—physical death and spiritual transcendence—may be two aspects of a larger process.

*Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973)

While *Gravity’s Rainbow* considers the same alternatives, the novel ups the ante in terms of characters who represent various Orpheus figures and their Eurydices. Not only are the novel’s protagonists masculine, the novel is about five times the length of *Crying*. Pynchon’s second masculine and massive novel features dual protagonists who emerge as Orphean and dual anti-protagonists who may be seen as failed Orphean figures. *V.*’s depiction of dual Orphean figures in the characters of Sidney Stencil and Fausto Mijstral find their counterparts in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s much more complex Orpheans, Tyrone Slothrop and Enzian, who have the potential to become victims of war and colonization, the extremes which permeate the novel and overwhelm its characters. Slothrop is an American whose ancestors came from England to colonize the New World; centuries later he finds himself assaulted by the British behaviorist, Ned Pointsman. Slothrop’s dark other, his mirror image, is Enzian, a member of the Herero tribe which was victimized by the Germans in their effort to colonize South West Africa. Each loses his sense of self—though their journeys to awareness are much more convoluted than Oedipa’s—and escapes victimization. Their escapes—completely independent of each other—enable their transformations into spiritual leaders whose reconfigured images carry with them the promise of transformation for their followers. In the manner of *V.* as well, *Gravity’s*
Rainbow depicts dual anti-protagonists who initially have Orphean potential. In V. these characters, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil, seem to be the novel’s protagonists; they receive more attention in the novel than do their Orphean counterparts. In Gravity’s Rainbow, these characters almost exclusively function as the novel’s antagonists with the countries they represent as the novel’s antagonist Force beyond human control. Behaviorist Ned Pointsman represents the White Visitation, the Psychological Warfare division of the British “Intelligence” Agency, the target of which is Slothrop. The Agency in general and Pointsman in particular hope to use Slothrop to determine the targets of future German rocket attacks in and around London. Pointsman’s emerges as one of the novel’s failed Orpheans because his goal is personal: he wishes to use Slothrop to transform himself into a future Nobel Prize winner. Weissmann, Pointsman’s German counterpart, represents the German will to power through colonization of the South West African tribes in the twenties and the all-out war effort of the thirties and forties. Once a reader of Rilke with Orphean potential, Weissmann’s experiences transform him instead into the very personification of death. In Gravity’s Rainbow, the extremes of colonization and war aimed at the annihilation of the individual will and physical death have created a world from which the Golden Mean seems to have vanished. Touted by critics for its “apocalyptic and millennial visions” (qtd. by Slade, “Religion” 153) and called “a monstrous omen” (Kharpertian 108), Gravity’s Rainbow may well be Pynchon’s most optimistic novel to date: within the extreme constructs of this world which engulf and diminish personal experience, overwhelm the individual will, victimize women and children, the Golden Mean is still to be found. Enzian discovers it by assuming the feminine role in a religio-sexual act, his coupling with Weissmann in the South West African desert; Slothrop discovers it when he enters the unmarked Zone of Central Europe at the end of World War II and, child-like, participates in nature which is in the process of renewing itself after being scarred by human violence.
Slothrop’s initiation into the concept of freedom and his brush with the supernatural occurs when he escapes into the Zone, one of the novel’s main metaphors for quantum space. Within the Zone at the end of the war with boundaries erased, Slothrop begins to lose his identity and commune with nature. This first occurs as he, like Oedipa, views a hillside and a town from a vantage point high above the city:

Nordhausen in the morning; the lea is a green salad, crisp with raindrops. Everything is fresh, washed. The Harz hump up all around, dark slopes bearded to the tops with spruce, fir and larch . . . . Meadows and logged-off wedges up on the mountainsides flow with mottled light as rainclouds blow away (289).

In bombed out Nordhausen, tucked away in this Eden-like setting, Slothrop meets Geli Tripping, a novice witch, who catches Slothrop’s attention by singing a song about love, linden trees, and roses. Slothrop sits in her “roofless room” and from this skewed perspective watches “black birds with yellow beaks lace the sky, looping in the sunlight” (290) and “a long tree-covered mountain ascending” (291). Later, on May 28, 1945, Geli accompanies Slothrop to the top of Brocken, a peak legend associates with “the very plexus of German evil” (329) and where, in Goethe’s Faust on the night of April 30 (May Day Eve, Walpurgisnacht), Mephistopheles takes Faust to participate in demonic festivities. This association of Brocken with the “plexus of German evil,” however, is negated for Slothrop by a natural phenomena—the “strangely beautiful light or Broken specter” (Weisenburger 154) which Slothrop witnesses with Geli. Atop Brocken almost a month too late for Walpurgisnacht, Slothrop and Geli stand “side by side, holding hands, very still as the sun beings to clear the horizon.” Together they witness “the Specter.” It begins developing on the pearl cloudbank: two gigantic shadows, thrown miles overland . . . . God-shadows. Slothrop raises an arm and his arm-shadow trails rainbows . . . . Not ordinary shadows, either—three
dimensional ones . . . Impossibly out of scale. The spectra wash red to indigo, tidal, immense, at all their edges (330-31).

The natural phenomenon not only suggests supernatural intervention, "the Brockengespenstphenomen is confined to dawn's slender interface" (330-31). It occurs at a marginalized time in Pynchon's metaphor associated with quantum "complementarity" when the opposites of light and darkness are simultaneously present: Dawn and twilight are always optimum times in Pynchon's fiction for otherworldly experience. Toward the end of the novel shortly before Slothrop figuratively disperses, he is alone; Geli is ministering to others--namely Tchitcherine and Enzian. In the Zone Slothrop has begun to change and to pluck "the albatross of self." As he begins to lose his sense of self, he begins to read the signs of other-dimensional existence in natural phenomena for himself--without a Eurydice figure to aid him: "Ormens grow clearer, more specific. He watches flights of birds and patterns in the ashes of his fire, he reads the guts of trout he's caught and cleaned" (623).

Slothrop does experience theatrical space on one very memorable occasion, and this experience becomes his emblematic "singularity." The theatrical space is an abandoned movie set for the movie, Alpdrucken (Nightmare), "a vaguely pornographic horror movie" (393), in which one of Slothrop's Eurydice figures, Margherita Erdmann, had starred twelve years earlier. The abandoned set has all the attributes of a quantum space: the title of the movie filmed on the set is Alpdrucken suggesting the nightmare world created in Europe by the War; the movie set is also the scene of the conception of Margherita's lost daughter, Bianca. The extremes of death and conception are evoked by the same theatrical space. Looking like Max Schlepzig whose passport Slothrop carries, Slothrop reminds Greta of Max, the father of her lost child. When they couple on the abandoned torture chamber-movie set, the "singular point at the top" of Margherita's stocking assumes the cosmological proportions of a singularity: "the infinitely dense point from which the present Universe expanded," the moment at which "the change from point to no-point carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw
in fright” (396). The “point-no point” within the “silver memory of her body on film” (397) is the essence of Bohr’s Complementarity where pain and pleasure, the threat of annihilation and the hope of procreation co-exist: the singularity is reminiscent of “that singular point at the top of the rocket” (396), an instrument of destruction; it is identified as well with the moment of conception—Bianca Erdmann by Margherita and Max, Ilse Pokler by Leni and Franz—inspired by Margherita’s performance in Alpdrucken. That such a singularity occurs in conjunction with the process of filmmaking, a sadomasochistic sexual encounter, and the conceptions of at least two daughters—“How many shadow-children would be fathered on Erdmann that night?” (397)—along with the epigraph by Merian C. Cooper to Fay Wray that beings Part 2 of the novel, suggests that film—a symbol of quantum space in Pynchon’s novels—in a play on Jean Cocteau’s words, makes “the unreal reel [real]” (689). Occurring at the center of the novel within a theatrical space and evoking the notion of the singularity, the “point-no point” of the novel marks a turning point for Slothrop whose coupling with Margherita—”paranoid” with “paranoid”—creates a “third” pattern, “a moiré, a new world of flowing shadows, inferences . . . .” (395) suggestive of that created on the movie screen. Afterward, Slothrop begins to experience a change; he begins to recognize that “Whatever it is with her [Margherita], he’s catching it” (446). Eventually, he comes to realize that he can save neither Margherita nor her daughter, Bianca—Eurydice figures, both—and that the best he can do is to save himself.

The notion of theatrical experience as quantum space is much more inclusive in Gravity’s Rainbow that it was in Crying wherein it was limited to Oedipa’s attendance of a single performance of The Courier’s Tragedy and her subsequent misdirected search for the “true text.” In Gravity’s Rainbow theatrical space is not limited to Slothrop’s encounter on the movie set of Alpdrucken or even to the novel’s various movie motifs. Instead Gravity’s Rainbow begins with the assumption that “it’s all theatre” (3) and ends by placing the readers-as-audience inside the Orpheus Theatre in LA at a great distance in time—c. 1970—from the novel’s major events which occur in 1944-45. Exactly what is “theatre”
in the novel remains ambiguous. Certainly on one level, the “theatre” must be the European Theatre of World War II which is the setting for most of the novel’s events. The theatre may also be Pirate Prentice’s dream of Evacuation with which the novel opens, a dream which might possibly be someone else’s since Pirate has a “strange talent for . . . getting inside the fantasies of others” and “managing them” (12). Managing them is what Pirate does in this case. This opening dream envisions a rocket hitting a target and bringing events “in total blackout, with no glint of light” to “Absolute Zero” (3). In the dream, “it is the end of the line,” “a judgment from which there is no appeal” (4); “there is no way out” (4). However, Pirate is able to awaken from this dream, to discover that the rocket has not fallen, that “all this while, light came percolating in,” and that his drunken comrades asleep in his apartment “look just as rosy as a bunch of Dutch peasants dreaming of their certain resurrection” (4-5). Juxtaposing the dream of death from which “there is no appeal . . . no way out” against the dream of “certain resurrection” reinforces the notion of theatrical space as quantum-like and capable of containing apparently mutually-exclusive situations. However, the novel’s final episode is set in bona fide theatrical space: the Orpheus Theatre in LA c. 1970. The episode opens with the Nixon-like Richard M. Zhlubb, the Theatre’s Night Manager, trying to subdue the crowd of harmonica and kazoo players in line for the midnight show. The episode is interrupted and juxtaposed against Blicero-Weissmann’s sacrifice of Gottfried in Rocket 00000 on Easter/April Fool’s Weekend, 1945, and at the apex of the rocket’s parabolic curve, “[t]he edge of evening . . . the long curve of people all wishing on the first star,” (759)--which in this case is the rocket--the scene shifts to inside the Orpheus Theatre with the movie-going crowd clapping for the resumption of the show: the screen is “white and silent” because the “film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out.” At this point in the novel, “we” the readers are also the movie-goers sitting in the darkened theatre waiting for the movie to resume, the “bright angel of death”--Rocket 00000 launched in Germany in 1945--poised above the Orpheus Theatre in Los Angeles in 1970, having reached “its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last
delta-T” (760). The moment is quintessentially quantum; the repercussions of the sacrificial launch in Germany in 1945 are about to collapse the moment in Los Angeles in 1970. It is the “last delta-t.” However, “in the darkening and awful expanse of the screen something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see . . .” and “we” are encouraged to join in the communal--and ritualistic--singing of a song “They never taught anyone to sing” (760). The song is Orphean; it is “a hymn by William Slothrop [the renegade Puritan minister and Slothrop’s ancestor], centuries forgotten and out of print” but to which “we” are given the words. In Gravity’s Rainbow theatrical space not only encompasses and contains the entire novel, but it may well be, in its ritualistic and communal attributes, the very essence of the Golden Mean which contains the possibilities of both physical death and spiritual resurrection. The delta-t--itself a point of diminishing increments that approach but never reach Absolute Zero--depicted as the rocket descends upon the Orpheus Theatre in 1971 may be a more accurate metaphor for the end of physical existence than the Absolute Zero of Pirate’s Evacuation dream in London in 1944 in which “There is no way out.” The “last delta-t” allows for possibility of the infinite suspension of death that on the last page Gravity’s Rainbow gives us.

Because of the plethora of characters in Gravity’s Rainbow and the convoluted nature of the events that shape their lives, many of those characters experience dark and dangerous journeys below the surface level of experience. Few, however, experience revelation as a result of their descents or emerge prepared for spiritual transformation. The most obvious and important of these characters is Weissmann, a young German Captain, a “scholarly white who seemed so in love with language” (99) sent to South West Africa in 1922 to subdue the Herero native uprising. His descent is to South West Africa and to the Southern Hemisphere where “the constellations . . . had become all unfamiliar, and the earth’s seasons reversed” (99). Armed only with his copy of Rilke’s Duino Elegies, Weissmann goes to South West Africa as a potential Orphean. However, when he encounters the Herero boy in the desert at night who “wants to fuck, but is using the
Herero name of God,” Ndjambo Karunga, Weissmann confronts a mythological possibility for which he is unprepared. Ndjambo Karunga is a god who is both Creator and Destroyer and in whom “all sets of opposites are brought together, including black and white, male and female” (100). Weissmann couples with the boy but is unreceptive to either revelation or enlightenment. Believing the act to be blasphemous, Weissmann’s experiences “dangers he can’t bring himself to name” (100) because “buggering the boy under the resonance of the sacred Name fills him insanely with lust, lust in the face—the mask—of instant talion from outside the fire” (100). Weissmann is transformed by the experience—but into Blicero-Weissmann, corrupter of innocents and God of Death. Transported to a different world (South West Africa) below the world he knew (Germany), Weissmann encounters the effects of “Mirror-metaphysics” for which his “bookish symmetries” leave him ill-prepared; by 1944 “those symmetries were all prewar luxury” (102). Contemplating the consequences of his descent to South West Africa, he believes that the significance of the experience has escaped him:

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\text{beyond was something heaving, stirring, forever below, forever before his words, something then that could see a time coming terrible, at least as terrible as this winter and the shape to which the War has now grown, a shape making unavoidable the shape of one last jigsaw piece: this Oven-game with the yellow-haired and blue-eyed youth and silent doubleganger Katje (who was her opposite number in Sudwest? what black girl he never saw, hidden always in the blinding sun, the hoarse and cindered passage of the trains at night, a constellation of dark stars no one, no anti-Rilke, had named . . . .) (101-02).}
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Weissmann went to South West Africa a reader of Rilke, a potential Orphean figure. Yet his limited perspective, his refusal to open himself to new possibilities encountered in the Herero boy in a hemisphere that presents a mirror image of his own result in his transformation toward physical death rather than spiritual renewal.
In Episode 24 of Part 3, two other main characters, the Dionysian Pirate Prentice and Katje, Slothrop’s first and most important Eurydice, also make a descent and find themselves displaced into hell which is not at all a frightening place. This hell clearly gives the Preterite “We” the advantage over the Elect “They,” especially in the Calvinistic scheme which argues that the Elect are bound for heaven and the Preterite are predestined never to experience resurrection of the spirit. This Hell is a place of “[f]antastic pastry carts” and “taffy by the yard,” “Street entertainers” and “some very extensive museums”; Pirate and Katje’s sojourn there allows them to recognize the method of “Their” control so that these methods might be countered by the as-yet-to-be-formed Counterforce. “Their” method: “They need our terror [of death] for Their survival” (539). The Counterforce strategy: to “change radically the nature of our faith” from “faith in Death as master of us all . . . [to] that leap of faith . . . [and] . . . demand . . . our own immortality” (539-40). Together, Pirate and Katje “do dance”; “Ev’ryone’s dancing [the parade of people they’ve loved], in twilight/Dancing the bad dream [of Death] a-way” (548). By the beginning of Part IV, the Counterforce—of which both Pirate and Katje are members—has become loosely formed on the premise that Pirate and Katje had recognized as a result of their descent to the Underworld: that people’s fear of Death “has been the source of Their power” (539) and to remove people’s fear of Death—presumably by belief in spiritual existence after death—is the most effective subversive tactic.

The Counterforce’s absent leader is Tyrone Slothrop whose Orphean dispersal comes as a result of his own descent and miraculous recovery. Slothrop’s initial descent is precipitated by Pointsman’s conviction that Slothrop’s erections are causally connected to the German Rocket strikes in and around London. Summoned to St. Veronica’s Hospital by PISCES to undergo testing, Slothrop is injected with sodium amytal and he regresses to 1939 when he was a student at Harvard and to the Roseland Ballroom in Boston. In the drug-induced scenario, Slothrop is vomiting in a toilet bowl when he drops his “mouth harp” down the toilet and finds himself about to be sexually victimized by a group of
Negroes. To save "his silver chances of song" (63) and to protect himself from the Negroes, he journeys through the dark shit-encrusted sewer into the "waste regions" where he finds himself among intricate sewer dwellings in "a place of sheltering [him] from disaster" (67). His movement through the sewer system is Westward, and in the sewer he meets "Crutchfield or Crotchfield, the westwardman" (67), "the White Cocksman of the terre mauvais . . . doing it with both sexes and all animals except for rattlesnakes" (69). For all his disgusting encounters, the segment ends with Slothrop's vision of musical unity: "all the Christmas bells in the creation are about to join in chorus—that all their random pealing will be, this one time, coordinated, in harmony, present with tidings of explicit comfort, feasible joy" (70). Slothrop's underground journey, of course, is far from complete; he must navigate his way through the war, make discoveries about his Uncle Lyle Bland selling him to Laszlo Jamf who "sold him to I.G. Farben like a side of beef," and he must realize that he has been "under their observation—m-maybe since he was born" (286). Slothrop emerges from his long Underground journey during which he has been the object of pursuit-with-intent-to-castrate, ready for his transformation. The time is after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Slothrop has left the war and has retreated to the mountains of Central Europe where he recovers "the harp . . . the same on he lost in 1938 or -9 down the toilet at the Roseland Ballroom" (622-23). Alone in nature, he communes with nature, and "[h]e's been changing . . . plucking the albatross of self now and then," longing for America—yet another of his Eurydice figures—and dreaming "the primal dream" of identity which, in Pynchon's metaphorical scheme, requires the loss of oneself in order to find oneself. A very Christian notion, this.

The most important Orphic figures in Gravity's Rainbow either attempt to redeem various Eurydices or, in a kind of role reversal, are redeemed by them. Some of those couples have odd relationships indeed. Ultimately a savior-figure, Enzian assumes the roles of both Eurydice and Orpheus. In 1922 as a young Herero boy in South West Africa, he comes to Weissmann at night in the desert and, uttering the Herero name of God, he
assumes the female role in their homosexual coupling. In this scenario Weissmann is the potential Orphean figure. However, to Weissmann who is out of his familiar hemisphere of experience, the boy represents the ultimate blasphemy. His coupling with the boy represents to Weissmann the mirror image of his German Christian upbringing, and, unable to understand the religious significance of the words the boy utters on that fateful night, Weissmann is transformed but not spiritually regenerated; he becomes instead Blicero, a version of Lord Death, a corrupter of children and player of the finite game of War “the real business . . . [of which] is buying and selling” (105). Enzian on the other hand emerges from the experience as “Ndjambi Karunga’s child” in which “all sets of opposites [are] brought together including black and white, male and female” (100).

Enzian’s dopplegangers are significant to his role as an Orpheus-savior-figure in the novel. For Weissmann the young Gottfried becomes Enzian’s German counterpart for Weissmann’s “African conquest,” Enzian. Both Gottfried and Enzian are not only sexual partners with Weissmann, they are both launched in V-2 rockets, the white Gottfried in the 00000; the black Enzian in the 00001. However, in the 1940’s as the Herero boy matured, Enzian organizes the Swartkommandos or Zone Hereros who operate within the War Zone of Central Europe. By operating within the War Zone, they offer an alternative to the attempted extermination of the Herero tribe by the Germans in South West Africa in 1904-22 by invading the “zone” of their German invaders in the north. The region of the North in Herero myth is both the place where the first Herero ancestor appeared and the place “to which all Hereros hope to return after death” (Weisenburger 166-67). Thus the Swartkommandos’ activities in the War Zone become emblematic of the Eternal Return Enzian hopes for and an alternative to the annihilation associated with colonization and War. Enzian eventually organizes a quest to restore and raise the Rocket as a maneuver to divert the Herero people from the tribal idea of suicide that some Hereros view as the ultimate subversive act against their conquerors. Enzian realizes that the Swartkommandos, the “scholar-magicians of the Zone” need a “holy Text” and that the
text "had to be the Rocket" even though the "Real Text persisted somewhere else, in its
darkness, our darkness" (520). Enzian at this point has been transformed into an Orphean-
Christ figure intent on revelation and redemption: "if he dies before they find the True Text
to study, then there'll have to be machinery for others to carry it on . . . . Somewhere,
among the wastes of the World is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth
and to our freedom" (525). This is Enzian's mission; his symbol is the mandala, the *axis
mundi* upon which Herero villages are built, the archetypal emblem of quantum space, the
intersection of mutually exclusive extremes, and the symbol of the totality of being. The
mandala is a circle imposed upon a cross.

In early September 1945, Enzian, who has managed to keep his Zone Hereros
together in spite of attacks by white forces, becomes the ultimate sacrificial Orpheus-Christ
figure as his troops approach Luneberg Heath for the Raising of Rocket 00001. There,
twelve of the Zone Hereros struggle to raise the Rocket at "Test Stand VII, the holy place,"
above the "ceremonial city . . . built in mandalic form like a Herero village" (725). The
Rocket, built from the ruins of other rockets has had certain "Rocket-modifications" that
transform its parabolic arc into a circular one: "It Begins Infinitely Below the Earth And
Goes On Infinitely Back Into The Earth it's only the peak we are allowed to see, the break
up through the surface out of the other silent word"; it travels "FASTER-TAN, THE-
SPEEDOFLIGHT." The "lack of symmetry leads to speculating that a presence, analogous
to Aether, flows through time, as the Aether flows through space" (726). In *Gravity's
Rainbow* the Rocket itself becomes a symbol of quantum space, the final complementarity
wherein the initial opposites, Enzian and Weissmann, are locked in a perpetual struggle: "a
good rocket to take us to the stars, an evil rocket for the World's suicide" (727); its
launching pad, the *Bodenplatte*, a symbolic *axis mundi*, Eliade's meeting place for all
cosmic regions: heaven, earth, hell (Weisenburger 314).

Throughout Enzian's quest for the Holy Center, the cite of the Rocket Raising on
September 14, 1945, he has been pursued by his other doppleganger, his half brother
Vaslav Tchitcherine. Tchitcherine is a Russian soldier who is convinced that he was supposed “to die for them” (emphasis added 704) in the war but that Enzian somehow caused him to be “passed over”; this in time causes Tchitcherine to question his belief (taught to him by them via history) in his own mortality thereby making Tchitcherine dangerous to them. Consequently Tchitcherine has been hunting Enzian in order to kill his brother and seek revenge. Enzian, however, is saved from death at the hands of his brother by Geli Tripping, an earth-goddess-Eurydice-fertility-figure, who happens to be a novice witch in love with Tchitcherine. Her love proves to be the magic that redeems both Tchitcherine and Enzian from death. Tchitcherine is reunited with Geli who saves him from “operational death” in Central Asia to which he has been assigned and causes him to “pass over” his brother Enzian whom he had pledged to kill by magically concealing their identities from each other. Both Tchitcherine and Enzian, warrior and savior, are redeemed by the magic of Geli’s selfless love for Tchitcherine.

Enzian selflessly sacrifices himself for his Herero followers so they might abort the tribal suicide prescribed by Josef Ombindi, the Herero advocate of death, and continue their quest for the True Text; Gottfried, Enzian’s German Counterpart, remains victimized by Weissmann and becomes the Innocent sacrificed by the Father Blicero, Lord Death. Unlike Enzian who matures into a savior figure willing to sacrifice himself for others, Gottfried is always Weissmann’s victim. In an inversion of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth—the German folk tale of Hansel and Gretel—Gottfried is Hansel-Orpheus, Katje, is Gretel-Eurydice, and the Witch-Lord Death obsessed with entrapping and cannibalizing Gottfried-Hansel is Blicero-Weissmann. Blicero-Weissmann is enamoured with Gottfried because of his resemblance to Enzian whom Weissmann was never able to victimize. In the first scene involving Gottfried, Katje, and Weissmann, the two “children” are engaged in a perverted sexual ménage à trois based on the Hansel-Gretel story. With Gottfried and Katje sometimes trading roles and Blicero-Weissmann longing for death in the Oven, they engage repeatedly in their perverse game, a finite game, which Katje eventually quits: she leaves
Gottfried, crosses “over the English lines” (104), and becomes just Katje. In this scenario Gottfried-Orpheus, not Katje-Eurydice, remains Death’s captive. The Zone Hereros poised to raise the recovered Rocket 00001 on September 14 at the end of the novel provides a segue to the sacrifice of Gottfried on the previous Easter Weekend with “Deathlaces . . . the boy’s bridal costume” (750), the 00000 Rocket “the womb into which Gottfried returns” (750), and with boy and rocket “mated to each other” (751).

The Rocket is the ultimate quantum space in Gravity’s Rainbow. The Herero rocket raised on the day commemorating the Feast of Exaltation has been recovered and reassembled to carry Enzian into space and back again; it has a rainbow-like circular orbit. Weissmann’s rocket, fired on Easter Sunday/April Fool’s Day, carries Gottfried, the innocent, for whom the rocket’s promise of escape is thwarted by its parabolic trajectory and its subsequent betrayal to gravity. In Weissmann’s distorted “mirror-metaphysics” (101)—which had its roots in “Rilke’s mountainside gentian of Nordic colors”—Enzian and Gottfried emerge as mirror images of each other. Enzian is black, associated with the Southern Hemisphere, the Herero tribe which the Germans attempted to annihilate, and with Rilke’s blue gentians; he is a savior figure who, in his selflessness, remains free of victimization. Gottfried is white, a German youth and golden boy associated with the color yellow who is unwilling to free himself from Weissmann’s control, who in fact seems to enjoy it. The rocket is the quantum space they share: Enzian’s is a rocket which transforms and recreates, its flight pattern a circular rainbow which connects the earth to that which is both above and below; Gottfried’s is a rocket of death which promises escape but brings only destruction. The reader, at the novel’s end is placed in the ultimate quantum space: the moment of decision, the only point at which human beings are “real.” The singular moment occurs in the darkened Orpheus theatre c. 1970 with a rocket (fired in 1945) poised overhead. All readers of Gravity’s Rainbow are potential Orpheans in the Theatre of Life and Death; we are poised like Orpheus—or like the observer of quantum
phenomena—-at the “point of decision” that “makes the reel real,” that collapses possibility into the moment and affects the outcome of the future.

Both Enzian and Gottfried have Orphic potential, a potential embraced by Enzian who accepts his role and rejected by Gottfried who becomes a victim of circumstance. Slothrop, however, is the novel’s most fully realized Orphic character and as such is spiritually transformed when he discovers the Golden Mean. Slothrop becomes, during the course of the novel both victim of the Apollonian dream and liberated from it. Initially he is its victim. Sold to I.G. Farben and Laszlo Jam's as an infant by his uncle and his father in order to insure his Harvard education, he discovers that he is intimately tied to the destruction of life through his sexual urges. His sexual exploits are documented; he is drugged; he is manipulated by the White Visitation into believing that he has saved Katje from the Octopus Grigori on the Riviera beach front. The White Visitation even dictates his first change of identity from an American working with British Intelligence agents into the British war correspondent, Ian Scuffling. Katje is his first and most enduring Eurydice figure, but at this stage of the novel she is merely a pawn of the White Visitation much as she was earlier a pawn of Weissmann’s Hansel-Gretel game, and Slothrop’s rescue of her is only a Pavlovian response to a predetermined set of stimuli: beautiful girl; giant beast. Slothrop changes his identity eight times during the course of the novel, and each change brings him closer to infinite play, closer to fulfilling his “Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible” (188) that connects him to his renegade Puritan ancestor William Slothrop. Slothrop’s first change of identity occurs at the Casino Hermann Goering in Monaco. The Casino itself raises the question of chance and causality. While it appears to be a quantum space containing both chance and causality, it is actually a faux middle, and Slothrop begins to discern that the “game behind the game” (208) involves his being “under some Control . . . the same as a fixed roulette wheel . . . where the House always does . . . keep turning a profit” (209). The loss of Slothrop’s American identity, his becoming “English again” (204), is not a transformation, but merely part of a plot akin to the plotting
of a rocket's parabolic trajectory which contains "no surprise, no second chances, no return" (209).

The Zone does become a quantum space for Slothrop: "Here in the Zone categories have been blurred badly" and "in the dark: images of the Uncertainty" (303) appear; Slothrop, like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, is "not in Kansas anymore." The Zone, like quantum space, burgeons with possibility. On the one hand it is a War Zone, the European "Theatre" of World War II; on the other, it is in the process of being reclaimed by nature. There Slothrop abandons his disguise as Ian Scuffing imposed upon him by the White Visitation and becomes Rocketman, Max Schlepzig, and finally a figure of redemption, a Plechazunga--a pig hero. Early in Part III, Slothrop meets the witch Geli Tripping whom identifies him with the man she loves, Tchitcherine, Enzian's half brother. In her roofless room, Slothrop beings to become connected, as if by magic, with something larger than himself. Geli, a Eurydice figure-Earth Goddess, is intimately attuned to the miraculous in nature and accompanies Slothrop to Brocken where, at dawn, Slothrop experiences the "Brocken spectre," the strangely beautiful light phenomenon. More importantly, through his contact with Geli and with the mysterious in nature, he becomes aware of the existence of the Eternal Present, the Holy Center, the still point of existence for which he will search. The tunnels through which Slothrop is chased are shaped like a "double integral sign" which, in calculus, is used to describe trajectories of moving objects. "[I]n the dynamic space of the living Rocket," Slothrop thinks, "the double integral has a different meaning. To integrate here is to operate on a rate of change so that time falls away: change is stilled . . . the moving vehicle is frozen, in space, to become architecture, and timeless. It [the rocket] was never launched. It will never fall" (301). Slothrop's quest for his own rocket connection is linked to Enzian, the Christ-like sacrificial Orpheus, who is devoted to finding the Eternal Center and whose name symbolizes "pure word" to Weissmann. Enzian's hope is that his name will be enough for his followers to believe in the existence of "the true message" emblematic of his being "passed over by death, of his ability to
operate in “their time, their space” (326), “an actor impersonating a leader,” and the existence of “an endless North [place of the Herero afterlife] . . . walled off by a great silence from the rest of the World” (327). Even Tchitcherine is made aware of such a still point when he hears the Aqyn’s song about “the first song” that tells of “the Kirghiz Light” (357). Some “It,” the singer sings “comes as the Kirghiz light” and changes men to children and then to babies to be reborn into a new order of being available only to those who search. Tchitcherine may pass by his brother, but he will not reach the still point. He is no aqyn [singer, Orphean musician], and his heart was never ready” (359). Slothrop, however, will be reborn not once but eight times. He “is one of the Faithful,” one of the “Pilgrims along the roads of miracle, every bit and piece a sacred relic . . . . ordinary hardware doesn’t interest Slothrop. He is holding out, saving himself for something absolutely unique” (391).

Led by Geli—Eurydice and Earth-goddess—to entertain the possibility associated with the Eternal Present, Slothrop assumes his Orphean role in earnest, attempting unsuccessfully to redeem various Eurydices. Resembling Max Schlepzig and having, in fact, Max’s papers, he accommodates Margherita Erdmann—“his latest reminder of Katje” (397)—and her sado-masochistic sexual desires, and in the process he begins to contemplate the possibility of “singularities” (396). “In each case, the change from point to no point carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in fright” (396). Later, “he feels responsible for her safety” (445), but after repeatedly sexually abusing her, he believes—she is Eurydice in hell and he with her—“Whatever it is with her, he’s catching it” (446). Unsuccessful in his efforts to rescue Margherita, Slothrop attempts to rescue her daughter, Bianca Erdmann, whose name means “white earthman.” Aboard the Anubis, named for the jackal-god of Egyptian mythology who conducted the dead to judgment, Slothrop has sex with Bianca for whom he becomes her surrogate father, Thanatz, whose name means death. Slothrop connects Bianca with
“this Eurydice—obsession, this bringing back out of…” (472). But he is unable to save Bianca as he was unable to save her mother, Greta. Both remain victims of Death.

From this point on, Slothrop begins “to thin, to scatter.” This Orphian-like dispersal is explained in terms of the “Δt,” a “dependent variable” and related to one’s “temporal bandwidth.” “The more you dwell in the past and future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. But the Narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are” (509). As Slothrop’s “sense of Now” narrows, his existence become increasingly tenuous. Toward the end of Part II, Slothrop is still in the Zone; as he treks across Germany alone, sleeping in haystacks, “trying for less visibility” (551), he has two more Orphian encounters. The first occurs when he dreams of Tantivy,

his friend from long ago. He has come back [from Death], after all and against the odds . . . the meeting takes place—it seems to be underground, not exactly a grave or crypt, nothing sinister . . . . [And]

Tantivy looks so real, so untouched by time (551-52).

The second occurs by a “blue anonymous lake” where Slothrop meets Ludwig, a “surprisingly fat kid of eight or nine” (553) looking for his lost lemming, Ursula, whom Slothrop is not sure exists; he cannot decide if Ludwig’s search for her is “manic faith” or an “impulse to suicide” (552). Miraculously Ludwig reappears later in the novel with Ursula preserved, “a boy and his lemming, out to see the Zone,” proving to Slothrop that “not all lemmings go over the cliff” (729). However, Ludwig, in the process of recovering Ursula and in order “to get by in the Zone these days,” has discovered that “chewing gum” and “foreign cock” are negotiable (729). “[N]ot all lemmings go over the cliff, and not all children are preserved against snuggling into the sin of profit. To expect any more, or less, of the Zone is to disagree with the terms of the Creation” (729). By the time Ludwig recovers Ursula from her suicide run, Slothrop himself has dispersed. His last disguise is as Plechazunga, a Pig Hero, a disguise which he dons at the pleading of village children to celebrate their “town’s deliverance.” By participating in the festival,
Slothrop simultaneously perpetuates the ritual of the cyclic return of the Pig Hero and becomes the town's emblematic savior. And then "he impersonates flight . . . keeps to open country" where he is awakened by another Eurydice figure, Frieda, Franz Pokler's pig. Frieda leads Slothrop to Pokler, the cause-effect man, who gives Slothrop more information concerning Jamf and his uncle, Lyle Bland, and the forces that shaped Slothrop's childhood.

Slothrop continues his Orphean dispersal as he merges with nature and begins to become the hero-savior for the Counterforce even as Enzian becomes the hero-savior for the Zone Hereros: Slothrop's "Potsdam Pickup is part of the folklore of the Zone" and his escapades as "Rocketman" are legendary. Having retrieved his "old Horner" he lost c. 1939 down the toilet in the Roseland Ballroom in Boston, Slothrop's identity as Gravity's Rainbow's Orpheus is solidified. Following a translation of Rilke's last sonnet to Orpheus, Slothrop, "just suckin' on his harp, is closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet" (622). He thinks of his one Eurydice, America, and "he just can't let her go" (623); she, he believes, is worth redeeming. Not only does he scratch the first of many mandala signs--"the A4 rocket as seen from below . . . variations on Frans Vander Groov's cosmic windmill," (624), but the moment of his own transformation occurs when chiseled in the sandstone he finds waiting the mark of consecration, a cross in a circle. At last, lying one afternoon spread-eagle at his ease in the sun, at the edge of one of the ancient Plague towns he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection (624-25).

Later in the day, "after a heavy rain he doesn't recall. Slothrop sees "a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying not a thing in his head, feeling natural . . . (626). His rainbow vision transfigures him. Having relinquished all traces of self, he is Orpheus, the Golden Mean, the still point, the axis mundi, himself the intersection of extremes---the Underworld and the Celestial, death and the possibility of continued
existence after death--in the ultimate quantum space, Earth. Slothrop is the energy that holds the Counterforce, his coalition, together. He is one of "'glozing neuters of the world'" (677) whose role is to model acceptance of that old Quantum Uncertainty as the essential part of the human condition on Earth. Readers, at the novel's end are encouraged to do likewise as they sit in the darkened Orpheus Theatre, "the screen... a dim page spread before us... the last image... too immediate for any eye to register... [which] may have been a human figure" (760), the Rocket reaching "its last unmeasureable gap about the roof of this old theatre the last delta-t" (760). Yet, "in the darkening and awful expanse of screen, something has kept on, a film we have not yet learned to see" (emphasis added), and "we" are encouraged to participate in song, "a hymn" by heretic Puritan William Slothrop, Tyrone's ancestor. The song connects all aspects of "our crippl'd Zone"--"a face on ev'ry mountainside/ And a Soul in ev'ry stone" (760)--where differences between the animate and the inanimate disappear and magic and mystery prevail.

*Gravity's Rainbow* may well be Pynchon's most optimistic novel; it is certainly his most convoluted and complex. Although the duality of protagonists and antagonists resurfaces in *Gravity's Rainbow* after having disappeared in *The Crying of Lot 49*, this only serves to reinforce the notion--apparent in both *V.* and *Crying*--of the great difficulties involved in the discovery and attainment of the Golden Mean. None of the circumstances in any of Pynchon's five novels are more extreme than those encountered by the plethora of characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The nightmare world they find themselves traversing during the last days of World War II--the most "apocalyptic" event in the history of human kind--seems to have obscured all traces of the Golden Mean which could offer some hope to a world pervaded by the constant fear of death and annihilation of the individual and dominated by "Them" who perpetuate such fears as a method of control. Miraculously, two of the novel's characters manage to escape such victimization. Symbolically they emerge as mirror images of each other: Slothrop, an American, who finds himself
victimized by the British who colonized his country three centuries earlier; Enzian, a Herero, whose country was colonized by Germany, Great Britain’s adversary in World War II. Operating from two different perspectives—represented by the northern and the southern hemispheres from which they come, by their American/English and Herero/Russian heritages, by their Puritan and primitive backgrounds—Slothrop and Enzian manage to “escape” from control perpetrated by the Apollonian Will to Power which, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, surpasses all national allegiances and from the fear of Death on which “Their” control depends. Both sacrifice the “albatross of self” upon which their victimization depends, and by doing so experience a transformation that elevates them, mythologizes them, and provides a model of behavior their followers—the Counterforce and the Zone Hereros—can emulate with “hopes for success [from their followers] and hopes for disaster [from “Them”] about equally high” (676). Because the circumstances within which the novels two Orpheans journey to enlightenment and become models for others are so extreme, *Gravity’s Rainbow* emerges as the most optimistic of Pynchon’s novels. Even in the “nightmare” that was World War II, these characters awake, like Pirate Prentice at the novel’s beginning, to the possibility of “certain resurrection.” All of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s characters are potential Orpheans—as are the novel’s readers who are positioned at the novel’s end in that quantum theatrical space. All have the potential to escape the fear of their own mortality as an end and see it instead as a continuance, as part of a process, “a song,” that exists beyond the time- and space-bound confines of self.

*Vineland* (1990)

Against the odds created for them by the extreme circumstances of their birth—colonization of South West Africa and World War II—Slothrop and Enzian are able to discover the Golden Mean, the still point of existence, and escape the confines of time and space that might otherwise make them victims of those extremes. *Vineland*, however, is set in a different time and place—Northern California in the 1960s and 1980s—in which the novel’s characters find themselves victims of their own government which seeks to control
the minds and activities of the individuals it governs. The Apollonian will to power is 
much nearer home and, in a time of peace—1984—continues to threaten the family structure 
and attempts to subdue the individual will. In *Gravity’s Rainbow* America was the one 
Eurydice Slothrop believes is worth redeeming; in *Vineland*, Vineland is America in its 
pristine form, that mythical Edenic quantum space with all its promise and possibility still 
in tact. It is the space the government agents of Death wish to penetrate and subdue. It is 
also Eurydice worth saving. *Vineland* is, of course, Pynchon’s second feminine novel and 
its setting is essentially the same setting as *The Crying of Lot 49* with some twenty years 
added. The novel restores the idea—first evident in *V.* in the characters of V. and Paola—of 
the feminine principle resurfacing from one generation to the next, this time in the 
characters of Frenesi and her estranged daughter, Prairie. The setting of *Vineland* is 
predominantly Vineland, the uncharted natural space that was once America; Vineland both 
narratively and symbolically ameliorates the circumstances within which the characters 
function even as it blurs the distinctions between Orpheus and Eurydice. Most importantly, 
Vineland becomes a space that assumes a life of its own independent of the characters who 
penetrate it, and it begins to reveal its quantum attributes to those who dwell there.

Vineland is not only the novel’s uncharted natural space, it may well be the novel’s 
Eurydice, the America worth redeeming. Vineland, in fact, has its own geography, its own 
landmarks, and its own peculiar “laws” that govern perspective. It is “the world behind the 
world” in *Crying* brought closer to the surface. One of *Vineland*’s more notable 
“locations” is Shade Creek. “Shade Creek [is] a psychic jumping off town—behind it, 
unrolling, regions unmapped, dwelt in by these transient souls [Thanatoids] in constant 
turnover, not living but persisting, on the skimpiest of hopes” (173). There, in Shade 
Creek at dawn, “all angles ordinarily hidden, in fact were somehow clearly visible [to 
Takeshi and DL] from up here at this window—naive, direct, no shadows, no hiding 
places” (173). However, as the sun rises, the town begins to change, and “the corners of 
things to rotate slowly, the shadows come in to flip some of the angles inside out as ‘laws’
of perspective were reestablished” by “9:00 a.m. or so.” (173). In Vineland is Rick and Chick’s Born Again auto-conversion shop, Vato and Blood’s Towing Service, and tales of “twilight reconfiguration” (44). Other “twilight happenings” occur in Vineland. The Blackstream Hotel where the “1984 Thanatoid Roast” occurs is hidden far from highways among long redwood mountain slopes where shadows came early and brought easy suspicion of another order of things. ... believed through some unseen but potent geometry, to warp like radio signals at sundown the two worlds to draw them closer, nearly together, out of register like the thinnest of shadows. (330-31)

Here Zoyd, Prairie, Takeshi, and DL experience the quantum space of Vineland where evidence of “another order of things” is an everyday occurrence. However, by the end of the novel, Vineland has come to take an active role in the lives of those who dwell there; its “Secret retributions”” restore “the level, when disturbed, of the divine justice”” (369). This is evident when Brock Vond, the novel’s Agent of Death, is miraculously “winched back up” into the helicopter just before he nabs Prairie and when, with the aid of Vato and Blood, “Brock Vond was taken across the river” into the Country of the Dead. In Vineland, Vineland, the ultimate Eurydice figure and quantum space--America, the Earth, the Earth Goddess--contains Brock Vond and his will to power and restores the “level,” the Golden Mean which he and extremists like him have disturbed.

In Vineland, the other quantum space associated with theatrical experience, seems to exist quite separately from the uncharted natural space that is Vineland. In Vineland film functions as the singularity which makes “the unreal real” for most of the novel’s main characters. The turning point of Frenesi’s life--of Zoyd’s and Prairie’s as well--is the moment at which Frenesi is ensnared, Eurydice-like, by the Plutonian Brock Vond. It occurs before Prairie is conceived, before Zoyd and Frenesi meet and marry. It occurs, like the film sequence in Gravity’s Rainbow, in the center of the novel and becomes a singularity into which past and future conflate. The quantum theatrical space is film
footage shot by Frenesi at the College of the Surf in the 1960s and viewed twenty years later by Frenesi’s daughter, Prairie, and DL in a workshop owned by Ditzah Pisk Feldman and her sister Zipi. In the sixties Frenesi belonged to the 24fps, a “guerrilla” film Kollective, whose members believed they could record, through images of “that most sensitive memory device, the human face” (195), the idea that power corrupts. To this end, Frenesi and the 24fps had formulated a new manifesto seeing the camera as a gun, “[a]n image taken” as “a death performed” (197), and film as a way to construct “a just Hell for the fascist pig” (197). However, Brock Vond, the main “fascist pig” of the novel, has a weapon more powerful than the camera--his penis--and with it he seduces Frenesi who is initially the median between the extremes of Brock Vond, fascist pig and Federal prosecutor, and Weed Atman, hippie rebel and college professor, into making movies Brock wants made. In the pivotal quantum moment of the novel, the moment in which possibility is collapsed and lives--even of those unmet and unborn--are changed, Frenesi becomes Brock’s accomplice: she convinces Rex who worships Weed that Weed is working for the FBI; she plants a gun in Rex’s bag, the weapon of Weed’s destruction at the hand of his assassin; she films

the real moment of his [Weed’s] passing . . . . the way that what he was slowly understanding spread to his [Weed’s] body, a long, stunned cringe, a loss of spirit that could almost be seen on the film, even after all the years between then and the screen in Ditzah’s house in the valley . . . . some silvery effluent, vacating his image . . . . He had just time enough to say Frenesi’s name before the frame went twisting and flying off his face (246).

In Pynchonesque fashion, however, the theatrical space like the space of quantum activity warps one’s Newtonian perspective.

Beginning the night she and Rex had publicly hung the snitch jacket on Weed, Frenesi understood that she had taken at least one irreversible step to
the side of her life, and that now . . . she was walking around next to herself, haunting herself, attending a movie of it all (237).

And then, of course, twenty years later Prairie, her estranged daughter, watches the films Frenesi made. "At some point Prairie understood that the person behind the camera most of the time was really her mother, and that if she kept her mind empty she could absorb, conditionally become, Frenesi" (199). And in the close-up of one of Rex's gleaming eyeballs . . . in the backscatter--if Prairie only looked closely enough she would have to see her--Frenesi herself, dark on dark, face in wide-angle distortion, with an expression that might, Prairie admitted, prove unbearable" (247).

Frenesi's film of that pivotal moment is symbolic of that quantum space in Pynchon's fiction in which "irreversible step[s]" are taken, decisions made, possibilities collapsed. Prairie's "looking back" to that moment by viewing the film becomes a quantum experience in itself: by doing so, Prairie is able to get beyond her own limited perspective and see the event through her mother's eyes--a prerequisite for Prairie's role as Eurydice regenerated.

Whereas Vineland's pivotal quantum moment is captured on Frenesi's film of Weed's death--a "performance piece" that Frenesi orchestrated--the Underground Journey in Vineland assumes several different aspects that are both related to the quantum realm and to the mythological Underworld experience. Initially the "Underground" refers to the subversive anti-government activities of the sixties in which the members of the 24fps and the People's Republic of Rock and Roll are engaged. The idealism of the 24fps, "the old guerrilla movie outfit," leads them to believe that the "camera is a weapon" (197); they particularly believe in the ability of close-ups to "reveal and devastate . . . the system, the countless lies about American freedom, [by] looking into these mug shots of the bought and sold" (195). To this end, the 24fps infiltrates the government-owned, corporate-sponsored College of the Surf to film a demonstration organized by the subversive professor Weed Atman. At this point Frenesi is the main camera person for the 24fps, and,
in good subversive fashion, is sleeping with Weed. However, she unwittingly becomes ensnared by Federal Prosecutor Brock Vond and the emblems of his power: his uniform, his penis, his gun. Brock wants “Weed’s spirit” (214) because he believes Weed to be the “Key to it all, the key log, pull him and you break up the structure” (215-16). Frenesi, feeling she had “lost just too much control” and that love could perhaps “redeem even Brock, amiable, stupidly brutal, fascist Brock” (217) carries her idealism “further into adulthood perilous and real” where she is seduced by the Federal agent of Death and sells out her subversive ideals: she convinces Rex who idealizes Weed that Weed is working for the Feds; she plants Brock’s gun in Rex’s bag; she films the rally and Weed’s moment of recognition just before his death that she is the one responsible. This occurs just before she is whisked away at Government expense and literally goes “underground” to be protected and controlled by the government and its agent, Brock Vond. Traveling the FEER, Federal Emergency Evacuation Route, Frenesi is convoyed to a secret “National Security Reservation,” “the Cold War Dream” because it is like a bomb shelter, a “refuge deep in the earth” (255). In this subterranean compound, Frenesi, like Rilke’s Eurydice in “Orpheus. Euridike. Hermes.” is not uncomfortable in the Underworld. Frenesi’s is a Death Wish; she has been captivated by Plutonic Brock Vond from whom she has no real wish to escape.

Frenesi’s future Underworlds are Plutonian, not quantum as her anti-government activities of the sixties had been. Her anti-government activities were subversive: childlike idealism exposed the extremes of surface-level experience as a control device and suggested that refusal to believe in mortality—Rock and Roll will never die—is the ultimate subversive activity. Instead, Frenesi becomes part of the Underworld chosen for her by Brock Vond—the world of government protection and Death. There she lives an Underground life with her second husband, Flash, and their son Justin in “a pale humid Sun Belt city”; they learn in 1984 that people they know under government protection are disappearing. When she and Flash try to escape, they discover that they too have become victims of “the Reagonmic
ax blades” which are this time in the computer from which they have been deleted: “it would all be done with keys . . . [and] weightless, invisible chains of electronic presence or absence . . . patterns of ones and zeroes . . .” like “the patterns of human lives and deaths” (90). The Underworld of subversive activities is a quantum world of ambiguity, complementarity, and possibility. The Underworld of governmental protection is the Newtonian world of absolutes and mutually exclusive opposites--ones and zeroes, life and death; it is a world in which “we are digits” who, at the “whim of something in power, must re-enter the clockwork of cause and effect” (90) and mortality. The Underworld of government protection is no different from surface level experience: in both the individual owes its existence to that which is in power.

However, not all subversives of the sixties sell out to the Establishment represented by Brock Vond, the Federal Prosecutor, and Hector Zuniga, the DEA Agent. Zoyd, the hippie surfer, and DL escape with their loved ones into Vineland, the novel’s quantum landscape where they are free to cling to their ideals and where the novel’s Orphean question, “Can Love Redeem the Death Touch,” plays itself out. There, the unseen trembles at the edges of the seen; there the mythological meets the material; there the Thanatoid community exists. Thanatoids: those who are caught in limbo between life and death; those dedicated to “setting right whatever was keeping them from advancing further into the condition of death . . . constrained by rules of imbalance and restoration” (171). In Vineland, Zoyd manipulates the system by performing his annual act of craziness so he can collect his Mental Disability checks for another year, resists Hector’s “new and more demented” plans to get him to defect, and chooses to live and raise his daughter Prairie. To Vineland DL returns with Takeshi, her beloved, for a year and a day of sexless penance in an effort to reverse the Death Touch she had placed on him thinking he was Brock Vond. Vineland: the quantum space where beams are balanced and from which “tyrans” are purged.
In *Vineland* the extremes of Pynchon’s earlier novels are ameliorated and the
activities of Orpheus and Eurydice figures in quantum space and the consequences of the
decisions they make there become the framework for the novel. Each of the major
characters must answer the question that both Orpheus and Eurydice must answer in the
myth: can Love reverse the Death Touch? The question is resolved differently for each
character depending on the nature of the role each plays in a particular relationship: Brock
Vond and Frenesi, Zoyd and Frenesi, Flash and Frenesi, DL and Frenesi, DL and Takeshi.
Other characters figure into the equation as well: Brock Vond, Hector Zuniga, and Roscoe
are government agents who advocate death to the individual will and to the emotional
bonding with family à la Orwell’s *1984*; Prairie, the daughter of Zoyd and Frenesi, is a
Persephone-Eurydice-down-to-Earth goddess who wishes to be reunited with her mother.

Frenesi, like V. in V., is the focal character of *Vineland*, the lost Eurydice whom
many of the other characters wish to rescue, reunite with, redeem. Like V., Frenesi resists
redemption. However, during the sixties, the time-behind-the-time of the novel (1984),
Frenesi considers herself an agent of redemption and transformation. A member of a
subversive film Kollective, Frenesi believed the movie camera a weapon by which the
Kollective could annihilate—judge and send to hell by editing film footage—the
Establishment. The fatal assignment for Frenesi was the Kollective’s filming subversive
activities led by Weed Atman at the conservative College of the Surf. There, Frenesi not
only begins to sleep with Weed whose cause she arrives there believing in, but she is
already in the process of being “captured” by the very image of Brock Vond, Federal
Prosecutor, that she “captured” on film covering unrest at some community college in
Oregon. She is in bed with Dionysus-Weed, math professor and savior figure to the
“smokers” who infiltrate the College of the Surf, and with Brock Vond whose mission, as
an agent of Death-to-the-individual, is to annihilate them all. Frenesi believes, in her
innocence, that love can “redeem even Brock, amiably, stupidly brutal, fascist Brock”
(217). Frenesi is wrong because he is Agent Death who has her in thrall rather than the
other way around. Feeling that she is losing control and driven by “her need for his bodily presence, his beauty, the fear at the base of her spine, prurient ache in her hands” (217), Frenesi surrenders to Brock’s will: she betrays her lover Weed whose cause she believed in, and she betrays her fellow members of the 24fps. Frenesi is Eurydice seduced by Death. When Brock begins to orchestrate Weed’s assassination, Frenesi accommodates his plans to deliver Weed’s “soul” to Brock and presumably her own as well.

Zoyd Wheeler is the major Orphic figure in *Vineland*. Like Frenesi in her innocence, he believes in “the magic payoff” (28). He is a surfer-musician in a band called the Corvais. When Frenesi rode “into his life like a whole gang of outlaws” (37), she had already come under Brock Vond’s will. Brock’s presence in Frenesi’s life and his power over her remain unknown to Zoyd through their brief courtship and pastoral psychedelic wedding which Zoyd counts as “one of the peak parties of his life” (38). On that day he poses to her the Orphic Question: “Frenesi, do you think that love can save anybody? You do, don’t you? At the time he hadn’t learned yet what a stupid question that was” (39). Even after he learns about Brock Vond, he believes that his love for Frenesi will enable the couple to “beat them all” (42). He, like Frenesi, is wrong. However, like his predecessor Sidney Stencil, his love for Frenesi endures, even when she longs for Brock Vond and runs away with him—even when she behaves like the agent of death herself by rebelling against her role as nurturing mother and considers an abortion. Zoyd, however, has more Orphic tendencies than Sidney Stencil, perhaps because Zoyd has never been controlled by Apollonian forces as Sidney had, working for the British consulate.

Essentially Zoyd never loses his belief in the redemptive power of love. Even though he never falls out of love with Frenesi, he is denied contact with her by Vond under penalty of prison. The birth of Prairie—which he deems a “cosmic” experience—opens him to a new dimension of love and encourages him to believe that “he wouldn’t die,” that “she [Prairie] knew him, from someplace else” (285). Unlike Frenesi who abandons her daughter, Zoyd dedicates himself to her upbringing. And when he discovers that he and Prairie are both
objects for “removal” by Brock, Zoyd escapes with his daughter into Vineland, the quantum space in which much of the novel’s action occurs: “Half the interior hasn’t even been surveyed” (305) , Sasha tells him. In this quantum-like Eden, this territory “of the spirit,” Zoyd nurtures Prairie and hopes for a reunion with Frenesi.

Flash, a potential Orphean figure and Frenesi’s second husband, lives with her in the Underworld itself as part of the Federal Witness Protection Program. Flash is there because “he’d been as outlaw as they come, grand theft auto, hard and dangerous drugs, small arms and dynamite” (73). Frenesi is there because of her betrayal of Weed: “Once they find out you’re willing to betray somebody you’ve been to bed with . . . they can use you the same way for anything on any scale” (70), she realizes. Together the two of them are locked in the World of the Dead, their “particular servitude as the freedom . . . to act outside warrants and charters, to ignore history and the dead, to imagine no future . . . defining moments only, purely, by the action that filled them” (71-72). In this position Frenesi becomes Demeter-like, longing for her lost daughter Prairie, realizing “if I saw her on the street someplace . . . I wouldn’t even know her . . . one more teenage girl” (68). Frenesi’s past “was on her case forever, the zombie at her back, the enemy no one wanted to see, a mouth wide and dark as a grave” (71). Flash and Frenesi are joined together by their inability to escape their pasts and by their son, Justin. However, they, like others in the government’s witness protection program, are terminated, deleted from the government’s and the bank’s computers and, in a rare moment for Frenesi, she realizes that she and Flash were no longer exempt, might easily be abandoned already to the upper world and any unfinished business in it that might now resume . . . as if they’d been kept safe in some time-free zone all these years, but now, at the unreadable whim of something in power, must re-enter the clockwork world of cause and effect (90).

The Government Protection Zone, the computer Zone of 1’s and 0’s: faux quantum-spaces much as was the Casino Hermann Goering in Gravity’s Rainbow.
DL tries to rescue Frenesi but early on in the sixties both before and after Frenesi becomes enamoured with Brock. On the one hand DL is an androgynous figure—a woman who, in many situations, acts like a man. She is most definitely an Orphean questor who endeavors to understand the “world behind the world.” When her father was stationed in Japan, DL began to look for instruction in “unarmed combat”; instead, an instructor, who had “the gift of seeing in a person what she is truly destined to be” (122), finds her and takes her to a sensei, a Japanese master whose disciple she becomes as she begins a crash course in patience, obedience, and the forbidden steps of ninjitse, skills she will later use to rescue Frenesi from Brock Vond’s clutches. DL’s first rescue of Frenesi occurs when DL happens into Berkeley “all in black including helmet and face shield, riding her esteemed and bad red and silver Czech motorcycle . . . onto which she gathered up Frenesi” who had been caught between the police in riot gear and the demonstration she had been filming. DL whisks Frenesi “out of danger . . . and carried her away” (116); Frenesi never thinks her rescuer, this Orpheus, “might be a woman” (117). In those days, Frenesi “dreamed of a mysterious people’s oneness”; DL was looking for “the asskicking part” (118). Later, in a kind of role reversal, DL will grow into Frenesi’s idealism while Frenesi will lose hers. However, when DL rescues Frenesi a second time after Frenesi has become involved with Brock Vond, after she has sold out and set up Weed, after she has been evacuated by the Federal Emergency Evacuation Route and interred in the Underground chambers of the National Security Reservation, DL understands “that by far the better course would have been to leave Frenesi where she was” (253). Convinced that Frenesi must have been “kidnapped” by Vond and acting “out of her own selfish passions” rather than “the egoless agent of somebody else’s will” (252) as she had been taught, DL penetrates the subterranean compound using her ninja “invisibility technique” (253) and together she and Frenesi escape to Mexico. At this point in the narrative their Orpheus and Eurydice roles become clearer: before Frenesi’s involvement with Brock Vond, Frenesi and DL had been lovers as well as partners in the film Kollective. However, once they arrive in Mexico,
Frenesi admits the details of her Brock Vond conspiracy, her setting up Rex and selling out Weed, and her relationship with DL begins “falling to pieces” (260). The last time DL sees Frenesi is when she lets Frenesi off at an exit called Las Surgras where Frenesi and Zoyd meet. Both DL and Zoyd, the novel’s most obvious Orphean figures who love Frenesi and try to redeem her, are unable to rescue Frenesi from Brock Vond, Reagan’s Plutonian representative of Death. Yet, even after all their attempts, Frenesi remains an enigma and, like Eurydice, a contradiction in Hell. “I never believed your mom ever sat down and deliberately chose anything,” DL tells Prairie. “Same time, I always believed in her conscience” (266).

DL is, however, able to redeem Takeshi, the man she comes to love, and she, in turn, is redeemed by love. Even in this relationship—which begins for DL as an act of revenge and a case of mistaken identity—DL assumes an Orphean role. Initially she is approached by Ralph Wayvone, Jr., a Mafia type, who shares her desire for Brock Vond’s death, and wants her to use “the Vibrating Palm, or Ninja Death Touch” (131) to eliminate Brock. In an interesting instance of role-reversal, Ralph insists that she be made up to look like Frenesi to lure Brock to her and to the Death Touch. DL’s journey from this point on is Orphean indeed: she will find release from her selfish obsessions with Brock and Frenesi and be led to enlightenment and transcendence by selfless love. DL descends—she is “brought—down again into the corrupted world” (154)—and because of her faulty vision—she is wearing someone else’s contacts to make her green eyes blue like Frenesi’s—in the middle of sex with Takeshi, DL puts the Death Touch on Takeshi because he looks like Brock Vond—is, in fact, Brock Vond’s “decoy.” Early in the sixties Frenesi wonders if love can save Brock Vond; in the eighties DL posing as Frenesi wonders if the Death Touch can be reversed.

In *Vineland* distinctions between the masculine and feminine identities of the character begin to blur as do the roles of the novel’s Orpheus and Eurydice characters. Early in the novel, Zoyd poses as “Cheryl,” dons a “party dress in a number of colors that
would look good on television” (4), and wields a “tailor-made lady’s chain saw” (6) for his “crazy act” of defenestration. However, some fifteen years earlier he willingly assumed the maternal role and has, during that time, nurtured his daughter when Frenesi abandoned them both. DL’s role in relation to Frenesi and Takeshi is even more ambiguous than Zoyd’s. In relation to Frenesi, DL assumes the masculine role: she “rescues” Frenesi several times; she has a sexual relationship with her. Later, however, DL assumes Frenesi’s identity in order to put the Death Touch on Brock Vond whom she believes to have been her rival for Frenesi. However, in the DL-Takeshi relationship the Orpheus-Eurydice roles becomes hopelessly intertwined. Essentially DL’s relationship with Takeshi not only mirrors Frenesi’s relationship with Brock Vond--when they meet DL is disguised as Frenesi, Takeshi as Brock Vond--it provides an alternative outcome to the Frenesi-Brock Vond pairing. Love cannot redeem the Agent of Death, Brock Vond: Brock is only obsessed with Frenesi and wishes to “possess” her; he is never able to love her because he is unable to get beyond his own preoccupation with self. Frenesi, on the other hand, has “lost” herself to Brock and the Apollonian will to power for which he stands; she has no self to lose in selfless love for another. The DL-Takeshi pairing not only calls into question the relationship between sex and death, it also asks who is redeemed and by whom. To remove the Death Touch, DL must become Takeshi’s “side kick” for a year and a day; in addition, they have a “no-sex clause” attached to the agreement. Together they set up a Karmic Adjustment business in the “Thanatoid village at the confluence of Shade Creek and Seventh River in Vineland County” (172), the epitome of quantum space. While the Thanatoids themselves are “victims ... of Karmic imbalances ... persisting on the skimpiest of hopes” (173) and are trying to “set right whatever was keeping them from advancing farther into the condition of death, Takeshi is “trying to go--the opposite way! Back to life!” (171). Unlike Brock Vond, Takeshi buys into the “adult fantasy” that “love, is always winnin’ out, over death” (171). In Thanatoid Village in Vineland, love does win out over death. Essentially both partners are redeemed by their selfless love for each other.
DL seeks to reverse the Death Touch she mistakenly put on Takeshi and during the process of reversal comes to reclaim her sense of spiritual responsibility in the use of her ninja powers. She comes to realize that Brock, whom she had thought to be her “destination” was really “only the means of transport” to “fulfilling her true Karmic project,” union with Takeshi. In turn, Takeshi’s “adult fantasy” is realized: love wins out over the Death Touch and resurrects him. In the DL-Takeshi relationship, DL is both the agent of Takeshi’s “death” and the source of his redemption, even as he is the source of hers. Takeshi, who should be the Orpheus figure since he is the male, is the Eurydice of this relationship; DL, his Orpheus. Yet, Takeshi serves as an Orpheus figure in that his love redeems DL even as hers redeems him. In the DL-Takeshi pairing, the distinction between male and female, Orpheus and Eurydice essentially disappears. The relationship itself redeems them both.

DL and Takeshi are not the only ones redeemed by love, a redemption that both occurs and is recognized in Vineland; Prairie, like Paola in V., emerges as Earth Goddess-Paraclete for the new generation, Eurydice as Redeemer and Redeemed. Prairie is after all Fenesi’s daughter; Prairie has been estranged from her wayward mother who was loved in spite of her wayward behavior by Orphean figures Zoyd and DL. Because she is Fenesi’s daughter, Prairie is likewise sought by Hector, Brock Vond, and other government agents as another means of possessing Fenesi once and for all. However, Zoyd has protected Prairie by raising her in Vineland. Therein Prairie has prospered primarily because of Zoyd’s unconditional love for his daughter; her birth transformed his life into a process of selfless caring. During the course of the novel, Prairie is protected and loved by Zoyd, educated and enlightened by DL and the Sisterhood of Kanoichi Attentives, and finally reunited with Fenesi and Fenesi’s second family—appropriately at the Traverse-Becker Family Reunion, a yearly event in Vineland, where they “hang out for hours, perilously reconnecting” (368). Prairie, named for the Earth, seems even at her young age—fifteen or sixteen—to possess the Earth’s mysterious knowledge concerning points of connection. She connects with her “sleazoid” relatives with whom she plays “the traditional nonstop
crazy eights game” (367), with her half brother Justin, with Frenesi, with Weed in his Thanatoid state, with Brock Vond who tries to abduct her from Vineland. She also begins to come to terms with who she is. At the Traverse-Becker “wingding” she tells Zoyd that meeting Frenesi was “like meeting a celebrity” (375), and she identifies herself with Zoyd: “after having just spent hours with Frenesi’s face” she takes a “long look” at Zoyd and sees in him “as clearly as she ever would in her own not-yet-come-to-terms-with face” (374). She also forms a relationship with Weed in his Thanatoid state, becomes an “Intercessor” between Weed and Frenesi, between life and death. Weed and Prairie “were soon to become an item around Shade Creek, out all hours among the mulling sleepless of the town” (366). Prairie, it seems, is equally comfortable with the dead as with the living, and with him, she begins to wonder, “if I am the payback [for what Frenesi did to him]? If your [Weed’s] account is zeroed out at last?” (365). She begins to suspect that she has some special significance, a “payback” for Frenesi who was lost and unredeemed. Prairie, like Paola in V., is in the process of assuming her role as Intercessor, Paraclete, the one who brings people who need to be connected together. Part of her coming-to-terms process is a “visit from Brock Vond” suspended from a helicopter, representing “Death From Slightly Above” (379). Even though she suspects after his sudden disappearance that he is “no longer available” to her, “she drifted into the lucid thin layer of waking dream” (384), a quantum-like state where she goes “back and forth for a while between Brock fantasies and the silent darkened silver images all around her” (384-85). At dawn, one of the two quantum times of the day when darkness and daylight interface, she is awakened by her dog, Desmond, a Vineland creature, who, having been lost, is now “thinking he must be home” (385).

The novel begins and ends with Desmond the dog. The word “dog” is a mirror image of the word “god,” and Desmond definitely has more than one personality. At the beginning of the novel, even though Zoyd dreams that the blue jays are “carrier pigeons . . . each one bearing a message . . . another deep nudge from forces unseen” (3), Desmond is
a victim of the aggressive blue jays who steal his food. Later Desmond is run off by Feds who invade and take over Zoyd and Prairie’s home. While he is lost, Desmond develops a reputation as a renegade dog, a subversive. He “had been spotted out by Shade Creek, having lately joined up with a pack of dispossessed pot-planters’ dogs,” a dog who could easily have a price on his head for “gangiing innocent cows” (357). At the end of the novel, Desmond, who was lost, returns, “roughened by the miles, face full of blue-jay feathers, smiling out of his eyes, wagging his tail, thinking he must be home” (385). Desmond is a Vineland dog, a descendent of Van Meter’s Chloe, each of whose puppies “turned out to look like their mother [and] went on to begin a dynasty in Vineland, from among one of whose litters, picked for the gleam in his eye, was to come Zoyd and Prairie’s dog, Desmond” (319). Moreover, Desmond is the very embodiment of the spirit of Vineland, of the “divine justice” spoken of by Jesse Traverse each year at the Traverse-Becker Reunion. The quotation Jesse recites is a passage from Emerson as “quoted in a jailhouse copy of The Varieties of Religious Experience by William James”: “Secret retributions are always restoring the level, when disturbed, of divine justice. It is impossible to tilt the beam” (369). Those who try to disturb “divine justice” in Vineland are made to feel the “retribution.” Desmond restores “the level”--the Golden Mean--by eliminating the blue jays who steal his food and by returning “home” to Prairie in the Vineland dawn. Desmond’s retribution is re-enacted by Vineland itself--with the help of its residents, Vato and Blood (Spirit and Flesh). Using their towing service, the pair disables and banishes from Vineland Brock Vond as a Force of Death to the individual will, to the family, and to any notion of continued existence beyond death; thereby, they “balance the beam.” Vato and Blood pick up Brock whose helicopter and/or car has been disabled and issue him a warning “against the Ghosts’ Trail leading to Tsorreh, the land of death.” “‘Once down under the earth,’” they say, “‘there would be no way to return’” (379) because they “‘take out your bones.’” Vato explains to Brock, “‘the bones have to stay on this side. The rest of you goes over’” (380). Brock’s “Death Touch” is neutralized and he is entombed--
boneless—within the "land of death," expelled forever from Vineland. Once Vineland has
purged itself of Brock Vond, Desmond returns, the Vineland dog to his Vineland master.
The final image of the novel: Desmond and Prairie together in Vineland with the Golden
Mean restored.

*Vineland* reverses many of the assumptions of Pynchon's earlier masculine novels,
*V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, and examines more fully the possibility that the feminine
principle is the impetus for attainment of the Golden Mean. The novel burgeons with
female characters. Frenesi is, of course, the novel's focal character and Eurydice figure
who is sought by all other major characters. Zoyd and DL love her; Brock Vond obsesses
over and wishes to possess her; Weed's recognition of her betrayal of him prevents his
natural passage into death; Prairie, her daughter, wishes to be reunited with her. Frenesi's
subversive maternal heritage is emphasized in the novel—the legacy of subversion, a
metaphor for the search for the Golden Mean. Frenesi's maternal grandparents, Eula
Becker and Jess Traverse, are the original subversives as labor union organizers of the
1930s. By organizing the annual Becker-Traverse Reunion each year in Vineland, they
become representatives of the Eternal Return. Jess's annual reading of the same passage
from William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* which emphasizes the
restoration of the "level . . . of divine justice" connects the couple with the Golden Mean as
an ideal state. Sasha Gates, their daughter and Frenesi's mother is the subversive of the
next generation. She is "a woman who also happen[ed] to be political, in the middle of a
global war [World War II]" (75). Even though her husband, Hub, was not political, both
were caught up in the "blacklist period" of the fifties in Hollywood. Keeping with her
maternal tradition, Frenesi becomes a subversive herself in the sixties as a member of the
Film Kollective and she has the chance, in her marriage to Zoyd, to continue the subversive
search for the ideal, the Golden Mean. She sells out those ideals, seduced by the very Will
to Power in the person of Brock Vond that she, as a subversive, had committed to oppose.
The subversive ideal, however, is resurrected in Prairie, the daughter she had abandoned
for the World of Death. Prairie emerges as her own woman, a Vineland woman, ready and
willing to assume her Eurydice-Earth Mother role, an Intercessor and Paraclete in the
tradition of Paola for those who search for the Golden Mean. Vineland, however, is
Vineland's ultimate Eurydice figure, who has come, in this novel to be associated with the
feminine principle, the Earth Mother who successfully nurtures both Prairie and Desmond,
the hope for the next generation. Vineland: a quantum space capable of bringing life out of
death, of expelling extremes, of restoring the Golden Mean.

*Mason & Dixon (1997)*

Although *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon's fifth novel, is masculine and massive, it
represents an interesting departure from his earlier masculine novels, *V.* and *Gravity's
Rainbow*. In several of its aspects, *Mason & Dixon* has more in common with *Vineland*
than it does with either *V.* or *Gravity's Rainbow*. Most obvious of its affinities with
*Vineland* is the setting of its huge central section entitled "America." The America of this
section is pristine and Edenic even as Vineland is. Mason and Dixon are its discoverers
even as they are the agents of its mapping. Their sojourn in America is a mere five years,
and though during this time talk of Revolution is about, war or the threat of war is not the
extreme circumstance with which the novel's characters must cope. Colonization is. Even
though Mason and Dixon as surveyors of the boundary line between the colonies of
Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware are colonization's agents, they gradually begin to
glimpse at the significance of their charting endeavors even as they reckon with the
"Tellurick Forces" of the Earth which they can neither control or understand. In *Mason &
Dixon* as in *Vineland*—and to a lesser extent in *Gravity's Rainbow*—America is both a
quantum space and a formidable Eurydice figure—a living creature—who, in this novel, has
only begun to be coerced by the Apollonian will to power represented by the newly-formed
power structure, the scientific community. *Mason & Dixon*, like Pynchon's two previous
masculine novels, features dual protagonists, Mason and Dixon. Their antagonists,
however, are less visible and less clearly delineated. Mason's adversary seems to be
Bradley, his sponsor, who married his first love, Suzanna, and subsequently refused to champion Mason’s bid for membership in the Royal Society. Otherwise, their adversaries are more generalized. Dixon opposes slavery in any form and demonstrates this several times during the course of the novel; both dimly sense that they have come under the influence of some malign force which they have difficulty recognizing—perhaps because they work for it. The force seems to be connected to England’s attempts to subdue the earth by demarcating it with “lines” so that it might be possessed and controlled. Mason and Dixon receive inklings of this notion from Zhang, the Chinese critic of their Newtonian endeavors to mark the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland by scarring the earth with a straight Line through the wilderness without any attention paid to the “Boundaries” of “nature” which honor the “Dragon . . . within, from which Land-Scape ever takes its form” (542). As the novel’s dual protagonists, Mason and Dixon represent two opposing perspectives on life: Mason is a “dour man” preoccupied with death who espouses the Royal Society’s Apollonian view; Dixon is a lover of life whose activities can only be described as Dionysian. Yet throughout the Rev’d Cherryoke’s account of their adventures in his “Tale of America” which is the novel itself, the delineation of the differences between them waxes and wanes until at last “taken together” they seem to be “light and dark Sides of a single Planet, with America the Sun” (707). The amelioration of extremes is more obvious in Mason & Dixon than in any of his previous novels as is the dominance of quantum space—the yet-to-be-charted America with all its promise and possibility still in tact. Pynchon’s fifth novel is a novel of America and of those who both participated in its charting and were transformed by its revelations. America in 1768 was the still point, the intersection of the savage (the Great Warrior Path) and the scientific (Mason and Dixon’s Line); Mason and Dixon experience both, and they experience both simultaneously. The result of their experience in the quantum space called America: a mating; a melding of opposites co-existing in the same instant; the Golden Mean, like the sun, perceived from light and dark perspectives.
Almost as soon as Mason and Dixon meet in Portsmouth, England, they encounter a marginalized natural phenomenon in the Learnc'd English Dog who sings them a song and presents them with a conundrum for which they, as men in the Age of Reason, are not prepared. “There is . . . no such thing as a Talking Dog,” the Learnc'd English Dog tells them. “Talking Dogs belong with dragons and unicorns” (22). Mason and Dixon must travel great distances and become immersed in uncharted natural space before they can understand the Learnc'd English Dog’s “Provisions for Survival in a World less fantastic” (22). To this end the Learnc'd English Dog leads them to Fender Bodine and to the Seahorse, “a tidy corner of Hell” (34), and the ship that will take them across the equator into a different hemisphere and to the Cape of Good Hope where they will begin their attempts, from two different perspectives, to unravel the conundrum presented them by the Learnc'd English Dog. They observe the Transit of Venus from the Island of St. Helena, said to be “Paradise.” They discover instead “Geometry and optical illusion” with “Darkness [rather than the sun] rising up out of the sea” which seems to “lie above the Island,—as if suspended.” The small town there “clings to the edge of an interior that must be reckoned part of the Other World” (107). Their experiences in the Southern Hemisphere are merely a preparation for their extended stay in the uncharted wilds of America which they are charged to chart. “Savages. Wilderness. No one even knows what’s out there . . . to place a Line directly thro’ it? Doesn’t it strike you as a little unreasonable?” (248) Mason remarks to Dixon.

In America where the miraculous is everywhere, the pair encounters numerous “marginal”--unexplained--phenomena which hints at the existence of another world--a quantum world--quite beyond the boundaries of their Newtonian perspective. From his former mentor, Emerson, Dixon receives a clock that never stops. “‘With proper deployment of Spring Constants and Magnetickal Gating,’” Emerson tells him, “‘Power may be barrow’d, as needed, against repayment dates deferrable indefinitely’” (317). Later, they ride in a coach the interior space of which is “quite noticeably larger than the
outside” (354). Eventually, they become acquainted with Armand, a French chef whose love animates a mechanical Duck. Tales of the Duck’s Exploits follow the Line. The Duck “is [said to be] susceptible to the shifts of Breeze between Worlds, notably at twilight” when the Duck has been seen “shimmering into Visibility . . . then out again” (448). They encounter the mysterious forces—electricity, magnetism, and gravity—in bizarre instances. Felipé, the performing Electric Eel, not only sings, but when its tail is in its mouth and the circuit is complete, the audience is entertained by “spectacles Pyrotechnick” (432). At Lepton castle the “Barking—tub with Feet, Bear Feet” is miraculously balanced via its “Centers of Gravity true and Virtual” on “some Axis invisible” (426). “Iron Hill, a famous and semi-magical Magnetick Anomaly” (470) and the “mysterious Lead Mines into he Mountains” (468) affect the survey of the Line. Eden-like America, they discover, has forces within the land that, like the supernatural—or quantum level activity—are unexplainable by Newtonian science. By the end of their life’s journeys when they are together for the last time, both Mason and Dixon encounter once again “a Norfolk Terrier, of memorable Appearance” (756). When the Dog whose “true Name is one they must guess” speaks, this time they are prepared to listen: “The next time you are together [this will be after death], so shall I be, with you” (757), the Dog—quite possibly the mirror image of God—tells them. The message comes to them in their shared waking dream, “of America, whose Name is something else, and Maps of which do not exist” (757).

The marginalized natural phenomenon Mason and Dixon encounter coupled with the immensity of the unbounded space that, in the 1760s when Mason and Dixon were charting the Line, existed in its pristine state overwhelm Mason and Dixon much as did the extreme circumstances of war and threats of war overwhelmed the characters in V. and Gravity’s Rainbow. In Mason & Dixon, however, the characters must come to terms with the uncertainty that is America, Pynchon’s most expansive quantum space to date. With their expertise in astronomy and surveying and their understanding of geometric principles and calculations, their Newtonian principles fail to explain all they encounter. In fact, their
Newtonian principles, like their mathematical calculations, fail to satisfactorily explain most of what they encounter, just as they fail to explain quantum phenomenon. However, the quantum attributes associated with unbounded space, most closely connected to the vast unexplored regions of America, are not confined to America, though a narrow Visto between Delaware and the Ohio River which Mason and Dixon explore and chart is the setting for most of the novel. In *Mason & Dixon* unbounded space is extended to include the entire earth. Much discussion revolves around the concept that the earth is “a conscious Creature, animated by power drawn from beneath the Earth” (128); the Hollow Earth Theory is likewise juxtaposed against Newton’s conviction that the earth is solid, its mass and dimensions calculable. Viewing the earth as a living creature connects the notion of Earth as quantum space to the ancient association of Earth with the Feminine Life Force even more directly than the connection made between the two in *Vineland*. In *Mason & Dixon* the quantum space—America, the Earth—begins to take on a life of its own and play an active role in the lives of the novel’s characters. The Hollow Earth Theory envisions the Earth as a body, with an “inside” and an “outside” which are equally deserving of respect. Their experiences in the novel’s quantum spaces—most of which burgeon with the miraculous and the mysterious—transform the two men of science, Mason and Dixon. Perhaps because of their connection, each in his own way becomes “open” and receptive to Rilke’s notion of “Superabundant being” which they come to believe dwells within the “Earth: invisible” (Elegy IX).

However, not only does quantum space in the form of marginalized (unexplained) natural phenomena and unbounded space dominate *Mason & Dixon*, the theatrical experience and space linguistically evoked is equally prominent as a quantum space in which transformation is possible. The entire tale of *Mason and Dixon* is itself a performance. It is told by Rev’d Wicks Cherryoke, a “nomadic parson” and “Family outcast” (9) whose condition of remaining in his sister’s home in Philadelphia during the Christmas season, 1786, is to “keep the children amus’d” (6). The Rev’d refers to his
religious role as "a parsonical disguise . . . that never took more than a Handful of actor’s tricks"; he counts those years as a parson as "years wasted" (8). He prefers to think of himself as "an untrustworthy Remembrancer" (8) whose "Tale of America" (97) he reads for the children’s entertainment. The Rev’d’s Tale of America is the tale of Mason and Dixon. That the tale has spiritual significance is evidenced by the Rev’d’s remark that he "tried to record" it "in what I then projected as a sort of "Spiritual Day-Book"; that the tale is connected to space associated with quantum activity is suggested by his remark to the children that the relationship between the two men was fraught with "Uncertainty as to how the power may come to be sorted out betwixt 'em" (16). The two men seem to be opposites brought together in the Rev’d’s tale much as they are brought together for the purpose of observing and charting the Transit of Venus from the vantage point of South Africa in the Southern Hemisphere.

The infinite regress of tales within tales is, by Pynchon’s fifth novel, emblematic of the quantum-like complexity of Pynchon’s theatrical space. One of the more important of these tales within tales begins "America," the novel’s 460 page midsection and Golden Mean. One of a series of poems that comprise the fictional Pennsylvanniad by the fictional Timothy Tox begins "America." It focuses on the Boundaries between Reality and Representation in the wilds of America where occurrences seem invisibly connected. The first line of Tox’s poetry addresses "The Boundary Dispute" that "Mr. Mason / And Mr. Dixon . . . / Connected, as with some invis’ble Bracket" (257) are called on to settle. The Poet, Tim Tox, himself appears in the Tale of America as Mason and Dixon make their "Retreat Eastward." Tox is said by the Countrymen to be mad because he "imagines himself Moses—with a Commission from God, to bring another People out of Captivity, "out of that American Egypt" (684), the city. He believes in the Golem, a huge "Creature made of Water and Earth,—Clay, that is, and Minerals,—as if an Indian Mound of the West, struck by Lightning, had risen, stood, and newly awaken’d . . . begun, purposefully, to walk. An American Wonder" (685). In a couplet Tim Tox, "the Forest Dithyrambist"
replies to the skepticism of his countrymen concerning both the Golem’s existence and his sanity: “‘Tis only by the Grace that some call Luck / That anyone can quite escape the muck” (684). The power to redeem—grant “grace”—depends on a mysterious Golem-like power connected to the earth and suggested within linguistic-theatrical space. Tom Tox’s *Pennsylvaniaiad* is a performance within a performance by Rev’d Cherrycoke. At their final meeting as old men in various stages of failing health, Mason and Dixon both fall asleep and dream of each other and of Public Performances. In Dixon’s dream, both he and Mason are “up on the Stage . . . back’d by a chamber orchestra . . . singing” of the “Marvels” they have “peep’d” at, of “the Cataracts and Caverns / And the Spectres in the Sky,” of “a wonderful place” with “Nothing but Space” which they will “chase in the Dark” (753). In their dreams, they, like Orpheus, are compelled to articulate their experiences and awakenings, to share them with others. Performance space in Pynchon’s novels possesses the most fundamental attributes of space in which quantum activity occurs. It is the space in which mutually exclusive extremes can coexist; it is the space in which past and future conflate into the moment; it is the space of infinite possibility. It is the fictional space of the novel in which Thomas Pynchon, like Tim Tox and the Rev’d Cherrycoke, performs.

Even though quantum space is, metaphorically speaking, more readily accessible to Mason and Dixon—perhaps because, in the 1760s, more natural space remained uncharted—they still have difficulties in adjusting their perspectives so that they may recognize the importance of attaining, in Dixon’s words, “the middling life,” “some happy Medium”—i.e., the Golden Mean. Before they can come to such a recognition they must experience the Underworld. In *Mason & Dixon*, the Underworld the two men experience undergoes some bizarre permutations many of which are exhibited in conjunction with the mysterious “Tellurick Forces” they encounter in their scientific investigations. These forces—gravity, electricity, magnetism—are observable in nature, yet seem to have their source in that which exists beneath or beyond that which is observed. Mason and Dixon first encounter these
mysterious forces in their charting expeditions below the equator to South Africa and across the Atlantic to the New World of America. Below the equator, the Island of St. Helena is a quantum Underworld on which mechanical rules and reasonable explanations fail to explain what is there “reduced to Geometry and optical Illusion, even what is waiting there all around, what is never to be named directly” (106). On the Island Mason encounters the effects of gravity when the “Attraction of the Mountains” deflects their “Plumb-lines, thereby throwing off our Zenith Obs” (158). To accommodate the deflections, Mason is obligated to “repeat the Obs at the other side of the Island, and take the Mean Values betwixt ‘em” (emphasis added 158). This obligation to calculate by approximation introduces the notion of Uncertainty into Mason’s Newtonian perspective and make him nervous. The “Other side” of the Island on which alternate calculations must be made is the Windward side; on the windward side of the Island Mason is introduced to the wind’s “properties of transformation” (163) which he also finds unsettling. Mason and Dixon later witness the effects of electricity—in theatrical performances in America. The first is Ben Franklin’s portrayal as the Grim Reaper, a “Scythe-bearing Figure in Skeleton’s Disguise” (294) who, after the demonstration of his new Leyden-Jar Battery in the performance of the “Danse Macabre,” leads his audience out into a lightning storm “to catch us a Bolt” (295) with his scythe. The second performance is by Felipé the electric eel, “each disk being a kind of Electrickal Plate, whose summ’d effect is to charge his Head in a Positive, as his Tail in a negative” which when touched together (resembling the Cosmic Serpent, suggesting the Eternal Return) provide “onlookers with a variety of Spectacles Pyrotechnick” (432). In response to this phenomenon, Mason writes into his “hidden Journal”:

I saw at the heart of the Electrick Fire, beyond color, beyond even Shape, an Aperture into another Dispensation of Space, yea and Time, than what Astronomers and Surveyors are us’d to working with. It bade me enter or rather it welcom’d my Spirit (433).
Once again Mason is disturbed—and curious about—the notion that behind the forces of nature as evidenced by the physical effects of gravity and electricity “another Dispensation” from which these forces arise seems to exist.

Magnetism is the force most closely associated with the Underworld and that which lies beneath the earth’s surface as well as at its polar extremes. “[A]ncient Barrows” have been known for centuries as sources of, and foci for, the Tellurick Energies” (218). Magnetism, like gravity and electricity, suggests the existence of the miraculous, the supernatural, a force unexplained. Mason and Dixon encounter the effects of magnetism when an iron factory begins to run Dixon’s “old Needle Amok” (453) near Octarara Road. (See Appendix A, p. 357 and Map 14, p. 373). The “notorious Wedge” at the “northeast corner of Maryland is priz’d for its Ambiguity” (469) and influenced by the nearby “Iron Hell, a famous and semi-magical Magnetick Anomaly” that has created a “geographick Anomaly” (470) as well. The Magnetic “Attraction of the Mountains” (474) forces Mason and Dixon once again to “take symmetrickal readings on opposite sides of the Crests, and hope that the two errors will cancel out” (475), a technique that reintroduces the Uncertainty factor into their measurement. The Uncertainty Mason and Dixon experience in conjunction with the Lead Factory, Iron Mountain, and the anomalies of Dixon’s readings are later reinforced by their experiences in the vicinity of the “secret Lead Mines, which the Indians guard jealously” and in which “Lime, in certain of the cells” (547) has been replaced with iron. A description of the landscape around the “Lead Mines” evokes an image of the Hell brought to the surface:

The odor of Sulfur was ev’rywhere. The Valleys were lit with many small Fires, at each of which Ore was being burn’d to a Regulus of the Metal . . . . Lead out here is a much-needed metal—what controls Lead controls the supply of Ammunition . . . [and] a segment of the Tellurick-energy Market (548).
However, another image gives the Lead Mines quantum characteristics when they are said to constitute "a Plutonian History unfolding far below . . . all unknown to use . . . . A complete, largely unsens'd World, held within our own, like a child in a womb, waiting for some Summons to Light . . .” (548). The two descriptions of the Lead Mines—as perceived at the surface and below the surface reinforces Pynchon's equation of surface level experience with Newtonian descriptions of natural phenomenon made in both "Under the Rose" and V. and juxtaposes it against the richer and more expansive possibilities that exist beneath or behind the surface—like the quantum world on which the surface rests.

Even though Mason and Dixon encounter the forces of gravity, electricity, and magnetism associated with the animating powers “drawn from beneath the Earth,” they both initially experience an Underworld Journey when they cross the equator and “descend” into the Southern hemisphere for their charting of the First Transit of Venus. In fact the title of the novel’s first section, “Latitudes and Departures,” calls attention to this crossing and descent. The Crossing of the Equatorial Line even requires that as novices—"Pollywogs"—they participate in the “ritual of Crossing Over” into the “South, with a newly constellated Sky, and all-unforseen ways of living and dying” (56). Their experiences in the Southern hemisphere—in Capetown, South Africa and St. Helena's Island—for which they are unprepared are reminiscent of Weissmann’s descent in Gravity's Rainbow. However, Weissmann was unable or unwilling to assimilate his new sphere of experiences into his former perspective. Perhaps this is because he is alone, as was Conrad’s Kurtz when he first encountered Africa and the “Heart of Darkness.” However, Mason and Dixon are not alone—they have each other—and this factor seems to facilitate their ability to emerge from their Underworld Journey enlightened; however, their Underworld journey to South Africa merely prepares them for their “descent” into the vast wilderness that is America. Structurally the novel’s central section, “America,” which focuses on the survey of the earth in order to establish a boundary line between two disputing colonies, is framed by two astronomical surveys of the same celestial
phenomenon at two different geographical locations, the Transit of Venus. On a very literal level, Mason and Dixon “descend” from a celestial charting to a terrestrial one. Their observation and charting of the First Transit prepares them for their descent to and charting of America. Their encounters in the Underworld, America—the Earth after all is beneath the Heavens—prepare them in turn to contemplate the Heavens in separate observations of “The Last Transit,” the novel’s third section. By this time, 1769, their perspectives have been altered to the point at which America’s “Abundance” seems as “infinite” as the heavens, “impossible to reach the end of in one lifetime,--hence, from a Mortal point of view, infinite” (754) and the distinctions between ascent and descent cease to exist.

This is especially true for Dixon, the more open and receptive of the two men and advocate of the Hollow Earth Theory who experiences a truly miraculous Underworld Journey during his observation of the “Last Transit of Venus” in Part 3. During his sojourn in America, Dixon is convinced of the Hollow Earth Theory by the philosophical meanderings of the Chinaman Zhang, the Welsh Capt. Shelby, and the Northman Stig. The Hollow Earth Theory maintains that the earth is a body with an inner and outer surface and that at some point close to the North Pole a “Funnel-shap’e” opening leads “inside the Earth . . . to another World” (603)—a quantum Underworld if ever one was described. Dixon’s convictions, he maintains in his last meeting with Mason, were confirmed during his charting of the Last Transit of Venus which took him far to the North to Hammerfrost Island while Mason went south to Ulster. There, Dixon says, he was visited by a figure resembling the Ancient Mariner; the figure seemed to be “a Shadow of Stig” who escorted him to “the Pole itself [which] hung beyond us in empty space . . . at the top of the World” (739). To Mason, Dixon describes in detail his miraculous descent into the funnel which is “ever downhill, into a not-quite total darkness.” In *Terra Concava*, he says, towns and lakes are “perfectly secured . . . by Gravity as well as Centrifugal Force.” “[T]o journey anywhere,” he tells Mason, “‘is ever to ascend’” (740). “‘No Hell then?’” Mason asks, “‘Nor any . . . Single Administrator of Evil?’” “‘Not inside the Earth,’” Dixon says. No
Underworld in Pynchon’s novels is evil; evil manifests itself in surface-level experience. The Underworld Journey is required for enlightenment. Dixon’s Underworld Journey results in a Biblical discovery from Job 26:5-7 which reads in part: "‘‘destruction hath no covering. He [God] hangeth the earth upon nothing’’" (742). The quotation for Dixon constitutes a revelation, one which suggests the existence of a world inside or beneath the visible. From this “underworld” something miraculously arises; the visible world which arises, according to Dixon’s revelation, appears suspended upon “nothing.” This quantum underworld Dixon calls “Terra Concava.”

If quantum spaces dominate—even overwhelm—the characters in Mason & Dixon, the novel’s Orpheus and Eurydice figures have evolved into its two main characters, Mason and Dixon. However, this evolution is not readily apparent. Initially the myth manifests itself in the relationship between Mason and his wife Rebekah who, when Mason and Dixon meet, has been dead a little over a year. She died at the birth of their second son, Dr. Isaac, whom Mason spends most of his life blaming for her death. After her death, Mason first fell into a pattern of debauchery and then became preoccupied with death and obsessed with the possibility of Rebekah’s return. His preoccupation and obsession have exacerbated his propensity for Melancholy that has become like a disease—“Hyperthrenia, or Excess of Mourning” (25) over Rebekah—that is part of his personality when he and Dixon meet in 1760-61. Mason consistently equates himself with Orpheus. After his first meeting with the Learned English Dog, he comes to believe that he can pass over into death, visit Rebekah, and return with “his Faith resurrected” (25). After several sexual escapades at the Cape, Mason envisions himself having “walked away from the Cape and successfully not looked back to see what Plutonian wife, in what thin garment, may after all have follow’d—” though he knows who his “Eurydice . . . is,—or would be, were he Orpheus enough to carry a Tune In a Bucket” (147). After two years of silence, Rebekah begins to “speak to him,” to “haunt” him. She comes to him on the Windward side of St. Helena’s Island. “‘I imagin’d you miss’d me,’” she tells him “in her own unmodified
voice” (164). Ever since they first met, Mason thinks of her as “an enigma to him, Eve in Paradise,--or Eurydice in Hell” (205).

Rebekah, in fact, is an enigma. Initially she seems to be a Eurydice figure, having been summoned to death before her time. She is thought of by Mason as the Eurydice he must visit and return from, dwell with, or resurrect. Yet, Rebekah as a Eurydice figure possesses some interesting quirks. First she is associated with Suzanna Peach with whom Mason had fallen in love at sixteen but who, wanting a son, had married Mason’s sponsor, Bradley. Rebekah, while living, possesses certain supernatural powers: she knows of his dreams of going to the “far Indies” before he tells her; she admits to detecting a certain affinity with Stonehenge when they visit it on Midsummer’s Eve. When she finally does “visit” Mason on St. Helena Island, she frightens him by saying, “But wait until you’re over here [on the side of Death], Mopery” (165), and Mason is unable to make sense of her visit—“nothing of Reason in it” (165), he later tells Dixon. Also, according to Uncle Ives, one of the listeners to Rev’d Cherrycoke’s tale, even though Mason and his children were all “baptiz’d at Sapperton Church” in Gloucestershire, “no records of her exist there . . . he and Rebekah were not married there” (171). In some ways, she seems “as-yet Unmaterialized” (171). Yet, she advises him—as does Dixon—to “‘Look to the Earth . . . Belonging to her [the Earth] as I do, I know she lives, and that . . . close to the Forces within, even you . . . may learn of her, Tellurick Secrets you could never guess” (171).

Later in Mason’s journeys to America, Rebekah becomes associated with a “She” who might have been Eliza Fields, kidnapped by Dark wild men and taken northward to be schooled; Rebekah is also associated with S. Blondelle, a gypsy child of the Sun who becomes a nun. When “She”—Eliza—is dressed as a whore to attract the Chinaman Zhang, she most resembles Rebekah. In fact, for Mason the resemblance is “‘More than merely some general Likeness . . . you [Eliza] are her Point-for-Point Representation’” (536), a coincidence that validates the notion of bodily resurrection for Mason but also equates Rebekah with the Whore of Babylon whose mission is to seduce the faithful. Later,
Rebekah becomes the focus of a dream Mason has of her being “seduced” and possessed “in ways more intimate than he had ever been allowed” “by this band of foreign, dimly political, dimly sinister men and women” with whom she “whispers incessantly, in a language they knew, and he did not” (538-39).

Rebekah’s last visit to Mason occurs toward the end of Mason and Dixon’s work in America shortly after Mason has, in talking with Dixon, questioned his own obsession with “Death’s Insignia, its gestures and formulae” in order to “show my worthiness to obtain a Permit to visit her, to cross that grimly patroll’d Line” between Life and Death. “She accosts him one night walking on the Visto” and jealously demands that he “leave Mr. Dixon to his Fate, and attend your own” (703). “‘Mr. Dixon,’ she says to him, ‘would much prefer you forget me’ and be his ‘playmate.’” Rebekah summons Mason “back inside the House of Your duty” (704) -- to obsess over her death and Death itself. In fact, she likens their relationship--Mason’s, Dixon’s, and hers--to “a Triangle” with her “as the Unknown side” (703). By the end of Mason’s life, he has remarried. Rebekah visits him infrequently in dreams, but eventually her voice is silent. Throughout most of his life, Mason believes Rebekah is his Eurydice and he the Orpheus whose duty it is to rescue or otherwise redeem her from the World of Death. This secret of his melancholia he confides to only one person, his “mate” in the truest sense, Dixon. Whereas Rebekah pulls Mason toward Darkness and the finite world of Death, Dixon, with his “beaming and cheery temperament” summons Mason to play the Infinite game of Life of which Death is a part. Throughout the novel, Mason is pulled both ways: toward Duty and Death by Rebekah; toward Desire and Life by Dixon. The change Mason-as-Orpheus undergoes, however, is painfully slow. He does not relinquish his melancholy demeanor and only at the end of his life-journey, much of which he shared with Dixon, does his perspective undergo some adjustment. When Mason and Dixon meet and travel together to the Cape of Good Hope to chart the first Transit of Venus, Mason is “nearly invisible,” an astronomer and an Anglican whose excessive mourning over Rebekah’s death has left him a wine-drinker with a dour
disposition and a “generally uneasy Life” (13). By contrast, Dixon, his partner for the charting, is “first to catch the average Eye” (16). Dixon is a surveyor and a Quaker whose love of life and ale fills him with Mirth. Initially, the pair seem to approach their task from opposite perspectives: Mason is a serious Newtonian practitioner; Dixon is a Dionysian through and through. To juxtapose the two men thusly would be, for a Pynchonesque novel, much too simplistic. Though these two protagonists do not willingly relinquish their points of view, they do share many life experiences which include from the very beginning of their relationship the intrusion of the miraculous into their lives. And while they often have opposing interpretations of, or reactions to, these experiences, they do, as men associated with the scientific community, share an innate curiosity about the worlds—both celestial and terrestrial—they are called upon to chart and measure.

Especially in America Mason and Dixon encounter a number of instances in which the miraculous assumes mythological proportions. One of the most miraculous is the relationship between Armand, a French chef, and the Automated Duck constructed by an engineer named Vancanson. Mason and Dixon first hear of this tale shortly after they meet up with Rev’d Cherrycoke who is “back in America” with the “hope that Miracles might yet occur, that God might yet return to Human affairs” (353). Together at the Inn in Pennsylvania they hear the tale from the chef, M. Armand, who has become personally involved with the Duck over time. The Duck, Armand says, was attributed by some to Vancanson’s hubris—his meddling where he should not have by giving the Duck not only a digestive system, but an Erotick modification that set off an “Explosion of Change, from Inertia toward Independence, and Power” (373): the possibility of “l’Amour,” he says, brought the mechanical duck to life. The Duck, named “Newton, the Metallic Marvel” (375), is attracted to M. Armand whom Vancanson used as a “decoy” to recapture the Duck, but, being a female duck unacquainted with love, the Duck develops an attachment for Armand who befriends her. Initially the two prove to be quite incompatible, Armand tells Mason and Dixon, since the Duck is “artificial and deathless, as I was meat, and of the
Earth” (380). To escape this attachment, Armand flees to America, to Pennsylvania known for its “Religious Eccentricity” (380). The Duck follows him. There, in America, the Duck is mythologized and takes on a life of its own. “Tales of Duck Exploits are ev’rywhere”: it “routs a great army of Indians . . . levels a Mountain . . . plow’d ev’ry Field in the County” (448) in a single afternoon. At twilight it has been seen “shimmering into Visibility, for a few moments, then out again” (448). Armand insists that as the Duck’s “Metaphysickal Powers” increase, “her Destiny [is] pull’d Earthward and rising Heavenward” at the same time (449). Armand unfortunately remains “‘ever tight in Time’s Embrace’” (637), and eventually he seems to have “‘pass’d altogether from her Care’” (637).

Mason and Dixon share the experience of the miraculous Duck and its mythology as encountered at different junctures of their measurement of the Line; however, they interpret the experience differently. When they first hear the tale, Mason responds to the Orpheus-Eurydice aspect of the Duck myth because he equates it with his own personal desire to redeem Rebekah from the clutches of Death and he identifies with the idea that love brings the Duck to life. However, as they begin to hear Duck Lore “all up and down the Line” (448), they “attempt to ignore” it, “assuming ‘tis only another episode of group folly” (449). Mason calls it an “irrational need to believe in automatons” (449). However, at this point of their mutual disbelief, the invisible duck swoops down and grabs Mason’s hat. Mason is immediately converted and believes the unexplained appearance and disappearance of the Duck is somehow linked to Celestial phenomena such as the appearance of new planets. Finally, as their “Days of Westering approach “Zero” (664), Mason and Dixon begin to take seriously Zhang’s proposal that the Line they have cut through the wilderness carries with it “Bad Energy” in terms of Armand’s Duck whose powers, they hypothesize, might increase with the “symmetrical bisection” of the Line (i.e., an intersection at right angles to the Line). To test this hypothesis, they have a decoy carved to “look like an Automatick Duck” (667) which does indeed attract the Duck. Once
released from her "immoderate Desire for the Orthogonal" (667) so that she may "shift [at right angles] north or south, to any Latitude she likes, without being restricted any more to the Line and its Visto" (669), the Duck is liberated. Holding "perfectly still in the air" as "the Earth spins beneath her," she reports on the "Interesting" condition of the "Planet" that Mason and Dixon have a "minor tho' morally problematic part in" by their charting "but five degrees of three hundred sixty" (669). While Mason interprets the encounter with and report from the Duck in terms of his own personal experience with Rebekah and his charting of the heavens, Dixon sees the larger picture. "A Global Scheme! Ah knew it!" he exclaims before he reveals the exact nature of his revelation to Mason--that they have been in their charting endeavors merely pawns in the Finite Game of possessing the land. As "Men of Science," he tells Mason, "[we] may be but the simple Tools of others, with no more idea of what they are about, than a Hammer knows of a House" (669).

Mason and Dixon encounter many such miraculous intrusions into their lives as they chart the Transits of Venus and the boundary line in America. Many, like the Tale of Armand and the Duck, assume mythological status. However, the astronomer and the surveyor being "Men of Science" also encounter the miraculous in unexplained scientific phenomena which, like the Armand and the Duck incident, evoke different responses from Mason and Dixon. The most notable of these are Mason and Dixon's various encounters with electricity. The first occurs shortly after they arrive in America where they "by chance" happen onto Ben Franklin, "the eminent Philadelphian." In their tavern-hopping, they are privileged to witness Franklin's "Electrickal performance" with Franklin in the role of the Grim Reaper in the "fam'd Leyden-Jar Danse Macabre" (294). Following the pyrotechnic performance inside the tavern, Franklin leads the audience--with Dixon but without Mason who is afraid--out into a lightning storm to "catch us a Bolt, perhaps a good many" (295) with his scythe blade. "[F]ascinated by Dr. Franklin's Leyden Jars," Dixon repeatedly volunteers to experience electrical shock in order to learn how to "reproduce that Effect" (765). Mason, however, withdraws from the Terminal on "the Pretext of Business
with Dr. Franklin’s Assistant” (764). Mason and Dixon witness another pyrotechnic performance, this one featuring Filipé, the giant electric eel. The eel’s last trick, in which wires are attacked to the animal’s body and a cigar lit from the spark, has little effect beyond entertainment on Dixon but has a profound effect on Mason who, against the advice of the eel’s trainer, stares into the spark and experiences an hallucinatory moment which he believes was “an Aperture into another Dispensation of Space, yea Time, than what Astronomers and Surveyors are us’d to working with. ... it welcom’d my Spirit” (433). If by looking into the Spark Mason experiences a glimpse into “another Dispensation of Space, yea Time,” he seems to regret he has never felt what Dixon “on more Occasions than he can now remember” felt: “self-electrocution” (764). Mason and Dixon experience miraculous intrusion into their lives but react as differently to these intrusions as they do to life itself. Dixon embraces the miraculous as he embraces life. In the Duck Mythology he finds a “Global Scheme”; with regard to electrical experiments, he chooses to feel their effects. Mason, on the other hand, reduces Duck Mythology to his own narrow personal situation, the death of his wife, Rebekah; he receives insight into the mysterious electrical phenomenon by close observation.

The most disturbing uncertainties Mason and Dixon experience, however, lie in the problems they encounter with Measurement, their own area of expertise. Though they speculate on the forces or circumstances which brought them together, they find these as mysterious as the forces which interfere with the precision of their measurements, whether they are measuring the Celestial Transits of Venus, or the Terrestrial Boundary Line in America. The arbitrariness of measuring both time and space is called into question by the discrepancies created by the Calendar Reform of 1752 and the Jesuit reduction of the degrees in the Chinese circle. The Calendar Reform eliminated eleven days from the calendar by moving from September 2, 1752 to September 14, 1752. These eleven days come to symbolize to Mason “Time” that “like Eurydice” needs “somehow to be redeem’d” (555). As published in their “Field Journals,” Mason and Dixon remark on their
experience with eleven-day “cycles” of occurrences during their measurement of the Line and come to see these cycles as “slowly rotating” loops or vortices “of eleven days, tangent to the Linear Path of what we imagine as Ordinary Time, but excluded from it, and repeating itself without end” (555). A similar phenomenon is noted in the Jesuit reduction of the Chinese circle from 365.25° to 360° which amounts to “twenty minutes of a Day” untapped by normal human calculations (669).

While the dilemmas of accurate measurement are symbolized by the Calendar Reform of 1752 originally implemented by the Catholics and by the Jesuits’ reduction of the Chinese circle by 5.25°, Mason and Dixon experience practical difficulties in their measurements due to the unseen forces of gravity and magnetism. On St. Helena’s Island, Mason first experiences the interference of gravity in his attempt to chart the Transit of Venus from the Island. Maskelyne, the man Mason has been sent to help and who Mason considers “a dangerously insane person” (128)—perhaps because he has been on the Island too long—insists that they move from the sheltered side of the Island to the Windward side in order to complete their part of the calculations for Venus’ Transit. “The Attraction of Mountains,” he tells Mason, “according to Newton . . . may hold enough mass to deflect our Plumb-lines, thereby throwing off our Zenith obs” (158). He insists on repeating the “obs at the other side of the Island,” and taking “the Mean Value betwixt them” (158). However, on the “Other side” of the Island Mason discovers that not only does the wind blow his measurements off but what Maskelyne called the wind’s “Properties of transformation” (163) seem to summon Rebekah to “visit” him from “the other side” of life. Later Mason learns from Dixon that Dixon’s teacher, Bradley, believed wind to be a form of gravity which acts laterally along the global surface. Mystery is also linked to the phenomena of Magnetism which frequently distorts their measurement of the Line as they move westward. From the Post Mark’d West where they encounter one of the “Islands in Earth’s Magnetic Field—Anomalies with no explanation for being where they are” (442), their Instruments are so affected that they seem “alive.” Later, when they cross the
Alleghenies, they discover the attraction of the iron lodes in the mountains affect Dixon's measurements, and once again they are forced to measure both East and West of the mountains and hope that the errors cancel out. Similar problems arise when they approach the Secret lead mines once guarded by the Indians who revered the "'Perfect Spheres of Lead ore...situated inside these Mountains...exerting Tellurick Effects unfathomable'" (547).

The "Tellurick Effects unfathomable," gravity and magnetism, coupled with the "not quite spherical earth," Mason and Dixon attempt to overcome with Euclidean geometry, particularly with the use of right angles. The merits of the use of right angles become a topic of debate among numerous of the novel's characters concerning the "immoderate Desire for the Orthogonal" (667) which seems to present a dilemma for humans much as it does for the Miraculous Duck. The Boundary dispute that their measurements are to correct, Mason and Dixon discover, has its origins in the "Problem of the Tangent Line" (334). The "Failure of the Tangent Point to be exactly at this [northeast] corner of Maryland, but rather some five miles south" results in "the notorious Wedge" (469) which contains "Iron Hill," that "famous and semi-magical Magnetic anomaly" coveted by Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware because of the importance of lead as a commodity--ammunition--and source of power in the New World. To rectify the rather large discrepancy involved in trying to get "the Arc, the Tangent, the Meridian, and the West Line" to "all come together at the same perfect Point," (337), they use both celestial and earthly calculations which, by necessity, involve right angles and require calculus to perform. The process takes several months and proves to be "off by two feet and two inches, more or less" (340). One of the problems of measurement on an Earth that is not perfectly spherical is that Euclidean geometry is an imperfect measuring tool; Euclidean geometry is accurate only for a large scale general description of the earth as proposed by Newton but becomes inaccurate when extremely precise calculations are required. In fact, human reliance on straight lines and right angles, even in conjunction with arcs and circles,
as an accurate description of Earth, as Mason and Dixon discover, actually distorts the
description because it ignores what Zhang calls the “Dragon . . . from which Land-Scape
ever takes its form” (542) and invites Sha, bad luck. Zhang likens the Earth to a Human
Body with “its network of points, dispos’d along its Meridians” (602); these, he insists,
must be respected and nurtured. Zhang’s arch rival, the Wolf of Jesus, a Jesuit priest,
represent the ultimate heresy to Zhang: the “Ortholatry of the Roman Empire,” the
worship of right lines in the form of a cross.

Other problems accompany the use of right angles in measurement. Mason and
Dixon’s measurement involves latitude; the Line they are demarcating essentially runs east
and west. The problems they encounter are primarily in determining longitude. Latitude
can be determined by measuring shadows produced by the sun at certain times of the day;
longitude is more difficult to determine because it depends solely on “the Needle” and the
precise location of “True North”--“Zero Degrees, Zero Minutes, Zero Seconds” (544).
Back in Philadelphia, their job completed, Mason and Dixon argue the relative values of
latitude and longitude, an argument that arises over Dixon’s drawing of the map of the Line
just charted and his inclusion of “an eight-pointed Star, surmounted by a Fleur-de-Lis”
(687), “a Surveyor’s North-Point” (688). For “‘this Map,’” Mason argues, “‘as East and
West are of the Essence, North need hardly be indicated at all’” (688). Dixon counters,
“‘This has been my North Point . . . since the first Map I ever drew.’” He cannot, he
maintains, “‘debase the Value’” of his North Point or his “‘Allegiance to Earth’s
Magnetism, Earth Herself’” (689). (See Appendix A, pp. 357-58 and Map 17, p. 376).
Even after their years of working together, Mason and Dixon emerge at odds even with
regard to the activity of measurement which is their life’s work: Mason is latitudinal, an
East-West man, who depends on celestial bodies to determine position on earth; Dixon is
longitudinal and prefers to rely on the mysterious Tellurick effects of magnetism on the
needle of his instruments. Couple this with the discrepancy created by the illusion that
latitude and longitude are straight lines when in reality they are arcs on the circumference of
a circle on the surface of an imperfect sphere, and the precision of measurement, even at the Newtonian level, is called into question. (See Appendix A, pp. 357-58 and Maps 16 and 18, pp. 375 and 377).

However, one aspect of measurement is not questioned in the Pynchonesque scheme of Extremes and Means, nor is it questioned in *Mason & Dixon: The Golden Mean*, the singularity, the still point midway between extremes, the point of intersection. In *Mason & Dixon*, this point occurs most noticeably where latitude intersects with longitude creating a “crossroads,” a Cartesian graph founded on orthogonality, converted to mandala where various dimensions of existence intersect giving rise to infinite possibilities not otherwise encountered. In *Mason & Dixon* such intersections proliferate and often involve some “passage” for Mason and Dixon and/or unexplained occurrences. An important “crossing” at the beginning of the novel is their Crossing of the Line, the Equator, which involves the initiates, Mason and Dixon, in an elaborate and theatrical ritual commemorating the “single shadowless Moment” in which they pass from one hemisphere into another. When they arrive in America, the two of them “are led to a remote crossroads” by Dr. Franklin at dawn where they get into “a Coach of peculiar Design” which miraculously transports them without stopping to the “Potowmack” where they ascend to Mt. Vernon. During their last year on the Line, 1767, Mason and Dixon’s westward-moving Line intersects with the Indian’s Great Warrior Path which runs north and south and the result is a “metaphysickal Encounter of Ancient Savagery [the Indian’s Great Warrior Path] with Modern Science [Mason and Dixon’s Line]” (650). The Crossing and their encounter with the Indians cause Mason and Dixon to reconsider their position, as Mason does, at “the present Moment, alone in a wilderness surrounded by men who may desire him dead, his Kindred that whole Ocean away, with Dixon his only sure Ally” (653). They are asked to consider their position from an Indian perspective, where God lives in the “Spirit Village” always at the western horizon, where people are “fished” for by Stars and other Heavenly Objects, where the Earth is the Garden and “We . . . [its] Garden
Pests" (657). Mason and Dixon jointly encounter another Crossroads on their return
eastward to the Tangent Point, the singularity out of which the line grew and “took on a life
of its own.” Dixon offers to give the “mad” poet Tim Tox, chronicler of the Pennsylvania
and believer in the Giant Golem “the Protection of the [Survey] Party” (685). Mason is, of
course, apprehensive, although the unexplained “rhythmic . . . Drumming” attributed to
the Creature’s approach suggests the Golem’s existence; the drumming diminishes as they
leave the wilderness and draw nearer to civilization. When they leave the poet at the
Crossroads near Newark, Tox disappears into “a Conestoga Waggon, with an
exceptionally bright Canopy,” confident in the Golem’s protection. Always, Mason and
Dixon’s encounters at the “Crossroads” leave them uncertain as to how to interpret them.

Instead of focusing on the extreme circumstances which overwhelm Orphian
characters and make difficult their discovery of the Golden Mean as V. and Gravity’s
Rainbow, Mason & Dixon focuses on the “interdictions” between Mason and Dixon who
find themselves overwhelmed by the Golden Mean metaphorically depicted by the vast
quantum spaces encountered in their charting endeavors, spaces that do not conform to
their Newtonian perspectives. In civil law, an “interdiction” is “any prohibitory act”; in the
Roman Catholic Church, it is “a punishment by which the faithful are prohibited form
participating in certain sacred acts” (Random House Dictionary). The first of these
“interdictions” occurs when Mason and Dixon miraculously survive the sea battle between
the British Seahorse, on which they are passengers in transit to the Southern hemisphere,
and the French l’Grande. The incident, termed their “Interdiction at Sea” represents a
quantum moment at the beginning of their journey together wherein an infinite number of
possibilities arise from their miraculous survival; perhaps at this “interdiction” they were
“prohibited” from passing over into death. Mason describes it as such:

“As if . . . there were no single Destiny,” puzzles Mason, “but rather a
choice among a great many possible ones, their number steadily diminishing
each time a Choice be made, till at last reduc’d, to the events that do
happen to us, as we pass among ‘em, thro’ Time unredeemable” (45).

The second occurs when together they reach the Warrior Path and “both dream of going on” (677). The scene itself is otherworldly: “Rays of light appear from behind Clouds, the faces of the Bison . . . grow more human . . . as if just about to speak” (677), and they reach a great river, “one that mayn’t be crossed” but that has “a great Bridge, fashion’d of Iron, quite out of reach of British or . . . French Arts, soaring over to the far Shore, its highest part, whenever there are rain-clouds, indeed lost to sight” (677). To cross they are told by an Indian messenger, they must “earn Passage” (677). At this point, they have a “difference of opinion”-- “not a faltering on either man’s part, or the mistaken impression of one, or any moral lapse” (678). Mason wishes to go on, “negotiate for another ten minutes of Arc” (678); Dixon sides with the Indians who wish to stop “this great invisible Thing [the Line] that comes crawling Straight on over their Lands, devouring all in its Path” (678). The disagreement, Rev’d Cherrycoke says, results in the third interdiction, “Their Agreement to un-couple” (690), “two veteran Wise-Men, coasting along between Transits of Venus” with a “desire to transcend their differently discomforted lives” (691).

The boundaries that exist between them are at last overcome when they meet after their separate chartings of the Last Transit of Venus--Mason from South Ulster, Dixon from a Northern position, each viewing the Transit separately and imperfectly. However, with Dixon’s account of his “visit” by a Stig-like Ancient Mariner, his transportation to the Earth’s Inner Surface which results in his experiencing a Space-Time confusion he had glimpsed at with Emerson’s mysterious watch that never stops, he and Mason overcome the boundaries between them, and communicate with the mutual recognition that “‘He [God] . . . hangeth the earth upon nothing.’” The Biblical message sounds like a description of the material world from a quantum perspective; it comes from the book of Job which, on his return from the North, was the passage revealed to Dixon. Their bond is solidified during their final meeting which occurs shortly before Dixon’s death. It is appropriately attended by the Learnd English Dog with which their relationship begins and
ends; these encounters also frame the novel. The first meeting with the Learnèd English Dog occurs in Portsmouth, England when Mason and Dixon first meet during “Christmastide” amid “a jostling Murmur of Expectancy” (18). In a pub where Mason and Dixon are drinking, the Learnèd English Dog materializes “All at once, out of the murk” as “a somewhat dishevel’d Norfolk Terrier with a raffish Gleam in its eye” (18); the Dog sings a tune and claims its name is Fang. Mason believes the dog—the word “dog” is the mirror image of the word “god”—is possibly an Oracle “for us, in our time” (19); Dixon agrees to “come along” with Mason believing “[t]here is something else in progress” (20). When Mason poses his question to the Learnèd English Dog—does the dog have a soul—the dog refuses to give Mason a definitive answer, regards the question as a “religious puzzle,” calls itself a “tail-wagging Scheherazades” who has become an expert in “nightly delaying the Blades of our Masters [who would eat dogs for food] by telling back to them tales of their humanity. I am but an extreme Expression of the Process,—” the dog tells them (22). Eventually the Dog leads the duo to “Dark Hepsie,” a fortune teller whom Mason believes can reveal to him “safe-conduct Procedures for the realm of Death” so that he can visit Rebekah and “come back, his Faith resurrected” (25). The last time Mason and Dixon are together, they alternate, as has become their custom in old age between “silence when fishing, fever’d nocturnal Conversation when not” (750). As they talk of the necessity of ridding oneself of Pride and learning to “feign . . . weakness, uncertainty, fatigue” in order to properly fish for Sea-trout, a year-old Norfolk Terrier “of memorable Appearance” appears resembling “old Fang’s way to the Arc-Second” (756). When Mason addresses the dog as “Fang” and Dixon as “Learnèd,” the Dog ignores them “as if his true Name is one they must guess” (756). But the Dog “accompanies Mason and Dixon to the River, and watches whilst they fish” (757). The Dog speaks to them only as they sleep. “‘I am a British Dog,’ he says, ‘and belong to no one, if not to the two of you. The next time you are together, so shall I be, with you’” (757). Very God-like language, this. As it happens, the next time they are together, if they are, will be in death: Orpheus and Eurydice joined.
The full significance of their union and reunion, however, is revealed to Mason only after Dixon’s death and by his son, Dr. Isaac, who implements—as children often do in Pynchon’s narratives—the redemption of his father initiated by Dixon, Mason’s true Eurydice. Mason, preoccupied with the death of Rebekah, which he blames on Dr. Isaac, manages all his life to avoid having a relationship with either of his sons. Yet, when Mason receives news of Dixon’s death and goes “about the rest of the Day as if himself stricken” (763), Dr. Isaac offers to accompany his father to Dixon’s unmarked grave. On the way, Mason “cannot refrain from telling his Son bedtime stories about Dixon” (763). Dr. Isaac articulates the reasoning behind Mason’s grief with “his gift of ministering to others” (768). “‘It’s your Mate,’ Dr. Isaac assur’d him, ‘It’s what happens when your Mate dies’” (768). Learning that Dixon eventually had two daughters, Dr. Isaac extends the “connection” between Dixon and his father by articulating the possibility that Mason and Dixon could, in fact, be wedded by virtue of their progeny: “‘Two Sons . . . Two Daughters . . . Mason-Dixon Grand-Babies’” (765-66). The “coupling” between Mason and Dixon is not sexual as it was in the failed relationship between Weissmann and Enzian in Gravity’s Rainbow; yet, it is a coupling nevertheless. In this most recent novel, Pynchon does not slight the children. In all of Pynchon’s novels, children represent the hope that the future might include a greater acknowledgment of the Golden Mean’s importance. Paola emerges in V. at the twentieth century’s midpoint as the Paraclete for a new generation; Slothrop in Gravity’s Rainbow is the child victimized but redeemed and transformed by his look backward toward his origins; Prairie is Vineland’s child, tied to the Earth and ready to redeem the failings of her parents. Dr. Isaac is another child whose very act of “ministering” to his father who rejected him is an act of grace which redeems his father and provides his father with a vision of a better world his father helped to fashion: America peopled with the progeny of Mason and Dixon, his mate.

Although Mason & Dixon is about two men who hold vastly different perspectives of the experiences they encounter, the novel’s primary focus is on the intersection between
them; the novel’s emphasis is on the ampersand of its title, *Mason & Dixon*. In earlier novels, Pynchon metaphorically exploited and exploded the possibilities of dual characters who are mirror images of each other. Unlike their predecessors, however, Mason and Dixon—the novel’s Orpheus and Eurydice figures—make their journey together and, in the process, become a kind of Dual Orpheus, joined by two flawed perspectives. Pitt and Pliny easily recognize this connection while listening to Rev’d Cherryoke’s tale: "‘Your Surveyors were Twins,--’ ‘--were they not, Uncle?’” the Twins ask (315). At the end of the novel’s central section, Mason and Dixon assume characteristics of the wave-quantum duality in a metaphorical re-enactment of the "‘archetypal’ quantum-mechanical experiment” (Penrose 231). This occurs when two possible outcomes of Mason and Dixon’s dilemma at the “crossroads”—the intersection of the Great Warrior Path with their Line—are related by Rev’d Cherryoke: their return to the East (Dixon’s choice) and their continuation on Westward (Mason’s choice). Their Eastward journey already related, the Rev’d fabulates an account of their alternative journey West. In this alternative scenario, he imagines that they follow Mason’s choice and continue the Line West across Ohio “after all.” On this journey they discover that “the landscape turns inside-out,” that the “condition of their Lives” is “the Need to keep . . . a fix’d Motion--Westering,” that “[w]henever they do stop moving . . . they lose their Invisibility” like particles in quantum space and “revert to the indignity of being observ’d and available again for earthly purposes” (707). In this scenario they are said to be “light and dark Sides of a single Planet, with America the Sun” (707). The West, the archetypal symbol for death, here becomes the symbol of “episodes ever to be enacted . . . the savage Vacancy ever before them” (709); the East to which they return, “Certain Fortune and Global Acclaim” (709) and recognition of the Line’s delineating and separating effect on the land and its people. Mason & Dixon. The Golden Mean is the junction between the two. It is the still point, the quantum moment of infinite possibility. It is the intersection of the Warrior Path and the Line. In *Mason & Dixon*, it is the “&.”
Notes

1 The concept of aether has played an important role in scientific theory through the ages. To the ancients aether was thought of as the "medium" which filled the upper regions of space (Random House Dictionary) and was also thought to be the "nothingness in which particles move" (Lederman 35). In the seventeenth century, Newton discarded the concept of aether. However, c. 1865 Clerk Maxwell "needed a medium to support his electric and magnetic fields," so he adopted the Faraday-Boxcovich notion of "an all-pervading aether" in which electric and magnetic fields "vibrated" (Lederman 127-30). Einstein later showed that aether was "an unnecessary burden on space" and restored Democritus' ancient concept of "the void" for the vacuum state. However, quantum physics requires a replacement for the "discarded" nineteenth century aether. The "Higgs field" seems to be its replacement. At least some of the particles in the Higgs field must have zero spin and must be intimately connected to mass." The "new aether" required by quantum physics then is "a reference form for energy... potential energy" (Lederman 374-75); it is "postulated to account for the propagation of electromagnetic radiation through space" (Random House Dictionary).

2 Pynchon frequently uses the number "8" as a symbol. Herbert Stencil in V. "does eight impersonations" in his quest for V.-as-Victoria Wren. Part II of Gravity's Rainbow has eight episodes and Slothrop assumes eight different identities before his dissolution of self. Prairie in Vineland plays "nonstop crazy eights game" with her relatives at the Becker-Traverse Reunion shortly before she is reunited with Frenesi. According to "Numerology Meanings" the number eight is primarily associated with "eternity, infinity." "Esotericism sees the 8 as symbolizing a resurrection into a higher consciousness and representing the eternal and spiral motions of cycles." This is interesting given the number's other interpretations which associate it with "material matters, money-making, industry and commerce, earthly power and all of 'the things of this world.'" However, according to numerology, "8 is really 4 (earth) doubled." The same number, it seems that gives rise to "organization, business and commerce" is also associated with "resurrection, new beginnings," and "Gaia as Great Mother" ("Numerology Meanings" 5). The number 8 also closely resembles the sign for infinity in mathematics: ∞.

3 Thomas Pynchon and his Puritan ancestor, William Pynchon, no doubt have a close connection to Tyrone Slothrop and his Puritan ancestor, William Slothrop as Steven Weisenburger points out in A Gravity's Rainbow Companion. William Pynchon was one of the patentees' names in the Charter of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay by Charles I in 1628. He was a leader in the settlement of Roxbury and the Colony's Treasurer for some years. In 1636 he served as a Magistrate for the colony in Agawam (later Springfield). In 1651 he convicted a man, Hugh Parsons, of witchcraft (later overturned) and according to Ezra Hoyt Byington in The Puritan in England and New England, it was probably "the earliest trial for witchcraft in Massachusetts" (197). William Pynchon established good relations with the Indians and was a fur trader. In 1650 his famous book, The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption, was published. The "damnable heresies" of William Pynchon's book were those that questioned the privileged position of the Elect to salvation. According to Byington, William Pynchon's book maintained that "Christ, as our Mediator, redeemed the world." He quotes Pynchon as saying "'His divine nature was the altar upon which He sacrificed His human nature'" (207). In a quotation from William Pynchon's response to the court, he articulates the crux of his book: "'I call them [Christ's sufferings] but trialls of his obedience, yet intending thereby to amplyfy and exalt the mediatorial obedience of
Christ as the only meritorious price of man's redemption'" (qtd. by Byington from Massachusetts Records vol. iii 229). Evidently Pynchon had omitted the necessity of man's punishment for his sins as a "way of satisfaction to divine justice for man's redemption." Pynchon's response did not satisfy the court that he had "retracted" his "heresies." Later William Pynchon returned to England and wrote a number of papers in which he upheld his original view that Christ's sufferings "were appointed" as "the due punishment of our sins" so that man's suffering might be ameliorated (Byington 185-218).

4 In his last two novels, Vineland and Mason & Dixon, Pynchon begins and ends each novel with the appearance of a dog--Desmond in Vineland, the Learned English Dog in Mason & Dixon. Not only is the word "dog" the mirror image of the word "god," but a connection can be made also with Rilke's comment on Sonnet XVI which is, he says, addressed to a dog. In a letter to Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crony dated June 1, 1923, Rilke points out the similarity--references in the poem--between the dog and Esau who "put on his pelt only so that he could share, in his heart, an inheritance that would never come to him: could participate, with sorrow and joy, in all of human existence" (qtd. by Mitchell "Notes" 583).

5 The reference here is to what Coveney and Highfield in The Arrow of Time call the "free lunch" that results from the "seething vacuums" that occur at the quantum level. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle "allows the law of energy conservation to be suspended over very short time intervals"; random quantum mechanical fluctuations allow energy to be "borrowed" at no cost from nowhere at all" (141). This concept of the "seething vacuum" has inspired a model for the creation of the universe: "If gravity is quantised, then random fluctuations in the gravitational field must occur which provide the 'mechanism' for the very act of creation ex nihilo--'out of nothing'... the universe itself is a free lunch' (144).

6 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "[i]n Jewish legend," a golem was "a human figure made of clay etc., and supernaturally brought to life." In the fourth century CE the Talmud mentions the creation of a golem. In the Sagas of the Talmud, the creation of a Golem was not considered particularly remarkable and sufficient belief in God enabled anyone to perform such a feat. However, during the tenth century a commentary on the making of a golem as described in the Talmud indicates that this golem was made "by means of the Book of Formation." Virgin soil kneaded with pure spring water is a requirement, according to this book, and those who make golems "must purify themselves... both physically and spiritually" before engaging in the activity. Evidence suggests that "creating a Golem was not primarily a physical procedure, but rather, a highly advanced meditative technique." Spiritual potential was transferred to the clay form and animated it ("Jewish Gothic" 3-6).

7 The "Tangent Line Problem" is one of the four major problems European mathematicians were working on during the seventeenth century. It involved the notion of a limit. The problem was solved when Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz introduced calculus. The problem can be explained in part by the four figures below and considering the question "what does it mean to say a line is tangent to a curve at a point?" For a circle the tangent line at point P is a line perpendicular to the radial line at point P (Figure 4.1). For a general curve represented in Figure 4.2, the problem is more difficult. One could say that a line is tangent to a curve at point P if it touches, but does not cross, the curve at point P. This definition works for the first curve shown in Figure 4.2, but not for the second. One could say that a line is tangent to a curve if the line touches or intersects the curve at
exactly one point, a definition that works for a circle but not for more general curves as the third curve in Figure 4.2 shows.

Figure 4.1
Tangent Line to a Circle

Figure 4.2
Tangent Line to a Curve at a Point

Finally, the problem of finding the tangent line at point P depends on finding the slope of the tangent line at P which can be approximated by using a secant line (Figure 4.3). By using this procedure more and more accurate approximations to the slope of the tangent line can be made by choosing points closer and close to the point of tangency (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.3
Secant Line

Figure 4.4
Progression of Accuracy in Determining Tangent Line

8 According to an excerpt from J. G. M. Ramsey's *Annals of Tennessee* (1856), the Great Warrior Path was a “thoroughfare between the northern and southern Indians,” an important path of “migration, the chase, the treaty and savage invasion.” Chosen for the ease of crossing the Appalachian Mountains, the path had an “[a]bundance of game, water and fuel,” and a “healthful and moderate climate” (qtd. in “The Great Warrior Path” 1-2).
CONCLUSION

In his “Introduction” to Slow Learner, Thomas Pynchon emphasizes the process of fiction and the appeal, not of the “finished character” but of “the changes,” of “the soul in flux” (23). At the time he wrote this “Introduction,” he had written both the short stories included and the novels V., The Crying of Lot 49, and Gravity’s Rainbow in which the Metaphor of Extremes and Means with the Golden Mean as a conduit to spiritual transformation had already been explored in many of its complexities. As a fabulator of tales which acknowledge the extremities of human experience encountered in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, Thomas Pynchon offers the elusive Golden Mean, articulated so many centuries ago by Aristotle as the ideal which can lead to virtuous behavior, as a way back to the notion that virtuous behavior is still a possibility and can lead to a sense of connectedness that has the power to transform. However, human beings have undergone countless changes in their world views since Aristotle c. 330 BC wrote his Nicomachean Ethics espousing the Golden Mean as an ideal. For the purpose of Pynchon’s scheme of extremes and means, the pivotal moment occurred in the seventeenth century when a culmination of ideas proposed by Galileo, Copernicus, and others found full expression in Sir Isaac Newton’s Principia published in 1687. The articulation of Newton’s “System of the World” displaced one extreme perspective of the world—the mythological—with another extreme perspective—the Newtonian—and ushered in the Age of Reason which has for three centuries dominated human interpretation of the natural world and provided the background for “most serious philosophical arguments concerned with the nature of reality, of our conscious perceptions, and of our apparent free will” (Penrose 225). The displacement of the mythological perspective—its magic and mystery which inspired a sense of awe in Eliade’s “archaic man,”--by the Newtonian world view with its insistence on prediction and determinism and its domination by reason and logic provides Pynchon with a set of extreme view points available to western civilization at the onset of the twentieth century.

In Pynchon’s fiction the clash between these extremes is most obvious in colonization
efforts: European countries of the northern hemisphere with their Newtonian perspectives attempt to dominate and exploit the more primitive countries, primarily in the southern hemisphere, that retain an attachment to a mythological view of the world. In Pynchon's writings the countries that espouse the Newtonian view are populated with many characters who are avatars of the Apollonian Way, who wish to exert power over others, to possess their land and resources, to annihilate all views unlike their own. In short, these characters aspire to be the "Master Players" of Carse's "Finite Game" in which physical or psychological death of the opponent is the goal. At the other extreme is Eliade's "Archaic Man," a Dionysian who has an intuitive sense of the world which comes from the observation of nature and its cycles both terrestrial and celestial and who sees the world as fraught with mysteries and a connectedness beyond human understanding. Such a world view even by Eliade's nomenclature has been rendered out of date having succumbed, as have the countries themselves by the early twentieth century, to domination by the power of Reason and scientific knowledge. These represent the extremes in the metaphorical scheme which structures Pynchon's fiction, each representing an aspect of Aristotelian "excess" and "deficiency," extremes which prevent the acknowledgment of the ideal of the Golden Mean.

"Exitlessness" is inherent in both extremes: Newton's clocklike universe will eventually will run down when a maximum state of entropy is reached; Archaic man is doomed to persist in an endless succession of cycles of death and rebirth based on his belief in the Eternal Return or be caught in the frenzy of self-imposed pleasure and pain. In Pynchon's fictive worlds, neither choice is acceptable because neither offers human beings a real alternative to the finality of death of the individual. The mediating perspective Pynchon metaphorically locates in quantum physics, a new scientific paradigm which emerged in the early twentieth century and which offers a description of a reality that is not visible or readily detectable by the senses, one that exists "beneath" or "behind" the apparent reality of surface level experience described with remarkable accuracy by
Newtonian physics. Because quantum physics depends on Newtonian mathematics (calculus) for its expression, because it could not have evolved without classical physics as its precursor, and because it incorporates a measure of the irrational, the uncertainty, the mystery and awe of mythology into its premises, the "new physics" does seem to offer a "median" way from which to view the world. More importantly to Pynchon's metaphorical scheme, at the quantum level the differences between the animate and the inanimate disappear, no evidence of entropy has been found, the "free lunch"--the emergence of something from nothing--is the rule rather than the exception, and measurement of quantum events becomes a factor. All of these attributes make quantum physics not only a new and mediating perspective from which to view the extreme circumstances humans have confronted since the seventeenth century, but new concepts of space and time associated with quantum physics provide a median setting in Pynchon's novels wherein his characters encounter the miraculous, experience uncertainty, acknowledge the existence of infinite connections and possibilities, and make personal decisions some of which lead them beyond Aristotle's "virtuous" behavior and toward spiritual transformations that affect not only their lives but the lives of others some of whom they will never know.

Most of Pynchon's characters exhibit the excesses and deficiencies defined by Aristotle as vices, and this causes them to adopt extreme forms of behavior. The Apollonians are associated with the patriarchal Olympian Apollo whose "way" they espouse. Their "way" is scientism; it aims at perpetuating an exclusively Newtonian world view which they attempt to impose--by force if necessary--on others. Their methods are colonization, psychological domination, possession, war. These characters focus on the macrocosm, the surface level world of cause, effect, and historical events. Their game is Finite. Their tactic: control through others' fear of death. Most are Europeans (British and German) associated with those countries attempting to colonize in the southern hemisphere--South West Africa in V. and Gravity's Rainbow, Capetown in Mason & Dixon--and America in Mason & Dixon. These characters dominate Pynchon's masculine novels
which are structured by colonization efforts from the mid-seventeen hundreds (Mason & Dixon) through World Wars I and II (V., Gravity's Rainbow); they are primarily associated with the European countries, Great Britain and Germany, which in two world conflicts were adversaries, but which seem, like Porpentine and Moldweorp in "Under the Rose," "cut from the same [Apollonian] pattern" (SL 107). Most are military men or government officials/agencies: von Trotha, Foppl, Sidney Stencil, Demivolt (V.); Pointsman and other members of the White Visitation and PISCES, Weissmann, Thanatz, Franz Pokler, Margherita Erdmann (Gravity's Rainbow); the Royal Society, Bradley, the Jesuits and the Roman Catholic Church (Mason & Dixon).

However, in the feminine novels, which are set in the early sixties and beyond these Apollonians take on a different identity, one which has been anticipated in V. and Gravity's Rainbow set in the first half of the twentieth century. Instead of being military men and government officials of colonizing countries, they are the entrepreneurs, the scientific and corporate brain trust, the government officials of America whose efforts are directed toward dominating America, its land and its people, and opposing those whose motives and points of view do not coincide with their own or with the image they are selling. Where will Weissmann and his ilk be after the war, the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow posits: "look among the successful academics, the Presidential advisers, the token intellectuals who sit on boards of directors. He is almost surely there. Look high, not low" (749). Such characters are introduced in V. in the New York sequences of 1956 as the "scientists" selling psychological and physical peace of mind--Dudley Eigenvalue the "psychodontist" who has replaced the "father-confessor" and Shale Schoenmaker, a plastic surgeon specializing in WASP "retroussé noses"--and as the toy-turned-weapons-equipment manufacturer "Bloody" Chiclitz, President of Yoyodyne, Inc. They are evident as well in the characters of Slothrop's father and uncle Lyle Bland and their "selling" of Slothrop to Laszlo Jamfi, a scientist affiliated with the I. G. Farben Corporation in an effort to secure Slothrop's Harvard education and his future position in the economic-
governmental-military power structure. In the feminine novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pierce Inverarity, whose entrepreneurship extends from land development ventures to the manufacture of military weapons, attempts to exert his "Will" over Oedipa from the World of Death by naming her "executrix" of his "Will," a symbolic effort by the male power structure to "encapsulate" and contain the feminine principle in the "tower." The idea of entrapping the feminine principle is again evident in *Vineland*. Brock Vond, the Federal Prosecutor and extension of governmental intrusion into personal lives, successfully "captures" Frenesi, severing her from any semblance of family life with her husband, Zoyd, and their daughter, Prairie. Vond even attempts to entrap Prairie, the earth goddess symbol for the century's last two decades, as well.

At the other extreme are those characters who exhibit Dionysian excesses and deficiencies. Most of these characters engage in indiscriminate sex, alcohol and/or drug abuse, and blatant disruptive behavior. Their frenzied and purposeless activities render them incapable of forming emotional attachments or of detecting the miraculous or any sense of connectedness when it intrudes into their lives. Portentine's womanizing colleague, Goodfellow, is the Dionysian prototype in "Under the Rose." He is a British spy whose his main concern is sexual conquest. However, although he has successfully seduced eighteen-year old Victoria Wren, he suffers from a symbolic impotence that characterizes many Dionysian figures who are unable to transcend their erratic behavior and experience regeneration. V.'s Benny Profane is the most fully developed of these unenlightened, unregenerated figures. He encounters the miraculous numerous times—in Father Fairing's "Parish" in the sewers of New York City, in the three women (Fina, Rachel Owlglass, Paola) who "happen" to him, in his voyage to Malta—but he chooses to "approach and avoid" any animating tendencies the miraculous might evoke in him. Profane exists at the periphery of the Whole Sick Crew, a Dionysian group in New York's Greenwich Village, the members of which have assumed meaningless "bohemian" poses in order to emulate the pop culture version of the avant-garde "artiste." In the feminine
novels, the Dionysians have the ability to facilitate the questing-characters’ journey. Metzger with his good looks, bottle of Beaujolais, and sexual timing initiates Oedipa’s journey at Echo Courts, and he and accompanies her to the theatrical performance of The Courier’s Tragedy where she becomes aware of Trystero and the notion of “ritual reluctance” necessary for enlightenment. Dr. Hilarious not only gives Oedipa a wake-up call in the night, but at the brink of his breakdown encourages her to “cherish” the fantasy she had hoped he would dispel. In Vineland Weed offers Frenesi a Dionysian alternative to the Apollonian, Brock Vond, and even represents a cause in which she believes; Frenesi, a Dionysian herself who is too “frenzied” to choose, has the choice made for her by Brock, a choice that brings death to the Dionysian impulse that could have facilitated her toward a clearer vision as Oedipa’s Dionysian encounters did for her.

However, some Dionysians either have redeeming qualities of their own or facilitate redemption in others. Seaman Bodine is the most pervasive of these characters, appearing as he does in “Low-Lands” and all three masculine novels. Crude and obnoxious in his behavior, he nevertheless facilitates Dennis Flange’s Orphean descent in “Low-Lands,” recognizes Paola’s importance as a redemptive figure and guides Profane in her direction in V., saves Roger Mexico from being “roasted” by the Apollonian Establishment and implements Slothrop’s transformation into a savior-figure for the Counterforce in Gravity’s Rainbow, and participates in Mason and Dixon’s first rite of passage at their equatorial crossing into another hemisphere of experience. Pirate Prentice likewise emerges as a redemptive Dionysian in Gravity’s Rainbow. His “bananery” and “banana concoctions” act as a spell against death by falling objects (rockets); he has the uncanny ability to experience the fantasies of others and “manage” them; his green “hijacked” P-47 “awakens” Slothrop to his Orphean role as “harpsman” for the Counterforce which Pirate eventually joins. Slothrop first appears in Gravity’s Rainbow as a Dionysian whose main interest is sex and whose desk at ACHTUNG Headquarters is in complete disarray. His fall from the tree in Nice, his eight “disguises,” and Major Marvy’s pursuit of him across
the Occupied Zone of Central Europe all suggest his Dionysian attributes. Likewise in 
Vineland Zoyd Wheeler exhibits all the excesses and deficiencies of a Dionysian when he 
dons a dress, appears in drag as Cheryl with his hair “ratted,” and jumps through a 
window at the Cucumber Lounge. Unlike Slothrop, however, Zoyd’s Dionysian behavior 
is merely a pose: he must perform some “publicly crazy” action once a year in order to 
receive his mental disability check, and his activities are aimed at confusing his pursuer, 
DEA agent Hector Zuniga. Dixon’s role as a Dionysian in Mason & Dixon aligns him with 
Seaman Bodine as a facilitator for redemption, an alignment Dixon also transcends. 
Though he is a beer-drinking, drug-taking bodice ripper, Dixon’s activities celebrate his 
ties to the earth which he regards as a “living creature” and Life Force. His mirthful and 
mythical view of life, tempered by his “scientific” occupation as a surveyor, serve only to 
reinforce his belief in the “Tellurick Forces” which affect his instruments and allow him to 
glimpse at connections unobserved by Mason who is preoccupied by his own grief. 
Dixon, as a Dionysian figure, represents a departure from the Dionysians in Pynchon’s 
previous novels. In this fifth novel, Dixon’s behavior is much less extreme; instead, his is 
just one of two perspectives on the experiences he and Mason encounter together. His 
mirth and celebration of life’s animating forces enable him to neutralize Mason’s dour 
death-bemused view of the world. In this respect Dixon is an ameliorator of extremes and 
emerges as a new Dionysian, or perhaps as a Dionysian for circumstances less extreme in 
the eighteenth century at the onset of the Scientific Revolution than those of the twentieth 
century to which the Scientific Revolution has led.

The Dionysian redemptive impulse is most fully realized in Pynchon’s obvious 
Earth Goddess figures who are often closely aligned with Demeter, Persephone, and the 
Elusian Mysteries as ancient rituals of earth worship out of which the Dionysian mysteries 
possibly evolved. These figures are also associated with Eurydice in the Orpheus-Eurydice 
myth, her abduction to the Underworld, and Orpheus’ attempts in various versions of the 
myth to rescue her. V. is the Earth Goddess corrupted by the extremes of the first half of
the twentieth century. This is evidenced by her transformation from the nubile young woman, Victoria Wren who experienced "seed-time [sexual] fantasies" during mass, to the emasculated Bad Priest who has incorporated numerous "little bits of inert matter" (V. 488) into her body. V. is the Earth Goddess de-animated: she refuses to nurture her child; she takes the male role in her lesbian relationship with Melanie l'Heuremaudit; she assumes the role of the Bad Priest who advocates Elena's abortion. Yet, because she shares certain characteristics with Mara, the ancient Earth Goddess figure and animating force of Malta, V.'s transformation to the inanimate is incomplete. At the novel's end, we see that her soul which is "singular" and "continuous" is that which Sidney Stencil loves and that which is spiritually redeemed by Fausto Maijstral whose birth was secured by Sidney's humanitarian act toward his parents. Because of Sidney's love for V., the Earth Goddess corrupted, Paola, Fausto's daughter, is conceived, born, and emerges at the century's midpoint, as the new Earth Goddess, Animating Force, and Paraclete for the second half of the twentieth century. Paola is the "payoff," the Golden Mean for the extreme atrocities V. and Sidney's generation perpetrated on humankind; Paola holds the key to mediating circumstances and behavior necessary for Herbert Stencil's spiritual regeneration, for Benny Profane's, and for the Whole Sick Crew's if they only open themselves to the "miraculous" Life Force she represents. Prairie in Vineland is the other character in Pynchon's novels most closely associated with Paola. Like Paola, Prairie is the "payoff," the "payback" for the failures of her parents' and grandparents' generations; she represents a mediating point between the extreme impulses that pulled the children of the sixties in two opposing directions even as they pulled her mother Frenesi: the Dionysian represented by Weed; the Apollonian represented by Brock Vond who successfully negotiated Weed's death and used Frenesi to accomplish it. Prairie, like Paola, is able to look both directions: back to the idealism of the sixties; forward to the century's end. At the novel's end, alone in her sleeping bag in the Vineland darkness and titillated by Brock Vond's assault "from above," she goes "back and forth for a while between Brock fantasies and the silent
darkened silver images all around her” (384-85). Yet in the end, she is Vineland’s child much as Paola is Malta’s. The earth goddesses of the preceding generations, V. and Frenesi, may have been seduced, even dominated by the Apollonian will to power, but the Earth Goddess has not vanished. Perhaps the implication is that the Earth Goddess, the redeeming feminine life-giving force, arises anew for each generation as the mediating factor, an Intercessor between extremes, the Golden Mean and way back to spiritual redemption and the continuation of existence even beyond death.

However, the Feminine Principle, the Earth Goddess is not always so obvious in Pynchon’s novels. Possibly because Oedipa is the protagonist of *The Crying of Lot 49*, she assumes a variety of roles. She is associated with the Feminine Principle at the novel’s beginning when she envisions herself as Rapunzel and imagines herself as one of the “frail girls with heart-shaped faces” in Remedios Varo’s triptych; she thinks of herself as encapsulated in a tower by the Apollonian Will to Power represented by Pierce and awaiting rescue. Like her namesake, Oedipa attempts to free herself from the Apollonian Will by investigating various clues she hopes might suggest that an escape from the tower is possible. The clues Oedipa encounters---most of which come through men---position her between her Apollonian summons to death via Pierce’s “Will” and the possibility of thwarting death’s summons to discover an alternative communication system represented by the “ritual reluctance” associated with Trystero. Oedipa is both the embodiment of the feminine principle who by her “fear and female cunning” eventually believes she may escape encapsulation in the tower, and she is the questioner of Apollonian authority in the tradition of Oedipus, who achieves heroic status not as a result of her thwarting Apollo’s “will,” but as a result of her attempt to seek the truth even at the expense of her pride. At the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa comes to realize that what she initially suspected has been true: that “her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego” (21) and that her ego imprisons her. By the end of the novel, Oedipa abandons her ego and “with the courage you find you have when there is nothing more to lose” (182), decides to enter the
quantum space—the auction room—to confront without the aid of any Orpheus, the
mysterious bidder, and to collapse the outcome on her own.

In *Mason & Dixon*, Dixon also emerges as a less obvious Life-Force representative
in the Earth-Goddess, Feminine Principle tradition. Dixon is most obviously a Dionysian,
but a Dionysian whose behavior is less consistently outrageous and extreme than the
behavior of his predecessors, even those—Pig Bodine, Pirate Prentice—who exhibit
redemptive impulses. Dixon offers an alternative to Rebekah whom Mason takes to be his
Earth Goddess, his Eurydice awaiting his rescue of her. However, Rebekah entices Mason
to accept death's finality in ways more malign than those exhibited by V. in her most de-
animated states because Rebekah has no “excuse” for her solicitations: no Apollonian Will
to Power seduced or corrupted her. Her motives for enticing Mason are Apollonian and
self-serving; she is jealous of Dixon’s encouraging Mason to participate in and enjoy Life.
Dixon is the Life-Force masculinized, the Feminine Principle embodied in a man. He is
Mason’s Eurydice, his “mate,” who tugs Mason away from his preoccupation with Death
by consistently offering him an alternative. As a Dionysian, Dixon is closer than Mason to
the animating powers of the Earth in which he participates rather than observes as Mason
does. That he experiences the miraculous Underground Journey near the North Pole is not
surprising to him; that he is awakened, enlightened, and transformed by his experience
occurs because he is open and receptive to enlightenment and transformation. Dixon is the
one who anticipates “the middling life” and recognizes the necessity of losing one’s Pride,
one’s focus on self, as a means of attaining it. Eurydice-like, he brings Mason to a
recognition as well. Dixon’s revelation to Mason of the “happy Medium,” the “golden
Beam/Uncharted” (703) in his own hand-penned Epitaph evokes an acknowledgment from
Mason concerning Mason’s own obsession with “Death’s Insignia” to which he has
allowed Rebekah to subject him. Oedipa and Dixon are representatives of the Earth-
Goddess, the animating Life Force associated with the feminine principle but less overtly
than their counterparts V., Paola, and Prairie. In a sense, both escape the boundaries the
Feminine Principle implies. Oedipa envisions herself as the Feminine Principle encapsulated in the tower constructed for her by the male Apollonian Will to Power only to discover that her own ego is responsible for her encapsulation; she escapes from the tower of her own construction to assume her Orphic responsibility for her own destiny. Dixon is the Feminine Principle embodied in a male persona whose connection to the earth eventually serves as a means to his own revelation and that of his mate, Mason.

Although Pynchon’s characters are exposed to the unseen/miraculous world which exists beneath or behind the surface level world they traverse--mappable and governed by a one-directional arrow of time called history--few choose to recognize the connections signified by its frequent “intrusions” into their daily lives. Most are too preoccupied or overwhelmed with their own “excesses” and “deficiencies,” or with the excessive or deficient circumstances that dictate their activities to either notice or to contemplate the significance of the miraculous intruding into their experience. When Benny Profane goes “beneath” the surface into the sewers of New York City, he encounters a “chamber lit by some frightening radiance” (V. 450). There, he waits “for something to happen . . . .

Surely the alligator would receive the gift of tongues, the body of Father Fairing be resurrected, the sexy V. tempt him away from murder” (V. 122). When none of these happens, Profane is unwilling to accept the experience as “otherworldly.” Even though he “finagle[s] himself into love” (V. 27) with Rachel Owlglass, he is unwilling to risk the uncertainty of commitment to her because he fears that Rachel, “flesh. . . .[would] fall apart sooner than the car [Rachel’s MG]” (V. 383). Herbert Stencil is too preoccupied with discovering clues to support the pattern he has imposed on the elusive V. to acknowledge the miraculous he directly encounters on Malta. During the extreme circumstances of World War II depicted in Gravity’s Rainbow, Ned Pointsman becomes not only a victim of the British White Visitation and the psychological testing unit which he serves, he becomes one of its monomaniacal perpetrators. By victimizing Slothrop he seeks simultaneously to perpetuate the White Visitation’s attempt to subsume Slothrop’s will to
its own and to solidify his own chances at the Nobel Prize by establishing a cause-effect relationship between Slothrop's sexual exploits and the location of German rocket explosions in and around London. Weissmann, a reader of Rilke and a potential Orphean, is unprepared for his otherworldly experience when he descends into the Southern hemisphere in the 1920s to subdue the rebellious Herero tribe. Confronted with a new dimension of experience, he retreats into an Apollonian mindset, "buggers" the boy he later names Enzian, and by doing so transforms himself into Blicero, the agent of Death. Some characters, like Gottfried and Bianca, are not only victimized by the "excesses" and "deficiencies" of their elders (Weissmann, Margherita) who have allowed themselves to become victims of the excesses and deficiencies of war, but the children come to actively participate in their own victimizations. Others, like Frenesi in Vineland, opt to waiver between extremes (Weed, Brock Vond) and their indecision eventually results in loss of control over their own lives and their jeopardizing the safety and happiness of others (Zoyd, Prairie). In Mason & Dixon Mason is so overcome with excessive grief for his departed Rebekah and so preoccupied with finding a way to redeem her from Death's clutches that he fails to notice the alternative of mirthful participation in the process of life offered to him by his "mate," Dixon.

In Pynchon's Metaphor of Extremes and Means only characters who are able to get beyond their excesses and deficiencies emerge as Orphean characters capable of envisioning the "middle life" as a means of personal transformation and transcendence beyond time- and space-bound existence. To acquire Orphean status, Pynchon's characters must exhibit certain attributes. They must become open and receptive to the connectedness inherent in the magic and mystery of the animating force associated with the Earth Goddess and Feminine Principle exhibited by various Eurydice figures. They must lose their preoccupation with self which occurs when they begin to consider the welfare of others before they consider their own. These they acquire only at the expense of dark and dangerous journeys during which they must accept the uncertainties and paradoxes that are
inherent in the human condition. They must emerge from these journeys animated and willing, like Orpheus, to participate in Life’s communal song.

In the masculine novels, Pynchon’s Orphean characters initially exhibit both Apollonian and Dionysian affinities before they become aware of the intrusion of the miraculous into their lives. When Sidney Stencil meets Victorian Wren in 1899 and is seduced by her, he is a former vaudevillian who works for the British Consulate in Florence as an employee of the Apollonian power structure. He continues his career in the foreign service for the next twenty years, giving it up in 1919 on the island of Malta where, under the influence of Mara, Malta’s earth-spirit, he is reunited with V. and recognizes this reunion as miraculous. Equally miraculous is Fausto Majistral’s encounter with V. Early in his Confessions, Fausto acknowledges the duality of his identity before World War II began to play itself out on Malta: his British education and his training for the priesthood associate him with the Apollonian power structure; his Maltese origins and his desire to be a poet reveal his Dionysian tendencies. His encounter with V.-as-the-Bad Priest on the day of his wife’s death c. 1943 becomes for him the pivotal moment in his spiritual life. In *Gravity’s Rainbow* Slothrop likewise exhibits a dual identity at the beginning of the novel. Although his behavior is Dionysian--his disorderly desk and his preoccupation with the number and locations of his various sexual conquests--he works for the British government at ACHTUNG headquarters pinpointing the exact locations of German rocket explosions in and around London. He continues his Dionysian behavior during his own personal quest after information concerning his childhood and the roles his father and uncle played in his situation in the Central War Zone of Europe at the end of World War II. His encounter with his first Eurydice, Katje, and his attempt to rescue her from the giant octopus Gregori catapult him on a quest into the Zone after other possible identities; in the Zone Geli Tripping, the youthful witch-earth mother, reveals to him a possible “way back” to enlightenment through revelation of the miraculous in nature. Enzian, Slothrop’s Herero counterpart and the novel’s second Orpheus, emerges from the mythical desert in South
West Africa having been "passed over" by death and resurfaces in the Central War Zone of Europe to operate in the technological world of rocketry. His quest, like Slothrop's, and his emergence as a savior figure is facilitated by the magic of the good witch Gelli Tripping. However, the duality of the Orphean characters undergoes a permutation in *Mason & Dixon*. In this most recent novel, the Orphean character is, in fact, two separate characters—Mason and Dixon, Apollonian and Dionysian—neither of whom is complete without the other. Mason, who believes himself to be Orpheus, mourns for his lost Eurydice, Rebekah, to such an extent he lives most of his life unaware of the transforming possibilities offered to him by his real Eurydice and Orphean counterpart, Dixon. He has focused his attention on Rebekah, the failed Earth Goddess who has no intent of facilitating Mason's redemption but instead tempts him toward permanent death. As a result, though he shares the most intense of his life experiences with Dixon, Mason's vision remains myopic: he wallows in his grief which he believes to be his "Duty" to the dead Rebekah. Not until the end of his life's journey does Mason allow himself to be coaxed away from "Death's Insignia" he so "obsessedly" sought in life and toward Dixon's vision of the "middling life" Dixon writes about in his Epitaph. However, Mason fails to grasp its meaning until he and Dixon are old men rejoined after their "separate" observations of Venus' Last Transit. He only imperfectly grasps it then—as does Dixon. Dixon is Mason's Eurydice and facilitator of the sense of connection so crucial to the recognition of the Life Force that they can only together, as the twin Orpheus figures of the novel, experience as a result of their pairing. The experience is a communal one, a concept wholly new in Pynchon's novels.

The necessity of abandoning one's ego and seeing oneself as part of a larger unity is a notion associated with the Earth as a Goddess from which life regenerated from death is part of a continuous cycle. It is a notion to which various Orphean characters must be led before they are eligible for regeneration; they must experience a loss or dispersal of self in order to be spiritually transformed and/or facilitate spiritual transformation in others.
Such is the case with Sidney Stencil whose love for V., the feminine principle albeit a
corrupted one, regenerates his “humanitarian instinct” and allows him to selflessly give life
to Carla, Old Maijstral, and their son Fausto. Such is the case also in Gravity’s Rainbow.
In this novel the primary Earth Goddess figure is Geli Tripping whom Slothrop meets
when he is still experiencing his erratic Dionysian behavior. She, however, provides
Slothrop with a direction and predisposes him to his connection with nature, his becoming
“a crossroads” and savior figure himself, and his eventual dispersal into the elements as an
icon for the possibility of spiritual transformation in others who come after him. Geli
Tripping is described as a youthful “good” witch who awaits her lover’s return in the
bombed-out war Zone of Central Europe. Mistaking Slothrop for Tchitcherine her lover,
she “opens up” possibilities for Slothrop even as she has sex with him in her roofless room
that, axis mundi-like, connects the earth and sky. She awakens in Slothrop an awe at the
miraculous in nature when, a month too late for Walpurgisnacht, she reveals to Slothrop
the Brocken specter and the ability of nature to transform a place of “demonic festivities”
for Goethe’s Faust (Weisenburger 154) into a source of enlightenment for Slothrop. From
this point onward, Slothrop begins to recognize and re-establish his unity with nature, a
process that culminates with his becoming a crossroads himself, his giving up his sense of
self which has been the object of his search throughout the novel, and his becoming the
vehicle, the crossroads, the axis mundi through which others can experience regeneration.
One of those who is redeemed in this way is Slothrop’s first Eurydice, Katje. During the
course of the novel Katje is victimized by forces of death as represented by Weissmann
who uses her as a participant in his perverted Hansel-Gretel game, and by Pointsman and
the White Visitation who use her as a decoy to lure Slothrop into trying to rescue her from
Grigori, the giant octopus. Eventually, she is not only able to sever her ties with the
Apollonian power structure, but she becomes one of the initial organizers and members of
the Counterforce which takes the absent Slothrop as its leader because Slothrop has guided
them to understand that fear of physical death is the most powerful weapon of the Apollonian will to power and control.

Yet another version, or inversion, of the Earth-Goddess-Eurydice figure is seen in *Mason & Dixon* in the character of Mason's dead wife, Rebekah. Even though she is absent in the novel, she is very much present in Mason's life. At certain points in the narrative Rebekah has earth goddess associations. When Rebekah and Mason visit Stonehenge on Midsummer's Eve while courting, she experiences a Druid-like connection with the place: "'I know the place,'" she tells Mason, "'and it knows me'" (210). More curious still is Uncle Ike's interruption of the Rev'd's "tale of America" and his insinuation that Rebekah herself seems "as-yet-Unmaterialized," that even though "Mason was baptiz'd at Sapperton Church, as were his Children" (171), no records exist there or anywhere else of her marriage to Mason. Finally Rebekah assumes a distinctly sinister pose. When she visits Mason on the Visto, she declares that she, Mason, and Dixon are engaged in a triangular relationship, that she is jealous of "'Mr. Dixon'" who, "'would much prefer you forget me'" (704), that if Mason loves her, he must resume his "Duty" to her memory and resume his obsession with the World of Death from which Dixon, with his "'cheery temperament'" tempts him. Rebekah in this scenario emerges not as a force to animate; in fact, in this novel, Dixon assumes this animating role, a role which Rebekah staunchly opposes because Dixon seems to be wooing Mason away from his potentially debilitating preoccupation with death. In Pynchon's fifth novel, Dixon is the source of enlightenment for Mason who, with his selfish preoccupations, is unaware of the mysteries and miracles he encounters with Dixon. Dixon's fascination with these "Tellurick Forces," his sense of awe before them, gradually over many long years nudges Mason away from his focus on self and toward the possibility of redemption from Death's grip. When Mason meets Dixon after their separate transits, Mason, sensing "a fragility about Dixon," thinks of Dixon before himself. Mason "accordingly grow[s] gentle with him [Dixon]. No child has yet summon'd from him such care" (734-35). Only toward the end of his life journey,
much of which was spent with Dixon, is Mason able to get beyond the confines of self and become receptive to the powerful forces which have animated and later transformed Dixon. At Dixon’s death, Mason “goes about like one himself stricken,” identifying as completely as he ever has with another, his “mate” in life and in death.

Once Pynchon’s Orphian characters become aware of the miraculous intruding into their surface level experience, they must descend below that surface in order to encounter the possibilities inherent in a different dimension of experience. This dimension, in Pynchon’s fiction, is a quantumized version of the mythical Underworld to which Orpheus of the myth descends in order to redeem his Eurydice. It is hell with quantum attributes: Heisenberg’s Uncertainty, Bohr’s Complementarity, the importance of measurement in the outcome of events, and “FASTER—THAN, THE SPEEDOFLIGHT” (GR 726) repercussions. Pynchon’s Hell is a quantum space where myth and science coexist and where infinite possibilities arise. In Pynchon’s masculine novels, male Orphian figures make their descents and emerge in order to redeem their Eurydices and others many of whom they never know. Initially Sidney Stencil’s descent is emotional—into the “heart’s landscape” of love for V. He “surfaces” only once—to sack Old Maijstral from his British role as spy—and then with his time-traveling navigator, Mehemet, Sidney disappears in a waterspout on that quiet day in June. The ramifications of Sidney’s humanitarian decision: the birth of Fausto Maijstral, Fausto’s Orphian descent and redemption of V. before her death, the birth of Fausto’s daughter and Paraclete-for-a-new-era, Paola. Sidney’s descent and decision result in the redemption of his Eurydice and the re-emergence of the feminine principle for the last half of twentieth-century America. Even though Slothrop’s descent in Gravity’s Rainbow is begun by the Apollonian establishment and his drug-induced journey into the Boston sewer, his encounter with Gelli Tripping enables him to recover his lost harp in a stream somewhere in the boundary-free Zone after World War II and complete his Orphian transformation. When he loses “the albatross” of self, becomes a crossroads, and beholds the rainbow vision, he enables the redemption of the Counterforce, of which
his Eurydice Katje is a founding member, to continue the transformation process after his own dispersal and disappearance. Enzian, likewise, after his encounter with Geli Tripping, is able to become a name in which his Zone Hereros may pursue their quest for continued existence in the Northern hemisphere. Although Mason appears to be the Orphean figure of *Mason & Dixon*, his redemption from the world of permanent death represented by his dead wife Rebekah is facilitated by Dixon's affinity with the Earth, its mysterious "Tellurick Forces," and Dixon's descent into *Terra Concava* where all descents become ascents. Dixon's "descent" near the North Pole, his revelation that the earth ""hangeth... upon nothing,"" and his ability to finally connect with his mate, Mason, reveal him to be more a Eurydice figure to Mason than Rebekah and, in a sense, complicate the Orpheus-Eurydice roles established in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. In *Mason & Dixon* Dixon is a Dionysian who not only assumes the role of Eurydice in Mason's awakening to the animating possibilities inherent in the Life Force which Dixon represents, Dixon becomes the Orphean redeemer of Mason who, Eurydice-like, is entrapped by his preoccupation with Death. Dixon facilitates Mason's eventual return to America--one of the novel's primary quantum spaces--with his sons, William and Dr. Isaac, who will "stay, and be Americans" (772).

In the feminine novels the distinctions between Orpheus and Eurydice begin to blur. On the one hand, certain Orpheus figures facilitate the redemption of the Feminine Principle, reversing the roles played by each in the masculine novels, especially *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*; on the other, feminine characters begin to assume Orphean roles. In *The Crying of Lot 49* both Mucho and Randolph Driblette, the novel's two male Orpheus figures, are instrumental in Oedipa's burgeoning awareness of alternatives to the "exitlessness" and "absence of an intensity" she had experienced in life up to the point of her being summoned by Pierce to become executrix of his Will. However, by the time Oedipa receives her summons, Mucho and Driblette are already in the process of assuming their Orphean roles--Mucho in his job as disk jockey, Driblette as director of and actor in
*The Courier’s Tragedy.* Early in the novel, Oedipa envisions herself as Eurydice—Rapunzel in a tower—awaiting some Orpheus to rescue her. In one sense, Mucho and Driblette do: they provide her with clues which pique Oedipa’s innate curiosity—her openness to other alternatives—and lead her toward an alternative that Mucho and Driblette have already recognized and in which they participate. Even though Oedipa would prefer to be rescued, she rises to the occasion and assumes her Orphean role. She undergoes her dark and dangerous journey into the San Francisco night hoping that “the whole thing [the possibility of connections beyond her understanding]” might “go away and disintegrate quietly” (109), and she emerges enlightened. On her journey she discovers evidence of Trystero’s existence everywhere, she experiences a selfless moment when she selflessly ministers to the “old tattooed man.” At the end of the novel, Oedipa has “lost her bearings” and has come to recognize that her ego is her encapsulating tower. She assumes her Orphean role as she enters the auction room—that quantum space in which Uncertainty reigns—to await revelation. Similarly in *Vineland,* Zoyd Wheeler has already assumed his Orphean role when the novel opens. What appears to be Dionysian behavior—his impersonation of Cheryl for his annual “crazy act” of defenestration—is merely a ploy aimed at confusing his Apollonian pursuer Hector Zuniga and the government officials who issue his mental disability checks. Zoyd has never lost the essence of his subversive idealism even though he lost his Eurydice, Frenesi, and the family life they might have shared, a situation reminiscent of Sidney’s in *V.* Whereas Sidney’s Orphean role was delayed by some twenty years, Zoyd has spent his daughter’s lifetime actively participating in his by his continuous and selfless nurturing of her in *Vineland.* *Vineland* itself is conducive to Orphean behavior since the space itself is uncharted, Edenic, encompassing enough to contain an infinite number of possibilities including both life and death, powerful enough to keep the beam of “divine justice” balanced. The daughter he nurtures, Prairie, may be a vital image of the Earth Goddess, of the Feminine Principle regenerated—a “payback” for the failures of her parents’ generation—but she is also an Orphean in her
own right. The novel ends with Prairie, the child of Vineland who has assumed many of Vineland's attributes as well as her father's: she unconditionally accepts the mother who abandoned her as well as all her "sleazoid" relatives; she establishes relationships with both the living and the dead (her boyfriend is Isaiah 2:4; later she and Weed in his Thanatoid state become "an item"); and, after a "waking dream" in which she goes "back and forth . . . between Brock fantasies and the silent darkened silver images" of Vineland, she is "awaked" by Desmond-the-Vineland-dog--to her Orphean position between alternatives and looking both ways--with "Sunday morning about to unfold" (385).

The most enduring ramifications of Orphic descents into various Hells to redeem Eurydices both worthy and unworthy of redemption is the articulation of the transforming experience itself: the Orphic Song, the ultimate quantum space. To exhibit Orphic characteristics, to be personally transformed, is finally insufficient in the Pynchonesque scheme. Connections must be made; extremes must be ameliorated. In the Ninth Elegy Rilke asserts "we are here in order to say," to articulate the Superabundance of Being. The key to such articulation is found in Pynchon's first novel, V., in which the concept of the metaphor as a connecting "device, an artifice" is questioned, examined, and later embraced by Fausto in his Confessions, his "legacy" to his daughter, Paola. Fausto finds the most truthful metaphor to be Dnubietna's, his engineer-poet friend: "the truth behind / The catenary: locus of the transcendental: / y=a/2 (e^x + e^-x)" which employs language both linguistic and mathematical. Articulation, Fausto comes to realize, is the essence of humanity; it is found in the connection Dnubietna recognizes in the "catenary," in the connection between the extremes which is always greater than a straight line, always more than what is spoken. The metaphor may be as simple as a single initial, V., or a novel as large as V. or Gravity's Rainbow, or as Pynchon's oeuvre, works which themselves become part of the all-encompassing Orphic Song. The Song is everywhere apparent in Pynchon's fiction; its melody is redemption; its theme, spiritual transformation. In V. the song begins with an initial in a single sentence in a single entry in Sidney Stencil's
journals. The mention of V. is sufficient to animate Sidney's son, Herbert, to pursue V. and to stencilize his own personal pattern from the clues he accumulates. Fausto Maijstral's Confessions find their impetus in Fausto's descent and his confrontation with V.-as-the-Bad Priest, an event which, coupled with the death of his wife Elena on the same day, precipitates his spiritual crisis which his Confessions are a means of resolving. The ambiguities which emanate from V., the initial and the novel's main metaphor, comprise the novel itself and contain Pynchon's larger Metaphor of Extremes and Means which thematically unifies his novels. In The Crying of Lot 49 the Orphean Song begins when Oedipa is summoned from her "out of focus" existence by the Will of Pierce Inverarity; it emerges when she is "sucked into the landscape" of The Courier's Tragedy and discovers the "ritual reluctance" in the fourth act and with it the metaphorical premise that "Certain things... will not be spoken aloud; certain events will not be shown on stage" (71). Her recognition of this premise opens her to the possibility of an alternative system of communication that operates behind/beneath/beyond the obvious: an apt definition of metaphor. What remains unsaid in the alternative system, Oedipa comes to suspect, is more powerful than what is said; the "spirit" of the play, Driblette tells her, is more enduring than its "text." In the end of the novel, Oedipa positions herself in that quantum space between what is said and what is unsaid--within the metaphor itself--to await her revelation.

Participation in the Orphean Song is an idea that permeates Gravity's Rainbow. It is the object of Slothrop's quest. Slothrop's role as "harpist" eludes him through much of the novel though the possibility of his "recovery" of this role hinges upon his persistent but uncertain quest after his identity which he initially believes to be connected to his father, his uncle, and their business dealings with Laszlo Jamf. However, after the assumption of eight different disguises, Slothrop comes to discover that his identity is more intimately interwoven with that of his renegade Puritan ancestor, William Slothrop, whose heretical treatise on the availability of God's grace and salvation to Elect and Preterite alike makes
him an outcast in the seventeenth century much as Slothrop is made an outcast in the twentieth. William Slothrop's song on the novel's last page solidifies William's musical connection with his progeny, Tyrone, whose harpsmanship is an integral part of his Orphean identity. It also inverts both spatial and temporal expectations attached to the narrative which, at the end of the novel, abruptly shifts from the firing of Rocket 00000 from Luneburg Heath Easter Weekend 1944 to the Orpheus Theatre in Los Angeles c. 1970. The shift aligns the reader with the "we," the Preterite Counterforce earlier associated with Tyrone Slothrop whose Orphean identity ultimately enables him to escape the Apollonian Forces that sought his capture and castration. "We," the readers, thehearers of Pynchon's massive and convoluted "song," Gravity's Rainbow, are positioned in the theatre with the disruptive crowd earlier accused of "irresponsible use of the harmonica" (754): "We" are in the "theatre" with the "rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, absolutely and forever without sound"; "We" are at "the last delta-t," the quantum moment in the novel's ultimate quantum space. "We," like all Orphean figures who have descended to become enlightened, are before the dark screen poised to confront "the image ... too immediate for any eye to register," to discover that even though the film has broken or the bulb burned out, "something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see" (760). In Gravity's Rainbow the song is "a hymn by William Slothrop, centuries forgotten and out of print," a song "They [the Apollonian power structure] never taught anyone to sing." And "We" are invited to participate in the communal Orphean song as a way of eternalizing the moment, of escaping the finality of death. No other fictional moment in Pynchon's writing is so powerful; no other fictional moment so removes the boundaries that separate singer, song, and listener. On Gravity's Rainbow's last page, Thomas Pynchon is the singer, Gravity's Rainbow is the song, and "we" readers are invited to participate, as its singers.

The communal aspect of the Orphean Song metaphorically evoked on the last page of Gravity's Rainbow assumes prominent importance in Vineland and Mason & Dixon. In
these novels the Song assumes great significance as a connecting device, as a Golden Mean with the power to transform. The “song” from which Vineland grows is Frenesi’s filming of Weed’s death: the moment that makes the “reel” real, the quantum moment from which the novel’s events arise. The “song” is theatrical—a performance piece orchestrated and then filmed by Frenesi—and the “theatrical” moment is pivotal for most of the novel’s main characters—Zoyd, DL, Prairie—because it signifies Frenesi’s entrapment in the Underworld by Brock Vond which both necessitates their unsuccessful attempts to redeem her and leads them, in the process, to transform themselves and others as well. The “Song” eventually situates the trio in Vineland, the proper quantum space for transformation, and exposes them to Vineland’s regenerative powers. In Vineland all three learn to love others unconditionally. Once in Vineland, they participate in a different song. The “song” of Frenesi’s film is the song of betrayal, recognition of betrayal, and death. The Song of Vineland is Emerson’s, “found and memorized years ago” from a “jailhouse copy of The Varieties of religious Experience by William James” and read annually at the Traverse-Becker family reunion. The song’s message: the power of “divine justice” to restore the Golden Mean. It is a communal song, one in which all the Traverse-Becker family members participate—it really “got them going”—and one that transcends its singer, Jess Traverse, Prairie’s great-grand father. Jess, “[f]rail as the fog of Vineland, in his carrying, pure voice” is merely the vehicle for Emerson’s words as he and Eula become “each year smaller and more transparent” (369).

The communal nature of the song, the transparency of the singer: these become the frame for Mason & Dixon. The entire “Tale of America” which the Rev’d Wicks Cherrycoke tells—which is to say the novel itself—is the Orphean Song. Told by the Rev’d to his nieces and nephews at “Christmastide of 1786” (6), the success of the Tale is a prerequisite for the Rev’d’s continued stay with his less-than-willing hosts; the children must be entertained. The subject of his Tale, as is the subject of Pynchon’s novels and, by extension, all Orphean songs is mortality, the crux of the human condition. Having arrived
too late for Mason's funeral, the Rev'd visits Mason's grave daily as if "he expected Mason, but newly arriv'd at Death to help him with something" (8). Reading from his "scurr'd old Note-book," the Rev'd begins his tale with an account of his own hypothetical hanging and "resurrection" "into an entirely new Knowledge of the terms of being." His "parsonical Disguise," he tells the children requires "no more than a Handfull of Actor's tricks"; he prefers to think of himself as an "untrustworthy Remembrancer" of Mason and Dixon. The Rev'd's only "crime," he claims, was "Anonymity"--anonymously posting public messages which accounted "certain Crimes I had observed, committed by the Stronger against the Weaker" (9). Rev'd Cherrycoke, it seems is an Orphean in his own right, a religious figure and actor who, having experienced death, resurrection, and anonymity resurfaces to tell his "Tale of America." The Tale is participatory, a communal experience, interrupted and supplemented by the children who are not only thoroughly entertained, but have an intuitive understanding of the connection between Mason and Dixon who, together, emerge as the Tale's dual-natured Orpheus. Mason & Dixon emphasizes, as no other previous Pynchon novel has, the Song as a communal process and Orpheus as an insufficient protagonist without his Eurydice--or his audience. Rev'd Cherrycoke finishes his tale on the opening pages of the novel's final chapter when the children "are at last irretrievable detain'd within their Dreams" and "the Hook of Night is well set." It is another quantum moment:

into the Room begin to walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese Sailors, the overflow'd from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia--as if something outside, beyond the cold Wind has driven them to this extreme of seeking refuge . . . . The Room continues to fill up, the Dawn not to arrive (759).

Herein yet another Orphean voice is heard--the Voice of Tim Tox, author of the oft-quoted Pennsylvaniaid whose sanity, in the Rev'd's Tale, has been the subject of much discussion. In "sotto voce" Tim recites his epic poem to the "others, the countless untold others" (760)-
-all the "unchosen" --who fill the room. Pynchon's Orphean Song is ever about Orpheus--
the one and the many--all connected, as are Mason and Dixon in The Song-within-The
Song-within-The Song ad infinitum. The Song is the ultimate Quantum Space which
connects all those who participate in it with the superabundance of human experience. It
both contains and ameliorates the extremes of existence. The Song is the Golden Mean
wherein what remains unsaid offers a glimpse into other dimensions of experience, touches
those who "come before and after us," and allows us to participate in the possibility of
spiritual transformation.

When Oedipa seeks out Randolph Driblette to inquire about the mention of Trystero
in The Courier's Tragedy, the play Oedipa watched and Driblette directed, Driblette,
exasperated with her focus on "words, words" tells her, "You can put together clues,
develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted . . . the way they did. You could
waste your life that way and never touch the truth" (COL 49 80). Developing "a thesis, or
several" is, after all, to view a text--or life--from a Newtonian perspective. Formulated on
the cause and effect of surface level events, a thesis often misses the meaning of the text it
proposes to elucidate; it fails to capture "the soul in flux." The deficiencies of the thesis
align it with Aristotelian "vice"; it cannot lead to transformation because it represents an
extreme viewpoint that can "never touch the truth" (80). Developing a thesis represents one
extreme approach to deciphering the mystery surrounding Trystero and the alternative
system of communication it represents; hallucinating the connections in the clues Oedipa
has discovered--making up her own myth--represents another. Neither extreme is
sufficient to "touch the truth," to redeem, or to spiritually transform because one extreme
excludes the other. Redemption and spiritual transformation are possible, in the
Pynchonesque scheme, in the Golden Mean, in the Orphean Song wherein mutually
exclusive extremes coexist to reveal in the moment of utterance more than either extreme
can express. Sidney Stencil becomes aware of it when he becomes a willing listener to
Mehemet's tale of Mara, Malta's feminine spirit; Oedipa detects it in the "ritual reluctance"
of *The Courier's Tragedy*: Prairie suspects it when she views the film Frenesi shot of "the real moment" of Weed's passing when "a loss of [his] spirit . . . could almost be seen on the film" (VL 146); Mason finally is touched by it when he willingly listens to Dixon's tale of his miraculous journey into the earth's inner surface and his revelation that the earth "hangeth . . . upon nothing." The reader is invited to experience it too at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*. In the darkened Orpheus Theatre, the reader becomes one with the rowdy harmonica-playing, hand-clapping members of the audience. "The screen is a dim page spread before us" (760) like the pages of the novel just read, and "we" are invited to join in the communal singing of William Slothrop's hymn, the transforming Orphic Song that envisions "a Hand to turn the time," "a Soul in ev'ry stone . . . ." (760). In the quantum fictional space, cause and effect cease to operate and the Eternal Return is suspended. In this space, that which is not uttered becomes more powerful than that which is. Like life and death, sound and silence become part of a larger process that is both beyond human understanding but accessible to it. Life and death are the extremes which necessitate articulation; the song is the connecting medium. Only those who are willing to seek the Golden Mean, to embrace the uncertainty discovered there, to participate in the Orphic Song are able to entertain the possibility of spiritual transformation as an alternative to the exitlessness of physical death. In Pynchon's fictive scheme "we" are all potential Orpheans; "we" are all capable of selfless participation in the regenerative and spiritually transforming Orphic Song, that quantum space and moment wherein "something from nothing"--the free lunch--is the rule rather than the exception.
APPENDIX A: MAPS

My discussion of Pynchon’s Metaphor of Extremes and Means relies in part on the mapping and charting activities of various characters in his novels and frequently focuses on the establishment of boundaries that enables nations to possess land through colonization efforts or war. Within the confines of the charted spaces, unbounded spaces emerge and are encountered by many characters some of whom are enlightened or transformed by experiences within them. Because my discussion, especially of Pynchon’s masculine novels, depends on these geographical locations, I have included a number of maps which locate the charted spaces referenced in Pynchon’s novels that are most important to my study. I have also included a few brief comments as to the significance of these spaces to my discussion of Pynchon’s works.

Map 1: Colonial Africa  Note particularly the British domination of Egypt and the Sudan referred to in “Under the Rose” and V. and the German colonization of South West Africa that is the setting of “Mondaugin’s Story” in V. and Weissmann’s encounter with Enzian in Gravity’s Rainbow.

Map 2: Egypt and the Sudan  Note the locations of Alexandria and Cairo, important in “Under the Rose” and in Chapter 3 of V. and the location of Khartoum in the Sudan where General Gordan met disaster at the hands of the Mahdi. Out of Old Hugh Godolphin’s traumatic experiences there, Vheissu emerges.

Map 3: Africa: Uprisings and political Upheaval in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries  Note the major revolts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against the British by the Arabs in Egypt and by the Mahdi in the Sudan, and against the German in South West Africa. These historical occurrences in response to the colonial efforts by the British and the Germans provide an historical and geographical framework for some of the important incidents in V. and Gravity’s Rainbow in which the British and the Germans attempt to subdue the mythological perspective.
Map 4: European Penetration of Africa, c. 1890 Although the British occupied Egypt in 1892, the Mahdists ruled the Sudan. Mahdist forces butchered and crucified many of General Gordan’s troops who tried to hold Khartoum in 1883-84. The event inspired the ivory comb, V.’s first inanimate acquisition, and the trauma experienced by Old Hugh Godolphin who was involved in the mopping up activities following the massacred that made Vheissu necessary. Forty years later, Vheissu is annihilated by V. in South West Africa which, by that time, had been colonized by the Germans. This map shows the German colonization efforts began in South West Africa in 1884.

Map 5 and 5A: South West Africa: The Herero and Nama Wars Map 33 shows sites at which the Germans engaged the Herero and the Ovambo tribes during the Herero War. Map 34 shows sites at which German forces engaged the Hereros, Bondelswarts, and other South West African tribes in the Nama War. This is the location of von Trotha’s massacre of the natives in 1904 and the uprising Foppl was sent to subdue in 1922, both referenced in “Mondaugen’s Story” in V. This is also where Weissmann is sent in 1922 and where his transformation into Blicero-Weissmann begins as a result of his coupling with Enzian in the desert in Gravity’s Rainbow.

Map 6: Malta: Proximity to Europe and Africa Malta is a mere point on this map located just north of Sicily. In the last paragraph of V. Malta becomes a symbol of Aristotle’s description of the Good, “a point, like the center of a circle”: “Draw a line from Malta to Lampedusa. Call it a radius. Some where in that circle, on the evening of the tenth, a waterspout appeared and lasted for fifteen minutes” (V. 492). This is the waterspout into which Sidney Stencil and his time-traveling helmsman, Mehemet, disappear.

Malta’s “odd position—near the major Mediterranean shipping routes yet out of the way”—is responsible for its periods of isolation “punctuated with often violent episodes of foreign intrusion.” Its ancient megaliths date form 3800 BC; the Phoenicians colonized the islands c. 800 BC; Malta became part of the Roman Empire in 208 BC. St. Paul is said to have been shipwrecked there in 60 AD and is believed to have converted the Maltese to
Christianity. In 1565 the Turks besieged the island with 30,000 troops, but 700 Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and 8000 Maltese managed to hold them off. The Knights were awarded the fortified city of Valletta for their efforts. In 1814 Malta became a British Colony. Britain eventually turned Malta into a British naval base making it a target in World War II for the Axis powers who inflicted five months of non-stop bombing raids upon it. Malta finally achieved independence from Britain in 1964, a time after the writing of V. ("Destination Malta" 2-3).

Malta's location and many of the historical events associated with it make it one of Pynchon's earliest "quantum spaces" and one of central importance in V. : it is an island, a mere point on a map; it has been a melting pot for many varied cultures which have dominated and besieged it over the years; it has a connection to both the mythological world because of its importance to ancient civilizations and to the Newtonian because of its colonization by the British; its people literally lived underground during the bombing raids of World War II.

Map 7: Malta Note Valletta's position which is on a promontory. Fausto Maijstral's remarks concerning Paola as a child growing up in Valletta during the German bombing raids of World War II connect her position as a mediating character in the novel to Valletta's geographical location: "Did the two forces [two extremes of underground existence during the bombing raids] neutralize and leave you on the lonely promontory between two worlds?" (V. 331)

Map 8: California This is the only map which pertains to the charted locations of The Crying of Lot 49 and Vineland, Pynchon's two feminine novels, which are less dependent on the mappable and the historical context than are his masculine novels. The verdant areas of California, particularly those north of San Francisco, are certainly the location of Vineland, one of Pynchon's very encompassing quantum spaces with its primeval redwood groves and pristine forest landscapes. In Crying, Oedipa discovers pockets of unbounded space within the boundaries of San Francisco and has her first
encounter with the otherworldly on a hill high above the fictional San Narciso presumably somewhere south of San Francisco. San Narciso is a land-development city dominated by Pierce Inverarity; it signifies the “tower” of self that encapsulates Oedipa and from which she must escape. In both Crying of Lot 49 and Vineland, bridges--the Oakland Bay Bridge, the Golden Gate--lead the characters to new dimensions of experience.

Map 9: Central War Zone of Europe at the German Surrender 8 May 1945  Note that on this map the boundaries of the European countries (except Switzerland which remained neutral during the war) are not shown. This is the “unbounded space” that Slothrop experiences when he escapes into “the Zone” in Gravity’s Rainbow. In the last days of the war in Gravity’s Rainbow, boundaries disappear and nature begins to heal the land scarred by war. In such a quantum space, Slothrop loses “the albatross of self” and assumes his role as Orpheus and savior figure for the “Counterforce” which will continue to oppose the Forces of war and death.

Map 10: South Africa: From Colony to Republic 1652-1961  Note the continued involvement of Britain as South Africa’s main colonizer. However, in 1761 when Mason and Dixon went to South Africa to observe their first Transit of Venus from the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa was a colony of the Dutch.

Map 11: Cape Colony and Capetown  Note the dates of the founding of various cities and the progression of Cape Colony’s colonial status after 1795. Before 1795, Cape Colony was Dutch.

Map 12: St. Helena Island and South Africa and Map 12A: Map of St. Helena in 1812  Note the location of St. Helena Island in relation to South Africa from which Mason and Dixon viewed their first Transit of Venus. On their passage home, they stopped at St. Helena. While Mason stayed on the Island with Maskelyne, Dixon temporarily returned to the Cape with Maskelyne’s clock to carry out gravity experiments (“Biography of Jeremiah Dixon” 1). St. Helena is an island and British colony located in the South Atlantic Ocean 1200 miles west of the southwest coast of Africa. It has an area of 47 square miles; its
capital and port is Jamestown. The East Indian Company occupied the island from 1673-
1834 ("The History of St. Helena, 1502-1821" 1-5).

Map 13: The Colonies in America, 1755 This map shows the colonies of Maryland,
Pennsylvania, and Delaware before Mason and Dixon arrived to survey their Line.

Map 14: Colonial America 1770 This map shows the colonies and their main economic
endeavors about the time Mason and Dixon finished surveying their Line. The map does
not show the westward extent to which Mason and Dixon’s survey took them. It does,
however, show the location of the Iron Works along the line between Delaware, Maryland,
and Pennsylvania which Mason and Dixon encountered in their survey. The high iron
content around that area caused Dixon’s needles to go “amok.”

Map 15: Mason and Dixon’s Line This map shows the Line measured by Mason and
Dixon. The survey was begun in 1763 and extended 244 miles west from the Delaware
River in latitude 39° 43’. They were within thirty-six miles of completion (i.e., the
Splawacipahi Fork of the Ohio River) when they were stopped by Indian opposition in
November 1767 (“Biography of Charles Mason” 1). The line also determined the north-
south boundary between Delaware and Maryland. On the map this portion of the Line
appears lighter than the east-west extension. Note where the east-west boundary stops.

Map 16: “A Map of that Part of America where a degree of Latitude was Measured for the
Royal Society by Cha. Mason and Jere. Dixon” This map is taken from Transactions of
the Royal Philosophical Society of London and shows the north-south boundary between
Maryland and Delaware. It also shows the town of New Castle from which the survey
began.

Map 17: Mason and Dixon’s Line: The North-South Boundary between Maryland and the
Three Lower Counties of Delaware This is the map of this area drawn by Jeremiah Dixon
after the survey was completed. Note the inclusion of the “Flower of Light” that, in
Mason & Dixon, Mason protested Dixon’s drawing because of its connection with the
French. “‘This is my North Point,’” Dixon tells Mason, “‘since the first Map I ever drew.
I cannot very readily forsweat it now sir . . . [T]o debase the Value of [the] North Point . . . 'Twould be to betray my Allegiance to Earth's Magnetism, Earth Herself'' (M & D 688-89).

Map 18: Mason and Dixon's Line: "A Plan of the Boundary Lines between the Province of Maryland and the Three Lower Counties of Delaware with Part of the Parallel of Latitude which is the Boundary between the Provinces of Maryland and Pennsylvania" (Foldout)

This is the map drawn by Jeremiah Dixon after the survey was completed. Interestingly the "map" includes only a narrow strip of land on either side of the Line established by Mason and Dixon.
Map I: Colonial Africa

(van Chi-Vonnardel 49)
Map 2: Egypt and the Sudan

(Espenshade 205)
Map 3: Africa: Uprisings and Political Upheaval in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

(Freeman-Grenville 109)
Map 4: European Penetration of Africa, c. 1890

(Freeman-Grenville 97)
Map 5: South West Africa: The Herero War
(van der Merwe Plate 33)
Map 5A: South West Africa: the Nama War
(van der Merwe Plate 34)
Map 6: Malta: Proximity to Europe and Africa
(Espenshade 130)
Map 7: Malta

(National Geographic Society 58)
Map 9: Central War Zone of Europe at the
German Surrender 8 May 1945

(Gilbert 87)
Map 10: South Africa: From Colony to Republic 1652-1961

(Freeman-Grenville 131)
Map 11: Cape Colony and Capetown

(Freeman-Grenville 87)
Map 12: St. Helena and South Africa
(Freeman-Grenville 131)

Map 12A: Map of St. Helena in 1812
("History of St. Helena" 5)
Map 13: Colonies in America, 1755

(Paullin Plate 26)
Map 14: Colonial America 1770

(Hamond Medallion World Atlas U-12)
Map 15: Mason and Dixon's Line
(Papenfuse and Coale 43)
Map 16: "A Map of That Part of America Where a Degree of Latitude was Measured for the Royal Society by Cha. Mason and Jere. Dixon"

(Papenfuse and Coale 39)
The Province of Maryland

The Three Lower Counties

Map 17: Mason and Dixon's Line:
the North-South Boundary between Maryland
and the Three Lower Counties of Delaware
(Papenfuse and Coale 41)
Map 18: Mason and Dixon's Line:

"A Plan of the Boundary Lines between the Province of Maryland and the Three Lower Counties on Delaware with Part of the Parallel of Latitude which is the Boundary between the Provinces of Maryland and Pennsylvania"

(Papenfuse and Coale 40-41)
Central Painting from Remedios Varo's

Triptych, "Bordando al Manto Terrestre"
("Remedios Varo" 8)


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