THE TREATMENT OF HISTORICAL SPACE IN SELECTED WORKS BY THOMAS PYNCHON

W. Kapp Hons. B.A.

Dissertation submitted for the degree Master of Arts in English at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus

Supervisor: **Prof. A.M. de Lange**

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Abstract:

This dissertation uses the concept of various "spaces" in a literary work to attain a historical perspective on selected works by Thomas Pynchon: *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966); *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *Mason & Dixon* (1997). The historical space forms the focal point for a discussion, since history is an important theme in Pynchon's novels. Different views of history can be constructed from each text by noting the interaction of the spaces and how they relate to the historical space. *The Crying of Lot 49* focuses on the individual in relation to history from a post Second World War perspective. *Gravity's Rainbow* concentrates on the Second World War and war in general as a metaphor for the twentieth century and how this is situated historically. *Mason & Dixon* reaches further into history to the eighteenth century as the "Age of Reason" to explore it from postmodernism. Throughout shifts in emphasis the spaces in each novel can be successfully used to bring the theme of history to the fore and analyse it.

Opsomming:

Die konsep van ruimte word in hierdie verhandeling gebruik om 'n perspektief te verkry op geselekteerde werke van Thomas Pynchon: *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966); *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) en *Mason & Dixon* (1997). Die historiese ruimte vorm die fokuspunt vir 'n bespreking, aangesien geskiedenis 'n belangrike tema in Pynchon se romans is. Verskillende sieninge van geskiedenis kan gekonstrueer word uit elk deur die interaksie van die ruimtes in ag te neem en hoe dit verband hou met die historiese ruimte. *The Crying of Lot 49* fokus op die individu in verhouding tot die geskiedenis vanuit 'n post Tweede Wêreldoorlog perspektief. *Gravity's Rainbow* konsentreer op die Tweede Wêreldoorlog en oorlog oor die algemeen as 'n metafoor vir die twintigste eeu. *Mason & Dixon* reik verder in die geskiedenis na die agtiende eeu as die "Age of Reason" om dit te verken vanuit postmodernisme. Die ruimtes in elke roman kan regdeur hierdie klemverskuiwinge suksesvol gebruik word om die tema van geskiedenis na vore te bring en dit te analiseer.

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A Note on the Text

The use of quotation marks: double quotation marks are used consistently with single quotation marks for a different reference within a passage.

Pronouns referring to gender: "he or she" is used when referring in general to, for instance, the reader; otherwise the appropriate pronoun is used in referring to a character or an author.

Page numbers from the primary texts: in the chapters relating to a specific novel, only the page number in brackets is used, in the introductory and final chapter the full citation is used.

Chapter One

Introduction

The focus on space and spatiality is relatively new in literary studies and also not unproblematic. Problems arise from the way in which these concepts are constructed, described, defined and interpreted. It is possible to derive numerous kinds of space, such as historical space, physical space, metaphysical space and religious space, to name a few, from the structure or thematics of a novel. This in itself presents a problem, since the literary scholar must differentiate between these spaces in order to determine which will be most useful for study of a particular aspect. On the other hand, space is a versatile construct to work with, offering flexibility and new possibilities in terms of text interpretation. The concept of space allows a pliable relationship to be established between theory and text, and such an approach is particularly suited to Pynchon's work, in which space plays an important role in creating meaning and a complexly shifting, interlinked vision. Since Pynchon's work is notoriously difficult to analyse due to its innovative stylistic features and postmodern techniques, a study of his use of space could assist in dealing with his work from a broader theoretical perspective. However, before outlining such a project it is first necessary to delineate the use of space in this dissertation by posing the question: What is space?

There does not seem to be a coherent theoretical position in literary scholarship regarding space, and thus various views of theorists will be considered. Gullón (1975:21), in a seminal article on space entitled *On Space in the Novel* provides a possible definition of space, with reference to another seminal article, this time by Joseph Frank when he states that "Frank calls 'spatial' the form of those works that at a given instant in time concentrate actions that can be perceived, but not related, simultaneously". This definition denotes a further complication engendered by space, namely the notion that different spaces intersect and interrelate with each other, and consequently that it is very difficult – if not impossible – to separate the various kinds of literary spaces in order to analyse the occurrence of a single space in a text. It also

seems bound to time, but in a sense bridges the temporal gaps in a novel since it brings together parts that are not necessarily adjacent to each other temporally. Time becomes spatialized by treating events in the novel as separate chunks which can be rearranged and linked to each other. This creates a more coherent and comprehensive picture of events in a text.

Space in a literary text can be interpreted and constructed in different ways but perhaps the clearest would be to regard parts of a novel as building blocks that can be put together in many different ways. Gullón (1975:21) describes how this may work in a text, with James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) taken as an example: "...in which the events that make up the background of the novel must be 'reconstructed from fragments, sometimes hundreds of pages apart, scattered throughout the book.' The reader must spatially connect temporally unconnected references". This is precisely what is expected from the reader by many other novels, especially from readers of an allusive novel such as *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). The exploration of space can be fruitful in linking events that are not always ordered chronologically and must be connected coherently, in a cohesive thematic and narrative sense, by the reader.

Structure and patterns are important aspects of any novel and examining these in the context of space can drastically alter one's view of the text, or make it easier to construct patterns. This interconnectedness of space is expanded on in the following statement by Zoran (1984:311), which also stresses the perception of spatial patterns in terms of the text as a whole:

> It is a more complicated matter when the dimension of space is attributed to the structure of signifieds in a text. Here the reference is to the structuring of meanings into a pattern not identical to the temporal order in which they appear in the text. A spatial pattern is any pattern perceived solely on the basis of the connection between discontinuous units in a text, demanding therefore a perception of the whole text or part of it as given simultaneously in space (which is, for example, the case of analogies).

The main point in this regard seems to be creating patterns. This brings together more elements for the reader to be viewed at once, allowing him or her to attain a broader perspective on the text.

This dissertation will examine various kinds of spaces generated in selected works by Thomas Pynchon, viz. *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *Mason & Dixon* (1997). The first three of Pynchon's novels were published relatively shortly after one another, within the space of a decade, and form thematic similarities, such as the use of entropy as a metaphor for society's decline, paranoia experienced by the individual in relation to the state, the effect of deconstruction on language and textuality, as well as the documenting of history. The plots in these novels also tend towards quest narratives and the multiplication of storylines, for example: in *V.* it ranges from a search for sewer crocodiles to the elusive identity of V., in *The Crying of Lot 49* a search for a secret underground postage system called the Trystero and in *Gravity's Rainbow* a search for an explanation for a bizarre relation between the protagonist's behaviour and bombing sites.

Pynchon started publishing in the sixties and also belongs to that generation of writers. The direction in which philosophy and literature moved during that period is described briefly in the following passage:

> In the sixties, in particular, certain cultural phenomena – the decentering of old subjectivities, the abbreviating of the historical horizon by movies and TV – found their most effective representation in an art that problematized objectivity, foregrounded the processes of representation, and expressed the strange idea that reality was never a given, never something one could divorce from the language purporting to render it (Cowart, 1999:11).

Although Pynchon employs some different techniques from writers of the time in his craft, the essence remains the same, especially in relation to cultural thought, leading to the establishment of a new movement in literature and philosophy in which the development of popular media played a leading role. The emphasis seems largely on culture and representation as factors in determining worldview and constructing a framework through which to process and document history. History is a common denominator between Pynchon's novels, along with textual innovations, which foreground the effect of postmodernism on the novel. In *The Crying of Lot 49* the state of America in the sixties and the position of the individual therein come under scrutiny, so that the course of history invariably needs to be scrutinized in order to make sense of the present. But this history is either apparently non-existent,

impossible to pin down or very difficult to accept. The novel does not treat its subject matter in a manner as to provide a plausible, final explanation for events from a historical point of view, but instead aims at problematizing such a view of history, to bring the difficulties of accurately establishing a model of history into sharp focus. To achieve this, the historical space depicted in each novel needs to be treated in unconventional ways, in contrast to the idea of "master narratives" or "objective truths", facts which are ordinarily regarded as easily verified or interpreted. The conventions of the historical romance, such as clearly and authoritatively sketching the period in which it is set in an entirely realistic manner, are not followed in the postmodern novel for depicting history; it rather prefers using some of the genre-breaking characteristics described in the following passage from Elias (1995:106):

> For Brian McHale, postmodernist 'revisionist' history foregrounds the ontological boundaries between the real and the unreal that 'classic' historical fiction seeks to camouflage. The postmodernist' transition from the real to the unreal is jarring: they contradict the public record of 'official' history, flaunt anachronisms, and integrate history and the fantastic — all disallowed by traditional historical novels.

All the characteristics mentioned in the passage are integral elements of Pynchon's novels, placing these firmly in the category of "postmodern 'revisionist' history". There are various reasons for writing in this manner, from a literary and cultural perspective. Pynchon's work is mostly concerned with American affairs, with a vision extending to the rest of the Western world, but it is essentially from the vantage point more narrowly defined as the cultural revolution of the sixties. Much of his work deals with a deep disillusionment with the prevailing cultural values, since it was a time in which people started to question political, religious and social systems that were perceived as oppressive. They were no longer willing to follow any government blindly. There is a profound distrust of these systems present in Pynchon's novels, mostly in the form of paranoia experienced by the main characters, such as Oedipa in *The Crying of Lot 49* and Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow,* so that to uncover the causes of this Pynchon needs to delve into history to find out, if possible, what went wrong and what can be done. The vision for all of Pynchon's fiction is concisely summarized by Cowart (1999:11):

> In *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* he charts, with no small prescience, the toll of the West's Faustian appetite for knowledge and power. In *Mason & Dixon* he explores the late eighteenth-century moment of the nation's founding. In *Vineland*, in press as the wall came down, his imagination shifts to the post-apocalyptic – indeed, millenial – fulfillments that might follow a generation's coming to terms with its own manifold betrayals. In *Lot 49*, finally, as in all of those fictions, he depicts an entire generation's passage – passage archetypal and American – from innocence to experience.

Two of Pynchon's novels will not be examined in this dissertation, namely *Vineland* (1990) and *V.* (1963). The former concerns the television culture of the eighties and would be interesting in shedding some light on the Reagan era in America, but it is not really regarded as one of Pynchon's major novels and has received mixed criticism. *V.* provides an earlier version of Pynchon's notion of entropy and history, but cannot be accommodated by the parameters of this study and is surpassed by *Gravity's Rainbow* in textual complexity and maturation of ideas. *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* are also more suited to an exploration of historical space, given their historical settings. *The Crying of Lot 49* will be discussed in a chapter as it provides a good balance in terms of postmodern theory and the historical. The study of the novels will be ordered chronologically in order to show development in the treatment of space and point out similarities as well as differences between the texts.

The various manifestations of historical space and other historical aspects will form the central focus of this dissertation, since it is such an integral part of each novel. *Mason & Dixon* is overtly historical fiction, yet with vital differences from the realist historical tradition, in accordance with the description of a work as "postmodern 'revisionist' history". The discussion of historical space will be embedded in the following concept of spatial history: "Such history examines place as a palimpsest on which the traces of successive inscriptions form the complex experience of place, which is itself historical" (Ashcroft, 2001:155). This "experience of place" is achieved by overlapping individual experiences of space. In this context literary space, which consists of various spaces such as psychological space and linguistic space, can play an important role in understanding historical space. Nethersole (1994:137) describes how events can be severed from their exclusively temporal function "...by dissociating spatializing operations undertaken in and through writing from their traditional static quality of merely aiding characterization and setting...it

becomes possible to articulate a logic of action (plot) based upon temporal succession as being necessarily tied to a logic of space". This link between events and place represents the intersection of time and space, which is a useful view of history and links the novel to history.

The Crying of Lot 49

The second chapter of this dissertation focuses on *The Crying of Lot 49* and foregrounds the individual person in relation to the course of history. In postmodern times the cultural and physical urban landscapes look very different in all respects from previous historical periods. The heroine of the novel assumes various ideological positions within a postmodern framework to explore the historical record, however apocryphal, in a labyrinthine search for origins and an attempt to make sense of the present through the past. History is largely an impersonal presence and various views of history have to be considered in order to make sense of a multitude of facts, most of which can only be verified textually in the form of historical documents or accounts, if at all. The questions asked by the individual change in emphasis from "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (McHale, 1991:9), to "What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (McHale, 1991:10). These questions represent a subtle shift from the epistemological to the ontological, paralleled in the shift from modernism to postmodernism and also reflect the individual's struggle to make sense of a rapidly changing world. At the same time they represent a change from old to new, while demonstrating an effort on the part of the heroine to apply an outdated method of interpretation unsuccessfully to organise events and facts. This dilemma has a cultural significance in the context of the sixties, since new theoretical methods of interpretation were undoubtedly called for:

> The point is that the semantic and textual abyss that many experience in reading Pynchon cannot be adjudicated by modernist or New Critical stratagems (thus Oedipa's predicament); the poststructuralist critic situates that abyss wherever a centralized subject attempts to read or write as if it were coincident with itself (Brown, 1997:98-9).

New Criticism had lost its dominance as critical procedure and was being challenged by other interpretative methodologies and approaches by the time that *The Crying of Lot 49* was published. The novel contains many instances of new and old intellectual trends:

> In the 1970s, critical recognition of postmodernism in all the arts led to the study of ways in which Pynchon's novels extend, critique, and parody modernist narrative techniques...Pynchon's work is in many ways prototypically postmodern and, as Gabriele Schwab has observed, *Gravity's Rainbow* could be read as 'a literary version of the post-structuralist critique of Western history and philosophy and of a symbolic order based on logo- and phallo-centrism' (Brown, 1997:96).

Interpretative space raises the text to the level of metanarrative through Oedipa's role as reader. Her interpretation parallels that of the reader as each is left with the same kinds of options, though the reader of course has the added vantage point of interpreting Oedipa's viewpoint.

Another factor that contributes to the text as metanarrative is the linguistic space, which serves primarily to highlight the constructed nature of the text. It keeps the focus on the surface, which complicates it for the reader in the sense of making it more difficult to become immersed in the story by constantly being reminded that the text is artificially constructed. The linguistic space consists mostly of wordplay, even in naming the characters, and complex, convoluted sentence construction. Another important space is that created by character and could also be called psychological. Criticism against the novel has been raised with regard to character development and representation, but this can be countered in the sense that Pynchon does not aim to portray characters realistically or conventionally in all cases. Through the metaphysical space the portrayal of character rather serves a symbolic or semiotic function as the expression of a particular idea. Hall (1991:71) argues that

> ...[i]n this context, Pynchon has Oedipa come to appreciate how the destruction of identity and experience engendered by contemporary mass social conformism and alienation might be countered by means of the difference and differentiation (Derrida: *différance*) that postmodernism understand to be central to signification. For the indeterminacy of signification, the elusive shifting of signifier to referent, the constant pressure and presence of the différance finally allows Oedipa,

through a simple pun, the changing significations of the letters *dt*, an appreciation of the many worlds of experience known by an old sailor.

The potential of the individual, in the sense of a traditional hero or protagonist as a saviour, is shown to lack power in its total impact on the world. Instead extra-human forces preside over people, for instance in the form of corporations or governments, which raises the question of the animate in relation to the inanimate. This is reflected in the physical space, which is portrayed in a realistic manner, but due to some surreal features of California in the sixties and the mental state of the protagonist, it becomes dream-like at times.

As the story of an underground postal service stretching over centuries occupies a central position in the novel, history forms an important part, but specifically in document form and thus as text. Pierce Inverarity's will confirms the focus on history that manifests itself in various ways, in intertextual form as a Jacobean revenge tragedy, a rare stamp collection and letters sent through a secret mail system, to name a few examples. Fry (1987:146) argues that "...[i]n a very real sense a will is history in its purest form as text". The individual is forced through alienation to grasp at desperate ways of questioning and reconstructing historical texts, such as conspiracy theories that include everything from the postal system to corporations and wars. The will creates a space between the old and the new, a continuation, and is an example of the type of metaphysical spaces that are formed in the novel. It is this space which Oedipa explores in order to create new meaning, "...discovering Inverarity's America, she rejects it, and desiring an alternative, she chooses paranoia" (Kharpertian, 1990:99) and in which the ending represents this state of paranoia in its inconclusiveness.

The execution of a will left to Oedipa in *The Crying of Lot 49*, which triggers her quest, implies a reconstruction of the past and it is in this reconstruction which Oedipa faces interpretative difficulties, similar to those experienced by the reader, which in turn leads to another question, viz. of how possible it is to reconstruct the past and how reliable such a reconstruction would be. The reader needs to overcome certain obstacles such as how to make sense of the proliferation of plots, in other words where everything fits, and which of the historical detail is real or fictional. Fry

(1987:146) states with regard to *The Crying of Lot 49* that "...[t]his systematic confusion of the historical stance undermines our confidence in the text". Possibly the real objective is to raise these questions which are never satisfactorily answered. Questions of authenticity are predominant: "...the repeated suggestion of an historical investigation on the part of the central figure in order to establish the nature of an estate as the execution of a will demands is an invitation to verify the authenticity of an historical document" (Fry, 1987:146). Documents take many forms so that even graffiti and personal accounts may be regarded as types of documentation, each with their own degree of validity. Yet in the final instance even the most formalized documentation is shown to be insufficient in bringing forth an objective textual account of history.

Historical space forms an important point of reference within this framework, since the concept of history can be defined as a way of ordering facts and events. Within this space questions of power, influence and conspiracy are raised, with paranoia shown as a possible reaction to all this. The whole enterprise could also be futile, created by "the idea that imposing patterns upon random, unordered data produces more disorder in the process" (Leland, 1974:50). Humankind's reasoning ability and ability to produce structures is not seen as effective in fighting entropy, but rather as contributing to the overall chaos. The spoken word is used to counter this, by accentuating the vitality it brings in contrast to the death and sterility of the written word. The director of a play illuminates Oedipa on this aspect of the difference between the two kinds: "You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfinger supplied the words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it" (Pynchon, 1979:54). The novel offers a surprising stance on the illumination of historical space by literary space, since texts are seen as creating confusion, with more trust placed in the spoken word as an action. But in this extremity the realization dawns that texts are all that is left of the past, which brings the focus back to the written word and legitimizes it.

Gravity's Rainbow

Gravity's Rainbow has been described as an encyclopaedic novel that offers a considerable challenge to the reader in producing an integrated reading of it. The text appears extremely fragmented, incongruent and lacking in plot or coherence, which leads to a great deal of confusion on the reader's part. Given the basic definition of a palimpsest as overlapping traces, it also provides fruitful ground for an exploration of space, especially since new traces can be followed and the various inscriptions of experience can be explored, something that the text invites the reader to do and which can be a very liberating experience.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, historical space is primarily linked to the Second World War, while the main characters (though due to the cinematic nature of the text they sometimes appear as lead actors) all attempt to find ways of coping with it, through various ways such as rationalizing, questioning history, paranoia and an affirmation of their basic humanity. Many cinematic elements are present and the text can conceived as a film which the reader is watching, creating a unique kind of interpretative space full of intertextuality, implying that the reader will have to be familiar with these distinctly American cultural products in order to fully grasp the significance thereof. The apparently convoluted style in which the novel is written suggests a productive way in which the effect of history on the individual consciousness can be represented in literary space.

Given the prototypical postmodern structure and narrative techniques of the novel, one aspect which brings cohesion to *Gravity's Rainbow* and gives it a satiric edge is the mode of attack which is aimed at the Western world, encompassing all aspects of society from arts to science and especially war. A strong subversive and parodying element is present in the text, leading Chambers (1991:258) to express the view that it is "a narrative that disrupts conventional forms of analysis as it dismantles the hardened systems of tradition, religion, history, language, and the self to free them from their obscuring contexts, to recast them, and thus to illuminate their hidden truths". Thematically, war forms an important part of *Gravity's Rainbow* and historical space in the novel. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, war leads to questions of

historical cause and effect. These are at the same time related to science and the role of the individual within society as it is shaped by forces beyond his or her control. Paranoia is a possible outcome, which remains indefinitely and unresolved within this context.

Another important link between the two novels is the position of the disempowered in history and society, and which is more fully illustrated in *Gravity's Rainbow*: "But in the bifurcation of the world along the lines of social control, that which is excluded from the official culture gains a mirror-image power to disrupt, shock, and challenge" (Ames, 1990:206). The focus is firmly on the individual, with a disregard that becomes an open contempt of and defiance towards restrictive systems imposed by people in power and the shackles created by practices that are uncritically deemed as acceptable.

History is pluralized in *Gravity's Rainbow* by bringing a multitude of possible versions and views of it into play. Eventually the most important result that it presents is the need for a humanist perspective in a postmodern, frequently inhuman, war-torn age. In essence this is the conclusion that Swartzlander (1988:135) comes to in the following passage:

> Conventional approaches to history are parodied and trivialized: history as cause and effect, history as a record of man's progress, history as a procession of people, places, and events, and history as the manifestation of God. Instead we are presented with history as illusion, nightmare, the eternal struggle between the preterite and the elect. We are shown the inadequacies of any historical perspective, and throughout the novels, we are forced to adopt a perspective that focuses on human relationships.

Gravity's Rainbow counters the deaths brought about by a period of war by re-affirming basic human attributes. In the process a form of romanticism is adopted in the focus on nature and play with language. Ultimately this play with language is tied to deconstruction, which reclaims some of the power of words for expression and opening new possibilities. The linguistic space takes on an important role in this respect, since it is an essentially human domain and is utilized by the characters in determining their identity. There is a human presence in language, which the

historical account does not always reflect, but which is prominent in the characters' lives. Ultimately the main character in *Gravity's Rainbow,* Slothrop, wonders how much is hidden behind official historical versions of events, perhaps especially to the exclusion of people's lives, as noted by Cowley (1989:6):

> He is concerned that 'history as it's been laid on the world is only a fraction, an outward-and-visible fraction' (*GR* p. 612), that while technology, as knowledge objectified, not only leaves a palpable historical trace, but is a prime determinant of historical action, any humanized historiography is confronted with the need to conceal absence in language with a fiction of verbally recuperated human presence.

In the end Slothrop receives a revelation that nature is transcendent. This character then promptly disappears, since he does not serve any useful function any longer, deliberately discarded to foreground authorship, fictionality and metaphysical space once more. Dichotomies feature strongly in the metaphysical/ideological space, but cannot be separated from the historical. As indicated in the title *Gravity's Rainbow*, there are opposing forces at work in the text, such as play/seriousness and creation/destruction, yet these are not at all times working against each other but are also shown as different aspects of the same force.

Physical space suffers from diffusion and fragmentation, it is even surreal at times. Characters move between locations that are dream-like and also indicative of the effects of war in their state of destruction. The overall effect is of a world that is far removed from everyday reality and adds to the despair and breakdown which many of the characters experience.

Mason & Dixon

Since it is set in the eighteenth century, the historical space in *Mason & Dixon* is even more pervasive than in any of the other novels. In contrast to *The Crying of Lot 49*, where historical space is subservient to the predominant metaphysical space, in *Mason & Dixon* all other spaces are connected primarily to the historical. The historical dimension is completely integrated into the text, as illustrated by the affected style of writing imitated from the authentic eighteenth century style as part of

the linguistic space, for instance, even though it is technically adept and quite convincing. Similarities abound between *Mason & Dixon* and the other works discussed, as some of the same focus on wordplay is present, for example in the form of very allusive or preposterously exaggerated names of the characters. Overall, the extreme nature of the style and diction is an indication that the reader is dealing with a historical novel which differs from the conventional.

Generally speaking, the postmodern historical novel is based on historical events with actual historical figures, but at the same time it "...challenges the historical record and subverts political myths" (Elias, 1995:109). *Mason & Dixon* is typical of this genre and represents a more radical treatment of historical space than traditional historical novels. This is a significant distinction that is more fully explored in the chapter on *Mason & Dixon.* Linear historical storytelling is undermined in the postmodern historical novel by presenting various views instead of one metanarrative as Elias (1995:108) states: "they 'spatialize history' – that is, they challenge the conceptual (linear) model of history implied in traditional historical novels". This is evident in *Mason & Dixon* from a very early stage in the novel through the use of various narrators, which makes it impossible to derive a completely linear narrative. The insertion of numerous episodes, many of a fantastical nature, further complicates the construction of an authoritative version of the historical tale. In addition characters present their views and enter into debate in discussing the story.

Consequently metaphysical space plays a large role in *Mason & Dixon,* with the ideological space and religious space as manifestations thereof. The ideological space is mostly concerned with the *Zeitgeist*, since the period is known as the Age of Reason, but in typical irony the novel incorporates fantastic events and irrationality to form a large part of the narrative. The religious space is very much of the time, but gets more extensive treatment than in the other texts and characters have many arguments over these issues. This is especially true of Mason and Dixon, who strongly state their convictions regarding religion, although they constantly question each other. There is a development in the space occupied by character, which is more fully explored, although characters continue to serve their purely symbolic functions as well.

It is also important to bear in mind the following with regard to *Mason & Dixon*, as an exponent of the postmodern historical novel: "'History' is no longer a secure metanarrative underlying and justifying cultural progression; it is shown to be an 'open work' that *resists* interpretation and authorial control" (Elias, 1995:109). Thus the story is not told as if it is simple fact, but many questions arise, as the protagonists themselves ponder about events. "It seems not to belong in either of their lives. 'Was there a mistake in the Plan of the Day? Did we get a piece of someone else's History, a fragment spall'd off of some Great Moment'" (Pynchon, 1997:44). This calls to mind the idea of possible worlds, with the possibility of worlds intersecting on the level of history. "But possible-worlds theorists in poetics have, by contrast, blurred fiction's external boundaries. By doing so, they make it possible for us to understand the passage or circulation that occurs across that boundary" (McHale, 1991:34). The function and crossing of boundaries comes under particular scrutiny in the novel.

Irony and parody are used extensively and are features in general of postmodern historical fiction, its function in part to undermine and subvert the historical record as well as question the nature of history. The novel works against the grain of realistic historical fiction by "the strategy of integrating history and the fantastic, a flagrant violation of the realistic norms of historical fiction" (McHale, 1991:94). This tension between the openly inaccurate and more realistic historical record foregrounds many of the questions regarding the relation between truth and history in the novel.

* * *

In summary, this leads to the following central questions to be explored in this dissertation, viz.:

How are conventional approaches to history questioned and displaced by spaces in the texts?

How do spaces interact and re-inforce each other, in particular historical space, in the works of Thomas Pynchon under discussion?

The overarching aim is to examine conventional approaches to history in contrast to postmodern revisionist history, in the context of historical space and the influence of other spaces on it in Pynchon's work.

Historical space is taken as the dominant in each text, in order to explore the differences between conventional history and a postmodern historical approach. Interaction also takes place between spaces that overlap and modify each other, and the effect on historical space forms the focus. Different techniques are employed in each novel and the spaces are used to view the subject matter from different angles.

Each text is dealt with in separate chapters as the spaces are identified, discussed and interpreted. Textual analysis is mostly used, bearing in mind the theoretical constructs dealing with history and spatiality. The conclusion serves as a means to draw the three texts together and point out similarities and differences.

Chapter Two

The Crying of Lot 49: History as Text

Introduction

The Crying of Lot 49 (1966) was published at an early stage of postmodernism in literature, at a time when the leading American authors included John Barth, Robert Coover, Kurt Vonnegut and Richard Brautigan, each with a distinctive experimental style and approach. Its relatively short length does not make it less complex or effective than any of the other novels discussed in this dissertation, but rather makes it more accessible for studying the techniques that Pynchon uses in most of his writing, which will be the focus of the rest of this dissertation.

Thematically, *The Crying of Lot 49* contains many similarities with Pynchon's other novels, opening the possibility for the common ground of historical space to be discussed from various viewpoints and approaches for each novel. These are, most notably, themes such as technology, power and particularly reading and interpretation in its various forms. Although Pynchon may follow different approaches, Hall (1991:63) notes this unifying thread when he states that: "All of Pynchon's fictions involve problems of reading and interpretation, but perhaps nowhere is this more self-consciously so than in *The Crying of Lot 49*". This self-conscious contemplation on the nature of reading and interpretation is one aspect out of many that makes the novel so fascinating and relevant to postmodern self-reflexivity and intertextuality, in addition to its particular representation of the historical space.

- **Structure**

On a narrative level, the novel's protagonist is an anti-hero named Oedipa Maas, a name that has many allusive qualities, ranging from Greek tragedy and Freudian theory to mass communication and networks. Similarly, virtually all of the character names in the novel carry associations, mostly of a comical nature. The narrative line

can be summed up briefly as follows, though in a very simplified manner, since it takes many unexpected and convoluted turns:

> Leaving her home in Kinneret-Among-the-Pines, California, to trace down the meaning of Pierce Inverarity's will – of which she has been named executrix – Oedipa explores the patterned veins and circuits of LA's freeways and the streets of late-night San Francisco. Finally, it is a kind of journey to the underworld, begun with a vague sense of hieroglyphic revelation in the pattern of the freeways and a chimerical hint of deeper meanings behind the surface order (Kolodny & Peters, 1973:80).

This imparts the structure concisely, with an emphasis on the "deeper meanings", since much is hidden and Oedipa in fact is engaged in a search that reaches no satisfactory conclusion, at least in the sense of a conventional ending.

The structure of *The Crying of Lot 49* consists of the interlacing of various kinds of space, such as the physical, character, metaphysical, interpretative, linguistic, textual and historical space, which must all be taken into account in order to achieve a fuller interpretation of the novel. The historical space, which will be regarded as the most important one, is linked and fused with other spaces until it reaches such complexity that it cannot be neatly dissected. Any attempt to analyse these spaces separately reveals their interrelatedness, making it difficult to identify them and determine where they fit. By focussing on and interpreting the use of texts, historical or otherwise, in the novel, the spaces are more easily related to each other, since it provides a focal point to bring them together by using an integral part of the novel.

- **Postmodern Literary Devices**

Intertextuality, parody and blending categories of genre are postmodern literary devices that are also integral characteristics of *The Crying of Lot 49*. Historical documents form essential structural and thematic elements in the text as the main character, Oedipa Maas, explores and investigates the past. This creates an obsession with various kinds of documents to be found in the text, at the same time foregrounding textuality. Documents provide an important unifying element in this way, particularly the interpretation of documents and views on these interpretations.

Although Oedipa initially only has the relatively straightforward task of executing a will, complications arise from unexplained elements in the past and estate of the deceased, which in turn draw her into a mystery that may exist or only be a product of her growing paranoia. This gives the novel the structure of a detective story. One of the most interesting aspects as the novel progresses is Oedipa's paranoid suspicions about whether things that happen to her are coincidental or filled with purpose and meaning. It is ultimately up to her and the reader, each to a different degree, to decide how much of what she discovers is real and how much was planned by her ex-lover who drafted the will.

Although it contains elements of the detective genre, *The Crying of Lot 49* differs and diverges from it considerably in fundamental ways. There is for instance an abrupt, unexpected ending that does not provide the reader with a clear, satisfactory conclusion to the trail of clues which Oedipa has been following. But it is an unusual mystery in any case, since it is largely a textual hunt. The detective genre can be regarded as epistemological, related to establishing the boundaries of what can be known and how it is known. But questions regarding certainty and authenticity prove to be irresolvable in the novel, suggesting that a different strategy is called for and implying that this modernist view cannot be appropriated to make sense of the postmodern ontological way in which the world and knowledge are organized. In this chapter this uncertainty will be used, tied to the use of subsidiary texts in the main text, to answer the question of how the view of history has changed, especially in relation to texts and what possible interpretations can be made of them. This is a useful example of how Pynchon integrates and draws from a variety of genres and modes in his fiction.

- **Spaces**

The physical space is discussed first and exposes the real function of places. The city may serve as an example, since it is in one instance described as "less an identifiable city than a group of concepts" (14), which is typically the way in which the reader finds surroundings described in the novel. It is thus not only appearances that are important, but also the meaning which objects and places represent and how they function in the text. This emphasis on functions prepares the reader for a mechanical

and technological view of industrialized civilization which becomes increasingly important as the novel progresses. Allusive symbolic meanings may also be derived from modernist or realist fiction, such as the significance of a lighthouse or an artist's canvas in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). But the meanings are no longer as hidden or alluded to in Pynchon's work, which facilitates abstractions to be formed from the existence of place in a more immediate manner. Signposts are found everywhere, such as road signs or a sign at a motel for instance, and these frequently need to be interpreted according to the conventions of a consumer-based society, which can lead to the physical environment being an impersonal place. Historical trends reveal that the individual increasingly experienced alienation in the twentieth century, indicated and intensified by the proliferation of signs.

The character space in *The Crying of Lot 49* reveals a significant assumption mainly found in conventional novels, namely that the reader expects fully fleshed-out characters to create and maintain the illusion that it represents realistically drawn people. This is where the novel differs since characters are sometimes transparently treated as concepts. So, for example, Oedipa can be seen as an explorer, a type of detective as well as a construction that Pynchon uses to articulate the position of the individual member of society as well as his view of American society at the time. An indication of this occurs early in the text: "As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away" (12). Once again there is a reference to the historical, to what has gone before, perhaps indicating that this is the real object of her journey. Oedipa's character enables an exploration of history. Merrill (1977:58) also seems to view her in this light when she argues that "...[u]ltimately, Oedipa is the vehicle by which Pynchon explores the landscape of contemporary America, not the protagonist of a traditional dramatic action". She represents a complacent, perhaps rather bored housewife at first, the stock of countless romantic novels, but by coming into contact with the unfamiliar she becomes involved in and makes the exploration of American culture possible that the novel engages the reader in.

The metaphysical space in the text is labyrinthine, which also is a useful and frequently used concept in postmodern literature and theory. The image of the

labyrinth occurs concretely in Chapter 2 when "Oedipa encounters San Narciso as a labyrinthine printed circuit" (Gleason, 1993:84). She experiences the moment as transcendental, which is in fact is an illusion, as Gleason (1993:83) remarks concerning postmodern culture and philisophy: "Man now lives in a circle without a center, or in a maze without a way out". Pynchon particularly draws attention to this fact in his work, exposing the text as "text" and shattering the illusion which Oedipa still adheres to at the beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49*, namely that underlying meaning will become evident if it is only searched for methodically. The text encourages diverse interpretations, but makes it difficult for the reader to make a stable interpretation that cannot be criticized or contradicted. History is also caught in this labyrinth through a distrust or rejection of accepted, processed versions of historical events and proposed causes for events. Individual accounts and interpretations are preferred, which means that the more these abound, the more it makes the construction of an accurate, "true" version impossible. Some elements of the text, such as style and diction, constantly draw the reader to the surface and to postmodern aspects of the text, such as a multiplicity of interpretations.

All the spaces contain metaphors but analysing a few separately creates a metaphorical space, which elaborates some of the other spaces. In this way central concerns of the text and recurring motifs that guide interpretation can be seen as well. The following, for example, are Oedipa's thoughts from a hilltop overlooking the city, which serves to illustrate the use of metaphor in the novel: "...there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding" (15). Oedipa perceives the layout of the city as the patterns on a circuit board, which immediately establishes a connection between the two. A circuit board implies interconnectedness and also the workings of a machine. This iconic image is an important indicator of the way in which the urban landscape, which is in effect the exclusive domain of her quest, should be interpreted. This highlights the inevitability of technology being integrated more and more into everyday life to the point of becoming indispensable. "Metaphor comes to serve Oedipa as a method of connecting in a meaningful way the profusion of coincidences she perceives" (Kharpertian, 1990:101). The links between different

images and concepts form new ideas and create metaphorical space in *The Crying of Lot 49*, which is contained in the way that images are used in the other spaces. These metaphors recur and are transformed throughout the text. Metaphor also makes it possible to bring the present age, employed as a paradigm in the novel, and a strong emphasis on the past together.

The discussion of historical space follows after all other kinds of space have been discussed and it focuses on how the historical perspective is undermined by the indeterminacy resulting from the process of interpretation and the difficulty in establishing the authenticity of documents in the novel. It is necessary to consider this space separately, since it creates its own difficulties with regard to interpretation, although the documents form part of the historical space. Interpretation, especially of historical documents, becomes an important part of the structure of the novel, which also propels Oedipa and the reader forward. But interpretation also has an effect on how history is viewed, leading to revisionism in some cases. The textual space is related closely to the historical, since different texts that take the form of historical documents in some instances, ensure that the representation of history is treated thematically.

Physical Space

- **Function**

Physical space becomes a means to supplement the metaphysical in the novel. The physical appearance of the landscape conceals meanings that are not immediately apparent and also draws attention to possible functions and purposes behind the obvious. Take, for example, the following description of an industrial complex from *The Crying of Lot 49*: "a prolonged scatter of wide, pink buildings, surrounded by miles of fence topped with barbed wire and interrupted now and then by guard towers: soon an entrance whizzed by, two sixty-foot missiles on either side and the name YOYODYNE lettered conservatively on each nose cone" (15). The corporation Yoyodyne is presented as a military installation or force, but it has an absurd appearance, perhaps to disarm the observer into believing it harmless. A late twentieth-century historical trend is hinted at in this instance, namely the power shift

from governments to corporations, where the real monetary power lies. In *Gravity's Rainbow* this becomes an important theme in the sense of where the power base really lies.

The physical space that Oedipa finds herself in strikes the reader as harsh, inhuman and unyielding in accordance with the imposing nature of these industrial institutions that dot the landscape. Her surroundings appear to be a labyrinth from which there is no exit or progression. Following a WASTE mail carrier, the alternative underground mail system, Oedipa finds that: "She was back where she'd started" (90). This is typical of most occurrences during her journey, where no matter how many attempts she makes to investigate her questions, which she is not even certain are valid, she does not seem to get any closer to a definite answer. Apparently not having learnt anything new, Oedipa only exhausts herself. Even her attempt at following a WASTE mail carrier, who is supposedly a postman for the underground postal service, only ends in frustration.

- **The Use of Metaphor**

Features of the landscape are used to convey different meanings in the text and draw attention to themselves as signs. The freeway is a prime example of this technique since it is not only associated with information flow, but also drug addiction: "...this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape - it wasn't. What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner LA, keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain" (16). This image of drug addiction graphically engraves the space of moral corruption of the late twentieth century in which the surroundings represent this pursuit of pleasure and escape. The city is personified in this instance, after it has been compared to a circuit board, presented as a living thing. There is an element of paranoia in this description, since it is as if something is being hidden on purpose, an illusion which most people subject to and which Oedipa recognizes. Further on it is called an "infected city" (80). A link is also established in through the image to the people excluded from the mainstream of society through drug abuse. It is a projection of her journey into the night which follows further into the novel.

The increasing interconnectedness of the world is identified as a trend that will continue into the future: "...census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway" (14). Here physical space is used to reinforce an underlying theme, viz. that of information technology, through a symbolic image of an information network, which is another characteristic of the way in which space is used in the novel to achieve an effect of interwoven threads. Oedipa's journey through this landscape, although spending most of her time in the car, makes her a part of and enables her to interact in this symbolic information network.

Character Space

- **Function**

There is a significant literary technique at work in how character functions in *The Crying of Lot 49*, since its purpose is not primarily to reveal the psychology of a character as would be expected in most conventionally realistic novels, but rather to act as a vehicle to foreground central themes. Consequently, Oedipa is not only a character but assumes a role as reader in her actions and quest. Her development as character is not as important as the realizations she has and changes in her way of thinking. Merrill (1977:56-7) highlights the reason for character being treated in such a functional way and which echoes the idea of Oedipa as reader:

> ...[T]he apologian is not free to develop his characters at will – not if he would succeed as an apologian: 'What is revealed about any major character is, almost of necessity and almost ruthlessly, limited to qualities directly required for their roles in the apologue'...The writer of apologue – or fable – is not interested in psychological realism for its own sake. Such 'realism' may even detract from his intended effect. The relevance of this to Pynchon's work is crucial.

This may incidentally provide a possible explanation for the abrupt, puzzling ending to the novel. Since Oedipa is no longer "necessary", her role as reader is over and it is up to the actual reader to go back over the text and realise that it does not really matter what happens next, because the central ideas have already been established. Yet this

also restricts Oedipa's role as reader since she does not realise that she already has all the information she needs to draw a conclusion and that simply discovering the possibility of an underground communication system has already been her greatest revelation. The passage above also stresses the point that *The Crying of Lot 49* is not a realist novel, but describes it as an "apologue" or "fable", which means that its purpose is rather to impart a philosophical truth and that all the other elements are adapted accordingly.

Meikle (1981:293) describes part of the relation between Oedipa and the reader when he writes that: "[Pynchon] does minutely detail the process of Oedipa's consciousness as she goes through the stages of the paradigm. In fact, by leading his reader to connect spatially and chronologically unrelated images and to track down sources, Pynchon forces the reader to assume, at least momentarily, her consciousness". This is also a method of bringing across views of history. Although *The Crying of Lot 49* contains only slight similarities with the detective novel and does not necessarily qualify as one, the same involvement between the reader and the detective is found here, especially in the process of tracking down sources. There is an added dimension in the sense that it is not only about solving a mystery satisfactorily, but also about exploring a cultural and historical landscape. Yet Oedipa's and the reader's consciousness do not merge completely, since Oedipa is never able to attain the realizations that the reader does.

- **Personal Spaces/Personal Histories**

In an important part of the novel, Oedipa makes a journey into the night that gives her a potentially subversive perspective on the underbelly of society, specifically on the individual, which she has never had before. It is as if she is forced to open her eyes to the squalor in which some people live, how valueless a life may seem, but more significantly how differently people can experience the world and that there are more possibilities than just the sheltered life which she has been used to. In the following passage she wonders about the life of an old sailor whom she encounters:

> Cammed each night out of that safe furrow the bulk of this city's waking each sunrise again set virtuously to ploughing, what rich soils had he turned, what concentric

> planets uncovered? What voices overheard, flinders of luminescent gods glimpsed among the wallpaper's stained foliage, candlestubs lit to rotate in the air over him prefiguring the cigarette he or a friend must fall asleep someday smoking, thus to end among the flaming, secret salts held all those years by the insatiable stuffing of a mattress that could keep vestiges of every nightmare sweat, helpless overflowing bladder, viciously tearfully consummated wet dream, like the memory bank to a computer of the lost? (87).

Oedipa here ponders over the significance and meaning of a personal space, more specifically a personal history, which is in essence a person's life. This forms a contrast and provides perspective to all the large historical issues which she deals with, such as possible conspiracies stretching over centuries and events having taken place long ago that still have effect on the present in some way or another.

- **The Use of Metaphor**

The play of imagery is complex, connecting technology with flesh and opening up new possibilities as the text has already advocated that metaphor should be used. The very personal is first focused on in words such as "sweat", "bladder", "tearfully" and "wet dream". But then these personal details are likened to a database on a computer, which links it with modern technology to illustrate how engraved this is in contemporary culture and also to form new metaphorical links:

> She remembered John Nefastis, talking about his machine, and massive destructions of information. So when this mattress flared up around the sailor, in his Viking's funeral: the stored coded years of uselessness, early death, self-harrowing, the sure decay of hope, the set of all men who had slept on it, whatever their lives had been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress burned. She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process. It astonished her to think that so much could be lost, even the quantity of hallucination belonging just to the sailor that the world would bear no further trace of (88).

Oedipa here connects the sailor to the Nefastis machine in terms of entropy and information. The mattress becomes a vessel in which information is stored through organic material, making up a person's life. The fire can be likened to the heat death of thermodynamic entropy, in which energy is lost. But it is more than this that would

be lost, since it would be information on someone who has lived as well. But it is an "irreversible process" as she thinks, since the information would be unreadable in any case, inaccessible to anyone, except in the symbolic value of the mattress. Through what she has realised about her world, the monotony and restrictiveness thereof, Oedipa is able to feel compassion towards this old sailor in the throes of delirium tremens. Her sheltered background means that previously she may have looked on with disgust, passed by or never even have been aware of in the first place. But Oedipa experiences an expansion in her consciousness. She is able to recognise, or at least fantasize, that he has turned "rich soils", and must in effect have had a fuller life than the people living only within the norm and routine of, as it is described in the text, ploughing the same furrow each day. The idea of another world is reinforced by invoking the image of planets: "She knew that the sailor had seen worlds no other men had seen if only because there was that high magic to low puns, because DTs must give access to dt's of spectra beyond the known sun, music made purely of Antarctic loneliness and fright. But nothing she knew of would preserve them, or him" (89).

A character can be tied to an object as a form of metaphor. But this is rarely used to illuminate, it is more used to complicate the characters and is fraught with ambiguity. At the motel in Chapter 2, an example of this technique occurs:

> A representation in painted sheet metal of a nymph holding a white blossom towered thirty feet into the air; the sign, lit up despite the sun, said 'Echo Courts'. The face of the nymph was much like Oedipa's, which didn't startle her so much as a concealed blower system that kept the nymph's gauze chiton in constant agitation, revealing enormous vermilion-tipped breasts and long pink thighs at each flap. She was smiling a lipsticked and public smile, not quite a hooker's but nowhere near that of any nymph pining away with love either (16).

It is striking that Oedipa and the nymph resemble each other facially. The resemblance establishes a link between them, but the nature of this link is uncertain. It can function as prolepsis, since a possible meaning will only become apparent as the chapter progresses and Oedipa has contact with Metzger, which already suggests her future actions. Then it would be possible to view this as a representation of Oedipa, not completely, but as an aspect of her, in the sense that she is "easy".

Perhaps Oedipa does not know herself as well as she thinks she does, or other people do not know her as well as they think they do, since Metzger tells Oedipa that Inverarity told him with regard to her: "That you wouldn't be easy" (28) and it is precisely this statement which Oedipa proves false through her actions by sleeping with Metzger. This is yet another example of the uncertainty that is repeatedly presented in the novel, just as the smile on the nymph's face is ambiguous. Within the world of the novel it functions as a portrayal of women in the media, filling this historical space, but from the reader's perspective it has the added link with Oedipa. From a historical perspective it raises the question of what the nature could be of a culture that produces this kind of image.

- **Oedipa's Personal History**

Not all the characters respond positively to her search. The men in her life, for instance, all of whom take on important roles for Oedipa since they become something against which she can measure her own past in order to see the captivity in which she was held and has to figure out how to break free of, even if it is only discovering that there is a world beyond, become a hindrance to her. At one point Metzger, who is supposed to help her execute the will, says in exasperation: "Fine...and what next, picket the VA? March on Washington? God protect me...from these lib, overeducated broads with soft heads and bleeding hearts. I am thirty-five years old, and I should know better" (51). This causes Oedipa to protest vehemently, but opposition such as this can only be expected, since Oedipa knows that she is basically held prisoner by society. Davidson (1977:41) reinforces this idea when he argues that "...this is merely one of the many discouragements that Oedipa encounters during her quest. The very pervasiveness of these incidents also indicates how persistently Oedipa's world conspires to keep her in her 'place' – the place to be determined, of course, by Oedipa's world and not by Oedipa herself". Metzger further voices his disapproval of Oedipa's intention to investigate mysterious aspects of the estate, which may contain conspiracies and injustices, when he says that:

> John Wayne on Saturday afternoon slaughtering ten thousand Japs with his teeth, this is Oedipa Maas's World War II, man. Some people today can drive VWs, carry a Sony radio in their shirt pocket. Not this one, folks, she wants to right wrongs,

> twenty years after it's all over. Raise ghosts. All from a drunken hassle with Manny Di Presso. Forgetting her first loyalty, legal and moral, is to the estate she represents. Not to our boys in uniform, however gallant, whenever they died (51).

Oedipa's role as heroine is foregrounded here in a distinctly mocking, undermining tone, doubting her ability to attain a realistic view of historical events and their impact on the present. What Metzger especially focuses on is also something which distinguishes Oedipa from the rest and makes her a real heroine, namely that she, whether it is through accident or being forced or willingly, is no longer able to go about her encapsulated life and ignore what could possibly be out there. Her sense of justice, what is right or wrong, is not the only thing that is at work here, but also her curiosity and feeling that the world is not what it seems. One thing is clear, however: after discovering and learning only a part of this knowledge, she cannot go back to her old life unchanged.

A statement is made numerous times in the novel about Mucho Maas with respect to the fact that he does not believe in something, although he becomes involved with it, such as a recording he is listening to of "Sick Dick and the Volkswagens (an English group he was fond of at that time but did not believe in)" (14). This is again a reflection of the time and shows how the development of music has contributed to the state of western civilization. In the end he becomes a drug addict, which is significant because it makes him one of the dispossessed which Oedipa is so concerned with and changes him to a person which she does not know anymore, which again throws doubt on how well she knew him in the first place. This issue is already raised in the first chapter, in the description of Mucho's homecoming. The entire scene is fraught with futility, with words such as "helplessness", "defeat", "crises", "panic" and "control" piling up within the space of ten lines. Mucho becomes a victim of society, because he is so much at its mercy. As Oedipa experiences herself while parked in the Chevy as "at the centre of some odd, religious instant" (15), she again thinks of "Mucho, her husband, trying to believe in his job" (15). He tries to question this religion of labour, but cannot quite manage to replace it with something else. In essence he does not succeed in creating meaning out of it, except for his nonsensical ranting towards the end.

- **Entropy**

Mucho represents the clearest case of informational entropy completed to its fullest. Oedipa encounters him again at a later stage:

> I noticed it the other night hearing Rabbit do a commercial. No matter who's talking, the different power spectra are the same, give or take a small percentage. So you and Rabbit have something in common now. More than that. Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? But the time is arbitrary. You pick your zero point anywhere you want, that way you can shuffle each person's time line sideways till they all coincide. Then you'd have this big, God, maybe a couple hundred million chorus saying 'rich, chocolaty goodness' together, and it would all be the same voice (99).

In terms of information entropy, the state of least information exchange is reached when there is nothing to communicate any longer, in other words when each point becomes the same and can be said to contain the same amount of energy. This is what he seems to be experiencing under the influence of LSD, namely that information exchange is no longer necessary, since each person is sharing the same experience. But Oedipa is trying to reach a position which is exactly the reverse, where each life can be valued for its differentness and individuality, and which she finds that society is trying to suppress in its move towards greater conformity under the influence of technological advance. For instance, a mass medium such as television is able to broadcast the same program to everyone, which creates a shared experience that in fact dulls the diversity of experience. What seems useful and advanced can also be seen as a means for manipulation and propaganda, which could create a very entropic situation of inability or unwillingness to communicate. On the other hand, interpretation is held as a means of individual expression, but this is itself problematic, since each of the methods that Oedipa turns to leads her to greater confusion or provides no answer at all.

Metaphysical Space

- **Spaces as a Postmodern Labyrinth**

The historical space and metaphysical space form a labyrinth by which the constructed nature of history is exposed. An ever growing mystery is created, as Gleason (1993:88) suggests when he notes that "...labyrinthine writing branches; it expands". Through the spaces created, in particular the linguistic space, the reader is kept at a distance and on the surface, ultimately forming an overarching textual space that acts self-reflexively. The reader cannot rely on his conventional attitudes towards what a text should be and how it should be approached. Gleason (1993:90) makes a significant statement with regard to what the reader needs to face: "At the level of narrative, we work our way through Pynchon's convoluted prose. But we also attempt to interpret the labyrinthine design in the text itself; we thus try to read both diachronically and synchronically". This brings into play the immediate linguistic space as well as the larger structure. The prose focuses on wordplay in the form of ambiguity and allusion, which comprises the synchronic part in which the reader has to deal with each passage or scene on its own. Yet diachronically, the text has to make sense as a whole.

The sense of mystery, which leads to the quest and which is connected to this labyrinthine structure, is the driving force behind Oedipa's shift to different locations, none of which can provide her with an answer, but only refer to other spaces. In the end then, it would seem necessary to consider the whole to arrive at a kind of conclusion, but this again proves impossible since there are so many conflicts and points that do not make sense and are irreconcilable with each other. Possibly this then provides a clue to an inherent mistake in Oedipa's reasoning and approach to the solving of this mystery, especially in her attempt to unravel it bit by bit, since each part considered on its own and compared with others individually would only lead to hopeless confusion.

- **Paranoia and the Detective Genre**

Oedipa progresses to a different perception of the world, thinking about the outlook she had previously held: "That optimistic baby had come on so like the private eye in any long-ago radio drama, believing all you needed was grit, resourcefulness, exemption from hidebound cops' rules, to solve any great mystery" (85). The detective genre is associated with modernism, implying that a different strategy is called for and that the old ways are no longer sufficient as epistemological tools with which to make sense of the postmodern way in which the world is organized and knowledge distributed. Also, Pierce Inverarity's will does not specifically contain an inheritance in physical form, but rather forms a space between the old and the new, a continuation. This is a good example of the type of metaphysical space that is formed in the novel. It is this space that Oedipa explores in order to create new meaning, "...discovering Inverarity's America, she rejects it, and desiring an alternative, she chooses paranoia" (Kharpertian, 1990:99). But this is seen as positive, since it is an awareness and a resistance. It is an awareness that means she no longer considers herself as naïve as the "optimistic baby" who believed that the world could be brought entirely under control and grasped by applying a certain degree of rationality. Paranoia becomes her resistance and a loss of innocence, since it causes her to refuse to adhere only to official ideologies and leads her to explore the underground version of America.

- **Language as Creative Force and Prison**

Oedipa is locked in a tower of words from which she cannot escape. At first she imagines herself, in relation to her previous lover Pierce Inverarity, when they were still travelling, as a kind of stereotypical fairy-tale figure, in line with her role as housewife and the parody of conventional fiction in the first chapter. The expectations, which are to have a drastic effect on her as the story develops and she is confronted with ever more sinister puzzling phenomena, are clear: "...gently conned herself into the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey,

let down your hair" (12). As another indication of the playfulness which the text leads the reader into, especially on the linguistic level, there is a double meaning contained in this last phrase. There is the obvious meaning, in line with the fairy tale in which the heroine lets the prince climb up the tower by using her long hair. But also very relevant to the novel, is the connotation in which this phrase is used colloquially as a way of "letting go", loosening your grip on your own preconceptions and ideological convictions, which can also lead to a kind of freedom or release from the symbolic tower, perhaps a more real escape than that which the prince offers Rapunzel, a fact which is echoed a few lines further: "But all that had then gone on between them had really never escaped the confinement of that tower" (13). This sentence may refer to a few options: that the love of her "prince" was inadequate or not the real means of escape from her state of innocence and a hindrance from discovering alternatives to living in America, leading to lack of a clear concept of historical origin. Also it could mean that she keeps herself secluded and hinders herself from venturing out into the world by keeping rigidly to ideological positions and not allowing anything to change her views. In this case, the world that she weaves will always in a sense still be inside the tower, since that is where it originates.

- **Modes of Thought**

The possibilities as Oedipa sees them, are contained in some of her thoughts towards the end of the novel, showing that she has not really progressed sufficiently to a new pluralized mode of thought. Compare, for instance, the either/or mode of thought utilized in the following passage from *The Crying of Lot 49:*

> Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, on to a secret richness and concealed density of dream, on to a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, and betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie (117-8).

From this passage the phrase "concealed density of dream" is particularly striking, also referred to as a "network" which can be regarded as a collective consciousness which, through the connotation of a dream-state, implies that this network is to a large extent controlled and dictated by the sub-conscious. The metaphysical space then addresses the issue of how possible it is to obtain an accurate reflection of the world, represented by the clues that Oedipa perceives as a mystery. Thus, how objectively it exists in the first place. The possibility remains that neither the mystery nor the clues that Oedipa discovers on her path are real, in an objective sense, but that they may only be personal constructions that are interpreted as such. Yet Oedipa seems unable to grasp this point and fully realize its implications, instead settling for futilely groping after what she perceives as clues in order to arrive at some absolute truth that excludes contradictions and new possibilities. This is evident in how she considers her options, by regarding everything as a case of either/or. But within the framework of the novel, if she continues to search for the one exclusive, absolute answer, then she will only be defeated and frustrated at every turn:

> For, in terms of this book, there IS, MUST BE a Tristero, whether it exists or not. The very recognition of one's alienation, or disillusionment, or disaffection is a key to freedom; any infidelity to the 'norms' of our socialization is itself the seizure of a new possibility. And the totality of all the clues, the intuitions, the dreams of new possibilities, the alternate worlds and modes of awareness whose existence Oedipa couldn't quite grasp – all these are summed up in Tristero. So that by the end of the novel, Tristero's existence or Oedipa's possible paranoia are no longer the alternatives. (Kolodny & Peters, 1973:85).

By believing that there must only be one option which either must be true or false and that they are all opposed to another, Oedipa reveals the way in which she still thinks. But by thinking in oppositions and alternatives the full potential of that which the Tristero represents is not realized. Oedipa needs to make a transition to include all possibilities, but she only experiences paranoia and uncertainty about Tristero's existence. As illustrated in the passage above, the Tristero can be considered an idea, which does not need to exist actually, but can still function potentially. This would eliminate the need for Oedipa's paranoia, since she could then accept the possibilities that the Tristero represents, even if it does not really exist physically. But the potential and alternatives brought forth by this system are points never reached by

Oedipa, it is left up to the reader and is also the point where her path diverges from the reader's. Although Oedipa never makes the transition in her thinking, the reader can recognise the possibilities of different worlds existing together.

Interpretative Space

- **Literary Theory and Interpretation**

Hall (1991:64) sums up some statements made by Kolodny and Peters on Oedipa's role as reader in *The Crying of Lot 49* which are useful to consider in the context of the argument presented thus far:

> They note, first, 'a kind of anti-historicism' that is emphasized with Professor and Editor Emory Bortz (93) and, second, Oedipa's own institutional background in the interpretation of texts, stemming from her university studies (93). In general terms, they note how 'as the novel progresses, Oedipa begins to learn the limitations of her conventional critical devotion to the word, and seeks instead, from Bortz and other sources, the sort of wider historical understanding necessary to contextualize the significance of word and text'.

This confirms a clear link between historical space and interpretative space, since a contextualizing knowledge of history is stressed as a necessity in arriving at a fuller and more comprehensive interpretation. In this context, with reference to Oedipa's university studies and the "conventional critical devotion to the word", *The Crying of Lot 49* can be considered a parody of an academic process that focuses too heavily on an analysis of words in texts that self-consciously refer to each other and lead to more confusion than clarity. This could also be an allusion to New Criticism, a major American critical movement, which includes the practice of close reading, focussing on the text itself as a self-contained monument and analysing the content accordingly. It is, conceivably, possible to lose sight of the context in this way and also to place too great a value on the written word.

- **The Interpretation of Signs**

In contrast to this, the power of the written word is undermined by the underground mail system, concentrating instead on resistance and nonverbal communication:

> As the logotype of WASTE, a major facet of the Tristero, the muted post horn signifies silence rather than speech or writing. WASTE itself isn't a word, as Stanley Koteks preemptorily warns Oedipa; it is an acronym that underscores the theme of nonverbal communication in the novel, reminding us of the motto 'WE AWAIT SILENT TRISTERO'S EMPIRE' (Richwell, 1988:51).

Oedipa takes an active role in the WASTE system by posting a letter, which irrevocably changes her stance towards it: "But at last in the shadows she did come on a can with a swinging trapezoidal top, the kind you throw trash in: old and green, nearly four feet high. On the swinging part were handpainted the initials W.A.S.T.E. She had to look closely to see the periods between the letters" (89).

This is the waste bin that acts as a post box for the underground movement that Oedipa encounters on her nighttime journey through the streets, following the directions of the old sailor. He gives her a letter which she must mail though this system, making her an active part of it, so that she can no longer only wonder about it, but has to come face to face with the reality of it. Although the novel then leaves the reader, as well as Oedipa-as-reader, with a few options involving what could be the real situation with the Trystero and underground empire, this in fact belies these options, leaving little doubt of the existence of these mysterious things. The actual existence becomes irrelevant before the possibilities contained in the idea of their existence. The iconographic value of the image ties in with the experiences which Oedipa has had up to that point: the narrator takes pains to inform the reader that the trashcan is in shadows, echoing the secrecy and darkness which the whole operation is shrouded in, also how hard it has been for her to find clues and then there is also the trapezoidal top, which reminds the reader of the form of the sign which Oedipa first encountered on a bathroom wall, the post horn with the trapezoidal figure protruding from it, possibly denoting a mute post horn, but which could also perhaps be an

envelope. The letters are very appropriate, since an uninformed observer would not be able to distinguish it from a normal rubbish bin and would find no reason to be suspect a different function for it. But they are deceptive once again, and though they appear to be an acronym are in fact known by the initiated to stand for a statement, attaching the significance not to the letters themselves but to that which they mean. Just as Oedipa has learnt through trial and error that this is the case, now she looks closely so that she sees the periods, which someone blunted to these possibilities would not even notice.

Linguistic Space

- **Wordplay**

On the linguistic level, Pynchon uses convoluted prose and various forms of wordplay to engage the reader in and which present a complex space to integrate in the context of the novel as a whole. Some of it seems very whimsical, as if added expressly to confuse the reader and may have functions difficult to discern. Such is the case when Oedipa finds out about the WASTE system and tentatively mentions this to Stanley Koteks as she hopes to gain access to it as an outsider, or at least find out more about it. Apparently, this is a mistake: "But she'd pronounced it as a word, waste. His face congealed, a mask of distrust" (60). He quickly reprimands her: "'It's W.A.S.T.E., lady,' he told her, 'an acronym, not "waste", and we had best not go into it any further'" (60). Oedipa encounters many dead-ends such as these, based on things which she, as well as the reader, has simply assumed. It is an indication that in the world of the novel, things cannot just be accepted without question.

- **Names**

The will also links Oedipa to institutions of the outside world which she had never previously encountered, such as law firms: "The letter was from the law firm of Warpe, Wistfull, Kubitschek and McMingus, of Los Angeles" (5). The names form part of the linguistic space. It is a familiar practice for Pynchon to give exaggerated, almost slapstick-like names in order to create obvious or ironic meaning or allusion.

Here the first name "Warpe" indicates the warped nature that the investigation takes on, in which nothing is claimed with absolute certainty anymore and previous notions and conventionalities are turned on their heads.

- **Title of the Text**

The number contained in the title of the novel is a linguistic feature that, through all the allusions and possibilities that it offers, shows how history is problematized. Alexander (1990:111-2) has the following to say about it:

> The number of the Lot – 49 – is suggestive, linking it with the moment in 'history' to which *The Courier's Tragedy* 'belongs' (1649, the period of the English Civil War) and the moment in American history (1849), shortly before the American Civil War, when, we are told, Tristero arrived in America from Europe. Implicit in the reverberation of the novel on the world is the possibility of the disinherited and dispossessed, the 'excluded middle' of contemporary America, claiming their own.

These are mostly the historical connotations of 49, but there are others as well, such as being the product of 7 x 7, which would give it mystical or magical properties, which can again be connected to the magic which Oedipa claims keeps her captive. No definite meaning that can be attached to this number, but many meanings are suggested, which brings across the freedom of the interplay of signs in the novel, with many options being valid at the same time.

Textual Space

- **Historical Documents**

The first historical document in the novel to be introduced, also a very important one, is the will left by Pierce Inverarity. This text is never shown, but remains an incontrovertible force throughout the novel. It is a presence not always too easily discernible, but a space that in fact directs the whole narrative and influences other spaces. Hall (1991:64) emphasizes this when he argues that:

> ...Alfred Mac Adam sees Oedipa specifically as a 'metaphor for the reader' and notes that 'Oedipa's role as reader and interpreter is alluded to throughout *The Crying of Lot 49*'. At the same time, Mac Adam usefully notes how Pynchon's writings share the quality of textuality (my term): 'His texts constantly point out their own artificiality, their identity as literature...'

These texts confirm the focus on history, which manifests in various ways, such as the Jacobean revenge tragedy and conspiracy theories regarding the postal system as well as other institutions and events. Although the will sets the tone for the rest of the novel, introducing major concerns and the textuality of the novel, the revenge tragedy is just as important. "The play is something of a dysfunctional double for the novel itself, and in this respect Pynchon's novel as a parodistic text designates its own failure to communicate while deconstructing the notion of revelation itself" (Thiher, 1981:545).

- **The Will as Historical Document**

The task of executing a will is strange to expect of Oedipa and already indicates her unique role. It raises questions, in the reader's mind and the novel, on whether she is meant to find anything or whether she draws the wrong conclusions and infers meaning out of context. The will implies a reconstruction of the past and it is in this reconstruction that Oedipa, as well as the reader, face difficulties. It leads to another question of how possible it is to reconstruct the past and how reliable this reconstruction would be. Fry (1987:146) states in regard to *Lot 49* that: "This systematic confusion of the historical stance undermines our confidence in the text". The real object then is to raise these questions that are never answered satisfactorily. Questions of authenticity are predominant: "...[T]he repeated suggestion of an historical investigation on the part of the central figure in order to establish the nature of an estate as the execution of a will demands is an invitation to verify the authenticity of an historical document" (Fry, 1987:146). Just as the story of the underground postal service occupies a central position in the novel, history forms an important part specifically in the form of documents, thus as text or, in the words of Fry (1987:146): "In a very real sense a will is history in its purest form as text".

- **Alternative Texts**

The stamp collection present in the estate can also be viewed as a "text" which provides a unique access to history: "Thousands of little coloured windows into deep vistas of space and time: savannahs teeming with elands and gazelles, galleons sailing west into the void, Hitler heads, sunsets, cedars of Lebanon, allegorical faces that never were, he could spend hours peering into each one, ignoring her" (29). The stamps stand as representations of time and space. The list reminds the reader of the memories which Oedipa has at the beginning of the first chapter:

> She thought of a hotel room in Mazatlán whose door had just been slammed, it seemed forever, waking up two hundred birds down in the lobby; a sunrise over the library slope at Cornell University that nobody out on it had seen because the slope faces west; a dry, disconsolate tune from the fourth movement of the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra; a whitewashed bust of Jay Gould that Pierce kept over the bed (5).

These sets of images echo each other and provide jarring juxtapositions on their own, correlations when taken together. The sunsets stand out as well as the heads. In the description of the stamp collection, there are also the "allegorical faces" which seem particularly significant and puzzling. There are also the faces which Dr Hilarius pulls in order to get a reaction out of his patients, sometimes even to shock them or drive them to madness, "...[h]is theory being that a face is symmetrical like a Rorschach blot, tells a story like a TAT picture, excites a response like a suggested word, so why not. He claimed to have once cured a case of hysterical blindness with his number thirty-seven, the 'Fu-Manchu'" (11). Dr Hilarius is also linked to history through his involvement with concentration camps and experiments during the Second World War.

Historical Space

- **Indeterminacy in the Historical Record**

The indeterminacy in the text extends to the historical space, since Oedipa is searching for some historical roots, but is unable to connect with it fully. Her inability to establish this link lends a degree of indeterminacy to the historical space. But it is caused by the tendency of the commercial, postmodern culture to place little value on items of historical significance and rather concentrate on manipulating and consuming for the present. Lord (1997:156) illustrates this point from the text: "A telling detail for the loss of historical roots in *Lot 49*, which destroys any possibility of a past-present relationship, is mentioned by Genghis Cohen who offers Oedipa dandelion wine: 'I picked the dandelions in a cemetery...'" he tells her. 'Now the cemetery is gone. They took it out for the East San Narciso Freeway'". This is a culture which has become very fleeting, focused on the here and now, with no real regard for history. Since everyone also has his or her own idea on the past, this is perhaps why Oedipa finds it so difficult to piece together her "clues". Either way the past is no longer valued or preserved, which makes this search futile. This indeterminacy extends to the authenticity of the historical documents that she gathers along the way, making it difficult for her and consequently the reader, to discern truth from falsity and establish facts. Alexander (1990:110) concisely summarizes this aspect when he argues that

> ...[t]he reader too occupies constantly shifting ground as verifiable historical fact is woven with fiction in such a way as to confuse the status of the fictional element. The Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly in late medieval Europe, the violent history of Wells Fargo in America, the disaffection of Puritans in seventeenth-century Europe – these, being 'known', lend plausibility to the possible existence of Tristero which, being essentially secretive in its operations, is unlikely to have a place in orthodox accounts of history.

The possible existence of these things strengthens the feeling of paranoia that vital information is withheld in official accounts of history and also becomes very important in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

When Oedipa visits Emory Bortz, a literary historian who wrote the preface to the book of plays which she wants to discuss with him, they make some revealing comments on the nature of history: "'The historical Shakespeare...The historical Marx. The historical Jesus.' 'He's right,' shrugged Bortz, 'they're dead. What's left?' 'Words.' 'Pick some words,' said Bortz. 'Them we can talk about.'" (104). This reveals an attitude that history is not "real", but mediated through the word. But there is also some scepticism towards the power of the word present in the text, meaning that the whole endeavour is not that straightforward. This is precisely where Oedipa's difficulty starts, as she attempts to pin down meanings and origins. "Faced with an unreliable and indeterminate text, however, Oedipa has no way of knowing which words she should pick. Oedipa-as-reader is left with an interpretive uncertainty" (Hall, 1991:66). In terms of the historical, it can also be said to consist of an incomplete and unsatisfactory text. The documents may be biased and cannot always be verified for accuracy. Then there is the question of which facts are really important and should be included, since it would be impossible to include everything. But facts also need interpretation, since they do not always yield their meaning naturally and require methods of interpretation for meaning to be attached to them. Each individual observer would then also bring his own interpretation to bear, complicating the matter further, but perhaps providing a better solution than simply accepting the official version as the 'truth'.

- **Revisionism**

A revisionist view of history comes to the fore at times, especially when Oedipa talks to one of the representatives of the various societies and organisations whom she encounters:

> 'Who cares?' Fallopian shrugged. 'We don't try to make scripture out of it. Naturally that's cost us a lot more support in the Bible Belt, where we might've been expected to go over real good. The old confederacy. But that was the very first military confrontation between Russia and America. Attack, retaliation, both projectiles deep-sixed forever and the Pacific rolls on. But the ripples from those two splashes spread, and grew, and today engulf us all. Peter Pinguid was really our first

> casualty. Not the fanatic our more left-leaning friends over in the Birch Society chose to martyrize (33).

Each group seems to provide its own interpretation of events, which – in turn – leads to revised stances and different versions. These organisations can then use it to further their own ideals and goals, which show that ideological viewpoints do have some potential power. Oedipa makes this discovery when she realises that society is holding her in place even though she has never really been aware of it, until she is forced to venture further and discover other options. Yet the seriousness of these groups is undermined in the text, by portraying them as relatively harmless, something that people only do to keep them busy, but not really affecting the overall picture in a significant way. During the same conversation, for instance, an unorthodox view of Capitalism and Marxism is given: "'You think like a Bircher,' Fallopian said. 'Good guys and bad guys. You never get to any of the underlying truth. Sure he was against industrial capitalism. So are we. Didn't it lead, inevitably, to Marxism? Underneath, both part of the same creeping horror'" (33). This statement already hints at what Oedipa should have realised by the end of the novel, but does not quite manage. By placing Capitalism and Marxism on the same level and not in opposition as it is usually done, as well as the reference to 'good guys and bad guys', Fallopian is giving Oedipa valuable clues on where she should really be aiming in her search, turning her thinking to a both/and paradigm.

- **Entropic Decline**

Entropy, as a major part of the thematic content, needs a closer examination. It refers to a scientific law, which states that energy becomes less and less instead of more. The fact of civilization's decline and more everyday phenomena such as a hot water becoming cold can be attributed to this law, is also linked to the second law of thermodynamics. Pynchon uses it in a number of ways, thematically, metaphorically and textually. As theme it is linked to such concepts as the decline of civilization; as metaphor it can be seen in characters's actions as their lives become more chaotic (for instance, Mucho drifting from one form of employment to the next, without deriving any meaning or satisfaction from it and in the end becoming a drug addict). But lastly it is also embedded in the text, as is evident in the extremely inconclusive ending,

which is so open-ended as to leave the reader with the impression that the novel has "run out of steam", as it were. As Leland (1974:46-7) argues: "...a distinction must be made here between Entropy as the vehicle through which Pynchon chooses to describe civilization and Entropy as a vital part of fiction *qua* fiction. Pynchon's novel is not only about entropy but is itself entropic".

The following passage illustrates how finely woven the text is in fully extending the concept of entropy from a metaphor and theme to a principle of writing: "However, to write a book *about* chaos, absurdity, entropy, or even apocalypse is quite different from using such themes as points of departure to explore their ramifications for the writing of fiction" (Leland, 1974:46). The book is about chaos, absurdity, entropy and apocalypse at a very basic level, so that it becomes a practical demonstration of these things in a practical textual way. "As Oedipa weaves away in her tower, so Pynchon weaves Oedipa in his; and what he weaves are symbols which, in their inability to escape the fabric of language towards a transcendental referent, paradoxically symbolize the failure of symbolic meaning" (Leland, 1974:46). In the process the novel itself becomes a paradox, which explains some of the problems it presents to interpretation. The confusion of symbols does not come together at a single meeting point, as a realistic novel might tie loose ends together. But the text does offer the reader the opportunity of finding links between concepts, so that most elements work together towards a surprisingly cohesive structure, in which diverse spaces form part of the historical space. Indeterminacy and ambiguity, especially in relation to meaning and interpretation, become so crippling that the characters are unable to make order events and historical facts in a meaningful way. Abernethy (1972:31) expands on this in the following passage:

> All of history, in fact, is seen as a closed circuit system in which entropy – the increasing ambiguity of history's 'message' – is growing. Like Maxwell's machine, it needs a 'sensitive' to provide the information necessary to make it meaningful, but Oedipa – suburban housewife and child of the 1950's – cannot find the key. The history of Tristero as it unfolds remains meaningless, since history can only be meaningful as operative myth. Pynchon seems to be saying that no longer can a mythic hero be big enough – not even a Randal McMurphy – to lead America out of its entropic slough of despond to a new identity.

The novel may not be quite as despairing with regard to the situation of decay, but it certainly is dire. The possibilities still remain open, even though there may not be definite answers or solutions. Tristero may not reveal itself to Oedipa, but its very existence, or possibility thereof, is a positive sign that other options do exist. Oedipa alone cannot save America, but there is a vision of people really communicating with each other and discovering what is essential and not only imposed by restrictive systems.

* * *

Oedipa's dilemma concerning history is something which she cannot resolve, since she wishes to recover some of the past, but is situated irretrievably in the present. For instance, she is given dandelion wine, which Genghis Cohen tells her becomes cloudy at certain times, after the field has been ripped up for a highway: "No, thought Oedipa, sad. As if their home cemetery in some way still did exist, in a land where you could somehow walk, and not need the East San Narciso Freeway, and bones still could rest in peace, nourishing ghosts of dandelions, no one to plough them up. As if the dead really do persist, even in a bottle of wine" (68). Here Oedipa openly laments the state of modern Western society and feels that it might be better to return to a more natural state, where man is not removed so far from his natural affections and is not forced to experience the world through technology. But these feelings are not entirely accurate and may also be a fantasy, since Oedipa is very much a part of her culture and realizes at another point just how much she has become used to it. It seems that she cannot ever really say that she is free of it, since she reveals the following while she is on the freeway. "All the silence of San Narciso – the calm surface of the motel pool, the contemplative contours of residential streets like rakings in the sand of Japanese garden had not allowed her to think as leisurely as this freeway madness" (75). All her difficulties show that it might not be possible to reclaim or fully grasp the past.

The ending of the novel, though it would appear to be inconclusive, is entirely sufficient in the view of everything that has gone before and it would seem that Oedipa has found some peace: "...Pynchon can end his book as he does, for Oedipa has already discovered everything she needs to know about the nature of her world.

She has decided to face that world, whether it is controlled by alien forces, or simply is" (Merrill, 1977:69). Another relevant thought on the ending is the following: "Closure is itself exclusive, and would be inappropriate in a novel which purports to reveal the excluded, and therefore invisible" (Alexander, 1990:111). The ending forces the reader to consider the excluded middles, taking him or her back into the text. It affirms the refusal to provide a definite, closed version of history and seems to indicate that the answer lies in re-interpretation, constantly keeping the signs open.

The points made in *The Crying of Lot 49* are expanded, elaborated upon and taken to a further logical extreme in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The main character returns to a more natural state, the signs and paranoia multiply, technology is more oppressive and history is pervasive while it is obliterated. Although the quest is no longer a hunt through documents and texts, signs remain important. But added to this is a pivotal event of the twentieth century with a lasting effect thereon: the Second World War.

Chapter Three

Gravity's Rainbow: War vs. Nature

Introduction

Gravity's Rainbow (1973) continues and elaborates on some of the main issues raised in *The Crying of Lot 49* and also introduces some new ones. The relation of the individual to the course of history once again plays a dominant role. Then there is also the nature of history itself in the organisation and documentation thereof. *Gravity's Rainbow* deals more directly with the past since it is set in the Second World War, one of the most important and influential historical events of the twentieth century. This means that the split between past and present is no longer as prominent as in *The Crying of Lot 49*, where the characters use indirect ways to engage with the historical space, such as textual analysis. *Gravity's Rainbow,* however, is not only concerned with simply reiterating the officially accepted facts of history as they are traditionally presented in history textbooks, nor only with representing the period so that the reader may become immersed in the events and setting. By casting *Gravity's Rainbow* in a very idiosyncratic and postmodern style, which in turn defamiliarizes the historical material, Pynchon removes the novel from a mode of realism and forces the reader to reconsider entrenched views on history. On a more romanticized level he explores themes related to love and nature, with the intent of comment on the human condition and transcendence of some of the restrictions which language and western history have imposed.

- **Themes**

Gravity's Rainbow is generally regarded as an important, groundbreaking novel in postmodern literature and has sparked some rather heated controversy. It is a difficult text, lending itself to many different ways of interpretation, which is one of the strikingly postmodern aspects of it. Siegel (1977:39) summarizes its controversial nature when he states that:

> Since its publication in 1973 *Gravity's Rainbow* has been the subject of controversy, of opinions ranging from fascination to revulsion. The controversy was exemplified by the Pulitzer Prize Committee's final rejection of the novel as obscure and obscene after it was unanimously selected as the best novel of the year by the Committee's own literary advisers. One critic announced that *Gravity's Rainbow* would 'change the shape of fiction,' and others claimed that it could only be measured against *Moby Dick* and *Ulysses*.

Gravity's Rainbow cannot be lightly disregarded as an eccentricity, since it has evidently influenced subsequent postmodern fiction to a great extent. It is ranked with the great novels mentioned above, such as *Moby Dick* (1851) and *Ulysses* (1922), since Pynchon uses revolutionary techniques and aims to encapsulate an entire culture, providing possibilities for where this culture may have originated and what its future may be. The opening scene in *Gravity's Rainbow* already indicates a continuation of the concerns of *The Crying of Lot 49* through the depiction of the oppressed people which are involved, placing an emphasis on culture: "...all out of luck and time: drunks, old veterans, still in shock from ordinance 20 years obsolete, hustlers in city clothes, derelicts, exhausted women with more children than it seems could belong to anyone, stacked about among the rest of the things to be carried out to salvation" (3). This crowd is part of an evacuation, threatened by bombing represented by the rocket, which is a symbol of the powers controlling them. The historical dimension becomes evident through the time span which some of these people are also linked to, such as the veterans. In *Gravity's Rainbow* history is always undeniably present, which is evident in the way this crowd is not confined to a single moment, but put in an ongoing procession of history. Siegel (1977:43) identifies Pynchon's concern with cultural problems in contemporary society as a general characteristic of his work, also naming some other important features:

> All of Pynchon's work to date is an examination of our current cultural problems and their possible outcomes, as well as of the methodology employed in the work itself. *Gravity's Rainbow* asserts the possible values of metaphor for examining the possible shapes of reality...It is a book of possibilities which seeks to divine the future through an examination of probabilities.

Evidently some reliance on the past and a probing into it is necessary to speculate on possibilities for the future, explaining the scope of *Gravity's Rainbow*. But the reader encounters a strange postmodern paradox in a lack of ability to choose, resulting from a profusion and overabundance of options. This is perhaps especially due to the aimless wandering at times of Slothrop, the main character. Oedipa experiences the same dilemma when she comments on the "exitlessness" of modern life.

- **Style and Structure**

Pynchon's work is relevant to the development of literature in the twentieth century, which makes it necessary to consider the stylistic aspects thereof. This is in addition to Pynchon's concern with cultural problems, mostly within the larger context of the nature of Western culture and the continual changes taking place therein. The structure and style immediately reveal the challenging nature of the novel. For instance, a multitude of characters populate *Gravity's Rainbow*, many of whom appear only briefly and then disappear, although many are also developed in some detail. One effect of this technique is that the reader is required to keep track of more characters and detail than may ordinarily be expected. Most of the events, which do not always make sense and in actual fact appear quite bizarre, also tend to fall into this pattern. The prose itself – which is of a poetic nature – is written in a very convoluted style with lengthy sentences, and the text contains many instances of poetry mostly in the form of lyrics. Each aspect contributes to an overall and cumulative ambiguity, which provides opportunities for multiple and varied interpretations in accordance with an opening of possibilities. The reader may also experience these positive aspects as stumbling blocks to an integrated interpretation. Alsen (1996:174) provides a fairly conventional overview of what the reader may expect to encounter in *Gravity's Rainbow*:

> The novel gives the impression of disjunction and fragmentation because the narrator often interrupts the story to let characters burst into song; he digresses and inserts stories that have nothing to do with the main narrative; he shifts back and forth between plausible and preposterous incidents, between historical accuracy and deliberate anachronisms; and he makes his protagonist disappear from the narrative some seventy pages before the end.

The novel appears to encapsulate the experience of life in postmodern times, where representation especially in the media has become dominated by edited images, fragmented yet integrated as a finished product. In accordance with the characteristics of Pynchon's work, themes are not treated separately from structure and style, rather they complement each other. Though the novel may seem disjointed in terms of structure, the alienating effect that this achieves causes the reader to consider anew what he or she unquestioningly encounters in everyday life. In terms of space, information is scattered throughout the novel and the reader has to make connections, sometimes in unexpected ways, which open up possibilities. The historical space in particular can be developed by the play with facts and accuracy, which creates different views on history. Although fragmentation may lead to confusion, it is a necessary way of re-organization. In relation to the structure of the novel, the following statement by Chambers (1991:264-5) makes the reason for this apparent confusion clearer: "To maintain the experiential element of storytelling in a world dominated by informational systems, Pynchon employs not mere narrative, but a discontinuous, disruptive, and poetic tapestry of various stories". The emphasis is on experience then, as opposed to the static imparting of information. It is a necessary distinction to draw, especially in a world that has grown more and more saturated with machines and information as a commodity. Conceivably, the novel represents a reworking of literary space to reflect and construct the postmodern world. Unconventional stylistic and structural elements are required, such as the disruption of narrative, to reclaim literary space as a human domain in the face of the dehumanizing effects of systems dominating history.

- **Spaces**

In *Gravity's Rainbow* the War represents the course of Western history as it is normally recorded in terms of power, conspicuously capitalised as a presence in the novel. Against this march of history, regardless of whether it can be called progress or not, the individual must be situated in this framework, which seems intented mainly for control and oppression. The following statement by Swartzlander (1988:135) contains some of the most important issues related to history in *Gravity's Rainbow*:

> Conventional approaches to history are parodied and trivialized: history as cause and effect, history as a record of man's progress, history as a procession of people, places, and events, and history as the manifestation of God. Instead we are presented with history as illusion, nightmare, the eternal struggle between the preterite and the elect. We are shown the inadequacies of any historical perspective, and throughout the novels, we are forced to adopt a perspective that focuses on human relationships.

The conventional approaches to history as described by Swartzlander in the passage above, as well as some alternative approaches which occur in *Gravity's Rainbow*, will be discussed to show the way in which the postmodern view of history differs from the conventional. The theme of transcendence will then be discussed as some of the characters search for a way out of the confines created by a technological society. There is a constant struggle between humanity and institutions that comes to the fore, with the power-hungry depicted on the side of the inhuman. People are described in various forms and shown from their most intimate to most degraded, to their most everyday and most disturbed forms. But there is a need for escape from the restrictions and limitations which technocratic civilization casts on the individual and by basic concepts such as love a transcendence is offered over the coldness of these institutions and the paranoia which they invoke. A central question can be derived from this search, namely what alternative can be given to the way in which the individual is trapped by history, represented by modern technology?

In the rest of this chapter, the focus will be mainly on the historical space projected, but cognisance will also be taken of the fact that the novel does provide scope for a humanist investigation, especially on the dehumanizing effects of technology and science. Pynchon recaptures some of this power by breaking and blurring boundaries, especially in relation to form. The leaning towards romanticism in the novel at times places an emphasis on language and nature, making it possible for a rebirth not only in terms of the past but also the present. Looking for an infallible explanation for something such as the cause of an event may be misleading and only provide a false or partially accurate view. Truth and falseness may not be the right terms for evaluating historical writing, since postmodernism states that there are many truths, as Hutcheon (1988:112) emphasizes: "Both history and fiction are cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being

autonomous and self-contained". These constructions must be unmasked, which Pynchon achieves in one way by the foregrounding of artifice in the text.

Various statements about history are made throughout the text, but in particular a Pavlovian behaviourist called Pointsman asks the following relevant questions in relation to Mexico, a statistician:

> How can Mexico play, so at his ease, with these symbols of randomness and fright? Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware – perhaps – that in his play he wrecks the elegant rooms of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico's whole *generation* have turned out like this? Will Postwar be nothing but 'events,' newly created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history? (56).

This last question eventually becomes very important and is particularly interesting to explore. What form of history can there be if the reasons for events are taken away and the spectator is left with a jumble of things that happened without clear links between them and explanations for them? The possibilities will be explored in this chapter, alternatives to closed systems of conventional history, as well as the renewed importance that is attached to the present and future.

Approaches to History

- **Cause and Effect**

A séance takes place in the first part of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which the late foreign minister, Walther Rathenau, is contacted and in which he answers questions and makes predictions. This contact with the dead is another way in which history is foregrounded in the novel, making it tangible and personal. He makes the following statement, which must be regarded as significant, since he presumably has access to knowledge which the living do not: "All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic...If you want the truth – I know I presume – you must look into the technology of these matters. Even into the heart of certain molecules – it is they after all which dictate temperatures, pressures, rates of flow, costs, profits, the shapes of towers..." (167). The discounting of cause and effect as

the main view of secular history is an indication of the path which the novel will take, urging the reader to look in less obvious places for answers and not accept things as they are usually presented.

- **Power**

Once again the spirit of Walther Rathenau makes statements pertinent to the heart of *Gravity's Rainbow*: "You must ask two questions. First, what is the real nature of synthesis? And then: what is the real nature of control?" (167). These are perhaps the two most important questions raised in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The effects of power on humanity are portrayed and scrutinized in order to uncover some its nature. But a warning follows: "You think you know, you cling to your beliefs. But sooner or later you will have to let them go..." (167). This is raised as a general caution to indicate that no-one is in full possession of any truth about history, but may constantly be surprised and forced to alter their beliefs. This could then lead to the deep mistrust which Slothrop experiences, manifesting as paranoia and meaning that he does not know what to believe any longer. Slothrop feels powerless in the face of all the adversity and secret acts against him, whether imagined or real, so much so that he experiences moments of deep despair or helplessness: "Ten minutes later, back up in his room, he's lying face-down on the bed, feeling empty. Can't cry. Can't do *anything*" (252). This helplessness is justified in the face of all the systems imposed on him, but as shown further on in the text, there is a transcendence to be experienced in day-to-day living and nature that does not fall under these powers.

Paranoia and Puritanism

- **Paranoia on a Cosmic Level**

The title of the novel provides a metaphor that can be extended to some of the religious and social concerns in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In essence it describes opposing forces at work, but contains a paradox since they are both natural phenomena, essential to life. Sanders (1975:184-5) examines these images in more detail:

> ...What I shall call Pynchon's entropic vision is a paranoia grown cosmic. The rainbow of Genesis is precisely a token of second chances, a promise of renewal. The rainbow of Gravity is the trajectory of matter, from order to disorder, a process remorseless and irreversible. Gravity, in other words, serves Pynchon as a name for the power at the center of his cosmic conspiracy, the entropic lust that drives the planet, the inimical power bent on dragging all the universe, and mankind along with it, toward death. Gravity becomes the paranoid God, wreaking destruction upon an entire cosmos imagined, in Puritan terms, as innately depraved. There are no possibilities for grace in this metaphysic: it is Calvinist theology conceived in the mode of perdition rather than salvation.

Even nature and consequently God is implicated in a conspiratorial way of thinking, giving way to paranoia. Paranoia is a viewpoint that Slothrop in particular takes on history and his surroundings in the present. An example occurs where he is in a casino, searching for information on a particular missile. It is his typical thinking for the most part of the novel, thoughts which also grow more paranoid as he learns more:

> The Forbidden Wing. Oh, the hand of a terrible croupier is that touch on the sleeves of his dreams: all in his life of what has looked free or random, is discovered to've been under some Control, all the time, the same as a fixed roulette wheel—where only destinations are important, attention is to long-term statistics, not individuals: and where the House always does, of course, keep turning a profit... (209).

This passage also shows that the individual is not regarded as important, but expendable in the hands of greater forces, which engenders a feeling of helplessness. A reaction is required from the individual to counteract this problem and paranoia is an ideal vehicle in this regard. The idea is that the individual still retains some measure of defiant control if he or she is able to speculate on the hidden machinations of power.

> Paranoia offers the ideally suited hypothesis that the world is organized into a conspiracy, governed by shadowy figures whose powers approach omniscience and omnipotence, and whose manipulations of history may be detected in every chance gesture of their servants. It substitutes for the divine plan a demonic one. Viewed in this perspective, paranoia is the last retreat of the Puritan imagination (Sanders, 1975:177-8).

The individual then suspects that history is manipulated by mysterious forces, but instead of seeing God behind it all, technology is seen as most powerful, but also harmful and threatening. Thus a focus on illusion and nightmare created by technology and the absence of God is necessary in a discussion on paranoia. The war assumes a god-like role or quality. "Yet who can presume to say *what* the War wants, so vast and aloof is it...so *absentee*" (131).

- **The City in Wartime**

The search for the Rocket gives many of the characters in the book different quests, thereby foregrounding interpretation as an important thematic concern. For Pointsman and Mexico it is a scientific endeavour, over which they have many theoretical discussions. For Slothrop, the way in which the missiles fall becomes even more mysterious and threatening, since it inevitably becomes an integrated part of his overall paranoia: "The people out here were *meant to go down first.* We're expendable: those in the West End, and north of the river are not. Oh, I don't mean the Threat has this or that specific shape. Political, no. If the City Paranoiac dreams, it's not accessible to *us*" (173). This passage contains a few recurrent concepts. First, there is the suspicion of conspiracy, as strong as it is vague. It takes the form of death by socio-economic distinction: a certain group of people are considered expendable by some power which is never explicitly revealed only hinted about its nature, as if the people who are threatened by it are also secretly overawed. This threat is capitalised as an entity, personified as a presence. But this power seems to be regarded as beyond human control, as having taken on a life of its own around human activity. The physical space of the city becomes a metaphysical concept and a being, which means that the very space in which people live and which is supposed to provide sustenance becomes a monster and a threat, with people in this case represented by "*us*" in the passage. An impression of the City Paranoiac as a sentient creature is reinforced a little further down: "But what if the Ci-ty were a growing neo-plasm, across the centuries, always chang-ing, to meet exactly the chang-ing shape of its very worst, se-cret fears. The raggedy pawns, the disgraced bish-op and cowardly knight, all we condemned, we irreversibly lost, are left out here, exposed and wait-ing" (173). People seem to placed at the mercy of this creature. But the "City" is given not only a spatial dimension but a temporal dimension as well, as something

growing throughout history and which has only recently started to come into its own. Something which even has its own fears, perhaps made up of the fears of the people living in it. This also indicates the constant change and flux of history, which must be taken into account in the writing or interpretation of it.

- **Narrative Form**

The paranoia is strengthened by the form which the novel itself takes, for instance by the use of narrators. Most of the parts in which Slothrop appears seem to be from his point of view, but occasionally a snide remark is included, which has to be authorial, as if the real narrator is hidden. For instance, when Slothrop meets a girl he is described as "Suave, romantic Slothrop" (194), but it does not seem likely that he is thinking about himself in this way. The suggestion is rather that it is someone other who is commenting on him in this ironic way, which would make it a disguised authorial intrusion.

- **The Effect of War**

Paranoia from a historical stance extends towards the present, by looking at after-effects of the War and projecting this onto the future, suggesting that in spite of the amount of change which occurs, it is carefully engineered for the purposes of some ruling party: "The track runs in different networks now. What appears to be destruction is really the shaping of railroad spaces to other purposes, intentions he can only, riding through it for the first time, begin to feel the leading edges of..." (257). Altering railroad tracks can be associated with a different course that the future will take. "The War has been reconfiguring time and space into its own image" (257). The War will become history.

- **Paranoia Among Slothrop's Ancestry: Preterite and Elect**

Slothrop has a Puritan ancestry and it would be fairly safe to suggest that some of this has been passed on to him. He also feels this when he thinks of his past:

> He will learn to hear quote marks in the speech of others. It is a bookish kind of reflex, maybe he's genetically predisposed—all those earlier Slothrops packing Bibles around the blue hilltops as part of their gear, memorizing chapter and verse the structures of Arks, Temples, Visionary Thrones—all the materials and dimensions. Data behind which always, nearer or farther, was the numinous certainty of God (241-2).

But Slothrop lives in a very different time from that of his ancestors, a time in which he cannot accept the certainty of God any longer. An alternative god is presented in the novel in the form of technology, which can be seen as a negative organizing principle, leading to destruction. Another viewpoint which is very pervasive in *Gravity's Rainbow* and which also has some Puritan origins is the tendency to see things very sharply in black and white, right and wrong, as Sanders (1975:185) notes on the text:

> The binary perception of the possibilities for understanding history is the single most important feature of Pynchon's worldview: paranoia or anti-paranoia; either everything is connected, or nothing is connected; reality either radiates from a Center, or it is centerless; history is either wholly determined from without, or it is wholly meaningless; the individual is either manipulated, or his is simply adrift. Once again the pattern of theological expectations is evident: either there is some principle as powerful and absolute as God to order the universe, or else the universe is chaos.

A very Puritan concern is the concept of an Elect and Preterite, which recurs in the novel. The Elect are those who have been chosen by God since the beginning of time to be his followers, while the Preterite are those who have been rejected by God and subsequently damned. There is an element of fatalism to this and the idea is transposed to a modern context, in which technology determines who the Elect and Preterite are. Religion no longer plays a dominant role in the paradigm that *Gravity's Rainbow* provides, as postulated by Krafft (1977:57-8):

> The elect are now the economically and politically privileged and powerful. They have created, they control, and they benefit from an incomprehensibly vast international military-corporate-governmental complex which has gathered about it, or has had attached to it, qualities formerly ascribed to a divinity: omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

But in the novel the most sympathy is gathered for the Preterite, they are also those on whom the most hope is placed. So there is for instance the mantra of the Hereros, an African tribe that has been trampled by Europeans bringing technology: "We have a word that we whisper, a mantra for times that threaten to be bad. Mba-kayere. You may find that it will work for you. Mba-kayere. It means 'I am passed over.' To those of us who survived von Trotha, it also means that we have learned to stand outside our history and watch it, without feeling too much" (362). The outcome of this paranoia is grim and does not provide an answer or real alternative for any of the characters involved. "The hopelessness of cosmic paranoia leaves many of Pynchon's characters no alternative but to escape from history to a form of transcendent grace unshackled by time" (Smith, 1983:248).

- **Economic Motivation for War**

The War once again comes under discussion in a passage describing what may be behind it:

> Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals. The mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways. It serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War. It provides raw material to be recorded into History, so that children may be taught History as sequences of violence, battle after battle, and be more prepared for the adult world. Best of all, mass death's a stimulus to just ordinary folks, little fellows, to try 'n' grab a piece of that Pie while they're still there to gobble it up. The true war is a celebration of markets (105).

Some of the key elements related to history can be extracted from this passage. A justification for Slothrop's persistent paranoia is contained in the distrust of what is officially recorded. There is a suspicion that behind the events of the war there really lies a wish for economic gain. There is the official version, which focuses on violence and attempts to justify the necessity of the War to the masses and its usefulness to them. Again the question of why it happened is answered unsatisfactorily. But an undeniable part of the War is mass death, and death plays a further role in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Metaphysical Space

- **Collapsing Binary Oppositions**

Death can be described as the zero, in the binary opposition of one against zero that the novel sets up in relation to science. But since it is treated as only the other side of the grave, it is the other side of existence and not an end to it, creating a stronger bond between life and death. This bond is inextricable, destroying the space between the one and the zero. This is an example of the alternative ways of viewing which can also be applied to history, viewing something as not only either/or, but both/and. This part of metaphysical space remains largely unrealised in *The Crying of Lot 49* where Oedipa still regards her options as a choice between irreconcilable differences. But an example of the change in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be found in the following description of the treatment of death: "Death resists characterization, resists being opposed in any positive/negative way, resists being placed in any determinate relation at all" (Nealon, 1996:124). This can be linked to Slothrop's disappearance, since it cannot be conventionally described as a death. If he had died in the normal way of cause and effect, that would have placed him in relation to the world around him, it would have been a natural occurrence. But in this way he can become "other", he remains in relation to the text as a presence, but does not exist in the world of the text any longer, although some critics contend that "Slothrop will lose all real and potential relation to *any* world, whether of language or of act" (Mendelson quoted in Nealon, 1996:125).

Highlighting certain startling relations dulls the contrast between life and death, for instance the use of "coal-tar" for the manufacture of steel:

> Consider coal and steel. There is a place where they meet. The interface between coal and steel is coal-tar. Imagine coal, down in the earth, dead black, no light, the very substance of death...Above ground, the steel rolls out fiery, bright. But to make steel, the coal tars, darker and heavier, must be taken from the original coal. Earth's excrement, purged out for the ennoblement of shining steel. Passed over (166).

Here is again the connection to *The Crying of Lot 49* with regard to the "passed over" or Preterite, those left out and trampled by the powerful, which forms such a large and essential part of any society. Those devoid of power and destitute may provide a different viewpoint, a different picture of the movement of history and another truth that is seldom touched on. This view will necessarily be more focused on the individual struggle, shifting the focus to people and not just events such as battles, which are considered the primary parts of history. The novel can then, in role and form, bring personal histories to the fore and also play a part in creating histories that differ from the conventional and restrictive.

The Individual and History

- **Nationalities**

History is spatialized and demythologised by creating images of the War and the illusory concepts it brings about: "...never a clear sense of nationality anywhere, nor even of belligerent sides, only the War, a single damaged landscape, in which 'neutral Switzerland' is a rather stuffy convention, observed but with as much sarcasm as 'liberated France' or 'totalitarian Germany,' 'Fascist Spain,' and others..." (257). Pynchon draws attention to the fact that treaties can be broken very easily when the need arises.

- **American Culture**

Slothrop experiences estrangement from his countrymen and this allows Pynchon to provide commentary on America itself. "American voices, country voices, high-pitched and without mercy...For possibly the first time he is hearing America as it must sound to a non-American. Later he will recall that what surprised him most was the fanaticism, the reliance not just on flat force but on the *rightness* of what they planned to do" (256). This throws doubt on the possibility of looking objectively at a culture for an individual as a member thereof, since the values and ideology would normally be accepted as right. But here Pynchon suggests that there may not be much of a difference in attitude between nationalities such as the Americans and Nazis or

Japanese as widely accepted, since "...he'd been told long ago to expect this sort of thing from Nazis, and especially from Japs – *we* were the ones who always played fair – but this pair outside the door now are as demoralizing as a close-up of John Wayne" (256). There is a strong sense of solidarity in the pronoun "*we*", but in the disillusionment which Slothrop undergoes, this would seem to be just a construction, such as "They", both of which may be false, or the one just created by the ruling powers in order to find a foothold to manipulate a nation on a greater scale. Invoking the image of a cultural icon in the form of John Wayne is done against convention, since the characters he normally portrays on film are regarded as heroes.

Sexual Space

A major part of the plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* involves the authorities following Slothrop around, speculating on why the sites of bombings seem to coincide with the places in which he has had sexual intercourse. They are able to determine this, since Slothrop always uses stars on a map to mark these places. The rocket blasts occur a few days after he has been there, turning cause and effect on its head since there seems to be no obvious rational explanation for why these events should follow each other and what the relation must be between them. One scientist regards the phenomenon as a form of precognition: "'Slothrop is able to predict when a rocket will fall at a particular place. His survival to date is evidence he's acted on advance information, and avoided the area at the time the rocket was supposed to fall.' Dr. Groast is not sure how, or even if, sex comes into it" (85). But since each scientist brings forward a theory related only to his or her discipline, it becomes apparent that these theories prove inadequate and that there is a mystical, inexplicable element present in the relation. It is similar to what Roger Mexico, a statistician, experiences in his love affair: "In a life he has cursed, again and again, for its need to believe so much in the trans-observable, here is the first, the very first real magic: data he can't argue away". The phenomenon related to Slothrop he calls "a statistical oddity" (84).

A somewhat more sinister connection to scientific experimentation in conditioning exists in Slothrop's past. As an infant, Slothrop had been in the hands of a behaviourist called Jamf who had conditioned him to achieve an erection when there is a loud noise. The conditioning was erased, but the possibility of negative

conditioning remains: "Not only must we speak of partial or of complete extinction of a conditioned reflex, but we must also realize that extinction can proceed *beyond* the point of reducing a reflex to zero. We cannot therefore judge the degree of extinction *only* by the magnitude of the reflex or its absence, since there can still be *a silent extinction beyond the zero*" (84-5). It could possibly provide an explanation for the strange phenomenon, yet in a highly scientifically theorized form. Ironically, it is simultaneously "anti-scientific", since the hypothesis rests on the assumption that in some way Slothrop is psychically sensing where the rockets will fall or, as one scientist puts it, he is telekinetically causing them to fall in those places, turning cause and effect on its head and invoking psychic phenomena. Such reasoning illustrates the complex ideas put forth in the novel, in which sexual space, power and supernatural concepts are combined and may or may not really be linked to each other. The first section of the novel is also entitled "Beyond the Zero", which carries connotations of death which can be linked to the bombings as well as interpretation as a scientific concept. Even religious space can be shown to play a role, as in one instance his reaction to a rocket is noted, in the context of his ancestry: "There is in his history, and likely, God help him, in his dossier, a peculiar sensitivity to what is revealed in the sky. (But a *hardon*?)" (26). The rocket may also be regarded as a phallic symbol, providing a more straighforward link with his erections.

Sexuality is regarded clinically and emotionless by those in power, as something to be studied and implemented in the control of humans. This assumption can be made from the way in which characters receive startling information that the higher ranks are aware of their sexual habits and hidden preferences: "Could there be, somewhere, a dossier, could They (They?) somehow have managed to monitor everything he saw and read since puberty...how *else* would They know?" (72). In another instance the scientific establishment is linked to loneliness and sterility, as the Pavlovian Pointsman realizes: "Women avoid him. He knows in a general way what it is: he's creepy...Here's an erection stirring, he'll masturbate himself to sleep again tonight. A joyless constant, an institution in his life" (141).

Deviant and unusual sexuality is linked particularly to technocratic, militaristic society and is mostly cloaked in a powerplay. It is established that those in power, sometimes mysteriously referred to as "the Firm" or more paranoiacally as "They",

are unscrupulous with regard to which persons to use in achieving goals. "It's as useful to him as he is to the Firm—who, it is well known, will use anyone, traitors, murderers, perverts, Negroes, even women, to get what They want" (32-3). The association with sexual deviancy is also apparent.

A particularly extreme sado-masochistic relationship is depicted between an army officer, Captain Pudding and Katje, a young Dutch woman who appears in different guises throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* and is a sexual figure also associated with Slothrop. There is a militaristic element to their liaison which is appropriate to the context of the army of which Pudding is a part:

> "Dismissed. Back in uniform, he closes the cell door and retraces his way in...Cold air hits Pudding like a blow. He sobs, bent, alone, cheek resting a moment against the rough stone walls of the Palladian house. His regular quarters have become a place of exile, and his real home is with the Mistress of the Night, with her soft boots and hard foreign voice" (236).

Pudding's reference to Katje as "Mistress" indicates the nature of their relationship based on power, thus more in league with the negative forces in the novel. A staged, planned and controlled element comes to the fore, which is in contrast to the more uncontrolled love affair between Jessica and Roger. The driving force behind it is pain rather than love, and becomes an unhealthy dependency instead of a mutual trust.

> "...bound by nothing but his need for pain, for something real, something pure. They have taken him so far from his simple nerves. They have stuffed paper illusions and military euphemisms between him and this truth, this rare decency, this moment at her scrupulous feet...sure in her ownership of his failing body, his true body: undisguised by uniform, uncluttered by drugs to keep from him her communiqués of vertigo, nausea and pain" (234-5).

Nevertheless, Pudding's motives evoke sympathy in the reader since it seems that he is a victim of his predicament rather than the instigator thereof. Once again the focus returns to the manipulation of individuals by the hierarchy of power.

A stable, loving sexual relationship in *Gravity's Rainbow* is represented by the love affair between Jessica and Roger. This affair is described in a different intensity of language, with the connotation of a sentimental romantic film as it was described initially still present: "'Ohh...' the sound rushing out of her, and she came in to hug him, completely let-go, open, shivering as they held each other" (120). In another passage a similar description is given: "...it is love, it is amazing. Even when she isn't there, after a dream, at a face in the street that might against chance be Jessica's, Roger can never control it, he's in its grasp" (121). Instead of manipulation, their love affair is characterised by a wilful surrender and abandoning of control which acts as a counterpoint in the novel to the destruction and inhumanity which the abuse of power brings about.

Linguistic Space

The language of the Elect and Preterite is shown to differ significantly on opposite sides of the power line that divides these groups. Typically the language of the Elect is sterile and cryptic, its purpose to enforce power and control. Consequently, it is found mostly in equations, contrary to the language of the Preterite which is seen as filled with vitality, although it may not necessarily bring about political change. The linguistic space illustrates the division between the powerful and the powerless through the types of discourses that each group use. Power is one of the main themes in *Gravity's Rainbow,* and the effect of it is profound even on the linguistic space:

> The axis that divides humanity in Pynchon's novel is power. No other category so clearly grasps the essential division, the true war, that separates the antithetical parties. The equation epitomizes the dynamics of the privileged discourse of power; the language of the powerless takes the shape of obscene statements or profanations (Ames, 1990:193).

The coldness and highly formalized nature of the equation hints at the calculated nature in which power is used, devoid of warmth or compassion. In contrast to this the language of the powerless aims to express, whether anger or defiance. Another, equally important form which Preterite expression takes is that of graffiti. The most graffiti is often seen in poor neighbourhoods and generally regarded as unwanted,

once again pointing to the nature thereof. Ames (1990:199) provides more commentary on graffiti in *Gravity's Rainbow*:

> Anonymous and often mysterious, the graffiti scattered over buildings and bridges – but above all on bathroom walls – forms a Preterite text, perhaps a text open to deciphering. As Slothrop undergoes his mysterious scattering in the Zone, as he gains at the expense of his identity a generalized union with nature and with the 'wastes of the world,' he grows adept at 'reading graffiti' to the Preterite texts he turns the deciphering skills he once applied to studying equations.

Initially Slothrop is involved in the War, fighting on the side of the Elect. But he undergoes a change in his identity and starts to associate himself more with the Preterite. The implication is that the dividing line of power cannot be destroyed and the two sides merged, but that the one side excludes the other. So complete is the divide that Slothrop has to learn to interpret graffiti in what is an entire paradigm shift for him from the language of science. It is interesting to note regarding *The Crying of Lot 49* that Oedipa also receives one of her first and most important clues to the existence of the underground WASTE postal network through graffiti she encounters on a bathroom wall. In both novels graffiti functions as an alternative text, a unique linguistic space through which people record history informally. The temporary nature of graffiti makes it an ideal postmodern sign system, since it mostly relies on present day cultural references and slang. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that it will be recorded anywhere else, so that most of it may vanish within a short space of time, to be replaced by new graffiti.

Cinematic Space

The part which film plays in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be seen as the point where the world of technology and that of the individual merge, but it is a paradoxical union since it can also be associated with life through art, a means of transcendence. Though the War plays such a central part in the novel, film is equally important, with references and allusions found consistently throughout the text. Cinema acts as a mode of interpretation and metaphor for the postmodern age and there is even a suggestion that although the text is read as a novel it can be construed as a film which is showing of the characters, where the readers are in fact revealed as attending a

screening on the last page. This also provides an explanation for the dream-like surrealistic quality of many of the passages and the note of unreality, "...when nothing can really stop the Abreaction of the Lord of Night unless the Blitz stops, rockets dismantle, the entire film runs backward: faired skin back to sheet steel back to pig to white incandescence to ore, to Earth. But the reality is not reversible" (139).

The whole novel is packed with filmic references, allusions and parodies, which are woven finely into the thematic matrix of the text. It is not clear for the reader where the film ends and whether it does end, since the text is constantly disrupted by these references. For instance, while Slothrop is conversing with Katje, he notices that she picks up a Seltzer bottle and he thinks, for no apparent reason other than pure paranoia: "The what, *The Seltzer Bottle?* What shit is this, now? What other interesting props have They thought to plant, and what other American reflexes are They after? Where's those *banana cream pies*, eh?" (197). This passage is interesting for several reasons. A cream pie fight really does occur further on (334) with pies that seem to be planted, a well-known slapstick device in comedies, especially those dating from the pre-war years. Slothrop also conspicuously views his surrounding as a film set, with various items placed as props. It is ironic that he is not entirely mistaken from a textual/authorial point of view, since the events and objects are determined by the needs of the author: "...they were counting on that damned American reflex all right, bad guy in a chase always heads up..." (199). The way in which scenes take place correlates openly with how scenes in a film would, without overtly being called so. Slothrop sometimes questions his own paranoia, by wondering why he is always thinking about Them. "They? *They?*" (199)

Aspects of everyday human experience and living are touched on and explored, and it seems as if the novel attempts to exhaust all possibilities: "It was what Hollywood likes to call a 'cute meet,' out in the neat 18th-century heart of downtown Tunbridge Wells, Roger motoring in the vintage Jaguar up to London, Jessica at the roadside struggling prettily with a busted bicycle" (38). This scene is described in terms of movie cliché, emphasizing the formulaic manner in which human relationships are depicted in films. But it is not clear whether this really is so, or whether the depiction by Hollywood only makes it seem so, which is more likely to be the case. This corresponds with the Pavlovian view of the predictability of behaviour, which is also

relevant to this section of the novel. Roger, a statistician, is contrasted with Pointsman, whom Roger refers to in the following way: "...I don't know why Pointsman does anything he does, he's a Pavlovian" (37). Each is primarily characterised through their scientific views, although the characters are then fleshed out through their actual behaviour, Roger Mexico especially through his love affair with Jessica, which again emphasizes the natural cycles of life: "If ever the Antipointsman existed, Roger Mexico is the man" (55). Their relationship is reminiscent of that of Oedipa and Mucho in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Mucho confiding nearly the same complaint as Roger: "they believe in survival after death, communication mind-to-mind, prophesying, clairvoyance, teleportation – they believe, Jess!" (56). This depiction of human relationships in film has a double function, since it would seem to affirm nature and art, but is also ruled by technology.

One of the paradigms formed in the novel is that created by mass culture, namely the products of companies, but particularly as produced by Hollywood studios. The implication is that people in Western civilization are so familiar with media generated images and information, that it becomes a pervasive cultural force and type of shared "language". For instance, when Slothrop sees someone who looks intimidating he is described as: "the meanest customer Slothrop has seen outside of a Frankenstein movie" (246). Even the alcoholic beverage that Slothrop mixes for himself at that moment is named after a child actress who was very popular at the time, namely "Shirley Temple" (246). Viewers commonly imitate famous comedy figures, as Slothrop also does: "Slothrop interjects in a Groucho Marx voice" (246). The repetitive and reproducible nature of the medium is also illustrated at various points, the following referring to an authority figure in the army: "His picture may hang prominently in all the guardrooms and be engraved in thousands of snowdrops' brains, but he has seen *The Return of Jack Slade* twenty-seven times" (247). This quotation seems to imply that it does not matter who the person is, he or she is just as likely to enjoy entertainment, making cinema a kind of common denominator between people, but also something which can drag people down to a common level and form a kind of obsession.

The focus is placed so sharply on cinema, since it is indispensable to understanding the twentieth century. It would be conspicuous in its absence in any case, but it is in

order to drive home the point of how fully the medium has invaded society that Pynchon concentrates so extensively on it.

Transcendence: Art, Nature and Language

"Pynchon's poetic prose has redemptive power in part because of the non-cognitive immediacy that it imposes on narrative form" (Chambers, 1991:159). *Gravity's Rainbow* shares the allusive and elusive power which poetry harnesses through ambiguity, indeterminacy and association. Images, acts and events which are not too rigidly placed in a framework or sequence of cause and effect, have the advantage of making the reader experience more without constantly thinking what the possible meaning may be. All this forms part of the linguistic space, which incorporates not only a fair amount of actual poetry in various forms thereof, but also means that the prose itself contains a poetic quality, such as the phrase "...crystals grown in morning's beaker" (6). The text opens up meaning by blurring boundaries between prose and poetry, pointing to the transcendence which may be inferred from it over too rigidly imposed notions of closed history.

True to the self-reflexive nature of *Gravity's Rainbow*, textual analysis frequently takes place within the novel, mostly in the form of some kind of deconstruction. There is a sharp focus on specific words and their meanings, traced through other words, so that they are shown to be decentred and unstable, resulting in a constant play with words and their connotations and meanings. "'There's a poetry to it, engineer's poetry... it suggests *haverie* - average, you know – certainly you have the two loves, don't you, symmetrical about the rocket's intended azimuth... *hauen*, too – smashing someone with a hoe or a club...' off on a voyage of his own here..." (207). Language is something which goes back to the earliest times of humanity, and thus much history is contained in words themselves. This facet is explored in an acronym for "Office of Strategic Services" (268), which is changed to a word and then traced through its history for its meaning: "But to initiates OSS is also a secret acronym: as a mantra for times of immediate crisis they have been taught to spread inwardly *oss*... *oss*, the late, corrupt, Dark-age Latin word for bone..." (268).

In the second part of the novel, there is a greater emphasis on nature, which is apparent from the description of the setting right at the beginning. The sea is especially prominent and the language becomes vivid, imparting the impossibility of adequately describing the experience: "The sun, not very high yet, will catch a bird by the ends of his wings, turning the feathers brightly there to curls of shaved ice" (181). There is an enormous sense of the vitality of nature and a greater degree of friendship and warmth than in the war-torn London. Stylistically, a lightness manifests in characters bursting spontaneously into song, as if a musical is in progress, presenting an affirmation of life and creativity. Art becomes a positive, legitimate means of expressing shared human emotions: "Oh, it sounds like a painting. Something by an Impressionist. A Fauve. Full of light..." (183). It is a very positive statement, related to the binary opposition between light and darkness at play in the novel.

Emphasis is placed on the experiences that characters have, to show the immediacy of life against the death brought about by imposed systems. Some images recur in the novel, such as the way in which Slothrop experiences light and darkness, which are used to convey concepts such as positions that the characters find themselves in. But these images are also altered from time to time, shown in different forms, to show the changeable nature of reality. The complexity of experience is foregrounded by the realisations which Slothrop has: "...there comes Slothrop to the best feeling dusk in a foreign city can bring: just where the sky's light balances the electric lamplight in the street, just before the first star, some promise of events without cause, surprises, a direction at right angles to every direction his life has been able to find up till now" (253). The influence of human endeavour on the environment is always kept in mind, also in this passage, where natural and artificial light are brought together, harmoniously, yet in contrast.

Slothrop experiences a great deal of paranoia especially in relation to an incident with and octopus and this is reflected in the description of the light: "...voices begin to take on a touch of metal, each word a hard-edged clap, and the light, though as bright as before, is less able to illuminate...it's a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia, filtering in...Structure and detail come later, but the conniving around him now he feels instantly, in his heart" (188). The various functions which light performs are explored in many possible connotations in the

novel. In this instance the light is perceived as blinding, something that is not able to shed light but is more akin to darkness. It is foregrounded as a force of nature, just as the sea air itself is given an ominous presence. Once again the natural human reaction is stressed, as its experiential aspect is more important in the novel and can only be rationalized afterwards. But all Slothrop's efforts to impose a system on the events around him seem to be doomed to failure, as things only suggest themselves and remain out of reach: "...when the light comes to strike *no telling when the light-*" (196). This is a progression from the beginning where there is first an absence of light, then light filtering in.

Gravity's Rainbow does offer hope for renewal, but it is only after a collapse has occurred, so that there can be an escape from dead-ends and a possibility for growth. The transcendence which the novel advocates can only take place in the ruins of that which has gone before, as Slothrop experiences in reading graffiti or part of a crumpled newspaper heading. Chambers (1991:270) describes the nature of this breakdown and renewal in the following statement: "...the real text is an open-ended, retrieval process: the act of reading the ruins and wastes disclosed through the poetic word. In the state of breakdown that such a narrative imposes, readers can begin to renew language, revive authenticity, regain a sense of mystery, and relearn love". The essence of nature, which cannot be controlled by technology, provide the focus for a hopeful future. Slothrop realizes this and starts to notice signs he has neglected before: "Omens 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, scraps of lost paper, graffiti on the broken walls where facing has been shot away to reveal the brick underneath – broken in specific shapes that may be read..." (623). In this instance the act of reading is extended to nature, which encourages the reader to view the world as text, a much more flexible and changing text. This is in line with his dichotomy between animate and inanimate things, man-made buildings and institutions against nature, in particular the printed word as contrasted with the spoken word.

* * *

Whereas *The Crying of Lot 49* focuses more on the individual experience in situating him or herself in history, *Gravity's Rainbow* presents a situation even more dire in which the individual becomes prey to a nightmare of manipulation and conspiracy, and virtually obliterated in the end. What seems to be important in reading *Gravity's Rainbow* is not only what it says about history but the way in which the historical space is explored. It becomes an experience for the reader, even if not a complete immersion, but still in contrast to an academic discussion on the nature of history:

> Readers are impressed by the sensual power of Pynchon's edifying 'performance,' not by what his prose 'tells' us about history. Hermeneutics and 'performance' complement each other in *Gravity's Rainbow*, creating a non-prescriptive, edifying meditation (rather than a concrete statement) directed at history, a meditation which suggests that control and repression are the driving forces of modern history (Smith, 1983:246).

The intricate structure of Pynchon's novel, in opposition to being merely there as a framework to support the narrative, contributes significantly to its "message" as proposed in the passage above. It indicates that the structure consequently does not have to be seen as a hindrance in laying bare the themes, nor does the "message" necessarily have to be seen as negative. There are some strong tendencies towards Romanticism, not only destruction and despair, in the novel, which can also be inferred from the following comments by Alsen (1996:174) on Pynchon's narrative strategies:

> However, instead of seeing these narrative strategies as an expression of Pynchon's desire to make his narrative reflect processes of unmaking, we can also see them as an expression of his refusal to impose restraints on his playful creative impulses. In short, the disjunctiveness of the novel might be explained in terms of the romantic notion that works of art should not follow established norms but be as irregular as nature herself.

Language is reclaimed as a tool for human artistic expression in opposition to the language of technology. The following quotation is relevant to all the chapters, but the next one on *Mason & Dixon* in particular since the novel is based on real historical events in a more direct way: "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present,

to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (Hutcheon, 1988:110). This is precisely what Pynchon does in his fiction, reaching even further back into the past in *Mason & Dixon,* not to discover origins, but rather reflections and establish a greater interaction between past and present. Historical space becomes even more important and enlarged as there is reached beyond the twentieth century in an effort to explore eighteenth century thought. Having considered history from a more present day to recently historical perspective in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49,* the more distant past and postmodern perspective thereof will be discussed in the following chapter on *Mason & Dixon.*

Chapter Four

Mason & Dixon: Postmodern History

Introduction

Mason & Dixon deals with history more overtly than either *The Crying of Lot 49* or *Gravity's Rainbow,* since it is an historical novel, chronicling the lives of two eighteenth century land surveyors who measure the Mason-Dixon line in America, which roughly divides the country in two parts, the North and South. Since a civil war was fought in America between these two parts nearly a century later, the expedition to determine the border is really significant for American history. The novel comprises a large scope, including the travels that the protagonists undertook from England to South Africa, St. Helena and America, shedding light on the past and hinting at possible causes and influences on the present. What makes this novel particularly worth discussing in this dissertation, is the unconventional stance on history found in it and the way in which this story is presented.

This chapter focuses on the question of the relation between fact and fiction – a major theme in the novel – raised in *Mason & Dixon* by examining the use of different spaces to achieve this. As a starting point, the following passage summarizes which historical perspective is shown in the novel: "The Line and its creation inform us about how it was constructed in the 1760s, how we reconstruct it from the twentieth century, and how our sense of history is constructed as well" (Foreman, 2000:163). A reading of this voluminous novel shows that it imparts much more than the telling of a historical tale as it raises some significant points on the nature of history as construction and discourse. The "Line" mentioned in the quotation is the central image of the novel, making boundaries and margins important motifs in the text. But, in accordance with the postmodern nature of the text, boundaries of various kinds are not strictly adhered to and a significant blurring and breaking down takes place, as is the case with the relation between fact and fiction.

In *Mason & Dixon* an array of spaces are opened, through style, structure and content. The novel is spatially organised. Structurally, there are embedded narratives, as told by various characters on different levels and these tales themselves form spaces, even though taking place temporally. The following passage explains how this may work:

> The dominance of space in *Mason & Dixon* is secured through the quantitive proliferation, functional centrality, and perceptual salience in the foregrounding of spaces (in the plural). These spaces are of various kinds; they include, as we have already seen, the subjunctive spaces of nonrealized possibilities, but also the spaces of narrated inset worlds, subjective spaces of dream and hallucination, parallel worlds ('paraspaces'), paradoxical interiors, and so on (McHale, 2000:49).

As in *The Crying of Lot 49,* there is a focus on alternate routes that America may have taken in its historical development, since according to these works, much unrealised promise and potential existed. In *Mason & Dixon* this is manifested as subjunctive space, a concept taken from the passage above, which gives not only a historical representation of events but also indicates what might have happened. One way of doing this is by presenting many different viewpoints, so that a clearly subjective mode of telling is established. Each narrator contributes an inset world, creating parallel worlds that may be regarded as fictions or potentialities.

Whereas plot is ordinarily expressed in a temporal manner, through regarding events as relevant spaces the temporal gap may be bridged and re-interpreted as or tied to a spatial function. For instance, dreams are frequently used as a motif in the novel and dream sequences enacted, which can be interpreted each on its own, but which creates a richer tapestry when combined to form a dreamscape created by the characters. This allows fresh connections to be drawn and can allow for a bigger picture to be drawn from loose standing elements, such as images which recur, through arranging them spatially and linking with other spaces. The subjunctive space can be linked to this dreamscape, since it is not real but concerns things that could happen, while questioning the nature of reality in the novel. In the process the ontological line becomes blurred, so that the difference between dream and actual event cannot be as readily discerned. As Mason imparts of an experience he had: "The only proof I had that 'twas not a Dream was the Bite I received whilst in my Noctambulation of the

City...Meanwhile must I travel alone, in a world as unreal as those empty September dates were to me then" (561).

Mason & Dixon presents a significant challenge to the reader, not unusual in novels by Pynchon. This is due to the technique of mixing various discourses which may not conventionally be regarded as fitting together, such as the fantasy mentioned in the previous paragraph woven into more straightforward historical accounts. These discourses need to be integrated since they play an important part in forming the literary space of the novel, for which Baker (2000:180) provides a possible suggestion: *"Mason & Dixon* is irrealist fiction: The novel 'levels' its various narrative codes, such as 'history,' 'fiction,' 'cartooning,' 'song,' 'science fiction,' 'fantasy,' 'sermon,' 'personal recollection,' and 'cultural critique,' and thereby assigns each code the same ontological status within the larger narrative structure". It is necessary to keep in mind that while the novel presents as a major theme the discourse of history as a construction, it achieves this not only through discourses related to history, but also through more general discourses such as those mentioned in the passage by Baker.

Postmodern fictional techniques and modes, such as textual self-consciousness, the multiplication of plots and an ontological uncertainty, add to the foregrounding of discourse in the novel. A probing into the nature of discourse takes place, which also serves to remind the reader of the artifice involved in construction. By placing discourses such as "song" and "sermon" on the same ontological plane, it provides the author with more possibilities to create links and blur boundaries between widely differing discourses such as "history" and "fantasy". This is very significant as far as the subjunctive space is concerned, since it enables fantastic elements to be placed alongside the more straightforward historical facts. Or discourses that are ordinarily used to impart history are avoided in favour of a comedic mode of description. The direct contrasts that these discourses normally have towards each other are obliterated, as Foreman (2000:162) states regarding this interaction: "Instead of the facts adding authenticity to the fantasy, the fantasy corrupts the facts and disrupts the whole retelling of history, infecting it with the uncertainty of fiction". This interaction is important in forming a large part of the subjunctive space.

The argument in this chapter will be developed along the following lines: first, the general thesis on the subjunctivity found in *Mason & Dixon* will be discussed in more detail, to establish how historical facts are integrated into the text and the relation this has to parts of the text more imbued with fantasy. This subjunctive space will be regarded as a manifestation of injecting the historical record with fantasy. Secondly, the nature and use of spaces such as cultural, metaphysical and religious space will be discussed as contrasting views on the historical context, contributing to the subjunctive space by creating an ideological space where ideas can be traded and critiqued. In the last section, the literary space of the novel will be considered, indicating how some of the more tangible linguistic properties and basic narratival features function in achieving an ambiguity between fiction and historical fact.

Historical Fiction and Historical Facts

Subjunctive Space

The postmodern view of history is present not only in theory or historiography, but comes to the fore quite clearly in contemporary postmodern fiction. This is borne out by Linda Hutcheon, who in her seminal book entitled *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* argues that: "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (Hutcheon, 1988:110). It would seem that the focus presented by this passage is on alternative possibilities, presenting a version of history which is not fixed and definitive, but which suggests that the past can and must be looked at from various angles. The central question to be answered in the rest of this chapter is then in which ways this is achieved in *Mason & Dixon*?

In a recent collection of essays on *Mason & Dixon*, Brian McHale discusses the subjunctivity found in *Mason & Dixon.* The account of actual historical events does not preclude an imagining of possibilities of what might have happened or have been said, so that we find a "...foregrounding of the subjunctivity that is such a salient feature of *Mason & Dixon*: the American West as subjunctive space, the space of wish and desire, of the hypothetical and the counterfactual, of speculation and possibility"

(McHale, 2000:44). On the one hand, it is not surprising, since the novelist's task is to narrate, which necessarily means that some things need to be invented and arranged to fit into a story. On the other hand, the implication brought about by subjunctive space is that the emphasis is more on what might have been than on what really was. Some interesting points of speculation also become possible, producing relevance for modern times and beyond, such as how the future might have been different if the past had been different. What the novel becomes is an investigation into the past in order to consider what might have gone awry so that expectations for America were not realised.

Although postmodern culture is of a very transient nature, it is particularly interested in history, since history is frequently brought to the fore to be contemplated and investigated. Given the dual nature of much postmodern writing to subvert the very medium which it utilizes, this investigation does not reject history completely, as it may seem at times, but aims at a rethinking and reconceptualization thereof. Some of these problematizations include concepts such as alternative histories, contextualization and the rejection of master narratives. But the emphasis as far as history as theme is concerned, has shifted, as Hutcheon (1988:15-6) is keen to emphasize: "Modern history and modern literature [I would say *post*modern in both cases] have both rejected the ideal of representation that dominated them for so long. Both now conceive of their work as exploration, testing, creation of new meanings, rather than as disclosure or revelation of meanings already in some sense 'there,' but not immediately perceptible". There is a clear relation between the writing of history and works of fiction, particularly in postmodern times in which there is no longer the striving for realist representation. The same spirit is found in *Mason & Dixon*, symbolized by the journey that the main characters undertake, exploring different cultures and drawing on their philosophies.

Subjective Spaces of Dream and Hallucination

The spirit-world hinted at by the religious space can be said to be ontologically uncertain, since it is not made clear in the novel whether this is real or an hallucination as experienced by Mason. Events which link the novel to spirituality and expands the religious space are the ghostly visitations which Mason receive, but

these remain part of a subjective space since it cannot be shared by Dixon or any of the other characters.

> Mason's satoris are (as he explains to a doubting Dixon) unsummoned and unwanted. They are experiences that call on Mason to acknowledge a cosmic vastness unreachable by his zenith sector, to understand the limits of intellection itself, to reject notions of time and space as entrapments and artificial constructions, to participate in a dynamic and vital void and to accept its pulsing mystery—to acknowledge a world, in short, best described by the Eastern tradition (Dewey, 2000:126).

Perhaps this is the reason for numerous inexplicable events occurring in episodes and the strange inventions mentioned from time to time. There is, for instance, an unexplained talking dog that appears intermittently and a mechanical duck that performs biological functions. Some of the aims which can be inferred from *Mason & Dixon* in phenomena such as these, is to explore the limit of what can be known, measured and quantified, infusing an overly rational Western world with a renewed sense of wonder. Mason cannot explain all his experiences, but he still tries to analyse and rationalize these, as his thoughts reveal after receiving another visitation from his deceased wife:

> He tries to joke with himself. Isn't this suppos'd to be the Age of Reason? To believe in the cold light of this all-business world that Rebekah haunts him is to slip, to stagger in a crowd, into the embrace of the Painted Italian Whore herself, and the Air to fill with suffocating incense, and the radiant Deity to go dim forever. But if Reason be also permission at last to believe in the evidence of our Earthly Senses, then how can he not concede to her some Resurrection? – to deny her, how cruel! (164).

There is some speculation on whether scientific investigation is necessarily limited to the measuring of natural phenomena, or could extend towards what cannot be seen and only wondered about, such as a spiritual plane of existence. Astronomy – the exploration of heavenly space – serves as a metaphor for this possibility. "Professionally committed to decoding the very heavens and measuring the vast plane of the immediate into a reliable system of gridlines yet devastated by the death of his young wife, Mason pursues any evidence of an afterlife and the paranormal, seeking

reassurance that the scientific reach is not our limit" (Dewey, 2000:117). Religion and science share common ground in this regard, since both are described as a pursuit of knowledge. But they are also shown to occupy different areas, since religion may explore what science cannot. The subjective cannot be discounted, but is rather used to question the possibility of being completely objective, as the ideal of the Age of Reason would seem to suggest.

Contrasting Views in Historical Context

Cultural Space

A mingling of cultures can stand for the broadening of possibility and diversity. But oppression by a dominant culture is also of historic value and protection of minority rights a concern of postmodernism. This is linked to globalisation and post-colonialism, in the interest of giving the history of the oppressed as well and attempting to change the course of this history.

In *Mason & Dixon* the clash between cultures features as an important part of the history of America, as well as other parts of the world that Mason and Dixon travel to. The following observation is made by Mason upon travelling in America: "Mason did note as peculiar, that the first mortal acts of Savagery in America after their Arrival should have been committed by Whites against Indians" (306). Contact between cultures is shown as not having the ideal positive effect of a learning experience, but as in this case, the destructive effects are foregrounded. This is not portrayed as it might be in some historical novels as a fight between heroes and villains, but rather perpetrators and victims. Fighting is also not overly focused on, but shown as a possible consequence of contact, which occurs not only in one place, but different continents, as Mason and Dixon witness along the way: "They saw white Brutality enough, at the Cape of Good Hope. They can no better understand it now, than then. Something is eluding them. Whites in both places are become the very Savages of their own worst Dreams, far out of Measure to any Provocation" (306-7). Passages such as these clearly put forward the intention in the text to explore racial relations, in

accordance with its postcolonial[1] nature, which acts as an umbrella term to encapsulate postcolonialism. Neither a simplifying view is given, nor a direct cause isolated to lay the blame on. But the oppression of cultures leads to diminished possibilities, so that it is shown as very negative and destructive. This is in opposition to the subjunctive space, which seeks to expand and explore possibilities.

Upon Mason and Dixon's arrival in America, ethnic diversity is stressed as an important part of the continent and the nature of the New World, as can be derived from the description of the surroundings: "Upon the docks a mighty Bustling proceeds, as Waggon-drivers mingle with higher-born couples in Italian chaises, Negroes with hand-barrows, Irish servants with cargo of all sorts upon their backs, running Dogs, rooting Hogs, and underfoot lies all the debris of global Traffick, shreds of spices and teas and coffee-berries, splashes of Geneva gin and Queen of Hungary water..." (259). It is presented as a global trading place, hinting at the central place which America will come to occupy in the world economy. Despite the fighting between races referred to further in the text, the idea of equality is also alluded to in this passage, in terms of all the mingling which takes place, from "higher-born couples" to "Negroes" and "Irish servants". Diversity is found in many descriptions, whether this is celebrated as positive or regarded with reservations, as in the following note on the people who frequent a local pub: "There, over the Evening, he will find, among the Clientele, German Enthusiasts, Quack Physicians, Land-Surveyors, Iron-Prospectors, and Watch-Thieves..." (298). When contact between cultures is portrayed in this way, as trade or in a social context, there are more possibilities opened for the subjunctive space to create an alternative view of history, not only related to the official version of slavery.

In accordance with the postmodern tendency towards parody and the carnivalesque, culture may also be presented in creative ways. "The serving-girls at The All-Nations Coffee House are costumed in whimsical versions of the native dress of each of the coffee-producing countries, — an Arabian girl, a Mexican girl, a Javanese girl, and according to Dolly, a Sumatran girl as well, — a constantly shifting pageant of allegorical Coffees of the World" (299). Yet this also correlates with the fascination

[1] Postcolonialism is seen as a new development which can be categorized under the broad theoretical

with spectacle sometimes attributed to Americans, as well as the techniques of exaggeration and vaudeville used in *Mason & Dixon.*

Metaphysical Space

Mysticism and revelation beyond the reach of rationality, or phenomena which cannot be placed neatly within a rational framework, also feature in *Mason & Dixon.* This consistently forms a part of Pynchon's work, but is linked to the East in this particular novel, which represents a part untouched by Western dominated rationality. Coupled with this scepticism towards rationality for its own sake, the religious tradition of the East is explored, especially in terms of a revelation that cannot be arrived at through logic:

> That moment of unasked for, unanticipated revelation, more intuitive than intellectual, parallels in its argument and its intensity the Eastern tradition of the satori, the glimpse, the awakening—often at the darkest moment of pain and isolation—that reveals the absurd construction of the ego as untenable abstraction and the uplifting release of perceiving the wider embracing unity of a cosmos that is not some problematic gift crafted by a meddling, capricious deity or some vast, efficient machine bound by a system of laws but rather is an ever-growing organic entity, ceaselessly (incomprehensibly) moving with a luminescent logic of its own (Dewey, 2000:116-7).

This part is similar to what is experienced by Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* at his moment of dissolution towards the end of the novel and marks it as a religious moment as well. Pynchon's characters tend to strive towards a revelation, some all-encompassing knowledge that will enable them to fully grasp the contours of the personal and social space in which they find themselves. But this revelation eludes them, or at least comes in unexpected, unlooked for places. Whereas the Western frame of mind holds the notion of "progress" through technological innovation, especially in the form of machines, and which tends to dominate views of the cosmos as well, the Eastern view seems more holistic. It is even implied, as in the passage above, that the distinction between animate and inanimate is needless, if the cosmos is viewed as organic. The emphasis is more on unity and resists compartmentalization.

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framework of postmodernism.

The possibility of reconciling even the perceived great difference between East and West is put forth in the metaphysical space, but it remains a possibility.

An over-reliance on reason can be linked to the scepticism of postmodernism towards master narratives. Master narratives can be constructed as being connected to paranoia and excessive ordering, since paranoia creates patterns that are not necessarily present. This patterning implies the conscious control of higher forces at work in the world on the flow of history. It also creates a closed system, which does not take subjectivity into account and restricts possibilities severely since a fixed plan is constructed, the negative aspects of which postmodernism seeks to foreground. "Postmodernism questions centralized, totalized, hierarchized, closed systems: questions, but does not destroy...It acknowledges the human urge to make order, while pointing out that the orders we create are just that: human constructs, not natural or given entities" (Hutcheon, 1988:41-2). Artificial borders, which are very prominent in *Mason & Dixon* since the Line plays such an important role, can be likened to master narratives as constructs which do not occur naturally and which are inhibiting.

Ideological Space

Ideological space differs from religious space since it is invariably more secular and a meeting-place for ideas and views to be compared and contrasted. But these ideologies are not placed one above the other and are even reconciled in some instances. This is not an effect that would be produced by the construct of "otherness", developed to challenge established norms from which literature and society are viewed. Binary oppositions and an alienating effect are produced by the concept of "otherness", but to counter this effect the idea of "decentering" was developed in postmodernism, in order to produce greater relativity and plurality. Hutcheon (1988:62) notes some of the implications of this transition in the following passage:

> And there have been liberating effects of moving from the language of alienation otherness) to that of decentering (difference), because the center used to function as the pivot between binary opposites which always privileged one half: white/black,

> male/female, self/other, intellect/body, west/east, objectivity/subjectivity – the list is now well known, but if the center is seen as a construct, a fiction, not a fixed and unchangeable reality, the 'old either-or begins to break down,'...and the new and- also of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities.

Mason and Dixon themselves represent such a dichotomy and a shift towards difference and multiplicity, by being at odds with seemingly irreconcilable differences, then towards the end of the novel moving towards each other, blurring their boundaries. As with the novels discussed in previous chapters, it is more a case of creating new possibilities than reiterating old oppositions. While the opposites mentioned above are pitted against each other, they cannot be measured or one put above the other, since there is nothing against which to objectively measure it, since objectivity is itself in opposition to subjectivity. So, for instance, Mason may superficially be considered the more religious of the two, with his background and visitations, while Dixon is more a self-proclaimed man of science, a Newtonian. Yet this simple distinction cannot be made, since the age in which they live is ambiguous in not providing a clear picture of which view is preferable or how to reconcile them.

Realising from which angle a historical account is written and the inclusion of different viewpoints contribute to a postmodern view of history. It is also important to bear in mind that people in power will produce most official versions, while historiographic metafiction aims to include the disempowered and dispossessed. Thematically this makes *Mason & Dixon* quite similar to Pynchon's other novels, in particular *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Religious Space

Religious space is something that cannot be ignored in the context of *Mason & Dixon*, owing to the religious struggles of some characters and the fact that a clergyman narrates the tale. "The narrative presence of Wicks Cherrycoke turns *Mason & Dixon* into an explicitly religious novel that explores the damaged legacy of Christianity, the emerging muscle of the Enlightenment and, finding both systems wanting for largely the same reasons, turning to a most unexpected source—the mysticism of the East—for (re)solution" (Dewey, 2000:113). An opportunity to derive a connection between

different times in history is created, where the reader may look on the attitudes prevalent in the eighteenth century and how they have progressed and evolved into current thinking. Ironically, the present is not necessarily put in contrast to the past, since this reference to eastern mysticism as a viable alternative to dogmatic Christianity is very contemporary. It could function to draw the ages closer together and to scrutinize the notion that things have changed drastically and irrevocably, in opposition to conventional views of progress. The idea is then also not to cling so steadfastly to rationality in all approaches to life and religion, but to allow for mystical experiences and the inexplicable.

The religious space in the novel is present not only in the content where the characters frequently engage in discussion or debate around religious issues, but also in the presence of the Reverend in such a central role. It is inevitable that his views will influence the narrative in one way or another, bringing the question of master narratives into the text. Depending on his orthodoxy or lack of it, he may colour the events as the will of God according to some divine plan. But this tendency is negated in postmodernism, which chooses not to see a coherent and cohesive pattern in history and regards it as an artificial construct, ultimately limiting and used by those in power to control.

For the most part, religion is regarded very sceptically, as can be seen in this statement on a religious institution: "Church of England, – that is, the *Ancestor of Troubles*,-" (38). This again brings in a historical perspective, since it points to the past as well as the future and puts an interpretation on it, which may also be regarded as unconventional by some. Dogma comes under scrutiny when Mason makes the following remark to Dixon: "'You're a Quaker, you're not supposed to believe in War'" (43). It raises the question whether people who profess to be of one faith should believe exactly the same thing and also implies the impossibility thereof. In *Mason & Dixon* the religious viewpoint is problematized considerably, bringing some of the postmodern absence of centre to bear on the eighteenth century.

An indication of the divergent influences on the text occurs early on, in particular related to Eastern mysticism, which plays a significant role in the novel. This underlines the contrast between Western and Eastern ways of thinking and also the

ignorance which exists with regard to knowledge of each other: "One of those moments Hindoos and chinamen are ever said to be having, entire loss of Self, perfect union with All, sort of thing. Strange Lights, Fires, Voices indecipherable" (10). Furthermore this is presented as so distant from the everyday experience of the listeners and teller that it must be told as a far-fetched tale. Yet the distinction between West and East is again blurred, as the superstitious character of this supposedly very rational age is highlighted in the first thirty pages, when the Learned English Dog makes its appearance and the travellers also consult a witch before they embark on their journey. Compared to this, Eastern mysticism seems a much more controlled and ordered discipline. Pynchon highlights the contradictions inherent in any culture's view of itself and others, by providing as many viewpoints as possible.

But knowledge of alternative systems does not mean they are readily accepted. All of the views explored in *Mason & Dixon* are not necessarily shown as working against each other, or a transition made from one to the other, but they are possibilities and evidence of diversity. So, for instance, the characters are sometimes also shown as captives of their own ideologies, from which they cannot reach other possibilities: "But, in that prison moment, Cherrycoke, a minister shaken by the stark evidence of the failure of the Christian system, intuitively touches – but quickly (dis)misses – a (re)solution that rests not in the West but in that very inexhaustible and mysterious East that will elude Cherrycoke for the rest of his life" (Dewey, 2000:116).

Literary Spaces

It seems clear that *Mason & Dixon* is not a realist historical novel and this serves to explain many of the postmodern features of the novel, such as the elaborate eighteenth century diction. At first it seems quite odd that Pynchon should choose to write a novel published near the end of the twentieth century in an imitation eighteenth century style. Yet this is one of the distinguishing characteristics that provide a clue to the true intent of the text to establish a dialectic with history. Through the literary spaces, of which the linguistic space forms a sub-division, the historical theme in the text can be explored.

Mason & Dixon is overtly historical in the sense that it is set in a particular historical period, the eighteenth century, making it unique in Pynchon's oeuvre of postmodern novels which are all set mainly in the twentieth century, although with many historical references. A cursory glance would seem to place the novel alongside many other conventional historical novels, such as *Gone with the Wind* or the historical romances of Scott, in the sense that it attempts to portray the period in which it is set, perhaps aiming to provide commentary and shed light on the present. *The Oxford Illustrated Guide to English Literature* states that: "many of Scott's novels are set in what one might call the fairly recent past...One theme of novels set in the recent past is the exploration of how the present situation has come about" (Rogers, 1996:323). Although the eighteenth century may have been the recent past in the age in which Scott was writing, the following description fits *Mason & Dixon* better: "Novels set in the distant past cannot usually shed light on the present in quite the same way, but they may offer analogies of present situations, or even an inspiration to the present" (Rogers, 1996:323). Within this perspective, different demands are placed on the novel than for one set in the Second World War, a more recent historical event. *Gravity's Rainbow* evidently has a more direct bearing on the present, although as postmodern fiction this does not make it a conventional historical novel.

There are significant differences in the way history was written and the way it is done in postmodern times. Importantly, the gap between historiography and fiction has narrowed, with historical writing adopting a narrative approach and vice versa. Hutcheon (1989:64) writes in this regard that:

> In all these, there is an urge to foreground, by means of contradiction, the paradox of the desire for and the suspicion of narrative mastery – and master narratives. Historiography too is no longer considered the objective and disinterested recording of the past; it is more an attempt to comprehend and master it by means of some working (narrative/explanatory) model that, in fact, is precisely what grants a particular meaning to the past.

This passage refers to the relation between writing history and postmodern works of fiction, dealing with history in some way or set in a historical period. It would seem that the line between the disciplines of fiction and historiography has become blurred, which is one of the important distinguishing characteristics of *Mason & Dixon* named

in this passage. Since *Mason & Dixon* is a work of historiographic metafiction, with the relation between historiography and fiction at its centre, fact and fiction naturally become a focal point in this discussion, as can be gathered from the following passage by Hutcheon (1988:93) on historiographic metafiction:

> Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity.

Foregrounding the nature of fiction and historiography as constructions plays a major part in the interpretation thereof, since it changes the definition of truth-value. Characteristics of historiographic metafiction, such as the rejection of master narratives and an emphasis on contextualization, which will be discussed in the next section, modify the meaning of truth and make way for more flexible and hopefully more realistic interpretations.

Linguistic Space

A number of significant differences are present in *Mason & Dixon* with regard to conventional historical fiction, giving the text the characteristics of historiographic metafiction as it is called in postmodernism. Broad differences include the style in which it is written, quite a plausible eighteenth century idiom, a mock imitation of the writing of the time, yet obviously out of place for the twentieth century. Conventional historical writing normally does not go quite as far in recreating a sense of the time, rather relying on description and dialogue for this.

As an example of how rigorously the peculiarities of an eighteenth century writing style are followed, almost any sentence may suffice, such as: "...tho' she's certainly not as eye-catchingly rigg'd out tonight as he's seen her before, – nor can he immediately 'spy any of her Companions" (299). Some nouns are capitalized, but this is not done in a consistent, systematized way, as would be the case in spelling. A possible effect of this would be to cast more uncertainty on the reader, in order to

emphasize the idea of unfamiliar territory being traversed. The historical setting and events would then be renewed and not comfortably glossed over, also drawing the reader's attention to the fact that it is not possible to know exactly what happened or what it was like to live in the eighteenth century, yet establishing a medium for a postmodern interpretation. It may also make the idea of a subjunctive space more acceptable, through the strangeness for the postmodern reader. Further features are the diction used, such as the interjection in: "Huz? We get along" (300) and truncated words such as "rigg'd" and "'spy". Although these examples are taken from dialogue, the same devices are used in the prose.

Pynchon jars the reader into self-consciously realizing that the novel is written from a twentieth century perspective. The objective is not solely to recreate the feel of the eighteenth century, but rather to question the validity of writing about a historical period, whether it would be possible to capture it accurately in any case. The style of writing is an example of how Pynchon manages to integrate aspects of the novel into the central problematic surrounding the fashioning of the historical space, creating a text in which parts relate to each other in unexpected ways to form rich possibilities for interpretation. Similar to Pynchon's other novels and as shown in the chapters on *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow,* every feature contained in the form of the novel is put to use in contributing as much possible interconnectedness and plurality of meaning. What differs strikingly, also in terms of historical novels in general, is the integral way in which style and diction is linked to the historical space. Usually the style would not play such an important part in creating the feel of the period and explicating some of its characteristics and complexities, but would rather be treated as a means to an end, its purpose to describe so that interpretation is made mainly through what is said and only inferred marginally from how it is said. This conventional use of style and diction is natural since, apart from an author's personal style and some period dialogue, there is not such a great focus on stylistic features, making this a truly unique feature of *Mason & Dixon.*

Self-referential Space

Another concept is the self-conscious nature of postmodern fiction, which is quite an integral part. It can be expressed in a different way as Hutcheon remarks (1989:49):

"This is postmodern de-naturalizing – the simultaneous inscribing and subverting of the conventions of narrative". Subversion of conventional notions of history is the end result.

Self-reflectiveness is also a characteristic of other historiographic metafiction, such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles, in which the reader "...is never allowed to ignore the lessons of the past about the past or the implications of those lessons for the historical present" (Hutcheon, 1988:88). One of the effects that this brings about is the shattering of the illusion that the text is an absolute representation of the past. An authorial interjection, such as the insertion of two possible endings to the novel, destabilizes the realist form in which most historic fiction is conventionally cast. The reader is led to regard the text as more open-ended and writerly, which consequently means that the focus is not mainly on actual historical accuracy, which is openly compromised in a text such as *Mason & Dixon*, but that the reader needs to keep an open mind about possibilities and alternative options.

Intertextual Space

Parody, combined with intertextuality, is used extensively in *Mason & Dixon* to form a historic context. Hutcheon (1988:118) states that "...one of the postmodern ways of literally incorporating the textualised past into the text of the present is that of parody", which makes sense in the context of this particular novel. For instance, in a parody of a historical figure, Dr. Franklin, is depicted as a "crackpot" theorist when he cites positive and negative electrical charges in the air as causing violence among people at the Cape of Good Hope: "...that vertiginous re-polarizing of the Air, and perhaps the Æther too, which may be affecting the very Mentality of the People there" (307). But this rationalisation sounds highly implausible, as Dixon also points out: "'Then what's America's excuse?' Dixon inquir'd, mild as Country Tea" (307). The question is left hanging at the end of the paragraph, as if no satisfactory answer can be given.

The use of parody and intertextuality, as well as the combination of these two, differ from its purpose in modernism or a previous movement, since postmodern works tend to push boundaries, in order to explore the limits of fiction and in turn derive more

meaning from it for a postmodern world. Hutcheon (1988:11) describes some of the characteristics of postmodern texts in relation to parody and intertextuality:

> In addition to being 'borderline' inquiries, most of these postmodernist contradictory texts are also specifically parodic in their intertextual relation to the traditions and conventions of the genres involved...Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies. It also forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality that is compatible with other postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions...

In *Mason & Dixon* the power of the bizarre and humorous is used effectively in serious subject matter, since the paradoxical nature of parody as described above is realized. It is strongly subversive. Many episodes occur which do not make sense in a conventional way and can be seen as diversions. The reader may conclude that it is pointless or inexplicable, but it can also be challenging, jarring the reader into reconsidering which alternative links and meanings may exist. Hutcheon (1988:39) makes an argument for the seriousness of irony, which includes parody:

> Many of the foes of postmodernism see irony as fundamentally anti-serious, but this is to mistake and misconstrue the critical power of double-voicing. As Umberto Eco has said, about both his own historiographic metafiction and his semiotic theorizing, the 'game of irony' is intricately involved in seriousness of purpose and theme. In fact irony may be the only way we *can* be serious today.

By making some parts not quite believable, yet presenting the novel as historical material, the story is undermined and this a double voicing achieved in *Mason & Dixon.* The seriousness of parody lies in its function: it signals that the author is investigating the subject matter from a postmodern perspective. Although the text is anchored historically, the use of parody assures that it does not assume authority as the final or only word on the matter and stresses the need for contextualization, as Hutcheon (1988:39) states: "We cannot ignore the discourses that precede and contextualize everything we say and do, and it is through ironic parody that we signal our awareness of this inescapable fact. The 'already-said' must be reconsidered and can be reconsidered only in an ironic way".

In *Mason & Dixon* the most immediate parody occurs in style, represented by the eighteenth-century diction in which the novel is written. The novel in its modern form originated in the eighteenth century, with episodic tales such as *Tom Jones* by Fielding. More specifically this form of novel is known as picaresque, which is also parodied by Pynchon. Most of the fantastic events are also not explained, since the novel does not aim to provide a neat framework within which to view it. The main characters are on a journey, which does not have a clear outcome. Though they may have a task to fulfil, the meaning and effect of this is not apparent, but left to future generations to speculate on.

Textual Space

The first contact between Mason and Dixon is made by way of letters, which also introduce them to the reader. A glimpse of the future relationship between them is placed between the two letters, which already gives an idea of the nature of each of the characters. Dixon's letter seems written in a very humble spirit and Mason confesses later (but in the part presented with the letters) to being taken in by this, although it was "Bitter deception..." (13). The difficulty of the relationship between the characters, as well as the difficulty of representing the characters themselves, are foregrounded, producing an intriguing effect leading to the realisation that all is not and will not be as it seems. This form of prolepsis leads to a very different interpretation of the letters than the letters on their own would have, leading to more anticipation.

Various texts are encountered and referred to in the novel, such as the poems *The Pennsylvaniad* and *The Line* by Timothy Tox from which passages are quoted as epitaphs for some chapters or used in the prose. The textual space created by this leads to uncertainty for the reader about the authenticity of the material, whether it exists as real documents written in the eighteenth century or whether it is an authorial invention not for actual historical accuracy but to make the illusion of the historical period appear more real. A similar situation is encountered with the characters, many of which are real historic personages:

> As the reader sinks his teeth into the text, he or she is confronted by personalities directly from our history, people whom he or she knows to be 'real.' Documents purporting to be authentic, such as *The Pennsylvaniad, The Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon,* and the works of Cherrycoke, add to this apparent authenticity. Inevitably, the reader must ask, 'Is this true or is this made up?' Depending upon the insistence of our questioning, we soon discover that some of the purported facts are real and some are imagined (Foreman, 2000:161-2).

The authenticity of historical documents also becomes unclear as the distinction between facts and fiction is blurred. So the reader may see it as a relatively common device in historical fiction that the novel contains the Rev. Wicks Cherrycoke's *Spiritual Day-Book* as a type of fictional diary, but some of the other documents may prove to be harder to categorize. Certainly the textual space, whether the texts are real or not, aims to enhance the experience of the historic period for the reader and impart ideas related to the worldview prevalent at the time (as can be perceived by research in the present). Since not every reader will verify the facts in the novel, this uncertainty would seem to be an acceptable part of the reading process and rather serves to illustrate the process of forming history at work. Foreman (2000:162) makes the following statement with regard to history as a construction: "By blurring the boundary between history and fiction, Pynchon forces us to see history as a construction. If we view the novel with this in mind, we find that the novel is in fact a discourse, a telling of the story of English men of science by Rev. Cherrycoke".

Narrative Space

Mason & Dixon delves most directly into history of all Pynchon's novels, although each contains an historical slant. It dwells on the distant past, at first glance seemingly in the form of a conventional historical novel, but can be classified as historiographic metafiction. Consider the following from *The Politics of Postmodernism,* regarding the postmodern view of history: "Historiographic metafiction is written today in the context of a serious contemporary interrogating of the nature of representation in historiography. There has been much interest recently in narrative – its forms, its function, its powers, and its limitations – in many fields, but especially in history" (Hutcheon, 1989:50). Narrative comes under scrutiny in order to see how it functions, since it also plays a part in the telling of history, which

may shed some light on the nature of history. Since *Mason & Dixon* is largely narrated by a reverend that claims to have a degree of first-hand knowledge of the events, it places the act of speaking above the act of writing in historical narrative, also emphasizing the subjective nature of documentation.

Mason & Dixon is cast in the form of a traveller's tale, told by Reverend Cherrycoke to members of his family. The implication for subjectivity in the novel is apparent, as the Reverend certainly uses his own perspective and interpretations, a tendency also found in historiographic metafiction:

> ...historiographic metafictions appear to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view...or an overtly controlling narrator...In neither, however, do we find a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty. This is not a transcending of history, but a problematized inscribing of subjectivity into history (Hutcheon, 1988:117).

In some parts of the story he has been present, but a large part has also been told to the Reverend from various sources. There are interludes at the beginning of some chapters, where the situation in which the tale is told is revisited, with comments made by the characters. These comments reveal various ideological positions. In this sense history is regarded as something pliable, not a complete text, but a text which needs to be interpreted and qualified. An aspect that makes *Mason & Dixon* more complex is the fact that both modes of narration mentioned above are used, with the reverend as an overtly controlling narrator and various voices heard in episodes. Since the title of the novel already invokes the two main characters involved, they must be regarded as very important in the sense that, in spite of all the incidental episodes and themes, the novel must be about them. For the largest part Mason and Dixon act as observers of the cultural climate around them, but each also represents a certain ideology. But even this distinction becomes blurred as they sometimes each act "out of character" in accordance with the postmodern characteristic of crossing boundaries.

Contextualization is used in the text in one way by placing the narrative within the framework of the teller and listeners. So, for instance, different voices placed in the

text form a discussion on religion, in order to show different viewpoints so that there is not really a centralized view on religion. Contradictions and doubt occur, for instance where the Reverend, while sailing on the *Seahorse,* contemplates the worth of his daily devotions (31). Otherwise, while he is narrating the story, persons present form an interesting representation of possible viewpoints, such as Cousin Ethelmer who is from a college and irreligious, perhaps pointing towards intellectual trends in the future or simply youthful irreverence. The twins act appropriately as children, astonished and engrossed, with the possibility that they may still be formed to develop in any direction.

Metaphorical Space

Surveying is a central metaphor in the novel for creating order and by its nature takes place in a physical environment. But this environment also creates a space in the text where different views can be brought together and contrasted. As Saltzman (2000:85) states on the topic: "*Mason & Dixon* is a polyphonic work where surveying is deconstructed by contrasting speakers into a process that is viewed from radically differing perspectives. The survey and the map that will be its end result are therefore destabilized as concepts subjected to endless reinterpretation as the narrative progresses." Different voices mean a foregrounding of the act of interpretation, which gives the text its self-consciously postmodern character.

The metaphorical space lends itself to the construction of a relation between the act of writing and the act of surveying, which also ties in with the subjunctive space. First a passage from Tanner (2000:225) that expands on the relation between the subjunctive space and what he calls the "indicative":

> The new country, the United States of America, depended for its existence both as entity and concept on two things – appropriated, surveyed, legally apportioned land; and a sense of an unchartered, inexhaustibly bounteous west, a plenitude of possibilities. Measurement and dream – in Pynchon's terms, the indicative and subjunctive. Among many other things, this novel is a celebration of America as a last realm of the Subjunctive and an elegiac lament for the accelerating erosion of that subjunctivity.

This passage touches on a theme in *Mason & Dixon,* also found in *Gravity's Rainbow*, namely the problems raised by dichotomies or opposites. Whereas the novel focuses on the subjunctive, in the sense of what might have been, there is also a strong sense of reality in terms of the historical legacy of America. In the final analysis the novel is an exploration of American history as much as it is a narrative of the two surveyors's lives. Since they are linked to America in such a direct way, their travels and opinions also have a bearing on the image of America and serve to bring other parts of the world towards it. Their surveying is a necessity, but is not without its disadvantages, since by laying down boundaries, the possibilities diminish and become tied down. Ownership is limiting and in dividing the land into fixed parts, the opportunities for change become less and less. So the correspondence between writing and surveying is of a dual nature. On the one hand, it can be a defiant act that illuminates and creates possibilities, similar to a subjunctive space. On the other hand, it can be limiting since it lays down concepts as boundaries.

In the passage by Tanner it appears that surveying necessarily involves the forming of boundaries, but that it is also crucial for the development of a country. The phrase "measurement and dream" seems to echo the act of writing, since fiction or even the re-telling of historical events includes casting it in a tangible form as words, even though the material dealt with is imagined or difficult to pin down. The truth-value of a text must achieve a balance between what exists and how to convey that reality from an author's perspective, which may be very idiosyncratic. Surveying creates potential in a landscape for human consumption; it is in the hands of the surveyor to decide how to divide it and measure accurately, even though the assignment may have come from elsewhere. In this manner the writer also takes stock of the world around him or her and attempts to provide as accurate a picture without losing sight of certain goals, since it is also an inner landscape which is depicted. The following passage taken from Brink (1983:169) describes this process:

> The writer is not concerned only with 'reproducing' the real. What he does is to perceive, below the lines of the map he draws, the contours of another world, somehow a more 'essential' world. And from the interaction between the land as he *perceives* it to be and the land as he knows it *can* be, someone from outside, the 'reader' of the map, watches – and aids – the emergence of the *meaning* of the map.

To this it may be added that the writer also fantasizes the impossible, not for mere whimsicality but to enable interpretations that he or she feels may not be possible in an entirely literal mode. Hence Pynchon uses parody, humour and fantasy in his work. This also ties in with the subjunctive space, since the writer must keep track of reality and yet expand on it imaginatively, as indicated in the passage above. By not merely recording events objectively and passively, the writer actively interacts with the material and imbues surveying with creativity. Yet the creation of boundaries and divisions, although useful in ordering the world, is not without its problems, as expressed in Pynchon's work and noted in the following passage taken from Tanner (2000:228-9):

> 'North and South' is just one more example of the pernicious binary habit of thought which Pynchon sees as having been so disastrous for America. He traces it back to the Puritan division – or line of demarcation – between the Elect and the Preterite, the Saved and the Damned, Us and Them.

Here a link with *Gravity's Rainbow* can be found once more in the familiar distinction between the Elect and the Preterite. The dichotomies that are encountered in that novel find conceptual form in the Line. In a way the Line represents the most extreme form of opposing and irreconcilable sides. In terms of the metaphorical space, the Line is an important concept in determining a series of lines and boundaries, as Tanner (2000:230) notes on *Mason & Dixon*:

> The whole book serves as a meditation on all kinds of lines and boundaries – boundaries of innocence, of marriage; boundaries between 'the Settl'd and the Unpossess'd'; the boundaries between reality and representation, boundaries of style...not to mention the barriers between people...it is evident that all too often boundaries become barriers.

In this passage the "boundaries between reality and representation" are particularly relevant for this dissertation. Even in terms of style Pynchon blurs boundaries and disdains conventional categorizations, confuting expectations for the reader by conveying serious material in a lighthearted manner or by mixing discourses normally regarded as incompatible and mutually exclusive. But something of the subjective nature of writing is imparted in the following passage taken from Brink (1983:117),

highlighting where the correspondences between the act of writing and the act of surveying are and where they end:

> In the quality of the writer's work, in the closeness with which his map approaches the truth of the geography he has observed and which he believes in, in the intensity and integrity of his moral and aesthetic response to the violence and the indignities of the world, we can discover something of our dangerous salvation.

But boundaries can also be crossed and in this the postmodern novelist may point to the possibilities for change. Pynchon in particular tends to blur boundaries expertly and in unexpected ways, sometimes pointing to the road which may have been taken historically, but which was not.

Character Space

In addition to the "decentering" perspective in the novel, the main characters represent the viewpoint from the margin. Although they contribute an important role in surveying the Line, which will have an effect on generations to come, they are placed inside the dominant culture yet in service of this culture, without having any real say. Their opinions and ideological standpoints do not amount to much in an executive sense, meaning they will not have such a great interest in preserving the official historical record. "To be ex-centric, on the border or margin, inside yet outside is to have a different perspective, one that Virginia Woolf...once called 'alien and critical,' one that is 'always altering its focus,' since it has no centering force" (Hutcheon, 1988:67). For the subjunctive space this means that the main characters will be in a better position to observe events and persons in a way not consistent with some historical viewpoint, as when writing a biography.

Some of the characters seem out of place in an eighteenth century setting, such as a female scientist, who treats scientific instruments as mystical instruments at times. Her manner is described as follows: "Holding out her hand, and before Dixon can begin to incline to kiss it, shaking his, as men do" (299). Many characters produce an emphasis on the unconventional and unexpected. In some cases it may be

anachronism or suggest that postmodern concepts are not as new or belong as exclusively to the twentieth century as widely thought.

Physical Space

While the Reverend is telling his tale, the twins interrupt at times to pose questions, providing an opportunity to interject the view that a child might have of the narrative and in keeping with the different perspectives that the text contains with regard to the narrative. Regarding the crossing of the equator and the initiation ceremony associated with it, they ask the following: "'Why?' the Twins wish to know. 'It sounds more like Punishment. Did somebody make it a crime to cross the Equator?' 'Sailors' Pranks, Lads, – ignoring 'm's best,' huffs Uncle Ives. 'And a foolish rowdy-dow over some Geometers' Abstraction that cannot even be seen.'" (56). The fact of the line's non-existence is illuminated in the typical jesting fashion Pynchon employs throughout *Mason & Dixon*. The question that the Twins ask is a more ominous foreshadowing of issues regarding boundaries.

The effect of artificially created borders is shown when Mason and Dixon cross the equator the sea-voyage that they undertake to the Cape. "In such a recreational Vacuum, the Prospect of crossing the Equatorial Line soon grows unnaturally magnified, as objects in certain Mirages and Apparitions at Sea, – a Grand Event, prepared for weeks in advance" (55). This is an example of an artificial border or line and the importance which can be attached to it. The line is not entirely arbitrary, since it is the imaginary line dividing the Earth into southern and northern hemispheres. But the equator still does not exist in reality and is an instance of human measurement system, of dividing the sphere of the Earth into longitude and latitudinal lines. In Mason and Dixon's position as astronomers and land-surveyors, these lines form a part of their everyday work. The lines represent an abstract system used to relate various positions to each other, almost like a map but not representing physical terrain, so that the position of a certain point and consequently a physical area can be defined. The first part of the novel is called "Latitudes and Departures", which also stresses this importance, but the point is that it remains essentially intangible. This line can be compared to the Line that Mason and Dixon will be measuring later on, which will lead to future conflict.

* * *

As the most explicitly historical of Pynchon's novels, *Mason & Dixon* has contributed a very definite view of the pliability of the historical record. In the text the presence of a variety of voices ensure that plurality is favoured over more limited interpretations. Historical space can be conceived as a natural way of re-telling history, as evidenced by parts consisting of fantasy and unbelievable events interspersed into the narrative. The storytelling tendency of humanity is explored in this manner. This differs from *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* by delving into the past in a very direct though multi-levelled storytelling mode, speculating on possible origins, while utilizing the postmodern innovations of historiographic metafiction.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation examined various kinds of space as these are manifested in some of Pynchon's seminal novels. Attention was paid to the concept of historical space since it occupies a central position in these novels. Throughout the argument presented the texts have been considered more important than the theoretical concepts used to examine and analyse each text. This is not to deny that the theoretical concepts are an essential component, especially with regard to contextualizing the texts within the larger intellectual, philosophical and historical context of postmodernism.

This method was chosen since a fusion of spaces can provide a more complex and consequently more holistic interpretation of a text, than analysing only one aspect such as history, creating fruitful ground for new connections. One of the underlying points of departure was that this process could be associated with the reading process, in which the reader needs to keep track of events, characters, themes and recurring motifs, in order for the novel to function as a sign-system.

In *The Crying of Lot 49* the historical dimension is already undeniably present thematically, but as has been shown, this differs considerably from the way it is presented in *Mason & Dixon* and even *Gravity's Rainbow*. These three novels can even be said to successively enlarge the historical space, which becomes more pervasive and is most evident in the historiographic metafiction of *Mason & Dixon*. Whereas *The Crying of Lot 49* deals with history thematically in a manner central to the plot, history becomes a more integral part of the novel through the background of the Second World War in *Gravity's Rainbow,* while in *Mason & Dixon* history is integrated into the structure, as a recounting of the past, and even the style of the novel is adapted to suit the period. What does occur consistently in all three novels are a questioning of the facts of history, and a continuous probing into the nature of history by the central characters or narrators. In this process the commonsense

concepts which a reader may entertain with regard to what is possible or not, what is real or not, as well as the truth-value of historical documents and facts, are disputed.

In accordance with the idea mentioned in the introductory chapter, viz. of place as a palimpsest (which is itself historical), space has been used in this dissertation as an overlapping and overarching concept to foreground the notion of history and demonstrate the complexity with which the subject matter is treated in the novels discussed. In addition, using an umbrella term makes it easier to analyse and dissect other thematic and formal aspects as each can be examined and treated individually, in as much detail as necessary. This includes using the most appropriate and relevant theoretical concept and viewpoint, while retaining a connection between parts and viewing the work as a whole.

The following briefly recounts some of the main issues and techniques regarding spaces found in Pynchon's novels and used in this dissertation.

Overlapping Spaces

As demonstrated in the second chapter on the densely and concisely constructed novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, this dissertation has attempted to show how various spaces overlap and interweave, while at the same time contributing to the particular brand of historical space in the novel. For instance, the linguistic space of the novel, while not directly linked with the historical space, nevertheless has an indirect influence on the interpretation thereof through the novel's use of postmodernist narrative strategies that have a bearing on the historical import of events in the text. In relation to deconstruction the role of signification is quite important, a fact foregrounded by Oedipa's search for the exact meaning of certain words found in a historical play, subtleties which have a great impact in terms of the historical origin of the play. The meaning of words have changed imperceptibly in some cases and some have fallen into disuse over time, making a precise reproduction of the text impossible and leading to strange results. What could possibly be a larger plot is uncovered, which in turn may be construed as a master narrative, but in reality only manifests as paranoia and cannot be proven to exist.

In spite of all her efforts, Oedipa is nevertheless unable to reduce her search to a single signified, in this case a neat solution that would explain all the inconsistencies which she encounters. Investigating the contextualized historical meaning or possible alterations and influences thereafter, also even seeking the verification of the authenticity of the material, bring forth nothing conclusive and only lead to confusion. This is nowhere highlighted more poignantly than when Oedipa says to a few students regarding the writer of the Jacobean revenge tragedy: "I would like to find out...something about the historical Wharfinger. Not so much the verbal one" (Pynchon, 1979:104), and when she is rather sharply rebutted in discussion: "'The historical Shakespeare...The historical Marx. The historical Jesus.' 'He's right...they're dead. What's left?' 'Words.' 'Pick some words...Them we can talk about.'" (Pynchon, 1979:104). The finding correlates with a decentred concept of language, which is important as a development in postmodernism, while at the same time influencing how history is viewed and interpreted ultimately. In this case the linguistic space undermines the validity of regarding words and documents as representations of history itself, since it can only be an indirect medium.

As another example there is the responsibility for the execution of the will, which is passed on to Oedipa in *The Crying of Lot 49,* which directs the novel unmistakably towards the past and points to the inescapable influence of history though the individual may be unaware of it. Throughout the novel these spaces such as linguistic space and textual space contribute in forming the historical space.

The Textualized Past

The Crying of Lot 49 explores the contention that historical investigation cannot be a static endeavour, but that it is an ever-expanding field in terms of ideas, philosophies and critical stratagems employed. *Gravity's Rainbow* develops the idea even further in the action and plot of the novel so that it can be read as a literary or textual version of history. The textualized past is thus treated as a work of literature and approached in the way a critic or scholar would approach a fictional text. Unexpected means of recording history, such as graffiti, appear in both *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, thereby stressing the way in which documentation changes and the fact that the historic context must be taken into account for a text to be interpreted

appropriately. This combination of the textual space and interpretative space affects the historical space in the sense that the dynamics of changing modes of interpretation and the nature of each text have to be kept in mind. A positive view of this situation may regard the discrepancy caused by change over time as an opportunity to bring forth previously unrealized possibilities for interpreting historical material. Contextualization through textual space and interpretative space will then play an important role.

The spoken word is contrasted with the written word in *The Crying of Lot 49* particularly clearly in the distinction between the text of the play as opposed to the performance thereof. Since a play is written to be performed, the study of the text as only words on a page seems static and self-defeating. In any case, it would seem that it could only take a scholar so far, yet it is virtually the only way of analysis. Words seem more captured on a page, whereas being spoken seems to allow a measure of freedom more linked to action. The director of the play makes it clear that he is not concerned with overly analysing the words of the text, but rather with giving them life as he calls it, in fact freeing them up. The action of the past or re-enactment thereof is of greater consequence than solely the study thereof.

- **Documents**

Despite the grandness of history and the perception it engenders of great events involving the fates of nations, it can also have a personal dimension, as seen in *The Crying of Lot 49.* Although the strategy of personalizing history by bringing it to the level of the individual (thereby forcing its continuous reinterpretation) is one of the primary objectives of much historical fiction, *The Crying of Lot 49* cannot really be classified as such. It is rather an investigation into how the individual may be situated in relation to history and how he or she may react when confronted by it. Historical documents of course play an important role in preserving the past and are also a means of expression. And it is precisely this textual space, which is constituted by a range of documents from letters to plays to graffiti, which is explored extensively in *The Crying of Lot 49.* Documents are also important in Pynchon's other novels and usually do not have singular, restricted interpretations. Again the revenge tragedy in *The Crying of Lot 49,* which Oedipa scrutinizes in order to derive as many possible

meanings from it as she can, is a case in point as the interpretations arrived at are mostly ambiguous.

It is striking that *The Crying of Lot 49* begins with the reading of a will, meaning that the catalyst for Oedipa's journey into the past is a text. The interpretation that is needed for the task of executing a will constitutes an act of reading, which establishes her role as reader at the outset of the novel. As the will only provides tenuous clues to what needs to be done, an unspecified object to what must be executed, it sets a precedent for the way in which many historical texts, such as a Jacobean revenge tragedy, an old film and a stamp collection, will be treated. If the landscape of America is regarded as the estate of Pierce Inverarity, since he had a large number of assets in the form of property, then Oedipa's task in settling affairs would invariably be in part to establish the nature of this landscape, even if it is only to determine the extent of it. In this context the search for verification and authenticity makes sense, since she would have to determine what belongs to the estate and what is excluded, linking with the notion of the Preterite and Elect as encountered in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The implication for texts is far-reaching since it would mean that artifacts that are not normally regarded as documents could be included, and in fact Oedipa interprets graffiti, letters, stamp collections and films in her quest for the truth.

In *Mason & Dixon* the validity of documents from or related to the past is equally apparent, but here it extends to the spoken word as much as to the written. Throughout this voluminous novel, the past is treated as fiction, creating a vast historical space in line with many of the characteristics of contemporary historiographic metafiction. While the version of the historical journey undertaken by Mason and Dixon, as told by the reverend, is quite entertaining as he employs suspenseful techniques commonly used by storytellers, the historical aspects are not completely verifiable, except where these clearly contradict the historical record. A great deal of fabulation takes place in the form of unbelievable events and inventions, which are told in a realistic way but which must be fictional and forms part of the subjunctive space. Therefore there is not such an incessant need, as found in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, to find what is true and what not, since imagination is contrasted with the rational aspects of the age and accepted as a normal, even essential and defining, human attribute.

The Second World War, as presented in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a great overshadowing event of historical significance, having an impact on the individual and even humanity as a whole. That is why this phenomenon is so intensely investigated and scrutinized in the novel, in order to establish possible perspectives, consequences and actions. In the light of the powerful dehumanizing effect of this, literary space can play an important role in determining possibilities for interpreting the situation and re-defining, re-claiming words and discourse as distinctly human activities. The contention is that the literary practices of interpretation have not adequately developed to match the tempo of change in the world, which would make these less relevant than they could otherwise be. *Gravity's Rainbow* may also represent an attempt to interpret the state of history, how humanity has arrived at its situation in the twentieth century, not only in a retrospective way but from within the culture and age itself. This is a significant technique for ensuring innovation in thinking and style, while preventing the strictures of realism being applied to the material.

Postmodernism and Spaces

In accordance with the context of the American counter-cultural movement, which started in the fifties and sixties and the spirit of which Pynchon adopted, the complacency of accepting cultural norms and viewing the text in a simplistic manner are questioned. This is most evident in literature and Pynchon's novels through postmodern techniques employed, which question the validity of absolute truths by pluralizing in various ways such as plot and interpretation. Some knowledge of postmodern theoretical positions and philosophical assumptions, such as deconstruction and historiographic metafiction, is needed in order to fully grasp the implications that the novels discussed may hold for the interpretations of space as proffered in the dissertation.

Narrative Space

The paranoia that characters frequently experience in Pynchon's work, can be said to represent a space where grand narratives are distrusted or discredited. Where the phenomenon of paranoia (which is also a form of mental illness) causes the sufferer to

attempt to form a coherent view of events, the end-result is a harsh, excessive, out-of-control signification. Master narratives represent part of this over rationalization.

The Crying of Lot 49 follows a trend in postmodern fiction to question actively the role of the reader. With the kind of interactivity normally present in the detective novels of Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett, the reader is lured into the mechanics and details of the mystery created by the convolutions of the plot. The originality and interesting aspects of the novel lie in this approach to organising history, making the reader an amateur historian, or at least an idea of what it must be like actively researching an obscure part of history. But *The Crying of Lot 49* refutes the expectation that the mystery will be solved, which indicates a break with an epistemological focus.

Mason & Dixon offers the most direct challenge to the formal historical record, as well as being an ironic play on historical events. Portraying history as a metanarrative is to a large extent avoided as the effects of various actions and events are left open-ended. A multitude of viewpoints are played against each other, but all on an equal level. Consequently, it is up to the reader to interpret the significance of the events surrounding the two main characters.

Entropy

Entropy is a theme that receives extensive treatment, especially in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. In these novels civilization takes a step backward to a degree, since the flow of information becomes overloaded and meaningless. Using strategies similar to deconstruction, *The Crying of Lot 49* is at pains to show how language can be viewed as a closed, decentered system. Through the scientific concept of entropy it is stated that within a closed system there will always be a loss of energy, so that the continual decline inevitably leads to a state of uniformly distributed energy, which leaves none to be transmitted and causes the system to lose its dynamism. In order for the system to continue to function effectively, there needs to be new input, at least as far as information systems are concerned. It is also found in the idea of Maxwell's Demon, originating in the nineteenth century and integrated into *The Crying of Lot 49*. This Demon would be able to sort higher energy molecules

from those with a lower level of energy and separate them into two compartments, meaning that the flow of energy would not stop but be able to continue indefinitely for as long as the sorting continues. Oedipa contests the point that this sorting would not count as work: "Sorting isn't work?" (Pynchon, 1979:59), although here is another difference in concepts, as is explained to her: "It's mental work...but not work in the thermodynamic sense" (Pynchon, 1979:59). The impossibility of a perpetual motion machine is stressed, even if it is only theoretical, since in her role as Maxwell's Demon, sorting through the information of history that she gathers for what is false or true, she does get very exhausted and starts losing hope when not seeming to get anywhere.

One interpretation of this is that perhaps science only indicates the inevitability of the outcome of entropy and that it is powerless to halt it. Slothrop finds himself in a similar situation in *Gravity's Rainbow*, where a search leads him to conflicting pieces of information that cannot provide him with a clear picture of what he is looking for or how to find it. It seems that a basic distinction between what is real and what is not lacks here, since it is impossible to be an impartial observer as Maxwell's Demon suggests. Maxwell's Demon is in fact only part of the same system, subject to the same rules or laws and thus unable to lift the effect of entropy. Such an observer is also found in *Mason & Dixon* in the person of the narrator, Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke. The natural function of a storyteller is to sift through facts events and information to retain what is relevant to the story and also to cast it in an effective form. Once again the reader will be involved in correlating facts and fantasy as it is found in the text, measuring it against established historical events and personae. The relevance of entropy to the historical space becomes apparent through this process.

Cinematic Space

A relatively general statement that can be made about all of the novels discussed is that they are very contemporary, rooted in the twentieth century in spite of all the historical aspects involved. They are visions or documents of the present, utilizing the paradigm of postmodernity, questioning and exploring it while still calling up the past. Each forms a unique vision taken individually, but contributes to a larger picture when considered together.

Included in this rootedness in the contemporary, are the many references to popular culture and concern with this phenomenon. *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* are filled with references to television and film that make up an important part of these novels. The same applies to *Vineland*, not discussed here, which even features some television addicts. The novels not only delve into history but form a chronicle of our times as well. Although Pynchon is regarded as a very literary author, his work delves into aspects of culture that would not normally be considered worthy of literary interest, such as a popular television show, which is in keeping with the postmodern characteristic of breaking barriers between high and low culture.

A major development in the twentieth century, namely the cinema, is also an entirely new artistic medium, besides its cultural and economic aspects, which makes it a very useful signifying practice for expression and creating connections or meaning through images and narrative. It is integrated into *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, and made into a very important structural element, to a lesser degree in the former than the latter. *Gravity's Rainbow* has an overall aim to bring together as many parts of Western culture reaching as far back into history as possible, so that this development needs to be featured strongly. In fact, in a cynical statement on the last page of the novel, when it is revealed that what has passed was really a film and casting the reader as a spectator portrayed in an audience with a rocket looming over their heads, the narrator ponders: "The film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out. It was difficult even for us, old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?) to tell which before the darkness swept in" (Pynchon, 2000:760). This scenario seems to imply that the twentieth century reader (or rather, audience) cannot properly integrate information, form a view of the whole or formulate a philosophy unless resorting to the framework provided by the cinema, so completely has it permeated the thought of society, at least those parts completely Westernized. This would make it literature's task not merely to ignore or discount these developments, but to find new ways of expression in order to adapt to accommodate it.

Parody

Subversiveness can be linked to parody, since it goes against the norm and is usually accompanied by a mocking tone. Parody is disruptive and used in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the other texts discussed in this dissertation as in much postmodern literature. The use of irony and parody can be ascribed to the aim of *Gravity's Rainbow* as a critique on the practices and conventions of the Western world in most of its aspects. Although the subject matter and themes, especially war, are treated seriously, snatches of humour and unexpected lightness contribute to an unsettling effect. The dual nature of irony and parody comes into play, as a humorous look at what is disturbing or shocking, challenging and exposing certain things as absurd while paying homage to it as well as acknowledging the power which it holds. In the chapter on *Mason & Dixon* this was examined in more detail since parody is used extensively in playing with the facts and important figures of history. Parody will naturally enable a more sympathetic stance towards the telling of history from the side of the victim, oppressed or voiceless, as can be seen for instance in Pynchon's use of anti-heroes in each novel: Oedipa, Slothrop, Mason and Dixon, as well as the dichotomy of the Preterite and the Elect.

Pynchon's work is scattered, as part of the literary space, with numerous storylines, plots and episodes, sometimes fantastic and implausible, at other times more serious and emotive. The multiplication of plots is a postmodern technique and as an influence on the historical space, it has the effect of exhausting all possibilities, looking at history from as many angles as possible, which is one of the strongest features of these novels. For clarity's sake, and as a reminder of what really concerns the crux of the texts discussed, the following statement by Swartzlander (1988:135), used in the introductory chapter, needs to be revisited:

> Conventional approaches to history are parodied and trivialized: history as cause and effect, history as a record of man's progress, history as a procession of people, places, and events, and history as the manifestation of God. Instead we are presented with history as illusion, nightmare, the eternal struggle between the preterite and the elect. We are shown the inadequacies of any historical

perspective, and throughout the novels, we are forced to adopt a perspective that focuses on human relationships.

There is a tendency in more conventional forms of historical fiction to blur the line between historical facts, the plot of and events in the novel, as well as the characters involved, in order to get the reader thoroughly involved in the story. Through blending and casting fact and fiction in a believable form, the impression may be created for the reader that the novel is historically accurate and that this must be the way in which it "really" happened, though most of the characters may be fictional as well as the events, or at least altered and re-organized in order to fit into the structure of the novel.

However, in postmodern historiographic metafiction the reader is reminded of the artifice involved in the process of creating historical fiction, which foregrounds the constructed nature of the text. Techniques which may be used is to diverge from the widely accepted facts of history, by inserting characters or events into blatantly false or anachronistic situations, as it happens in Ismael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1978). The novel is a parody on nineteenth century slavery in America, featuring aeroplanes, televisions and an escaped slave who becomes a celebrity. Harriet Beecher Stowe also has her own television show. Although many fantastical elements are present, the work is not irrelevant or merely whimsical, since it does aim to provide social commentary, not only on the age portrayed in the novel, but postmodern times as well, in a way which is new, surprising and can only be done through the medium of parody.

As seen in *Mason & Dixon*, intertextuality is used to link with the past, to a great extent through the Jacobean revenge tragedy in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Parody is linked to intertextuality and used extensively, as one of the distinctly postmodern techniques in the novel. Form and content are parodied through describing the play in detail, providing extracts in blank verse in order to make it appear authentic, which is done very convincingly. Hyperbole is one of the devices used in parody that is also applied to the fictional play as historical document. Whereas this kind of play is known for its violent and tragic nature, the effect is exaggerated to the point of being ridiculous, but still close enough to the original form to be comparable and

recognizable, so that the original is reflected in a different light. *Mason & Dixon* parodies historical figures in the same way by exaggerating certain features but retaining enough similarities. Despite the time span that separates these novels, they are brought closer together through use of the same techniques, lending cohesion to Pynchon's work throughout changes in style and material, theme and subject matter.

* * *

Pynchon's novels are not limited to the details of daily living, relationships and experience, neglecting to take greater time spans into account and larger issues, such as history or religion. Neither are common human traits belittled and focussed solely on a cosmic vision which dehumanizes the characters, disregarding simplicities. The complex vision found in Pynchon's work combines these elements in order not to be reductive. It is taken into account that each age needs to be interpreted, from within itself and re-interpreted after it has passed. But this does not take place in a vacuum, since each interpretation will be tinged by the thought prevalent at the time. Through the many convolutions of historical space in Pynchon's novels, the complexity of the present as well as the relation to the past is illustrated. The texts discussed show the complexity and problems posed when interpreting historical events in a literary context. The themes and techniques supplement each other in such a way as to make these works and their approach to history undeniably postmodern.

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