

CHAPTER FOURTHE FABULISTS

The main thrust of this chapter is toward making out a case for the fabulist novel as prophecy as Kermode maintains rather than metafiction, i.e., fiction about fiction which is little more than a subjectless drift of cyphers.

Our contention is that this fiction is meaning-producing and offers new versions of violence and madness not wholly derived from contingent reality. The reason for the notion that the fabulist novel is a metaphor for itself can be attributed to the lack of durative space, as Todorov<sup>1</sup> puts it, between cause and effect. The fabulist novels do not reflect social concern directly but as Dikstein points out, "they illuminate society less through their content than through their experiments in form". The word *form* does not indicate mere technique, "but the pressure of individual vision from which new technique must flow".<sup>2</sup>

The basic assumptions from which this chapter proceeds may be summed up as follows in terms of both thematic and formal categories:

Thematically, novels discussed in this chapter seem to project history as a form of discourse. The much-vaunted formal

experimentation implies a basic need to shape human responses to "the fictive behaviour of the emerging actualities of a technocratic society".<sup>3</sup>

Kermode claims that American fabulists are expected to provide literary structures that would explain the structures of today's society, to play a prophetic role:

What you want now is meta-novels; you want things which tell you about the structure of the present and therefore give you some power to predict what is going to happen next. You want the novel in fact to be a prophecy.<sup>4</sup>

The individual in the semi-fabulist and fabulist work is up against the violence inherent in cultures. In semi-fabulation the central figure struggles to set himself free from that violence. In fabulation this struggle is given up because the individual becomes a cypher.

This phenomenon is reflected in the form of the fabulist work. To elucidate this point further, certain categories formulated by Todorov to define his idea of the fantastic can be reformulated for making the distinction between semi-fabulation and fabulation clearer. For Todorov "the fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader - a reader who identifies with the chief character - as to the nature of an uncanny event".<sup>5</sup>

The uncanny event does not alter reality but the character's delusion impels him to imagine that what he is

witnessing is unreal. Whereas the marvellous is that which leads one to believe that reality is controlled by laws unknown to man. The character of the fantastic work for Todorov is one who hesitates between the uncanny and the marvellous. I should like to propose here that the science fiction utopias, the futuristic landscapes in Vonnegut and Pynchon are the fabulist's structural parallels for Todorov's marvellous. The the fabulist character does not question their validity, indeed he behaves exactly like the character from fantastic literature who assumes that the supernatural does exist. On the other hand one might say that in semi-fabulation the hero who struggles to retain his hold over reality seems to function within the uncanny situation after experiencing considerable hesitation between the uncanny and the marvellous whereas the fabulist character seems to accept the marvellous situation as something real. Therefore the degree of struggle between the uncanny and the marvellous defines the extent of fabulation. The hesitation of the semi-fabulist character is conveyed to the reader who too must hesitate between the two poles of the uncanny and the marvellous. When these categories are applied to the thematics of semi-fabulation it should mean that the semi-fabulist character's hesitation between these two poles and his leaning toward the uncanny, that is, his conviction that he is merely being conned by a man-operated system and not by some unknown, unreal force, is the aesthetic cor<sup>2</sup>relative of his struggle against the protean nature of violence inherent in the culture.

The semi-fabulist character fights proteanism by assuming a positive schizophrenic mask. In fabulist works the entire frame within which the action takes place is fantasized. The ~~fabulist~~ fabulist does not start from a natural situation to reach its climax in the supernatural as does the <sup>semi-</sup>fabulist. In the fabulist frame we are plunged directly into the marvellous. The surreal does not encourage any hesitation. The questions raised in this chapter have to do with what happens to the structure of violence and madness in a work where every strand is an abstraction. We maintain that even in the works of the so-called fabulists considerable attempt is made to retain the discursive level in the form of dystopia in Vonnegut, fragments of history in Pynchon and fiction disguised as history in Barth. This discursive level is the referential frame to which the rhetorical gestures are multiple submissions. As Todorov puts it, "These are the two essential levels of verisimilitude: verisimilitude as discursive law - absolute and inevitable - and verisimilitude as masks, as a system of rhetorical methods tending to present these laws as so many submissions to the referent."<sup>6</sup> In Vonnegut, Pynchon and the early Barth, the rhetorical submissions, however varied and abstract ramify the meaning of violence and madness instead of destroying it. All of them draw on the technique and resources of modern systems of mass communication for restructuring realities in fictional terms. To quote Zavarzadeh:

The new communication technologies make the formulation of any encompassing authoritative visions increasingly more difficult, since they produce an information overload which gives such diverse and disparate views of reality that no single interpretive frame can contain the experience. The information reduction also expands the range of probable to the extent that it blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction.<sup>7</sup>

If right can be made to look wrong and vice-versa, violence can appear as charity and madness as sanity as in the works of Barth, Vonnegut and Pynchon:

One of the seminal features of this new situation, this zone of total probability is the inter-changeability of the ascertainable "face" in the experiential world and the made-up "fiction" of the imagination. The runaway contemporary technologies are turning the sensory world into a projected fiction and transforming unreal fantasies into actualities... observing this new "patareal" reality (to use Ishmael Reed's term) with its heavy symbolic load, fictive resonance, and ironic overtone is like entering the fantastic world of the fabulators...<sup>8</sup>

In Barth can be seen a clear movement from naturalism to fabulated history to pure fabulation. Violence and madness are progressively denuded of empirical resonances and become putative formulations. The question one asks then is, how does the reader react to acts of violence and madness? and what is the relationship between violence and madness in Barth's fiction and modern American experience? Before tackling these issues it is necessary to study the shift from naturalism to abstraction in Barth.

The early works, the Floating Opera and The End of The Road are largely naturalistic. A story unfolds conventionally, moves to a denouement. In the middle period covered by The Sot-Weed Factor we are presented with history as fable. In Giles Goat-Boy and Chimera Barth switches to complete fabulation where there is no attempt at realism. Giles, for example, is the progeny of a computer and a human being.

This movement is best illustrated by the change in his treatment of characters.

In his early works the central characters seem to protect themselves from the ravages of American life by cultivating an impenetrable detachment. Hendin calls them "psychic paralytics".<sup>9</sup> They have managed to anaesthetize themselves against pain.

They are not only detached, they are also manipulators. These manipulators are transmogrified into protean figures in the later books. But these later characters, although as important, are not the 'heroes'. They act as a foil to the protagonist who is an innocent and blunders through the world. The protagonists are Quixotes with glorious hopes and no idea of what awaits them in the big bad world.

Let us examine these three types of characters:

I. The naturalistic characters are different from Yossarian who is a man of sensibility and is pitted against a world which

has lost all sense of value. Barth's characters, on the other hand, are emotionally paralyzed and are themselves the cataclysmic agents of violence and destruction.

Human relationship gets short shrift at the hands of Barth. This is because his characters follow the path of non-involvement. As Hendin says, they believe that, "peace and innocence may be found in paralysis, the well of choicelessness where the numbed mind and non-being free you from being alive."<sup>10</sup> The protagonists of The Floating Opera and The End of the Road are detached to the point of being cold-blooded.

Tod Andrews (The Floating Opera) is equally detached in his public and private life. As a lawyer he takes only those cases which interest him. Winning or losing are immaterial to him as are his client's feelings. If this indifferent attitude sometimes results in the persecution of innocents, it does not bother him. Under certain circumstances, he says, he is not averse to "pillorying the innocent, to throwing my stone with the crowd, at some poor martyr. Irresponsibility, yes. I affirm, I insist upon my basic and ultimate irresponsibility".<sup>11</sup>

His cold-blooded detachment is seen clearly in the way he handles his affair with Jane. He is totally uninvolved with her. All he is interested in is whether the affair will follow the course he thinks it will. He has drawn an outline of what is likely to happen during the affair. The outline

runs through different stages, from I to XX. XV to XX, eg.,  
read like this:

XV Both h.& w. become more demanding of  
friend...  
XVI want declaration of love from friend.  
XVII Friend refuses - friendship cools  
XVIII Active dislike of friend for his  
ingratitude.  
XIX Suspension of affair  
XX Period of mutual silence...<sup>12</sup>

The affair follows this outline almost exactly. He manipulates the Macks in such a way that they come up with the responses he expects of them. He needs to destroy the Macks' affection as he had to kill the German Soldier. Hendin says, "the urge to kill any closeness in any encounter suffuses Andrew's life. For his alternative to detached cruelty is involved cruelty".<sup>13</sup>

Andrews deals with life by adopting a series of stances - he is, by turn, a saint, a cynic. The final stance is "the stance to end all stances... Suicide!"<sup>14</sup> Suicide does not terrify him. It initially delights him and then he is almost indifferent to the idea, going through his day routinely, as though there was nothing momentous to it. He does not spend it in contemplation or reverie. One is struck by the contrast to Quentin's day of agonized re-living of the past on the day he commits suicide. "It was a lovely day for suicide",<sup>15</sup> says Andrews in the tone of someone saying, "It was a lovely day for a swim".



Even his suicide plan reflects his detached cruelty, involving the annihilation of innocent people. He plots the blowing up of the floating opera during its evening performance so that he would be killed along with the others. The fact that others - including his own daughter - will be killed does not bother him. When his plan fails even that does not bother him:

Need I tell you that I felt no sense either of relief or of disappointment?... I merely took note of the fact that despite my intentions six hundred ninety-nine of my townspeople and myself were still alive.<sup>16</sup>

He, then, just as indifferently decides not to commit suicide.

Andrews regards his fellow men as : more or less pacific animals among whom it was generally safe to walk... or as a colony of more or less quiet lunatics among whom it was generally safe to live...<sup>17</sup>

He cannot see them as individuals. He ultimately comes to the conclusion that "nothing is intrinsically valuable; the value of everything is attributed to it, assigned to it, from outside, by people."<sup>18</sup>

Jacob Horner is another character for whom life holds no value. His emotional paralysis can be judged from the way he handles affairs. When he goes to a beach he feels he has to pick up a girl - although he does not much want to. He starts an affair with the wife of a man he respects, more out of

curiosity than love. Like A New Life, The End of the Road is set in a campus and has a triangular relationship. But whereas Levin agonizes over his affair, it does not make much of a dent in Horner except at the end when Rennie dies.

Horner is detached to the point of effacing himself out of existence. He needs his varied moods to give him the feeling that he is alive:

... a day without weather is unthinkable, but for me at least there were frequently days without any mood at all. On these days, Jacob Horner, except in a meaningless metabolic sense, ceased to exist, for I was without a personality.<sup>19</sup>

Like his counterpart, Tod Andrews, he is indifferent to human beings: "for human kind in general I had no feeling one way or the other..."<sup>20</sup>

II. The naturalistic character is transfigured into a protean character. The protean character retains the naturalistic character's traits of detachment and manipulation. What has been added is his need to transform himself into different people. He too is a survivor but his technique is not merely to cultivate indifference to face changing reality but to assume changing forms.

The protean trait is not just a strategy for survival, it can also be traced to modern man's inability to involve himself in anything.

Burlingame, says, Hendin, "multiplies himself out of the obsessional, paralytic bind of Horner and Andrews, out of human stature into a living demonstration of Flux."<sup>21</sup> He changes so swiftly and completely that even Ebenezer who has known him for many years, is not able to recognize him. Says Burlingame of his own proteanism: "Your true and constant Burlingame lives only in your fancy, as doth the pointed order of the world."<sup>22</sup>

Many minor characters in the book are also protean. Coode is a Catholic priest, Church-of-England minister, sheriff, captain, colonel, general. Sowter is a lawyer, physician, preacher. It gets so convoluted that no one is sure if Coode or Baltimore really exist or are created legends, whether they are enemies or secret partners.

Bray in Giles Goat-Boy plays such a variety of roles that he seems "a species instead of one man".<sup>23</sup> Unlike Burlingame or Milo, Bray is really that Archetypal protean character, the devil himself. Bray's miracles show an other-worldly power. Every Christ needs an anti-Christ figure. His function is to be driven out by the real saviour whose place he is trying to usurp. Another protean character with other-worldly powers is Polyeidus (Chimera). It is said that he had been Proteus's apprentice or is a stranded version of Proteus himself. This is one protean character who can change into inanimate objects - scrolls, letters, amulets,

patterns, Amazons are also said to have a limited protean capacity when attacked sexually. Melanippe, before she is raped by Bellerope, becomes "a stone crab, a water snake, a hind, and a squid, in that order".<sup>24</sup>

There is one thing worth noting about proteanism - it calls for liveliness. Burlingame, Milo, Bray - however unscrupulous - are full of life. Only a fully alive and imaginative man can, after all, change so continuously. Liveliness is a trait Barth's naturalistic characters do not have. They are rooted to the ground unlike the protean characters who are always soaring away on their flights of fancy.

III. The third kind of character is the innocent let loose in a world of evil. Ebenezer is one, Giles is another. Ebenezer is awkward, self-conscious, naïve enough to sign away his estate. A moral and upright young man, he continues to be one in spite of all the craftiness and evil he is exposed to. He gradually loses his awkwardness and becomes almost a leader, prepared to give up his life for his friends.

George the goat-boy brought up in the non-evil world of goats, is unprepared for that of human beings. But despite the mistakes he makes he grows into his role of Grand Master.

These are the innocents who slowly, painfully graduate into heroic figures. Says Hendin, "infusing all Barth's later work is a passion for the single anomalous figure who

depersonalizes, abstracts and enlarges emotion toward a heroic dimension."<sup>25</sup>

Studying these three types of character, one can see that in the later fabulist books, Barth's narratives are not "an illustration of character"<sup>26</sup> as James would have it. In realistic novels what is more important than anything else, is the psychology of characters. Whatever action takes place illustrates the character. But in Barth's fiction there is no character in the traditional sense, psychologically coherent, developing gradually.

In an apsychological work like Arabin Nights what is important is action, in a Jamesian novel, the character. Todorov makes the distinction clear in structural terms:

If there is a proposition "X sees Y", the important thing for James is X, for Scheherazade, Y. Psychological narrative regards each action as a means of access to the personality in question, as an expression if not a symptom. Action is not considered in itself, it is transitive with regard to its subject. A psychological narrative, on the contrary, is characterized by intransitive actions: action is important in itself and not as an indication of this or that character trait. The Arabian Nights derive, we might say from a predicative literature: the emphasis will always fall on the predicate and not on the subject of the proposition.<sup>27</sup>

Todorov discusses the two ways of showing how a character trait provokes an action. There can be immediate causality and mediated causality. An example of the first is "X is brave

X challenges the monster".<sup>28</sup> In mediated causality there would be no immediate action to back the proposition that X was brave but the reader would discover it gradually through X's actions. Psychological narrative is mediated.

Arabian Nights has immediate causality. If someone is greedy we are immediately given proof of it in his action. In fabulist fiction the distance between the character trait and the action may not be as immediate as in Arabian Nights but the durative space is shorter than in naturalistic or psychological fiction. Since there is no internal analysis of character in Barth, the action seems to have a certain immediacy. In Giles Goat-Boy we know the goat-boy is naïve and in quick succession, we are given instances proving his naïveté.

Since there is no psychological complexity, there is little ambiguity in the characters of Barth, the kind found in someone like Svidrigailov. What the character is leads <sup>instantly</sup> to what the character does. The opposite is true of naturalistic fiction where what the character does <sup>eventually</sup> reveals what the character is.

The form, like the characters, moves from naturalism to fabulation. This can be seen clearly in Barth's treatment of violence. The naturalistic novels have some gruesome moments of violence realistically presented: the killing of the German soldier and the father's suicide in The Floating Opera; the death of Rennie while she is being aborted in The End of the Road.

In The Sot-Weed Factor many violent events take place but the presentation is entirely different. Realism gets metamorphosed into comedy. A nightmarish vision of the world unfolds before us but the horror is accompanied by hysterical laughter. "The farce and melodrama", says Fiedler, "evoke terror and pity... and all the while one laughs, at a pitch somewhere between hysteria and delight".<sup>29</sup>

The naturalistic novels contain a few people and the violence revolves around them. From The Sot-Weed Factor on, there is mass-scale violence since the plot concentrates not on a few but on many.

The Sot-Weed Factor is a travesty of history or a "mockery of written history"<sup>30</sup> as Kostelantz calls it. History, for Barth is not an absolute. It is to be treated with irreverence because he knows "not only what Marx knew (that if history does, indeed, repeat itself, the second time is always comic) but also what Heraclitus knew (that there is only a second time)".<sup>31</sup>

The viability of fable in Barth cannot be established in allegorical terms as in Vonnegut. He does not write prophetic novels. Instead he achieves a reversal of literature in the distorted history of The Sot-Weed Factor and the destruction of narrative structure in Siles Goat-Boy and Chimera.

As the displacement goes on from novel to novel, there is a dilution of violence in concrete terms. Violence is not

eliminated but redefined and invested with menace through controlled cruelty. The detached destruction of the naturalistic characters is transformed into the detached destruction of history and the narrative form. After examining this movement from the naturalistic form to the abstractions of history and fabulation, one can suggest that the paralysis is displaced from character to form.

The paralysis of the characters in The Floating Opera and The End of the Road is displaced to the protean character of Burlingame. It is further displaced to the total form of the novel where the form becomes metaform.

The emptiness which produced the horror of the violent deaths of the German and Rennie, is reproduced through the comic mode. The irreverence of the comedy provokes delight but it is overlaid with hysteria. When one wants to locate horror in The Sot-Weed Factor, one discovers it in the impersonations of Burlingame. Burlingame becomes a faceless form controlling the world. Comic cruelty is present in scenes like the mass rape which might be said to be mythologized violence, but it is not mythologized in order to contain it as can be seen in Joyce or Eliot. Myths are drained of all their charismatic significance and become metamyths, mere empty shells.

Violence does not get shaped into some kind of order by comparison nor does it get trivialized by the bolsterous



comedy. It is a kind of "homely insanity"<sup>32</sup> as Fiedler calls it, recalling de Sade.

In realism, as in Steinbeck and Dreiser, causality is mediated in sociological terms. In symbolic works - in Joyce, Woolf - causality is psychologically mediated. In fabulist works, such as Barth's, causality is punctual and predictable as Todorov puts it. Violence and madness are made problematic in formal terms rather than psychological or sociological terms.

The mode of mediation in modern fabulist work is embedding. This method of stories-within-story is used extensively by Barth. This is how Todorov defines embedding:

... the embedding narrative is the narrative of a narrative. By telling the story of another narrative, the first narrative achieves its fundamental theme and at the same time is reflected in this image of itself.<sup>33</sup>

There are stories-within-story in almost all of Barth's books. The Sot-Weed-Factor, specially, is full of them, the appearance of each new character - and there are plenty of them - heralds the beginning of a new story. In The Sot-Weed Factor, Barth has somehow managed to make all the stories converge finally. All the main characters are discovered as having some connection to the formerly related stories and so finally the stories are all linked to the main narrative. For instance, Mary's story of her violent Indian lover is relevant because he turns out to be Burlingame's brother.

Chimera, too, uses the technique of embedding. "Bellerophoniad" is interrupted while Barth talks to the audience about the story of his writing. Barth interrupts his own story to present a text dealing with myths. We are taken back to Barth's lecture and then switched suddenly to the narrator's story. The three stories which comprise Chimera are themselves linked. Bellerophone reads "Perseid". The Amazon he rapes narrates the story of the founding of the Amazons. This is the same story told to Dunyazade by her husband who is responsible for the founding of the Amazonian race. In "Dunyazadiad", Dunya tells her sister's story to her husband, her husband tells his story to her. Bellerophone tells his story to Melanippe. But most complicated, "Perseid" is a tale being told to readers about a tale told to Medusa about a tale told to Calyxa. In "Literature of Exhaustion" Barth talks of a regressus in infinitum, a story-within-a-story, which keeps reflecting back on itself.

All this makes one realize how complicated fabulist fiction is. The source of complexity is not in the character, the cause-and-effect relationship. The ambiguity results from a different frame of reference which is formal rather than character-based. The writer is more interested in what he is doing than in what his character is doing.

Todorov in his discussion of Kafka says that in the traditional fantastic the uncanny followed a series of other events but with Kafka, it takes place in the first sentence:

"In Kafka, the supernatural event no longer provokes hesitation, for the world described is entirely bizarre. The fantastic becomes the rule not the exception".<sup>34</sup> The same can be said about Barth's later work. The impossible happens and keeps happening.

One might say that fabulation is a compulsive story-telling. Is a modern fabulist a Scheherazade afraid of impending violence and telling a story in order to ward it off? Violence is present in the form of the narrative itself.

Let us now turn to specific instances of Barth's treatment of violence.

Jacob Horner with his philosophy of detachment does not care for anyone. His affairs are conducted either out of biological need or curiosity. Rennie's husband, Joe, on the other hand, cares deeply for Rennie and yet does her great violence. He moulds her according to his idea of perfection in a human being. In the process he analyzes everything she says or does. He even uses physical violence - knocking her out cold - when she does not behave the way he thinks she should.

When Rennie sleeps with Jake, it comes as a big shock to Joe but his reaction, again, is not normal. He keeps analyzing it, making her go over it again and again. He then goes to the unbelievable extreme of forcing her to continue the affair - although now it is distasteful to her - because he

wants her to find out how she really feels about it. This is the kind of quiet reasonableness which can be "nightmarish and insane"<sup>35</sup> and one comes to the conclusion that too much abstract thinking can turn a man into a monster.

Joe even keeps a gun handy in case one of them wants to use it. When Rennie learns that she is pregnant and is not sure who the father is, she decides she will get an abortion or commit suicide. Horner goes to a lot of trouble to arrange for an abortion but Rennie dies on the operating table.

Rennie's death scene is luridly violent and realistically done. This is completely in contrast to the later books where violence is treated as a huge joke. Whereas in The Sot-Weed Factor the reader laughs at violence, albeit with some unease, here he is made sick by the detailed description of a violent death.

In The Floating Opera, too, violence is depicted realistically. The book revolves around suicide: two attempted, one successful. The narrator's suicide plan - the blowing-up of the floating opera so that he and the rest of the audience would be killed - fails and he dispassionately gives it up. The other attempted suicide is of an old man. It is a theatrically arranged suicide. Since it is so much like the play-acting of a suicide it is only fitting that it fails. (Later the old man re-enacts the scene and this time succeeds).

Andrews's father has committed suicide by hanging himself.

The first time Andrews slips this fact in casually as though it is of no consequence:

In 1929 Dad lost all his savings and property on the stock market, and the next year he hanged himself with his belt from a floor joist in the basement.<sup>36</sup>

His next mention of the suicide is touched with comic cruelty. He is reminiscing about his father teaching him to be neat and careful - he makes him do manual work in good clothes so that he learns to be tidy. His father takes neatness seriously because when he finds him hanging:

there was not a smudge of dirt anywhere on him, though the cellar was quite dirty. His clothes were perfectly creased and free of wrinkles and although his face was black and his eyes were popped, his hair was neatly and correctly combed.<sup>37</sup>

That his father's death has affected him deeply we learn when we are told that all his spare time is spent writing Inquiry - an attempt to bring to the fore his father's reasons for committing suicide. We also know how much it has hurt him through this brutal passage:

Does one's father hang himself for a simple, stupid lack of money? And is one expected to set up again the chair one's father has kicked over in his strangling? Can one actually with a kitchen knife, saw through the belt? Carry one's father up to the bed whereon one was conceived, and laying him on it, dig one's fingers into the black and ruptured flesh to release the dead neck from its collar?<sup>38</sup>

The realism of the description, the intensity and hurt of the passage is totally unrecognizable when compared to the later Barth. In the later books if anyone tries to commit suicide, it is most likely that like Estragon, his trousers will fall about his ankles.

Tod's masks are adopted to hide the fear he feels because of his heart condition. Though appearing healthy he can drop dead any minute. He has to live with the fact that:

having begun this sentence I may not live  
to write its end; that having poured my  
drink, I may not live to taste it, or that  
it may pass a live man's tongue to burn a  
dead man's belly...<sup>39</sup>

As the passage continues there is a hint of the Barth to come : "Having sugared will I cream? Itching, will I scratch? Hemming will I haw?"<sup>40</sup>

Tod's past as a soldier also involves violence. Hiding in a shell hole during an artillery attack, he knows real fear for the first time. Objective to a certain extent even then, he sees himself as "a shocked, drooling animal in a mud hole".<sup>41</sup> After this experience he is never able "to oppose the terms man and animal, even in casual speech".<sup>42</sup>

When a frightened German soldier gets into the hole, Tod is happy. Without knowing each other's language, an intimacy is achieved. Tod feels as protective toward him as a lioness over her cub. But as time pass<sup>es</sup><sub>h</sub> he starts having doubts and

finally kills the German. The violence is again realistically presented.

Violence in these two novels springs from real, human crisis. These characters inhabit a world which is possible. With The Sot-Weed Factor violence moves onto the fabulist plane. Horror is evoked not through gruesome realistic detail but through comedy, a light hearted playfulness and exhilaration tinged with hysteria.

In The Sot-Weed Factor Barth delineates the degenerate times of 17th and 18th centuries with its convoluted politics, double dealings, underhand methods, petty jealousies, corrupt courts. Kostelanetz calls the novel "almost a catalogue of man's sins".<sup>43</sup> "Figures awful in their energy and purpose"<sup>44</sup> prowl through the book. It is a tale so exuberantly told that one almost overlooks the fact that it bristles with violence.

The political scene is so embroiled with intrigues that no one knows who is on whose side. No one is even sure of who the hero is, who the villain. Baltimore has been thought of as the good man, Coode the evil but as Burlingame says, "did it e'er occur to you that Coode, like Milton's Satan, might more deserve our sympathy than our censure?"<sup>45</sup>

To gain power vice is encouraged - the province is to be ruined by pox and opium. Such devious machinations leave the reader echoing Eben's helpless statement: "Ne'er have I encountered such a string of plots, cab<sup>l</sup>is, murders, and machinations in life or literature..."<sup>46</sup>

Equally conniving are the courts. The outcome of a case depends on who the judge and jury have a bet on - the defendant or the plaintiff. Courts are so well-known for their injustice that a dishonest man is said to be as "crooked as the courts".<sup>47</sup>

Violence surrounds everyone. Whenever a ship sails it is sure to have a shadow following - the pirate ship with its evil, depraved pirates. To earn their fare to the new world, girls go to the colonies for six months as prostitutes. Men are sold as slaves to plantation owners. The dispossessed - the blacks and the Red Indians - are also present, fighting for their rights.

The book contains purely slapstick moments of violence. When Eben goes to buy a notebook for his poem he has to deal with the mad Bragg who drives Eben crazy with a list of what kind of notebook he should buy. He takes a handsome leather-bound notebook and proceeds to mutilate it to fit it in the Golden Mean. Ebenezer watching the ripping out of pages, the gouging of the leather, the scratching of blank pages, looses his head and brings down his sword upon

the mutilated notebook with such a mighty chop that, had Bragg not just then stepped back to contemplate his creation he'd surely have contemplated his Creator...  
"That for your damned Golden Mean-"<sup>48</sup>



As stated before, while Barth's earlier books deal with naturalistic violence, in The Sot-Weed Factor violence is placed within a fabulist frame. A striking example of comic cruelty is the hallucinatory scene of mass rape. Pirates invade a ship carrying only women and they have only one intention - rape. There are no dramatic moments of heart-rending pathos as a scene of this kind could well justify, no commiseration for the girls. In fact, the narration is interrupted when Eben goes inside to read the erotic journal of John Smith.

How obnoxious this rape is to the girls is suggested by the desperation with which a young girl tries to escape by climbing the mizzen ratlines. The moor follows her and rapes her while she is trapped fifty feet up. The horror is left for the reader to feel in this sentence: "... the girl trapped in the rigging like a fly in a web, and... Boabdil climbing leisurely to envelop her like a great black spider..."<sup>49</sup>

This vivid picture of a rape victim's desperate plight becomes representative of the plight of all the women aboard the ship and finally of all rape victims of all times and all places:

From outside came another cry, a hard, high protest that trailed into lamentation. There was an ancient ring to it, an antique sorrow, that put the poet in mind of Philomela, of Lucretia, of the Sabine virgins and the

daughters of Troy, of the entire wailing region of the raped... That instant... how many women heard - in England, Spain, and far Cipango - the footfall of the rapist on the stair, or in the path behind? The ranks of women ravished, hundreds and thousand and millions strong, of every age and circumstance - the centuries rang and echoed with their cries, the dirt of the planet was watered with their tears!<sup>50</sup>

This is an example of a character moving toward the uncanny, of fabulation reconciled to the uncanny. The emergence of consciousness in Eben is an indication of his human condition. This departure from the absolute comic could be explained by the fact that Barth uses the poet's consciousness for this passage. A poet, moreover, who is a romantic fool, untutored, naïve. Barth, in any case, destroys the credibility of the poet's concern by making him climb the mizzen ratlines in an attempt to rape the girl. The character's humanity disssipates as he reliquisties his moral obligation.

Giles Goat-Boy runs the gamut of primitive violence, historical violence and futuristic violence.

George, who has been brought up as a goat because Max cannot bear the calumny of human beings, knows no evil. His first experience of the twisted ways of human beings is when they gather to watch him and cheer his pranks. But when he accidentally falls over the fence in their midst, they get frightened and start beating him up, laughing the while. George cannot understand this: "What manner of beast was it that laughed at the victim's plight?"<sup>51</sup>

In Giles Goat-Boy the various characters are indeed shown to be beasts. Croaker - a Frumentian - is more animal than man. He cannot speak, goes around raping girls, eats what he can get. He is under control only when he has a master-figure sitting on his shoulders and treating him like an animal. More sophisticated but no less beastly are Maurice Stoker and his cronies. Stoker's parties are in the nature of the Roman reveleries where people quickly degenerate into an animal state.

Eierkopf is an intellectual but a voyeur. He did not sleep, he says, but merely "turned his mind off"... between mental tasks, and in this manner rested, like a fish or a machine".<sup>52</sup> Dr. Sear is so sated with every kind of experience that he is willing to try death as "the one experience he'd yet to try".<sup>53</sup>

Awful violence is present in the duel between two one-eyed friends. This fight is fraught with comic cruelty because the winner's prize is the loser's good eye. They both lose their eyes as it happens because Greene, the winner, stabs out his good eye through remorse.

Historical violence is represented by the Bonifacists. A violent incident involving one of them is again tinged with comedy. Max - a pacifist - has a confrontation with a Bonifacist. Filled with hatred, he nevertheless finds he cannot kill a man. He gives the man the gun and says, "shoot yourself". He means, of course, that the Bonifacist should

kill him, but the Bonifacist's Sregfrieder training is such that it is impossible for him "to flout a direct order from any source. He'd murmured, "Ja wohl", clicked his boot-heels, and shot himself accurately through the head".<sup>54</sup>

Giles, who is an outsider to this world of violence, himself wreaks violence because of his naïvete. His wrong advice twice results in a serious collapse of social and economic order. A mob tries to lynch George. This takes place twice and has a hallucinatory air because the second lynching is exactly the same as the first. The nightmarish atmosphere is further reinforced with the guards standing grinning and the crowd chanting, "Get the Goat! Get the Goat!"<sup>55</sup>

WESCAC, the computer, symbolizes futuristic violence. During Campus Riot II, it produces certain brainwaves with which it EATS people in the East Campus. To be EATEN meant to be mentally burnt out in varying degrees. The college was filled with madness - people still kept working but they had gone mad so that

Bus-drivers... had smashed their vehicles into buildings and gibbering pedestrians, infirmaries-surgeons had knifed their patients, construction-workers had walked casually off high scaffoldings.<sup>56</sup>

Violence further escalates because East Campus too invents a similar computer.

WESCAC has through the years assumed total power so that its keepers become the kept. It even makes a girl pregnant - the progeny being Giles.

From futuristic violence Barth retreats to past violence in Chimera. The story of Scheherazade is the story of latent violence: the stories she spins out to the king are meant to forestall the death sentence. When the king decides to marry her after the thousand and one nights and to get her sister, Dunyazade, to marry his brother, the sisters plot to kill their husbands as revenge for the many deaths. Then they would kill themselves. "For Barth's people," as Hendin puts it, "... in the relations between lovers, artists and audiences, is always the fact of destructiveness, the impulse to kill each other".<sup>57</sup> Compulsive narration is meant to forestall violent death. End of narration is tantamount to death.

The plan does not materialize and they stay happily married to each other.

The next two stories have violence of the mythic variety with the slaying of monsters and the defeat of the Amazone. But the main violence for mythic heroes is of reaching forty and getting bored resting on laurels. They are like artists or writers who have dried up and can no longer be creative.

In some of the scenes depicting violence - like the rape scene in The Sot-Weed Factor, the suicide of the father in

The Floating Opera or Rennie's death in The End of the Road - resistance is offered to the dehumanizing forces. This is where Barth seems to move away from the marvellous or the purely fabulated, toward the uncanny. (Uncanny, as Todorov explains it, means a state in which even when the character is bewildered by what is happening to him, his faith in the laws controlling reality is not shaken). However briefly presented, there is a sense of outrage, a kind of recoil from the dehumanizing effect of this world as envisaged in modern terms. At times like these a semi-fabulist structure begins to appear but recedes in the wake of the over-whelming comedy which often produces hysteria. The hysteria is an apprehension of there being something fatally inadequate with the attempt to contain violence. Zavarzadeh says,

The violence of nineteenth century London street life is "local" in the sense that the violence is seen as a temporary and limited violation of still-existent regulative forces in nature and society. But, in contemporary America, the loss of conviction is "global", pervading all levels of sociocultural and emotional-familial life. The local-global distinction, in other words, marks the difference between the passing convulsive seizure and spastic paralysis.<sup>58</sup>

The fabulist frame-work accommodates global level and that is why it is functional. The apologists for fabulation have taken Barth far too literally when he says that the novel is a metaphor for itself. In actual fact even in Barth are scenes - mentioned above - where individual consciousness

does emerge and there is an incursion of naturalistic rationalization in the midst of fabulist abstraction. However, this stance is not allowed to stabilize - as it is at the end of Catch-22 - but is swept away by the fabulist playfulness and rhetorical virtuosity.

Although fabulation deals with general situations rather than particular and characters who are types, it is wrong to say that it is all abstraction. Scholes says that structural fabulations originate in some projected dislocation of our known existence. They are projections of realism and naturalism into future time and draw their power from the cognitive system of present social science. This, Scholes continues, is unlike the far future fictions which are either philosophically speculative or romantically sublimative.<sup>59</sup>

Pynchon's preterities live in a Lucy-in-the-Sky-with-Diamonds world, a world which is so hallucinated and unreal it might have been drug-induced.

Fabulated situations, mdistorted images, characters out of funny mirrors, oneiric violence on the see-saw with hilarity, characters ballooning in and out: this is indeed a world one might expect to find in a drug-addict's mind. It is as though Pynchon were projecting pictures from the mind of a junkie on to a 70 mm screen.

Everything that the other writers have dwelt on - mechanization of life, a controlling organization, proteanism,

is present in Pynchon but he blows them up to larger-than-life proportions. Each theme has a fuller treatment and greater intensity.

The one theme that is found on almost every page is that of violence. He deals not just with futuristic violence, but also gives a new dimension to past and present violence. Futuristic violence is not of the star-war-variety - he does not soar to outer-space as Vonnegut does. In his work violence is firmly anchored in our damaged planet: even if a violent rocket takes off into space, the earth's gravity pulls it back.

Pynchon's books are built around a quest: Stencil's quest for V., Oedipa's quest for Tristero, Slothrop's quest for rocket ooooo. The theme has undergone a metamorphosis from a quest for a spiritual object like the grail or a figure of succour like a father to a quest for an object of violence although the questers are themselves non-violent.

Pynchon's main areas of violence are centred on an omnipotent organization composed of controllers simply referred to as "They". This organization has its tentacles spread over the whole world. In V. there appears to be a systematic plot to turn people into mechanical objects. The subterranean world of Vheissu - "they" have gone underground in a bid to take over the world - is evil, it is a "dream of annihilation".<sup>60</sup> Tristero in The Crying of Lot 49 is a



parallel postal system whose control is enormous. Strangely enough to Kolodny and Peters, Tristero, symbolizes hope: "the world is overripe for the Second Coming. The sacred beast is shaking off its slumber... Pray that it springs in time. We Await Silent Tristero's Empire".<sup>61</sup> The springing of the beast should cause alarm not hope. Tristero produces a feeling of terror in Oedipa. It appears to be totally ruthless and dehumanized in its greed for power. As Oedipa gets deeper and deeper into its labyrinthine structure, she finds those closest to her being taken away: her psychiatrist goes mad, her husband becomes a drug-addict, her lover elopes with a fifteen-year-old drop-out, her best source to Tristero commits suicide, her friend disappears.

How all-pervading and powerful that influence of Tristero is, is discovered by Oedipa when she spends a night walking "the infected city",<sup>62</sup> a walk reminiscent of Yossarian's walk through Rome. Everywhere - even tattooed on a sailor's hand - she sees the muted post horn of the Tristero. Every deviant behaviour, every grotesquerie is linked to the muted horn. Every underground system communicated by WASTE. Hundreds of citizens used the WASTE system, "deliberately choosing not to communicate by U.S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery".<sup>63</sup>

In Gravity's Rainbow the firm is the controlling organization. Pynchon describes it in a chapter which is a reworking of Dante's The Inferno. It begins with the line, "Who would have thought so many would be here?"<sup>64</sup> People are classified and assigned to different areas. Each of the damned souls is forced, as in Dante, to repeat the action that he performs outside. The double agents, for instance, keep betraying each other.

In all his books Pynchon shows how the dehumanized cartel uses people for its own purpose. This theme is specially prominent in Gravity's Rainbow. Slothrop, for instance, makes the chilling discovery that as a child he has been experimented on and has probably been under surveillance ever since. The White Visitation, conducts the wierdest experiments in the name of psychological warfare. Pointsman - the man in charge - thinks up the most unspeakable experiments, none of which seems to have any use for war or for science. It is more a way of being God by playing with a person's intimate psychological traits and then stepping back to see if he will react the way you expect him to. Pointsman even uses those who are supposed to help him in his work.

War and the cartel turn people into zombies. Katye, is capable of action only when a string is pulled and when the master puppeteer - Pointsman - himself goes crazy she feels terrified and lost, because now she is "in a control that is out of control".<sup>65</sup>

Another person who uses other people is Blicero, the German commander. He makes Gottfried and his sister Katya, play a corrupted version of Hansel and Gretel, the witch and the oven. Given the role of Hansel, Gottfried is so dependent on the witch that he finds a separate existence impossible.

This strange case of dependence is extended to some of the homosexual prison camp inmates of Dora who are desolate when they are set free. Addicted to pain and misery, they set up a new camp - 'a hypothetical SS chain of command'.<sup>66</sup>

Pynchon thus establishes a pattern of victim-victimizer in which the victim becomes so dependent on his victimizer that he is terrified of the idea of living in freedom. These people reveal masochistic tendencies because as Fromm says the aim of the masochist is to get rid of the individual self, to get rid of the burden of freedom. Since even the victimizer is dependent on the victim, Fromm maintains that the aim at the basis of both sadism and masochism is symbiosis. Symbiosis in the psychological sense, he goes on to explain, is the union of one individual with another in such a way as to make them lose the integrity of their self.<sup>67</sup>

A poignant illustration of a person being used by those in power is Pokler. Pokler's wife has left him, taking their daughter with her. Pokler is one of the engineers working on the rocket and one day his daughter, Ilse, comes back. After a few days of happiness she is taken away. "They" keep

bringing her back and taking her away to insure Pokler's working on the rocket. Pokler is not even sure if it is his daughter or even if it is the same girl but he loves her. When his work is finished he goes to Dora to look for Ilse. Pynchon in one sentence gives us a hideous and touching picture of the suffering of the inmates. As Pokler watches the dead being carried out he sees, "each face so perfect; so individual, the lips stretched back into death-grins, a whole silent audience caught at the punch line of the joke..."<sup>68</sup>

Pynchon touches briefly on almost every kind of violence: gang-violence, gang-rape, violence involving spies, drug-addiction; plastic surgery for "beauty" where a perfectly healthy nose is fractured so that its shape can be changed. Brief glimpses of violent children are caught in Pynchon's books. In V., Majistral's Journal mentions the children of war, no longer scared by falling bombs, swooping down on adults in order to loot them. One of their victims is the dying Bad Priest who is really a manifestation of V. Instead of helping her, they pick her clean, removing her boots, her artificial feet, her hat, her clockwork eye, her false teeth. A boy digs in with a bayonet to remove the star sapphire at her navel. Pynchon also presents the other side of the coin with the character of Margherita (Gravity's Rainbow) who kills Jewish boys and allows her eleven-year old daughter to be in the company of decadent aristocrats who practise perversions. The child is finally murdered and possibly by her own mother.

Pynchon draws our attention to the violence wreaked by war. Men are killed and those who survive sometimes end up looking like monsters - there is a young pilot, for instance, whose face is partly shot off. The doctors involved favour allografts which meant introducing inert substance into the living face. After they work on the pilot he gets a "nose bridge of ivory, a cheek-bone of silver and a paraffin and celluloid chin".<sup>69</sup>

Pynchon, like Mailer and Bellow, describes the war dead but there the similarity ends. While Mailer and Bellow give a lengthy and camera-like detailed account of the bloated and decaying bodies, Pynchon resorts to macabre grotesquerie, calling the bodies enormous loaves of bread dough: "They are rising, they are transubstantiated, and who knows, with summer over and hungry winter coming down, what we'll be feeding on by Xmas?".<sup>70</sup>

This is the culture of death where methods of killing are perfected. Mass death is useful, says Pynchon, as diversion from the real nature of war which is profit-making. "The true war is a celebration of markets",<sup>71</sup> he says in a Milo-like statement.

The rocket is an efficient instrument of death and Gravity's Rainbow revolves around it. It is the new face of violence replacing the pervert who walks the night in pursuit

of innocent victims "gathering up slender girls, fair and smooth as dolls, by the handful".<sup>72</sup> But although a few are terrified by it, to other people - the ones who have borrowed the necrophilous character of the war - it is a source of excitement. The rocket factory Swinemünde, has become a tourist attraction. The ones assembling the rocket are having a jolly time as though they are at a picnic, getting drunk and singing:

#### ROCKET LIMERICKS

There once was<sup>a</sup> thing called a V-2,  
To pilot  
which you did not to -  
you just pushed a button,  
And it would leave nuttin'  
But stiffs and big holes and  
debris, too.<sup>73</sup>

"Far to the east", goes a paragraph, "down in the pink sky, something has just sparked, very brightly. A new star..."<sup>74</sup> The Star of Bethlehem has been replaced by an ugly and malignant one whose shining heralds not peace and goodwill but the ultimate in violent destruction. For the necrophilous characters it is the new God and one of them thinks of it as "a baby Jesus with endless committees of Herods out to destroy it in infancy..."<sup>75</sup> What Alvarez says of the need to commit suicide applies to this rocket worship. The imperviousness to everything outside the closed world of self-destruction, says Alvarez, produces an obsession so weird, total and psychotic that death itself becomes a side issue.<sup>76</sup>

Slothorp with his Yossarian-like paranoia is convinced that they are out to get him, that the rocket is meant for him, that, in fact, there exists a rocket with his name written on it and that "the great bright hand reaching out of the cloud"<sup>77</sup> is reaching out for him.

Slothorp is one of the preterites. "Preterite" in Pynchon is different from the dictionary meaning. Here it stands for the lost, the dispossessed. They flit about from one unsafe place to another, always frightened, never secure. Pynchon loves the preteries or as Poirier puts it, "loves the lost ones - and writes in a way that would lose them completely".<sup>78</sup>

Slothorp finally does get lost completely. He does not die or get killed, he just stops being. He disintegrates totally, becoming a zero no one can see or hear. From being a central character like Yossarian, Slothorp gets transformed into a non-being with no consciousness. There is a purpose to Yossarian's fight and final flight but Slothorp, who is a fighter of sorts, just peters out. His is the clear case of a fabulist character with a consciousness who was trying to move to the uncanny, getting assimilated finally to the marvellous.

In contrast to the preterites who are vulnerable, are the decadent characters who have exclusive tastes in perversion. In V. Mondaugen's narration reveals mediaeval bestiality in the house of Foppl. Life there is a continuous sick party with

a never-ending orgy of sex and violence. The inhabitants of this Baroque world are like the necrophiles who have "the pure passion to destroy", a "desire to tear apart what is alive".<sup>79</sup>

Foppl's house is a place of baroque Gothic horrors, each room concealing unexpected terrors. Mondaugen, for instance, watches in a mirror Vera Meroving (V.) and her lover mouthing obscenities at each other. In the next room he comes across a beautiful young girl and dances her into a planetarium from where she suddenly disappears; finally stumbling upon the dying body of a Bondel with whipping scars on his back.

When a battle between the Bondels and whites takes place Pynchon foregrounds not the battle but the reaction of Foppl's guests. They watch in complete silence because "no one wants 'to miss any sound of death that should reach them'".<sup>80</sup> The pop of the firing guns is "echoed by the pop of corks on Foppl's roof".<sup>81</sup> These people try to recreate the age of Von Trotha who killed hundreds of Hereros and has a lust for blood.

There is a connection between this recreated violence and present violence, represented through V.'s mechanical eye. For them human beings are devoid of humanity, objects that are theirs to destroy. Modern violence, too, seeks to rob men of their humanness, turning them to automata, mechanical beings like the manikins, SHOCK and SHROUD, in the factory Profane works for.



Gravity's Rainbow has the same kind of people who sail in Anubis and practise perversions.

Pynchon keeps referring to historical events such as Von Trotha's massacre of the Hereros. Barth presents fiction as though it were history and Pynchon presents history as though it were fiction or as Piorier says, Pynchon's "fictions are often seamlessly woven into the stuff, the very factuality of history".<sup>82</sup>

The descendents of the Hereros appear in Gravity's Rainbow. Rebels now, with the name of Schwarzkommando, they worship the rocket because it is the only truth for them.

Tristero in The Crying of Lot 49 also has a place in history: the Thurm and Taxis system was a private courier service since 1300 till Bismarck bought them out in 1867. Their symbol is a post-horn. The Tristero System is the same except for the mute attached to the horn because their aim is to silence the Thurm and Taxis system (or the government system).

Pynchon is concerned about the damage done to people by the establishment of colonies. He is unique in extending the meaning of European Nineteenth-Century Empires to America. The colonizer is now colonized. Empire no longer means conquest of territories but in its deeper sense, conquest of minds. America, then, is a colony of the Organization.

In his books Pynchon gives illustrations of the decay overtaking American society. Oedipa in her search for Tristero

makes a discovery of twilight regions. There are clubs such as Inamorati Anonymous, composed of failed suicides, whose members are talked out of falling in love, AC-DC (Alameda County Death Cult) chooses innocent, virtuous victims and then molests them and sacrifices them.

Pynchon, like most recent American writers, mentions Kennedy. Slothorp has been to the same college as Jack and admires him. Slothorp recollects him and a shoe-shine boy, Malcolm : "Eventually Jack and Malcolm both got murdered. Slothorp's fate is not so clear. It may be that they have something different in mind for Slothrop".<sup>83</sup>

The Whole Sick Crew is representative of the lethargy overtaking contemporary America. Unable to do much the Sick Crew spends a great deal of time yo-yoing - travelling up and down in suburban trains. "Pynchon's yo-yo", says Haugsdorff, "in various metaphorical forms comes to characterize mechanistic and meaningless society: it is his reductio ad absurdum".<sup>84</sup>

Lethargy is the characteristic of the Sick Crew and its most exaggerated form is found in the person of Fergus Mixolydian. His only activity once a week is to fill a green balloon with a Z painted on it. This is tied to the bed-post when he wants to sleep, "this being the only way for visitors to tell which side of consciousness Fergus was on".<sup>85</sup>

Bodies are losing animation so that people are turning into automata. Everyone has written about Pynchon's use of the

concept of entropy - the decay of the earth due to the loss of energy.

The theme of man turning into machine permeates V. Bango-Shaftsburg says he is a mechanical doll - his arm has a miniature electric switch sewn into the flesh. Thin Silver wires run from these switches into the brain. V. herself is being gradually transformed literally into a thing. Her artificial eye is made of delicately wrought wheels, springs and is wound by a key, her navel has a star sapphire sewn into it. Her obsession is "bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter".<sup>86</sup> When she is dying she is made up of artificial parts : feet, hair, navel, teeth, eye. Fausto III, too, comes close to non-humanity and Tchitcherine in Gravity's Rainbow is "more metal than anything else".<sup>87</sup> People are moving closer to "the time when like any dead leaf or fragment of metal they'd be finally subject to the laws of physics".<sup>88</sup> These transformations of men into the inanimate seem to fit into Fromm's description of the cybernetic man whose love of the artificial is such that he "turns his interest away from life, persons, nature, ideas - in short from everything that is alive; he transforms all life into things, including himself..."<sup>89</sup>

Stencil needs to chase V. - Pynchon's protean character - because it is this which keeps him from becoming inanimate. Stencil's chase is a repetitive gesture. It is not an attempt

to bring order to chaos as Yossarian's is. He does not have Yossarin's attitude to proteanism - Yossarian rejects it whereas Stencil welcomes V's proteanism because it makes it more difficult for him to find her. Stencil, a quick-change artist, always refers to himself in the third person. He has a repertoire of identities and when he assumes these he does things he hates doing. This "forcible dislocation of personality" is mainly to "keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person".<sup>90</sup>

He is terrified of finally finding V. because that would mean his reverting to inertia which has become a real danger since, in Tanner's words "twentieth-century man seems to be dedicating himself to the annihilation of all animatedness on a quite un-precedented scale, and with quite unanticipated inventiveness..."<sup>91</sup>

To prove his point, Pynchon quotes extensively from the "Disasters" column of an Almanac, where encounters between the inanimate - trains, buses - and the living result in the death of the animate. Pynchon thus invents new patterns of violence: the inanimate have decided to destroy mankind. Like the Great Floods or the Fire Next Time, the inanimate is going to engulf the world and destroy it. Apocalypse in Pynchon takes the form of entropy and as Lhamon says entropy should strike fear in everyone because it "evokes death, a state in which no energy is useful and all life has guttered out into

undifferentiated soup. The inanimate, through entropy, merges with the animate".<sup>92</sup>

These different forms of violence get varied treatment. For instance, Pynchon takes us to a fabulated plane of violence with Profane's underground hunt for alligators, alligators which moved "big, blind, albino all over the sewer system".<sup>93</sup>

Pynchon's most notable treatment of violence is the way he overlays it with comedy. This is not the kind of comic found in Hawkes where sometimes comic terror springs from an inappropriate comment, a comment ludicrously out of tune with the violence portrayed. In Pynchon when brutal violence is taking place and it changes to the comic, it is the whole scene that changes and violence becomes as farcical as a Laurel-Hardy film. At times it is the other way around so that a comic scene is transformed to one of unmitigated horror. It is as though reels of a horror and slapstick film have got mixed and that Pynchon were sitting in a room editing a film so that he could cut to violence from comedy and vice versa without regard to logical sequence. The audience is moved from laughter to horror or horror to laughter in the matter of a split second. Thus utterly disoriented the audience is hysterical. This may be Pynchon's unique way of animating readers whose sensibility is jaded through constant exposure to violence via mass media. The inert mind of the reader is now jolted into an awareness of horror. Violence is thus

recycled and acquires a life of its own. Thus Pynchon's technique which enables him to plunge his readers into the comic and the serious with breathless speed is resuscitating and its aims are positive in as much as they are directed toward recovering some sense of urgency bearing on the human condition. Thus fabulation in Pynchon far from abstracting violence rehabilitates it in human society, quickening man's sense of dread which proves that he is alive and not an inanimate, entropied object.

Gravity's Rainbow abounds in scenes of this sort but some are found in V. as well: Godolphin running from the police runs into a typical Hollywood situation - a bedroom in which a couple is making love; an elaborate plan to steal a Boticelli succeeds but at the last minute - just as they are about to take it - the mastermind decides he does not want it; a suicide attempt ends with suicide and rescuer running up and down staircases.

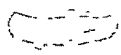
But it is in Gravity's Rainbow that Pynchon really lets himself go. The following are a few illustrations of this technique:

Slothorp is robbed of everything and has to borrow a uniform. This grim situation changes to comedy when a colonel gets frantic because Slothorp has not saluted him. When Slothorp explains that the uniform is not his and he is an American, the colonel goes hersek:

"You're a what?" roars the Colonel, pulling leaves from the chrysanthemum with his teeth. "What kind of Nazi foolishness is that, eh?"<sup>94</sup>

The moment Slothorp leaves the room and goes into another, the comedy is converted to menace. It is as though each room has its own atmosphere - of fear, comedy, terror.

Violence can be as farcical as in a Marx Brothers film. The chase scene involving Slothorp and Major Marvy is pure farce with Slothorp using different ways - including a miniature train - to escape. The chase continues after a time gap, this time with Slothorp in a balloon and Marvy and his men following in an old plane. The balloon just happens to be carrying a cargo of pies and there is a reworking of the pie-throwing scene when Slothorp gets Marvy in the face with one as the plane passes him.

Farce recurs  when Soviet troops surround Slothorp's ship which is carrying chimpanzees and chorus girls in feathers and spangles. A chimpanzee bites a corporal in the leg and both chimpanzees and girls are chased by the Soviets on the shore.

When Slothorp and Narrisch go to rescue Springer a serious situation is reduced to hilarity. They run into a huge sentry, for instance, and instead of the expected violence, the sentry scampers off at the threat of violence, whimpering. "You're mean... Beasts... Oh, nasty, awful..."<sup>95</sup> The scene

builds up in comic tension till Springer is rescued and the reader reduced to tears of laughter.

But with Närrisch's sacrifice to save the others, the comic scene dissolves into reverie - its quiet tone, sad quality - as we are taken into Närrisch's consciousness before he is either taken away or killed.

At times the farce changes into menace but in the following incident it is transformed into spine-chilling horror: Slothorp goes reluctantly to the Anubis with its decadent passengers, to pick up a parcel for Springer. The interlude begins on a comical note with Otto's mother jamming her ship against the Anubis. But there is a hint of menace when Slothorp is beaten up by an invisible person and forced to descend to the engine room where the parcel is. The place is in total darkness and we can sense Slothorp's horrified recoil as his hand closes over stiff taffeta. Wherever he turns he ends up touching the slippery cloth:

"No". Yes: hooks and eyes. He breaks a fingernail, trying to lose them but they follow... l@acing that moves, snake-sure, entangling, binding each finger...

"No...." He rises to a crouch, moves forward into something hanging from the overhead. Icy little thighs in wet silk swing against his face. They smell of the sea. He turns away, only to be lashed across the cheek by long wet hair.<sup>96</sup>

We too feel real horror because we know that it is the eleven-year-old Bianca who is hanging there.



Slothorp is sensitive and kind and has deliberately developed an armour which enables him to suppress the terrors of his experience so that he can face the life he is forced to lead. But there are unguarded moments when the horror surfaces into his consciousness and he is swamped by it. He is never able to forget Bianca:

She's still with you, though harder to see these days, nearly invisible as a glass of gray lemonade in a twilit room... still she is there, cool and acid and sweet, waiting to be swallowed down to touch your deepest cells, to work among your saddest dreams.<sup>97</sup>

Again we have the comic and the horrific when Slothorp makes yet another escape in an expressionistically-hued pig costume. He goes to the Baths where he has to remove the costume. There is a very funny mix-up when the soldiers come and people get panicky. Marvy puts on the pig costume because his uniform is stolen and the soldiers arrest him instantly since they have been informed of Slothorp's pig costume. This comedy of mixed identities is not resolved comically. It takes on a sinister air when two doctors, under Pointsman's orders perform a castrating operation on him. Marvy is a disgusting character and we have no sympathy for him but although we are relieved Slothorp has escaped and we smile at the very English speech of the doctors while operating, we are aware of a growing sense of terror at the thought of something as primitive as castration being cold-bloodedly performed on a man made helpless by anaesthetics.

In Pynchon violence is so pervasive that we can say the landscape itself is violent in Hoffman's terms:

The history of violence in the twentieth century (and in its literature) follows somewhat along these lines, in terms of the character of the assailant: the assailant as human being, as machine, as landscape. In this last case, the assailant is neither human nor mechanical but the entire environment, the land itself, or the world or the solar system: whatever extent of space the instrument of the assailant has put at his disposal.<sup>98</sup>

While Pynchon is earth-bound, Vonnegut's characters take off into outer space.

As in Barth there is a movement from a realistic treatment to abstraction. The duality of the real and the surreal is there from the beginning but as we move from the earlier to the later work, we find that abstraction replaces realism.

There are three main sources of violence in Vonnegut:

(1) war (2) meaninglessness (3) mechanization.

War recurs in Vonnegut's work as the chief image of violence. It is one of Vonnegut's main concerns because of his wartime experience in Dresden. Writing directly about it was not easy for him and Slaughterhouse-Five he says is "short and jumbled and jangled... because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre".<sup>99</sup> This traumatic experience he has carried over to other wars in other books.

Slaughterhouse-Five which centres on the bombing of Dresden, lacks the brave characters or dramatic confrontations favoured by Mailer in The Naked and the Dead. "One of the

main effects of war, after all", says the narrator, "is that people are discouraged from being characters".<sup>100</sup> These are ordinary people caught in a situation over which they have no control, people who have been pushed into fighting a war. Unlike Hemingway's heroes who were heroes in the true sense of the word, Vonnegut's men are disillusioned victims who fight because they have no choice.

In Slaughterhouse-Five the narrator reads from the Bible the passage about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of Heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.<sup>101</sup>

The Truman report on the bombing of Hiroshima is read out:

It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.<sup>102</sup>

There is the description of Dresden after the bombing:

Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn.

... Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead.<sup>103</sup>

71,379 people were killed in Hiroshima. 135,000 in Dresden.

Thus does Vonnegut establish a pattern of destroyed cities. Since the book was written during the Vietnam war, the reader would also be reminded of the bombing of Vietnam.

One becomes aware that only the Biblical destruction had a purpose - the twin cities were destroyed to erase evil. Hiroshima, Dresden, Vietnam are wiped out without reason. The Biblical cities function as the referent against which the other cities ironically resonate.

A potent bit of irony is the shooting of a man for stealing a teapot in Dresden. Says the narrator:

A whole city gets burned down, and thousands and thousands of people are killed. And then this one American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for taking a teapot. And he's given a regular trial, and then he's shot by a firing squad.<sup>104</sup>

The formality of the trial mocks the casualness of killing thousands and makes the death of the soldier poignantly ironic. Perhaps this is a form of protest and suggests a leaning toward the uncanny. The trial is perfectly plausible because the army ritual is maintained even during a massacre. Vonnegut here does leave us facing a question.

Wars are generally fought by young boys and Vonnegut draws our attention to this by the sub-title of Slaughterhouse-Five, which is The Children's Crusade. Although the sub-title refers to a historically authentic event when a unit of

medieval children had mounted a crusade for peace one might say that Vonnegut also seems concerned about what happens to these modern children after the ageing experience of war. There is a hardening at times. When the narrator, working as a reporter, sees a particularly gruesome accident, he is unaffected because he has seen worse in war. Perhaps a person deals with his war experience by escaping into fantasy the way Bill Pilgrim does. But Vonnegut seems convinced that war makes most people non-violent.

There are not too many illustrations of physical violence which take place during war. There is in Slaughterhouse-Five the narration of the terrible journey of the prisoners of war. To the German guards the prisoners have become dehumanized, and it is the cars bearing them that are personified:

To the guards who walked up and down outside, each car became a single organism which ate and drank and excreted through its ventilators... In went water and loaves of black bread and sausage and cheese, and out came shit and piss and language.<sup>105</sup>

The bombing of Dresden is mentioned in Mother Night. The tone used is flippant. He talks, for instance, of:

artifacts characteristic of fire storms: seeming pieces of charred firewood two or three feet long - ridiculously small human beings or jumbo fried grasshoppers, if you will.

... Everything was gone but the cellars where 135,000 Hansels and Gretels had been baked like gingerbread men.<sup>106</sup>

Vonnegut does not confine himself to war on earth but takes it to the realm of fantasy with the Martian invasion in The Sirens of Titan. This war, as all the other wars in Vonnegut, points to the violence of manipulation. People are kidnapped from earth and taken to Mars where they are turned into robots for the army. The Martian army is trained to fight a great war against earth but in the war it is slaughtered. This is a deliberately planned defeat by Rumfoord in order to form a new religion: "When Rumfoord staged a passion play, he used nothing but real people in real hells."<sup>107</sup>

But even these activities are planned by the Tralfamadorians who are using earthlings merely to rush a spare part to Salo whose space ship has broken down on Titan. All of earth's civilization is nothing but different messages to Salo on Titan. Stonehenge, for instance, means in Tralfamadorian, "Replacement part being rushed with all possible speed."<sup>108</sup>

The final irony is that the message Salo is carrying to a far-off galaxy and for which so many lives are sacrificed turns out to be only "Greetings".

The protagonist of Mother Night is also made use of. Happy in his professional and personal life, he is persuaded to be an American spy. Pretending to be a Nazi sympathizer, he broadcasts pro-Nazi speeches which carry information to the Americans in code. His life is ruined by this double role and he feels the government has used him as thoroughly as a pig

is used - every part of a pig is utilized, <sup>except</sup> its squeal. Campbell feels that even his squeal has been exploited.

By showing us the different kinds of war violence, Vonnegut makes clear his anti-war stance and its brutalizing effect on people, even on children. In Mother Night he narrates an incident which takes place during an air-raid. A family is taking shelter and the wife gets hysterical but the three children do not bat an eye. "Nor... would they ever".<sup>109</sup>

Vonnegut makes his disgust with war clear in a speech given by one of his characters in Cat's Cradle. Minton talks of the soldiers killed in war, "murdered children". He goes on to say that instead of a parade of guns and flags when we remember wars, we should take off our clothes and paint ourselves blue and go on all fours and grunt like pigs.

This picture of man reverting to a primitive state seems to be Vonnegut's way of suggesting the level man stoops to when he indulges in war. At the same time, Vonnegut feels that violence is inevitable. Writing an anti-war book is as good as writing an anti-glacier book, because "there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers."<sup>110</sup>

This notion that in the final analysis everything is pointless forms the basis of Vonnegut's second source of violence. The focus in his books is on meaninglessness with no hope of salvation or improvement. This is specially true of his later books which are totally fabricated and lack the

irony present at times in his earlier books implying a standard worth attaining.

In Vonnegut's universe man is not at the centre nor is there the Great Chain of Being. Man might think he is in charge but in actual fact all his movements are controlled by some other power. His civilization and culture may take a certain shape in order to deliver a spare part to <sup>a</sup> broken-down space ship on another planet. Even those who seem to be manipulating are themselves being manipulated and who the final controller is, is never clear because Vonnegut's <sup>is</sup> a Godless universe.

Most critics seem to agree that meaninglessness is the basis of Vonnegut's work. Burhans, for instance, in his comparative study of Vonnegut and Hemingway sees this as the main point of difference between the two. Whereas for Hemingway there is finally meaning and order, for Vonnegut this is emphatically not so because "for him the empty and meaningless universe is both source and measure of the repetitive, vaguely fatalistic, and utterly futile state of man".<sup>111</sup>

But this idea of total meaninglessness seems unpalatable to some critics because while talking of the meaninglessness in Vonnegut they make a desperate bid to salvage some kind of meaning. Burhans, whom I have just quoted, contradicts himself by saying that in both Vonnegut and Hemingway there is



a stress on "love and human relationship as meaningful answers to the human condition".<sup>112</sup> Malashri Lal, too, insists on Vonnegut's "doctrine of humanism". Mother Night according to her "impresses upon the reader the consoling necessity of friendship".<sup>113</sup> Mother Night, on the contrary, stresses finally the futility of human relationships - true love ends in death, your best friend prepares secretly to turn you over to the communists. Lal also mentions Vonnegut's new sociology in which his "anti-war, anti-science attitudes and his religion of compassion comprise his vision of an alternative world order".<sup>114</sup> But, as a matter of fact, Vonnegut seems to find man's struggle to assert free will as absurd as the dream of utopia. One is more inclined to agree with Hendin who says:

Men who believe in something, who try to take charge of their lives, become in Vonnegut's fiction, the true buffoons, the butts, the Dr. Franksteins... Vonnegut seems to believe that only fools and crazies let themselves care, or let themselves distinguish between one kind of madness and another. What Vonnegut prescribes is not the freedom to be yourself, but the freedom to be nothing.<sup>115</sup>

The meaninglessness found on earth is extended to outer space as well and it is this resigned and pessimistic world view that Bosworth criticizes :

The problem... is not the reductionist author's pessimism per se, but his failure to "earn" his pessimism on the printed page... instead of creating a world, complete ambiguous, within

which to explore man's ultimate failure, he invents another world, flat and barren, within which failure is prescribed from the start.<sup>116</sup>

The third source of violence in Vonnegut is that caused by mechanization. In Player Piano violence is done to the minds and spirit of men who have been deprived of the right to do what they really want to do. There is little physical violence because war has been done away with. This is violence beyond war - the violence produced by a sterile society where a new class system has been spawned based on I.Q. levels. The ones with a high I.Q. become engineers or managers. The rest have to join the army or the "Reeks and the Wrecks" as the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps is called. Young boys commit suicide because they are not able to pursue a career that interests them. They are the victims of what Honrich calls violence by omission as we shall see later.

Machines run the country. Machines decide who is qualified for which job. To them human beings are like machines - to be evaluated as machines, to be discarded if found to be inefficient or redundant.

Creativity has no value and culture is "so cheap, a man figured he could insulate his house cheaper with books and prints than he could with rock-wood".<sup>117</sup>

Most people get assimilated to this system. Fromm talks about how when someone wants to escape from freedom:

he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he thereby becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be. The discrepancy between "I" and the world disappears and with it the conscious fear of aloneness and powerlessness. This mechanism can be compared with the protective coloring some animals

assume... The person who gives up his individual self and becomes an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel alone and anxious any more. But the price he pays, however, is high: it is the loss of his self.<sup>118</sup>

Just as people start sprouting horns in Ionesco's Rhinoceros, in Player Piano people themselves can become like machines. Baer, for instance, talks like a machine: "Yep - there it goes, there it goes, all right... Zip zip, out the window".<sup>119</sup> Or, "Fine, fine, right, sure, sure, wonderful, yes, yes, exactly, fine, good."<sup>120</sup>

Human relationships have also acquired a mechanized quality. Anita has "the mechanics of marriage down pat..."<sup>121</sup> Their conversation usually ends on this note:

"I love you, Paul".  
"I love you, Anita".

It is as though a machine has been programmed to make a certain response. Anita is determined that Paul should get his promotion. When Paul decides not to continue working in the organization she leaves him. As Fromm says, manipulation and instrumentality have entered into relationships and in

all social and personal relations the laws of the market are applied.<sup>122</sup>

The character produced by the commodity market, Fromm calls cybernetic man:

Cybernetic man is so alienated that he experiences his body only as an instrument for success... he transforms all life into things, including himself and the manifestations of his human faculties of reason, seeing, hearing, tasting, loving, sexuality becomes a technical skill (the "love machine"), feelings are flattened... and whatever love and tenderness man has is directed towards machines and gadgets... the whole man becomes part of the total machinery that he controls and is simultaneously controlled by.<sup>123</sup>

All three fabulators - Barth, Pynchon, Vonnegut - create cybernetic characters to emphasize the mechanization of society. The cybernetic PRO men of Player Piano claim that in their world:

Civilization has reached the dizziest heights of all time ! ... Thirty-one point seven times as many television sets as all the rest of the world put together ! ... Ninety-three per cent of all the world's electrostatic dust precipitators !...<sup>124</sup>

But these amenities do not compensate for the feeling of being useless. There is never enough to do. Those who still retain the capacity to think experience discontent. This discontent has been organized into the Ghost Shirt Society, named after Red Indian rebels.

But the well-planned final riots end up being as chaotic as the race riots in Invisible Man. Like the blacks who destroy their own apartment and are left without a home, the workers go berserk and attack every machine without considering its use to them. The sewage disposal plant, for instance, is demolished. The main casualties are machines and Vonnegut makes a list of the different parts of broken machines in alphabetic order as though it were a list of the war dead. The whole exercise is in vain because when the riots end the workers take great pride in repairing the machines they had maimed.

The idea of man gradually turning into a machine is carried over to The Sirens of Titan. The soldiers in the Martian army follow orders implicitly because they have a radio antenna installed under the skull. This antenna triggers off an unbearable pain if the soldiers disobey orders. All the men are reduced to robots capable of feeling nothing but the pain if they disobey.

Besides these three main sources, Vonnegut depicts other forms of violence:

He outlines the violence done to oneself by pretending to be what one is not. This is the main theme in Mother Night where Howard Campbell pretends to be a Nazi sympathizer while in actuality he is an American spy. Campbell broadcasts Nazi propaganda which carries secret information in code but an

ambiguity is involved here. If by doing good, you are at the same time doing evil, how justified is that good? Campbell's broadcasts convince a number of Nazis that what they are doing is right. One Nazi tells him, "You alone kept me from concluding that Germany had gone insane".<sup>125</sup>

Campbell goes out of his way to convince people of his Nazi sympathies and this leads us to another ambiguity: is there really evil within him which he hides from himself and which can surface because he has the excuse of doing good? Campbell himself is not sure and says, "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be".<sup>126</sup> He hangs himself "for crimes against himself".<sup>127</sup>

The same concept is in Cat's Cradle. Bokonon and McCabe, shipwrecked on San Lorenzo, want to help the people there. But San Lorenzo is so infertile that it is impossible to improve the economical condition. They decide instead to enact the drama of the saint and the tyrant which will help people forget their problems. Bokonon's religion is founded on the Dynamic Tension, an equilibrium between good and evil. Everyone on the island becomes a Bokononist and McCabe who is now the ruler puts up the hook - anyone practising Bokononism is to die by it. People are happy because "they were all employed full time as actors in a play they understood". But the drama changed the two men. They had been alike, "half-angel, half-pirate"<sup>128</sup> but now they became what they

pretended to be. Bokonon became a saint and McCabe an evil man. People really started dying on the hook.

Inspite of so much violence there are not many instances of actual physical violence in Vonnegut. Perhaps this is so because as he says, "Everyone has my sympathy, even those I'm most indignant about. I've never written a story with a villain".<sup>129</sup>

There is some physical violence in Mother Night when Campbell is beaten up as a Nazi sympathizer. Bernard O'Hare who has had a frustrating life, pursues Campbell with the persistence of a private fury. The pursuit of Campbell is the only purpose of his life. Campbell's father-in-law who is a Nazi is hanged in a cruel fashion by his slaves. They did not know who he was, they just "hanged him for the satisfaction of hanging somebody important".<sup>130</sup>

Vonnegut's own mother committed suicide so it is out of personal experience that he conveys his feeling of a suicide leaving behind a sad legacy:

Sons of suicide seldom do well.  
Characteristically, they find life  
lacking a certain ring. They tend  
to feel more rootless than most...  
they suspect that they, too, will  
probably kill themselves.<sup>131</sup>

Vonnegut depicts casual violence. Felix Hoenikker is the scientist responsible for the atom bomb. His is a casual form of evil. As children build houses from blocks, Hoenikker

creates the bomb and later ice-nine which ends the world.

Bellow symbolizes the destruction of the old order through the image of the ruined city. Vonnegut too employs this image in Slaughterhouse-Five when Billy drives through a scene of great desolation. Urban renewal has seen to it that the place looked "like Dresden after it was fire-bombed - like the surface of the moon".<sup>132</sup>

The difference between Bellow's rendition and Vonnegut's is that whereas Bellow's heroes are desolated, Billy does not mind seeing empty space where his childhood home used to be, "that was all right with Billy Pilgrim"<sup>133</sup>. This points to the idea that for the fabulist character cruelty is routine expectation. There is also the difference, that in Bellow destruction is caused by the ravages of time and in Vonnegut it is already after apocalypse.

Racial violence is also mentioned in Vonnegut specially in Mother Night. The White Christian Minuteman is published by Dr. Jones who is against Jews and coloured people. He has formed an Iron Guard of the White Sons of the American Constitution. The guardsmen are all blonde and over six feet tall. Racism is mentioned banteringly in Breakfast of Champions in which blacks are called reindeer. The Police Department had racks of sub-machine guns "for an open season on reindeer..."<sup>134</sup>

The pathetic figure of Kilgore Trout personifies the violence done to writers. Trout, a struggling science fiction



writer, has to sell his books to porn magazines because no one else will publish them. Vonnegut's description of Trout as "a frightened aging Jesus"<sup>135</sup> makes one wonder if Vonnegut thinks of writers as Christ figures, sacrificing themselves but without hope for the redemption of mankind.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater though not a social tract, points to the unfairness of a lop-sided economy. Various incidents highlight the privileges that are automatically conferred on the rich and to the indignity of being poor. The difference between the rich and the poor is resolved with great difficulty - when Eliot uses his money to help the poor he is considered insane.

Vonnegut is casual about violence and this is signified specially by the "so it goes" phrase in Slaughterhouse-Five, used after a death has been mentioned. There are even sentences like "The champagne was dead. So it goes".<sup>136</sup> It is a way of saying that death does not matter as much as we think it does. This device is amusing to start with but becomes irritating when every other sentence ends with "So it goes" (or "Hi-ho" in Slapstick). It is like a literary tic.

Casual reference to extreme violence is more effectively used elsewhere, as we can see from the following examples:

In Herzog Bellow narrates the trial of a mother who kills her child for crying. Herzog is "wrung and wrung again, and wrung again".<sup>137</sup> The narrator of Breakfast of Champions

describes the same kind of killing but not in the tone of a man who is wrung. It is Almost flippantly told, the narration of a usual happening:

Her name was Cynthia Anne, and she certainly didn't live very long before she was made dead again. She got killed for crying and crying. She wouldn't shut up. 138

This can compare with the flip language of Newspeak. Vonnegut seems to be making an oblique comment on the control of mass media on minds where reality is restructured by media. This light-hearted couldn't-care-less tone continues to be deployed for the most brutal violence, e.g. Kennedy's death:

John F. Kennedy... was a President of the United States who was shot to death. Presidents of the country were often shot to death.139

or, over the drawing of a gun he says, "This was a tool whose only purpose was to make holes in human beings".140

This casual mention of violent death seems more chilling than an intense passage about it.

Yossarian and Mac resist disaster but Vonnegut's characters do not try. They are aware of the pointlessness of fighting against meaninglessness. Even death is finally without meaning. "That a Yossarian... should... say "So it goes" is unthinkable"141 says Pinstker but that is because Yossarian is a semi-fabulist character. The fabulist character has gone beyond protest into a state of resigned acceptance. The gesture that one associates readily with a Vonnegut character is the shrug.

The semi-fabulist character is one who does not give up the struggle to combat collective evil or tyranny because he is convinced that the nature of reality does not change basically although he may be deluded monetarily. The fabulist resolution in Vonnegut is always round the corner because the character is unable to sustain his resistance to the manipulative forces which succeed in destroying his consciousness of being human. Once Vonnegut's characters escape into space what is happening on earth is projected up there. The Tralfamadorians are not so different from the Combine or the Air Force. The discursive level is maintained throughout but the resolution is fabulist. As Vonnegut gets more and more abstract he employs a lot of mass-media techniques.

Vonnegut's grotesques include: a crippled man "as spastic in space as Billy Pilgrim was in time. Convulsions made the man dance flappingly all the time, made him change his expressions, too, as though he were trying to imitate various famous movie stars".<sup>142</sup> There is another cripple "so jammed between his crutches that his shoulders hid his ears".<sup>143</sup> In The Sirens of Titan the skeleton of a large dog is chained to a wall. "Its long teeth meshed. Its skull and jaws formed a cunningly articulated, harmless working model of a flesh-ripping machine."<sup>144</sup> There is a "Beware of the Dog" sign on the door. Chrono (The Sirens of Titan) joins the Titanic bluebirds and starts living like them, sharing their food and speaking their language. Slapstick's twin protagonists are

monsters with six fingers and toes and the features of "adult, fossil human beings even in infancy - massive brow-ridges, sloping foreheads, and steamshovel jaws".<sup>145</sup>

Madness in the fabulists is not a conventional straw in the hair image of the idiot. It is the other face of violence and can be defined as a state of settled necrophilia, the love of dead things or the consuming desire to transform the animate and living to the inanimate.

In Mother Night Howard's best friend loves his motorcycle more than anything else, even more than his wife. Fromm says that contemporary man has lost interest in people, nature and living structures. This lack of interest in what is living is accompanied by an increasing attraction of

mechanical, non-alive artifacts...  
All over the industrialized world  
there are men who feel more tender  
towards and are more interested in  
their automobiles than their wives.<sup>146</sup>

Pynchon, too, has a character, Rachel Owlglass in V., who loves her M.G. the way she would love a man - it borders on the sexual. Profane overhears her talking to her car:

"You beautiful stud... I love to touch  
you... Do you know what I feel when  
we're out on the road?"<sup>147</sup>

She talks in this lover-like manner while carressing the car.

Da Conho, a very minor character in V., has the same kind

of love for his machine gun. When it is stolen he cries for it like a child.

Dr. Gelhorne, the man at the top in Player Piano has a "perpetual I-smell-excrement expression".<sup>148</sup> Fromm in his study of necrophilia mentions "sniffers":

Many necrophilous individuals give the impression of constantly smelling a bad odour. Anybody who studies the many pictures of Hitler, for instance, can easily discover this sniffing expression in his face.<sup>149</sup>

Necrophilia, it should be remembered, is not just attraction for the dead and the desire for dismemberment, it is also the "exclusive interest in all that is purely mechanical".<sup>150</sup> The men in Player Piano's mechanized world seem to be drawn from such a concept of modern living.

Felix Hoenniker's is also a form of madness in Cat's Cradle. A brilliant scientist, he plays with materials and produces bombs and something called ice-nine which has the capacity to destroy the world by turning it to ice. He does this without thought for the consequence. His creations are the end product of an intelligent game - like solving a cross-word puzzle - than an evil intent to destroy. Hoenniker is the embodiment of Fromm's contemporary technical man who "is not motivated by a passion for destruction, but would be more properly described as a totally alienated man whose dominant orientation is cerebral, who feels little love but

also little desire to destroy..."<sup>151</sup> His son, Frank, too is interested in the mechanical and does not know how to communicate with the living.

In contrast to these characters are those who suffer a breakdown because they are sensitive and unable to insulate themselves the way the living dead are.

Billy Pilgrim has a nervous breakdown because he has been through extreme violence in the war. He has himself committed to a ward for non-violent mental patients in a veterans hospital. There are twenty-nine other patients who, like the patients of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, have "come here voluntarily, alarmed by the outside world".<sup>152</sup> Next to him in the ward is Eliot Rosewater who tells a psychiatrist: "I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful new lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living."<sup>153</sup>

Eliot's wife, Sylvia, (God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater) is sensitive to the needs of people and assists Eliot when he starts helping the poor of Rosewater town. Five years later she has a nervous breakdown for which a word has to be coined since it is a new kind of breakdown. "Samaritrophia", the psychiatrist calls it, "hysterical indifference to the troubles of those less fortunate than oneself".<sup>154</sup>

Vonnegut also describes various obsessions.

Beatrice Rumfoord in The Sirens of Titan cannot bear dirt. She has been obsessed with cleanliness ever since she was a child.

Bernard O'Hare who has an empty, meaningless life after the war, sees its only meaning in the defeat of Howard Campbell. He is convinced that it is in the stars that they will meet again and he will defeat Campbell. He is so sure of this that he comes unarmed to Howard.

Eliot Rosewater is obsessed with firemen and fire engines. This obsession began as a child when he was made mascot of the firemen in his hometown. His obsession becomes complete when he kills three firemen in the war, mistaking them for German soldiers.

Campbell in Mother Night stays alone. He does not seek company. All he does is think of his dead wife Helga. His morbid fixation verges on the insane:

"... I became a death-worshipper... Always alone. I drank toasts to her, said good morning to her, said good night to her, played music for her, and didn't give a damn for one thing else".<sup>155</sup>

The experience of too much suffering either leads to a nervous breakdown or to a paralytic trance in the case of Campbell and Eliot.

In Mother Night, after Resi kills herself and Kraft is discovered to be a Russian agent, Campbell freezes to one

spot. What freezes him he says, is not sorrow or rage but the fact that there was no reason to move in any direction. Even curiosity had died out in him.

When Eliot finds out that he has killed firemen by mistake he too gets totally immobile.

This paralytic trance is also found in Barth with the difference that Barth's characters are already paralyzed whereas in Vonnegut they reach that state.

Jacob Horner in The End of the Road is subject to this trance. He once sits on a railway bench completely immobile - even the pupils of his eyes do not move - for about fifteen hours. He might have remained there indefinitely had he not been spotted by a doctor. The doctor - himself an eccentric with unconventional methods - describes this physical paralysis as a cessation of participation in myths. In a normal state a person assumes a mask which is shaped according to the heroic image he has of himself. Horner gets paralyzed because at that moment he has lost the myth about himself.

Ebenezer (The Sotweed Factor) also goes into a trance, specially when he is faced with a difficult decision.

This physical and mental paralysis is a state of catalepsy which can be associated with schizophrenia. Vonnegut seems most concerned, of all mental diseases, with schizophrenia. He even calls it "that simple and widespread boon to modern mankind".<sup>156</sup>



For Campbell it is a boon because that is the only way he can live with himself. He remains unaffected by his activities as a Nazi by distancing himself from the broadcasting voice.

Kraft, the Russian spy, is also saved by schizophrenia. As a spy he plans to turn in Campbell but as a private person, he cares for him and means well by him.

Vonnegut, then, sees schizophrenia not as a disease but as a cure for the disease of the soul. It becomes a way for the sensitive man to save himself, to escape into an inviolate self. It has a positive side because it functions as a defence mechanism. But unlike Yossarian Vonnegut's characters are not able to get out of the entrapment.

Klinkowitz says, "the madness in Vonnegut's cosmos goes beyond the clinical illness. To maintain an integral self in this chaotic world is schizophrenia writ large".<sup>157</sup>

Eliot and Dwayne Hoover (Breakfast of Champions) can alternate between charm and rage.

In Barth schizophrenia is destructive and not a mask as it <sup>is</sup> in Vonnegut. Horner is schizophrenic at times when he can observe his own actions with the detachment he reserves for others.

The most complete case of schizophrenia is Peter Greene's in Giles Goat-Boy - unlike the other characters who are aware

of their schizophrenic tendencies, Greene is two totally different people and does not know this. One self is a voyeur and when his girlfriend complains of being pestered by a voyeur he tries to catch him, not realizing that he himself is the culprit. He loses an eye when he throws a stone at the 'Voyeur' and a piece from the mirror lodges in his eye.

He is so much at odds with himself that he bribes the police to put down a demonstration and then marches disguised with the demonstrators and takes a beating he himself had paid for. This seems to be a form of masochistic self-defeating schizophrenia which is different from the positive kind. He is aware that he seems to be "a pair of humans in a single skin".<sup>158</sup>

Vonnegut writes not just of schizophrenia but of people who are totally insane. Dr. Jones in Mother Night is from a family of dentists. He is expelled from college because all he wants to do is prove that the teeth of Jews and Negroes are degenerate. His racism is of the insane variety. He starts a paper called The White Christian Minuteman where every article is "an explanation of some current events in terms of Jones' theories about dentition and race".<sup>159</sup> He writes a book called Christ Was Not a Jew which seeks to prove that Christ was not a Jew because he did not have Jewish teeth or jaws. Jones' assistants have the same insane convictions. There is a black who says that the coloured people are going to rise and take over the world since they are making their own hydrogen bomb.

It is insanity which makes Jones - a rabid racist - and Robert - a coloured man - work together. Eichmann is also presented as mad, as someone who cannot distinguish between "right and wrong... truth and falsehood, hope and despair, Beauty and ugliness, kindness and cruelty, comedy and tragedy..."<sup>160</sup>

In Breakfast of Champions Vonnegut develops a character in the process of going mad. Madness is explained in terms of bad chemicals which play havoc with a man's mind.

Dwayne Hoover's madness takes various forms: he sees and hears things, like a huge duck directing traffic; he is insulting without reason to his close friends; he gets echolia which means his repeating out loud the last word in a sentence addressed to him; he cannot remember things, even his wife's suicide; he sings aloud although he had never sung before; he contemplates suicide and shoots the toilet, washbasin and tub instead.

There are other mad minor characters in Breakfast of Champions. Dwayne's and the narrator's mothers were mad and both have committed suicide. They both hated having their photographs taken: "... if somebody aimed a camera at either one of them during the daytime, the mother who was aimed at would crash down on her knees and protect her head with her arms, as though somebody was about to club her to death".<sup>161</sup>

Their suicide is violence committed against themselves because of madness. Violence and madness are connected in

other cases as well. Dwayne Hoover, after he goes completely crazy, beats up a number of people. The reason for this is a book written by the science-fiction writer, Trout. The book begins with, "Hey - guess what: You're the only creature with free will. How does that make you feel?"<sup>162</sup> It goes on to say that everyone else is a robot - there are crying machines, sulking machines, machines programmed to commit suicide. In the state of mind he is in Dwayne believes this implicitly. He proceeds to beat up people violently - including his mistress and son - because he thinks no one but he can feel pain.

In Slaughterhouse-Five Roland Weary is a queer psychological case. He makes friends with someone who is even more unattractive than him and then finds some pretext to beat him up savagely. Lazzaro, too, is violent and crazy. He has a list in his head of people who have insulted him and plans to have them killed after the war is over. Billy Pilgrim's death is finally caused by him.

Eliot's madness is partly explained in terms of the harrowing experience he has had during the war. When he is leading a platoon they attack a barn said to have German soldiers in it. Eliot bayonets one and kills two others before it is discovered that these men are really firemen and not soldiers. The one Eliot has bayoneted is a fourteen-year old boy. Eliot seems to be alright for some time and then he lies down in front of a truck. The truck stops in time but when his men pick him up they find he has gone completely stiff.

Many years later the stiffness returns and his memory fails him. He goes blank and when he comes to, he is in a private mental hospital and gradually realises that he has lost a whole year.

Despite his phases of madness there are people who find him the sanest American they have ever met, because of his generosity and kindness.

In Catch-22 there is a paranoid psychiatrist, Vonnegut has one in Slapstick. This woman psychiatrist craves money and cannot bear others to have it so that "she seethed with paranoia... she was... enraged by how much money and power our family had..."<sup>163</sup>

Mailer and Heller have given us a definition of madness - Vonnegut does too in Mother Night when he talks of the totalitarian mind:

which might be likened unto a system of gears whose teeth have been filed off at random...

The missing teeth, of course, are simple, obvious truths...

The wilful filing off of gear teeth, the wilful doing without certain obvious pieces of information - ...

That was how Rudolf Hess, Commandant of Auschwitz, could alternate over the loudspeakers of Auschwitz great music and calls for corpse-carriers -

That was how Nazi Germany could sense no important differences between civilization and hydrophobia - <sup>164</sup>

Turning to Barth, we find Burlingame talking of preventives against madness. One way to avoid insanity is to be dull-witted, the the other way is to assert yourself. Ebenezer thinks that a third course could be to get paralyzed. But, says Burlingame, he has found many people in Bedlam who are paralyzed, repeating one gesture or being transfixed or taking on false identities.

Strangely enough, Burlingame himself keeps changing identities. The insane assume an identity to escape reality, the sane assume identities as a defence against the madness of the world.

There are some minor characters in Barth who are insane. In Floating Opera the narrator tells us of a case involving a multi-millionaire. With the gradual lose of his health, he has slowly lost his mind, going along "the continuum from relative normalcy through marked eccentricity to jibbering idiocy". He allows "nothing of his creation - including hair-and nail-clippings, urine, feces, and wills - to be thrown away..."<sup>165</sup> He leaves these - with his money - to his inheritors.

In Giles Goat Boy, Alexandrov - who is otherwise sane - and Greene, both have a strong antipathy for mirrors. Greene removes the rear-view mirror of his motorcycle. Alex says that if he had a wall lined with mirrors instead of bars he would not escape, "he would be frozen in its center with his

eye shut".<sup>166</sup> Croaker who is animal-like becomes total beast for a while, crawling on fours, huddling in a corner. Mrs. Sear reverts to the mental state of a five-year-old girl. Giles' mother who is already slightly insane goes further mad when she gets EATEN by a flash from WESCAC. What she does now is mix maxims: "First served, first come".<sup>167</sup>

In Giles Goat-Boy are some totally mad patients who think they are animals. Two men growl and bare their teeth and when they bump against the chair of a young girl she arched her back, threatened with her nails, and hissed".<sup>168</sup>

When Chancellor Rexford issues a general amnesty not only to prisoners but also to mental patients, the place turns into a virtual Bedlam. Barth presents in this scene a vivid Bosch-like nightmare where "demented undergraduates and faculty of both sexes swung from light-fixtures, raced in wheel-chairs, coupled on the carpet, shat in typewriters, or merely stood transfixed in curious attitudes..."<sup>169</sup>

This leads to a comic scene. George and his mother escape from the place by taking a taxi but find on reaching their destination that the taxi-driver is an inmate. Alarmed Giles orders him to stop the motorcycle. "Stop the cycle", he squawked like a parrot. "Stop the cycle,".<sup>170</sup> The motorcycle finally comes to rest in a hedge. "The driver sat erect and beaming as ever, though yew-things pressed against his face, even into his mouth.

"Thtop the thycle," he repeated".<sup>171</sup>

Although violence is dominant in Pynchon, there are also a great number of mad people or people who are paranoid because of the violence they have to face.

V. has a mad priest called Father Fairing. During the depression he decides that the rats are going to take over after New York died and so thinks he should convert them to the Roman Church. He climbs down a manhole and starts living in the sewer because he wants to be the spiritual leader of the inheritors of the earth. He teaches himself to communicate with them and presumably succeeds because in his journal he writes things like, "Ingatius is proving a very difficult student indeed. He quarreled with me today over the nature of indulgences."<sup>172</sup> Victoria is his favourite rat and she wants to be a sister. There is an apocryphal tale of an affair between the two. At the same time Father Fairing has to eat three or four of the rats to keep alive.

V's affair with fifteen-year-old Melanie is also abnormal because it does not involve any physical contact. It is enough for Melanie to watch herself in mirrors and enough for V. to simply watch her. Oedipa's husband can do spectral analysis in his head after he starts taking LSD. He loses his identity, becoming many people, "a walking assembly of man".<sup>173</sup> Pointsman (Gravity's Rainbow) head of the White Visitation where wierd experiments are conducted, starts hallucinating and speaks aloud to a voice only he can hear.



The White Visitation is itself full of grotesques, people with extraordinary gifts or freak talents. Cherrycoke, for instance, can divulge the secret thoughts, anxieties and events of another person; Margarat Quarterhope can produce voices on discs miles away without speaking or touching the equipment; Gavin Trefoil can change into different colours from albino to a deep purplish black, like a chameleon.

Slothrop comes across Margherita, a masochist who likes to be whipped. She cannot bear to be alone because then she can see "them" torturing her. Even looking into a mirror frightens her because she can see "them" in it. Slothrop finds out later that the "them" are Jewish boys she has murdered.

Pynchon, too, writes of a mad shrink. Oedipa's psychiatrist suddenly goes berserk and starts firing at everyone he sees. He thinks Israelites with machine guns are after him. This paranoia results from his having been an intern at Buchenwald. He had worked on experimentally-induced insanity. They had different methods for driving the Jews mad. His was to make terrible faces. As atonement he chooses Freud's methods rather than Jung's.

In Gravity's Rainbow there is a mad man called Le Froyd.

Why are there so many mad people in these three fabulists? We can explain this by saying that they are different versions of madness. But they can also be thought of as different submissions to the same referent - the central madness in

culture. These different examples of madness create a sense of general madness, an asylum without walls.

One reason fabulist writing seems so surreal is because of the profusion of insane and irrational characters. It is not so much a case-study madness as an imaginative reconstruction of that basic madness for which Nazi Germany is the model. Narrative manipulation creates a sense of universal madness.

Although Vonnegut deals extensively with violence and madness, his is a comic vision, not a tragic one. Comic cruelty and fabulation are, for Vonnegut, the only methods to come to terms with the ridiculous life modern man has to lead. As Buck says,

for him, the elements of death, fear, and humor are almost interchangeable, the presence of one leading quite naturally to a consideration of the other two. "you can't be funny," Vonnegut maintains, "unless you get close to death, to fear".<sup>174</sup>

The dedication of Slapstick is to Laurel and Hardy. This is significant because Laurel and Hardy make violence and destruction hilarious. Furniture is broken, crockery is smashed, a whole house is demolished and the audience roars. Even when Laurel cries, the audience is in splits. Vonnegut uses this technique when writing about madness and violence. Tragic destinies - and there are plenty in Vonnegut - do not seem tragic.

Madness is made comic by using colloquial phrases about insanity one after the other: "He had bats in his bell tower. He was off his rocker. He wasn't playing with a full deck of cards".<sup>175</sup> There is no sadness about the fact that it is a kind, generous man who is going mad.

Suicide itself is treated as a comic act. Fred Rosewater puts the noose over his head, climbs a stool, when his son shouts that he has a visitor. "Fred moved quickly, barely escaped being caught in the embarrassing act of destroying himself".<sup>176</sup>

In a scene like this Vonnegut's debt to the comedians is clear. He acknowledges it in Between Time and Timbuktu. American comedians, he says, "have probably done more to shape my thinking than any writer".<sup>177</sup>

Sometimes he produces a comic effect by giving an entirely new perspective to a tired cliché. In Cat's Cradle Julian Castle, a millionaire, works day and night - in a hospital he has founded - to save people from plague. Doing the rounds with his son one night, all he can see is one dead man after another, dead people stacked on top of each other. Julian Castle starts giggling, puts his hand on his son's head and says, "Son... someday this will all be yours".<sup>178</sup> According to Olderman:

The particular power of Vonnegut's works...  
is in the deceptively simple way he deals  
with the extraordinary nature of contemporary

fact. Vonnegut is master at getting inside a cliché and taking it enough off center to reveal both the horror and the mystery that lies beneath the surfaces of the most placidly dull and ordinary human response".<sup>179</sup>

Fabulation is another method of dealing with life. As Hendin says:

As fabulist, as creator of the startling imaginative predicaments of science fiction, Vonnegut captures the emotions, the fantasies too painful to name, the problems the audience finds insoluble.<sup>180</sup>

Scholes defines fabulation as "fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know yet returns to confront that world in some cognitive way".<sup>181</sup>

Through fabulation we see our world as we have never seen it before since we approach it from a wholly new perspective. It is a way of dealing with tragedy. Billy Pilgrim, for instance, has "exhausted his horror quotient",<sup>182</sup> as Uphaus puts it. Since he has seen so much death and destruction, says Uphaus, he has taken to the Tralfamadorian philosophy which sees death as only a moment in time. Billy thus saves himself from further horror. Yossarian and Mac resist disaster but Vonnegut's characters do not even try. They have come to see the pointlessness of struggling. Vonnegut himself finds it "gruesome and comical that in our culture we have an expectation that a man can always solve his problems".<sup>183</sup>

Billy does not solve his problems but escapes them by getting "unstuck in time".<sup>184</sup> He can get away from the present moment by disappearing into a past or future one.

Slapstick presents the dystopia of a future America in which energy has been used up. There are not many people left because they die of a mysterious disease called "Green Death". The germs which cause Green Death transpire to be tiny Chinamen who get inhaled by people.

Vonnegut does not use science fiction in the way the science fiction writers do - as a corrective. As Rose points out, "Vonnegut is not apparently using alien life-forms to throw into relief peculiarities or inadequancies of humans..."<sup>185</sup> What the science fiction passages do is to enable us to look at our world from another planet and see it from a different perspective.

Vonnegut projects in space violence inherent in man. Scholes says that although "structural fabulations originate in some projected dislocation of our known existence, their projections will be based on a contemporary apprehension of the biosphere as an eco system and the universe as a cosmosystem".<sup>186</sup>

What strikes one forcibly in Vonnegut's work is his use of the narrative style of a children's book to project violence and madness. Take a look at these sentences from Slaughterhouse-Five:

"During the night some of the locomotives began to tootle to one another, and then to move".<sup>187</sup>

"Its locomotive whistled. The locomotive of Billy Pilgrim's train whistled back. They were saying "Hello".<sup>188</sup>

Anyone looking at these sentences would be forgiven for thinking he was reading a children's story. What makes the light-hearted tone so shocking is that Vonnegut is describing not happy trains but trains carrying prisoners of war to camp.

Breakfast of Champions, specially, uses all the technique of a children's book - language, illustration, explanation. The content is adult but the tone is meant for children. Children's books take violence for granted. It is perfectly plausible for the wolf to don the grandmother's clothes and try to eat up Red Riding Hood. In the same manner violence is taken for granted in Vonnegut.

Vonnegut has borrowed some forms of fantasy from Alice in Wonderland. Like the Cheshire Cat:

Winston Niles Rumfoord vanished slowly,  
beginning with the end of his fingers,  
and ending with his grin: The grin  
remained some time after the rest of him  
had gone.<sup>189</sup>

The fall of the space ship in Mercury is like Alice's fall:

And the ship was still falling, and  
 falling fast...  
 then the ghastly feeling of the leaf-  
 like fall began again...  
 Twenty Earthling minutes later the ship  
 was still falling gently.<sup>190</sup>

The phrase "beamish boy" is used in Mother Night. Alice discovers a bottle which says "Drink me". Billy finds a bottle of champagne, "Drink me", it seemed to say".<sup>191</sup>

Pynchon, too, borrows from Alice in Wonderland. Blodgett Waxwing like the Cheshire cat can "fade when he wants to".<sup>192</sup> The smile of the cat lingers after he has disappeared so also Major Marvy's "double row of shiny bright teeth hangs in the air".<sup>193</sup> Marvy and Chiclitz are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee: "They stand with their arms around each other's shoulder's, two smiling fat men".<sup>194</sup>

Pynchon also often goes to children's media - specially the comic book - for language.

Most of his characters have comic-strip names: Profane, Stencil, Sphere, Charisma, Trench, Winsome, Mafia, Pig, Satin, Bloat, Pirate, Krypton, Pox, Stick, Blooming, Scorpia, Mossmoon, Morituri. Charisma (V.), like Linus, always carries a blanket.

But it is in Gravity's Rainbow that he really makes extensive use of comics. So much so that one can say that the novel functions on two levels: one is the level of zap comics and the other is the intellectual level which includes the theory of entropy.

Slothorp who reads Plasticman comics, himself acts out the part of a comic character. Dressed in a cape and helmet shaped like the nose assembly of a rocket, he is called Rocketman. When he goes to a forbidden area no one stops Rocketman. He begins to think of himself as invisible. Rocketman becomes a legend like Superman so that Slothorp sees graffiti which says, "ROCKETMAN WAS HERE".<sup>195</sup>

Violence at times, takes the shape of a comic-book event. When Slothorp climbs onto the roof of a moving train he meets Major Marvy who makes nasty cracks about Africans. At this point a tall African steps out of the shadows and throws Marvy off the train. Marvy utters one short yell. Then Slothorp and the African "watch the Major bounce down the embankment behind them, arms and legs flying, out of sight. Firs crowd the hills. A crescent moon has risen over one ragged crest."<sup>196</sup>

This is the verbalization of a strip-cartoon illustration: the villain being thrown off a train, silhouetted against the moon and trees, arms and legs spread out. And instead of dying, although it is a fast-moving train, he is back again after a few pages, like the survivor of comic-book violence, wearing just a bandage or two.

The pig incident in Gravity's Rainbow is like the fantasy in a children's tale. Slothorp dresses as a pig and falls asleep by a stream. He is awakened by a lady pig who licks his face. "She grunts and smiles amiably, blinking long



eyelashes".<sup>197</sup> She <sup>S</sup>recues him from a dog and leads him to her master.

The book even has witches. Gelli is a practising witch who uses witchcraft to make Tchitcherine hers. Narrative technique helps create new forms of futuristic violence generating new connotations of violence and madness.

Turning to language what strikes us most in Pynchon is his exuberance in writing (look at the way a single sentence "You never did the Kendsha Kid" is made to mean so many different things). Whatever has been said about Gravity's Rainbow, there seems to be total agreement on the power of his language. Levine puts it thus:

Pynchon's language is so richly, sometimes so cruelly anchored in the banalities of the colloquial, the obscene, the trivial, the familiar, and it so miraculously spins from these things into high scientific and historical speculation, into melodrama, romance, and apocalyptic intensity, that the experience is not merely - if it is even primarily - intellectual.<sup>198</sup>

He transfers the language of the comics to fiction - "sez", "critter" are used all the time. There are sentences like: "Whir underneath an oil pipeline...", "Zoom uphill slantwise...",<sup>199</sup> "A cow sez moo".<sup>200</sup> Roger "stuffs his hostage into a gigantic furnace which is banked for the spring (too bad), and flees out the back way... over a fence, zippety zop, fastfoot Roger and the London cops".<sup>201</sup>

Straight out of comics are sounds like "YAAAGGGHHHH"<sup>202</sup> to express horror.

Barth, too, is very original in his use of language, inventing a new language to suit the form of his book. The Sot-Weed Factor is written in the language of late 17th-18th century. An illustration of his inventiveness are the seven pages which are devoted only to curse words. A vituperative argument between a French and English cook turns into a curse-word competition.

In Giles Goat-Boy, where the campus is a metaphor for the world, he has created a language to go with this concept. For instance, kings are deans, swords are quills, saviour is the Grand Tutor, God is Founder, Christ is Enos Enoch, world is campus, good is passedness, bad is flunked, Devil is Dean o' Flunks. Prayers like "Our Father" are changed to "Our Founder".

George as a goat boy uses words associated with goats, e.g. "A small bleat of pity escaped me...",<sup>203</sup> "Stoker... herded me to the lift",<sup>204</sup> "...coming on the hooves, of my reprimand..."<sup>205</sup>

While the mad, absurd situations conjured up by these writers could suggest the projection of violence and madness on futuristic space, what makes the reading of these works really harrowing is the language. Whatever abstraction might be involved in fabulation and however much the fabulist

characters move away from the uncanny into the marvellous, the imagery very graphically captures madness and violence in concrete terms, reminding us of Artaud's idea of cruelty.

While the writers fail to rein in their sense of horror, it does not get diffused into abstraction because the images are startlingly real. They invest madness, violence and cruelty with sensuousness and so the general effect is one of intense presentation or cruelty in the Artaudian sense. There is a kind of primitivism involved in the images - the prespeech stage that Artaud celebrates.

The stark vivid imagery, in fact, reifies violence instead of abstracting it. While the forms and situations - because of their outlandish character - seem to move away from contingent reality to abstraction, the imagery works against the abstracting tendency of the narrative.

In the midst of all the abstraction the imagery is tactile (a lot of animal imagery is present, for instance). The so-called cerebral intellectual abstraction congeals into carnal imagery which thwarts the tendency toward abstraction. This may be self-reflexive fiction but in the imagery the self-reflexive character seems to disappear. The frequency of this imagery is not as great in Barth as in Vonnegut or Pynchon.

The form, the character, the resolution, all ~~are~~ abstracted and yet the horror of these writers seems to express itself tangibly in spite of their commitment to abstraction.

A close look at the imagery will make this clear.

(a) Grotesque

Inanimate as Animate

Vonnegut

"The television cameras dollied and panned about him like curious friendly dinosaurs, sniffing and peering".<sup>206</sup>

"The cameras about-faced and closed in on Paul like dogs closing in on a coon shot from a tree".<sup>207</sup>

"The terrazzo floor... was strewn with the guts and internal secretions of the automatic ticket vendor, the automatic nylon vendor, the automatic coffee vendor..."<sup>208</sup>

"The air-raid sirens of Dresden howled mournfully".<sup>209</sup>

"... looking like a mouthful of broken teeth was all that was left of the home of Werner Noth..."<sup>210</sup>

"Somewhere a siren, a tax-supported mourner, wailed".<sup>211</sup>

Pynchon

"... he heard the MG's sinister growl".<sup>212</sup>

"He... heard the nails shriek free of the wood..."<sup>213</sup>

The sky's "tentacles already touched the roof..."<sup>214</sup>

"... three rival ambulances backed snarling up onto the lawn..."<sup>215</sup>

"Mud occupies some streets like flesh".<sup>216</sup>

"A truck motor snarls somewhere into life".<sup>217</sup>

"... tobacco smoke clawing at insides of eyelids..."<sup>218</sup>

"... the glossy skin of the rocket..."<sup>219</sup>

### Barth

Motorcycles "monstrously wobbling uswards now with... sprawl of eyes, mad hoots, and growling throats".<sup>220</sup>

### Animate as Inanimate

#### Vonnegut

His legs "were pale white broomsticks... they were embossed fantastically with varicose veins".<sup>221</sup>

"Thin clouds of bats stream out of the subway - jittering, squeaking, dispersing like gas".<sup>222</sup>

#### Pynchon

"Her eyes glittered like the slopes of adjacent sawteeth".<sup>223</sup>

"Her eyes hide in iron shadows... Her jaw is small, square, levered forward... Bones in her face strongly curved and welded".<sup>224</sup>

### (b) Man as Creature

#### Vonnegut

Eichmann is "that chinless old plucked buzzard..."<sup>225</sup>

"... his head looked to me like a bizarre little owl, blinded by light and perched on a tall white post".<sup>226</sup>

Pynchon

A girl with a guaze beak..."<sup>227</sup>

"Young Stencil... waggled his shoulder blades like wings".<sup>228</sup>

"Signor Mantissa, skewered like a butterfly, flapped his arms, tossed his golden head".<sup>229</sup>

"... four fat school mistresses whinnying softly to one another..."<sup>230</sup>

"... fingers with dirty nails clutching like talons..."<sup>231</sup>

"Old people in black are bat-flittering among the walls".<sup>232</sup>

Barth

"... his eyes, round as always, and protruding, looked lusterless past his beak like a sick owl's eyes".<sup>233</sup>

(c) Violent ImageryVonnegut

"Maple sugar was a kind of candy made from the blood of trees".<sup>234</sup>

The dog's "eyes were pinwheels. His teeth were white daggers. His slobber was cyanide. His blood was nitroglycerine".<sup>235</sup>

Pynchon

"... dead skin peeling off the burned face in white rage".<sup>236</sup>

"... his gangrenous face".<sup>237</sup>

"their feet crush unicorns and peacocks that repeat diamond-fashion the entire length of the carpet".<sup>238</sup>

"... streets bleeding tar..."239

"She.. stared at Profane out of her dark eyeholes".240

"... the sorrowing and weary eyeholes".241

"the leaves of trees whipped to and fro like tiny automata".242

"... a long gallery, stabbed at ten-yard intervals down its length by yellow daggers of African sun..."243

"... wounds, laid open across the flesh like so many toothless smiles".244

"... a picked, architectural web of bone..."245

"... eyes, which were the color of freezing rain".246

"... the most diseased part of the sky... the clouds hung like leprous tissue".247

"... the underbelly of a nauseous-yellow cloud".248

"His eyes waited at the centres of their webs".249

"They sat in silence, listening to rain gnaw languidly at the windows and skylights..."250

"... that vast sink of the primal blood the Pacific".251

"... the white fracture of the rain passes".252

"This city, in all its bomb-pierced miles: this inexhaustibly knotted victim... skin of glistening roofslates..."253

"... the eyes a seldom-encountered blue that on certain days... brims over, seeps, bleeds out to illuminate the boy's entire face..."254

"... that vaguely criminal face on your ID card, its soul snatched by the government camera as the guillotine shutter fell..."<sup>255</sup>

"The sun, not very high yet, will catch a bird by the ends of his wings..."<sup>256</sup>

"... black curly skeletons of iron benches..."<sup>257</sup>

"... tears coming up to fill each (eye)  
... mascara bleeding out in fine black  
swirls... translucent stones, trembling in  
their sockets..."<sup>258</sup>

"... eyes like safety valves that pop out at you whenever... the pressure in his head gets too high".<sup>259</sup>

"... the crosses priests make in the air quarter and divide the staring congregations behind them."<sup>260</sup>

"... walls whose tops are broken like fever charts".<sup>261</sup>

"... money... swelling, paper cancer in their billfolds..."<sup>262</sup>

"Apes scuttle along in the bonelight..."<sup>263</sup>

"Spotlights find and skewer them now".<sup>264</sup>

### Barth

"... trees gaunt as gibbets".<sup>265</sup>

"... infinities of faceless, featureless, identical row houses and nightmare lines of marble steps like snagged teeth".<sup>266</sup>

### (d) Funeral Imagery

#### Vonnegut

"... he still looked garishly boyish, as though he went to a mortuary cosmetologist regularly".<sup>267</sup>



"Eliot's head was under his blanket and his hands... gripped the shroud tightly".<sup>268</sup>

"Thus the American dream turned belly up, turned green, bobbed to the scummy surface of cupidity unlimited, filled with gas, went bang in the noonday sun"<sup>269</sup>

### Pynchon

"... snow-shrouds flap silently against the big windows".<sup>270</sup>

"Corpse fingers jabbed in the air".<sup>271</sup>

"Tough skins of oxides... shroud the metal surfaces..."<sup>272</sup>

"... food covered with rigid shrouds of clear plastic..."<sup>273</sup>

In this sort of imagery the presence of what Dickatein calls "the individual vision"<sup>274</sup> is felt.

We began this chapter with an Edward Said like faith in the interrelationship between the world and the text. "My position", says Said, "is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted".<sup>275</sup> Whereas these texts do not mimetically reproduce violence and madness as they exist in contingent reality, they produce new meanings of violence and madness, and implied in this meaning-producing activity

is the insight given into the true nature of violence by Honderich, that violence can take shapes and forms not apprehended by man in his quotidian world. By stressing its ambiguity the fabulists raise violence to the order of social crisis.

The fabulists delineate what Honderich terms violence by omission. "In fact", Honderich asserts, "we ensure by our ordinary lives that multitudes of individuals die before time, that families exist in single wretched rooms, and that this or that people are powerless in their homeland, or subservient in it, or driven from it".<sup>276</sup> The fabulists confront us with the fact of our complicity in this silent act of violence by presenting the victim's version of violence as in Slaughterhouse-Five. We said at the outset that the fabulists deal with collective violence but their satire is not aimed so much at the obvious tyrants like dictators and Combines. They implicate the ordinary people like Profane or Billy Pilgrim in violence of this kind. As Honderich puts it, "We judge our kind of conduct to be right, and the conduct of the violent to be wrong, but the two kinds of conduct are alike in a certain fact, and this fact of likeness is all-important. Each kind of conduct consists in the denial of human needs and indeed of life".<sup>277</sup> (emphasis Honderich's). As he puts it trenchantly, "The wrongfulness of violence is in no way diminished by the wrongfulness of our omissions".<sup>278</sup>

Vonnegut's Mother Night, Slaughterhouse-Five, Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, Barth's The End of the Road by blurring the distinction between institutionalized violence, like war, and violence of the necrophilous individuals, stress this fact of the complicity of the common man in violence. The images discussed here contribute a great deal to the creation of this ambiguous nexus between violence of the obvious kind and the potential for violence inherent in ordinary human lives. They also, as in Vonnegut and Pynchon and to a much greater degree in Hawkes, as we shall see, make us aware of the predicament of the victims of violence by presenting it from their perspective. The agents of violence are almost sub-human automatons whereas the victims, as the gory imagery suggests, represent the living matter. Black humour springs from this dichotomy between the living and the dead. Under the rigid fabulist frame, therefore, pulsates a whole submarine forest of living matter captured by the intensely carnal imagery which is intense in the Artaudian sense.

As we have seen earlier, even in fiction like Barth's Vonnegut's and Pynchon's, while the fictionality of violence is stressed, the imagery refers us back to violence as the primitive condition. So the break with culture which is implied in the metafictionists' stance and other discontinuities which are certainly not found in the works of the semi-fabulists,

are also not present in the works of the fabulists. While the character does not hesitate between the uncanny and the marvellous and is assimilated to fantasy, the rhetoric stops short of this assimilation.

While the sense of fabulist abstraction is reinforced by the enlargement of the connotative significance of violence, and both violence and madness in the works of these writers resist reification in a typology of texts, yet they are certainly not reduced to a subjectless and meaningless drift as is generally believed.

The two positions emphasized in this chapter, then, are that the discursive levels reflected in the science fiction allegory in Vonnegut, of fable in Barth, or history in Pynchon, and the rhetorical density created by the carnal imagery in these works suggest a critique of culture rather than a flight from it.

The variety of imagery of violence and madness in the works of the fabulists while offering epistemological relativity, retains an ontological link between the text and the world as Said would put it.

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