

The Deconstruction of American Myth in Thomas Pynchon's Fiction*

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Living and creating in the tumultuous decades from the 1960s through 1980s, Thomas Pynchon unfalteringly chooses the countercultural and civil rights movements in the United States of that age as the permanent topic of his fiction. It can be seen from Pynchon's dramatic, sometimes fantastic narratives about these movements that the failure of the countercultural movements lies in their illusive nature in contrast with the hypocrisy and disproportionate power of the government to destruct these movements, and that the presence of American racial problems results to a great degree from the sloth prevailing over various institutions in American society when dealing with racial inequality and from American white racists' desire to eliminate an imagined threat in the face of the minorities. This paper tries to provide a different understanding that Pynchon's writing of the marginalized or surrealistic issues in these countercultural and civil rights movements is his strategy to expose the falsehood of American myth of democracy.

Keywords: Thomas Pynchon, American myth, countercultural movements, racial problems, deconstruction

Introduction

It seems undeniable that Thomas Pynchon is a postmodernist, though his literary works, like Pynchon himself, refuse to be nailed down on any label. Pynchon's postmodernity, in light of the rich political and cultural implication of his fiction, lies with his deconstructive writing of American history especially of the post-war years. Growing up and writing in the most tumultuous age in American history ever since, Pynchon was absolutely touched by various political and cultural movements in the 1960s through 1980s, which he more than often implicitly rewrites in his fiction. Pynchon's fiction, from a deconstructive angle, provides a truthful record of American political and cultural life in these years, especially the vigorous countercultural movements amongst its youth and the wide-spreading civil rights movements staged by American minorities, especially those that are often neglected or intentionally covered.

Yet Pynchon's "truthful record" of the reality is quite different from that done by the fiction before the World War II. Pynchon's fiction has skillfully decomposed the borderline between truth and fiction, deconstructing the grand narratives of contemporary American politics and culture. However, Pynchon never denies the realistic existence of various political and cultural problems prevailing over the United States. What

* **Acknowledgements:** This paper is part of the author's academic studies project sponsored by Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China—*A Study of the Historical Writing in Post-War American Fiction* (11YJA752008).

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Pynchon does is to stimulate his readers, white or colored, to meditate over these problems from different angles. A misleading creation strategy Pynchon employs in his fiction is that he does not lose his time on any detailed description of the struggles in countercultural and civil rights movements in the way non-fiction works do with these topics, but attempts to excavate their ideological sources to trigger the readers' reflection over the myth of American democracy and equality as well.

Demystification of the Myth of American Democracy

One of Pynchon's peculiarities in writing about the tumult of domestic political and economic activities in the United States after the World War II is to define them as wars which are in essence similar to the one that just ended. Under Pynchon's pen, "The War is keeping things alive. Things. The Ford is only one of them. The Germans-and-Japs story was only one, rather surrealistic version of the real War. The real War is always there" (Pynchon, 1973, p. 645). Like other postmodern literary texts, Pynchon's fiction conveys such a clear message that "there is virtually no difference in conditions of our existence in either peace or war" (Clerc, 1983, p. 23). Following World War II, in the 30 years' Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, many of the social upheavals in the United States were partly the result of a series of domestic and international strategies American government formulated in political, economic, military, and cultural fields. The anti-war movement triggered by the Vietnam War, and the civil rights movements staged by the minorities, women's liberation movement, countercultural movements, sexual liberation movements that followed, caused a great reform in political, cultural, and ideological fields throughout the country. American public, especially the young generation of intellectuals, uttered their doubt about the traditional authority system, trying to find a new way of self-expression in personal life, spiritual pursuit, and artistic creation. The hippies' dissipated life and sexual orgies, the liberation movement of gays and lesbians, the public demand of speech freedom, the spreading of drug addiction, and the popularity of rock'n'roll music became the indispensable elements in the life of the post-war generation. Born in the early stage of World War II, living through the Cold War years in the political and cultural upheavals in the 1960s through 1980s, Pynchon definitely could not deny his thorough understanding of this era.

It cannot be denied that this era should have a great impact on Pynchon's literary creation. Gordon (1994) as an insider knows well about what Pynchon might have experienced, "Throughout the decade [of the 1960s, Pynchon] was close to the life of the counterculture, absorbing its values and smoking its weed, but always listening and observing intently, sorting sensations for later use" (p. 177). Pynchon (1984) himself acknowledges that "For the first time I was also beginning to shut up and listen to the American voices around me, even to shift my eye away from printed sources and take a look at American nonverbal reality" (p. 22). Pynchon, via the presence of his various protagonists, fulfills these tasks of listening and observing the American society of his age. His early short stories, *Vineland* (1990), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1986), *V.* (1981), and *Inherent Vice* (2009) utter his truthful interpretation of these tumultuous decades lying in the shadow of various deaths. Just as Saltzman (2000) defines it, that was an age infected with white terror, anxiety, and "shattered faith in the American experiment and its founding ideals" (p. 73). Profane and Stencil in *V.*, Oedipa in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Frenesi and Zoyd in *Vineland*, Doc Sportello in *Inherent Vice*, all live through the perplexities of shattered dreams, unnamable anxiety and fear that Pynchon also experienced.

Critics agree that *Vineland* is the best in Pynchon's fiction that depicts this special historical period in American history. According to Sandra Baringer, David Seed and many others, the central issue in this novel should be the "New Leftist Movement" and the countercultural movements staged by the university students alongside the Pacific in the 1960s, and the PR³ (People's Republic of Rock and Roll) organization might be modeled on one radical student society in California University at Berkeley, while Brock Vond's governmental institution might originate from the COINTELPRO (the Counter Intelligence Program) of FBI (the Federal Bureau of Investigation). Anyone who is familiar with this part of American history should have no trouble understanding Pynchon's true meaning in writing in this novel about the countercultural movements, the "New Leftist Movement" and the fictional PR³. The COINTELPRO that American grand historical narrative tries to hide from its readers may be what Pynchon wants his reader to explore into.

According to an explanation from Wikipedia, COINTELPRO was in reality a series of secret, concealed, and often illegal activities carried out by FBI between the 1950s and 1970s under the cover to guarantee national security, to curb violence, to maintain harmonious social and political order, with an ultimate attempt to monitor, to infiltrate, to destruct domestic radical political activities, to defame relevant individuals by means of psywar and faked documents, and to disturb, to detain, even to assassinate the radicals. The FBI blacklist covered any organization or individuals that might be involved in any communist and socialist societies, civil rights movements, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Congress of Racial Equality, "New Leftists", and anti-war societies, including political figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., scientists like Albert Einstein, Mr. and Mrs. Rosenberg, even Chinese scientist QIAN Xue-sen, and many writers. This organization came into being in 1956 to countercheck the imagined communist movements in the United States. Its major work in the 1960s was to destruct socialist party and any other radical organizations. COINTELPRO fell into silence after Nixon's resignation, but came into use after Reagan came to power, and its job was to work with CISPES (The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador)¹. This kind of reading of Pynchon's historical writing may be an over-reading, but as one of his favorite techniques, Pynchon's historical writing in his fiction often pulls his readers into the process of reconstructing a history that is often neglected or concealed by grand historical narrative. The readers of *Vineland*, like Prairie who is constructing her mother Frenesi's personal history in the narrative frame, are compelled to piece together the historical fragments into a different American history between the 1950s and 1970s. Pynchon's job is to make this part of history sound "stranger than fiction" (Gordon, 1994, p. 167), so as to give the readers absolute freedom to reconstruct this history according to their own understanding.

It is clear that the failure of the "New Leftist Movement" is one of Pynchon's thematic focuses in *Vineland*.

¹ The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), bases in Washington, D.C., is a national activist organization with chapters in various cities in the United States. CISPES supports the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front and the progressive social movement in El Salvador. CISPES was founded in 1980 in opposition to the U.S. aid to the Salvadoran military and government during the Salvadoran civil war. CISPES opposed the politics and the actions of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance and its leader Roberto D'Aubuisson during the Salvadoran Civil War, and continued to oppose the policies that ARENA (The Nationalist Republican Alliance) implements. Since the end of El Salvador's civil war in 1992, CISPES has worked with the FMLN (The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and with Salvadoran popular movement organizations in opposition to economic policies of free trade and privatization such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement. CISPES organized delegations to visit with El Salvador's left wing activists as well as organizing delegations to monitor Salvadoran elections for potential fraud or political manipulation. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_in_Solidarity_with_the_People_of_El_Salvador).

The "New Leftist" organization based on a body of university students was quite different from the earlier generation of leftist organizations that displayed much concern over the role of labor union, class conflicts, and social justice. They concentrated on personal issues of alienation and anomie in contemporary American society, authoritarianism and some other social problems, and adopted untraditional cultural values with an attempt to countercheck various social authorities. They advocated absolute equality between men, between races, and rejected the national utilitarianism in education to seek spiritual freedom and to refuse to become the tool of the military, technological, and economic institutions of American government. The "New Leftists" discarded the revolutionary strategy of labor union and any other forms of organization, emphasizing the spontaneity of revolution. So it was infected with anarchism from its very beginning, which, together with its unrealistic goals, led to its failure (ZHANG & LI, 1992, pp. 315-325). This is the true history that Pynchon wants his reader to reconstruct in *Vineland*. Within Pynchon's literary view, the anarchist elements results in the break of "New Leftist Movement" away from American reality. The goals of Frenesi and her colleagues turn into a pure idealist act, and their failure is inescapable.

This understanding gives a peculiar significance to the different viewpoints about American social revolutions seen from three generations of social reform radicals of Frenesi, her parents, and her grandparents.² For Pynchon, Frenesi's generation is different from the radicals of labor unions in the 1930s and the silent radicals of the McCarthyist 1950s, for her generation of radicals are infused with too many idealistic elements. Brock Vond knows well about this generation of radicals and the reasons for the failure of their movements: "These kid rebels, being halfway there already, would be easy to turn and cheap to develop. They would only been listening to the wrong music, breathing the wrong smoke, admiring the wrong personalities. They needed some reconditioning", and they are "the sort of mild herd creatures [...] Children longing for discipline" (Pynchon, 1990, p. 269). Pynchon is indicating that the history of revolution of his contemporaries becomes one "about a generation's missed chances, about its addictions and betrayals, and about its replacement, among the educated classes, of an uptight morality and blatant racial prejudice with more subtle forms of mental and economic oppression" (Tabbi, 1994, p. 97).

In light of Pynchon's habitual technique of historical writing in his fiction, there should be more behind the failure of Frenesi's cultural rebellion. Solomon (1994) states that Pynchon's *Vineland* is intended to rewrite American history in the 1960s into one of betrayal: "Government agencies betray the people; revolutionaries sell each other out; the New Left, as in Doctorow's *Book of Daniel*, is disgusted with the Old Left because of its penchant for doctrinal strife" (pp. 161-162). Solomon notices the differences between the revolt of Frenesi's generation in the 1960s, the old leftists' loyalty and radicalness in the 1930s, and the silence of the radicals in the McCarthyist 1950s. By means of Brock Vond's generalization of this generation, Pynchon utters his clear, positive attitude towards the old leftist radicals different from the generation of Frenesi's grandfather Jess Traverse³.

In his sixth novel *Against the Day* (2006), Pynchon traces the radicalness of the old leftists as seen in Jess

² Solomon (1994) provides a very detailed study of the 1930s America in *Vineland* in his essay "Argument by Anachronism: The Presence of the 1930s in *Vineland*". Dickson (1998) extends the scope of Pynchon's historical reference back to 1915 when Joe Hill, the secretary of International Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) in California, was executed (p. 139).

³ Interestingly, obviously not out of mindless coincidence, the surname of the anarchist family in *Against the Day* is also Traverse. And the word "Traverse" itself means "to go counter; to thwart" or "to join issue upon (an indictment)", according to *American Tradition Dictionary*.

Traverse back to American workers' movements at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The center issue in this novel is the United Colorado Labor Wars around 1903, which reminds the readers not only of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Haymarket Riot of 1886 at Chicago, and the Pullman Strike of 1894, the name Traverse also reminds the readers of the series of strikes by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) that Jess Traverse took part in around the 1930s, as well as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or the Wobblies) set up in 1905 and the series of strikes relevant to it. The labor movement at the beginning of the 20th century was also obsessed by its anarchy like the cultural revolt of Frenesi's generation in the 1960s in *Vineland*, but it avoided the fate of failure caused by the radicals' disbelief in their organization in the 1960s. The rampancy of anti-communist McCarthyism undercut the radicalness of the radicals in the 1950s, trapping the generation of Frenesi's parents into a state of silence resulting from fear of political persecution and betrayal. Pynchon is not commenting by this implication on whether or not Frenesi's generation inherits the earlier generation's revolutionary consciousness, but emphasizing the idealistic, unpractical posture of Frenesi's generation who are rebellious in nature but quick to surrender to the governmental suppression and seduction. Pynchon's comment on the 1960s revolt from a different angle expresses his doubt about anarchic ideology inherent in this generation of rebels. Yet it does not mean Pynchon uncritically accepts older generation of radicals' recognition of social justice, labor union, and class struggles, but provides a stimulus for the readers to reflect on American rebellion tradition and the goal of democracy and equality these rebels have been fought for.

Vanderbeke (1999) contends that "the movement of the 60s, which never excelled in excessive coherence, has further dissolved into a heterogeneous mass of solipsistic and interchangeable ideologies" (para. 11). Like the "New Leftist Movement", the countercultural movements of the same age also show themselves as various self-centered utopian dreams lacking practical combatant power. Film making, rock music, and drug, as the majors forms of the self-centered cultural revolts in the 1960s, are also emphasized in *Vineland*. Slade (1994), Olster (1994), and Porush (1994) have all found the hidden political meaning behind the film making industry as suggested by Pynchon's fiction, arguing that the countercultural rebels treat film making as their tool to fight against government for its lies and frauds just because of the governmental anti-communist white terror by means of film censorship.⁴ Zoyd Wheeler who once depends on drug addiction for cultural revolt tells Hector who films his transfenestration: "I had you pegged as a real terrorist workin' for the state? When you said cuttin' and shootin' I didn't know you were talkin' about film" (Pynchon, 1990, p. 52). Zoyd's remarks are an implicitly clear expression of the political significance of film making and the struggle between the government and the rebels about film making as a political weapon ever since the McCarthyist 1950s when American utopia of democracy and spiritual freedom were seriously threatened.

The work of the feminist 24fps that Frenesi once works for is to go everywhere looking for trouble, finding and filming it with a belief "in the ability of close-ups to reveal and devastate [...] What viewer could believe in the war, the system, the countless lies about American freedom, looking into these mug shots of the bought and sold?" (Pynchon, 1990, p. 195). Pynchon's point is clear that the rebels use film making not only as a tool to

⁴ It seems that Ronald Reagan is a quite unfavorable president for Pynchon. Pynchon's writing of the 24fps in *Vineland*, as many critics suggest, is implicating Reagan as the governmental agent in "the Screen Guild", because the censorship in film industry is the extension of McCarthyism of the 1950s. Pynchon wants the readers to see the correlations between countercultural movement and the McCarthyist white terror, that is, what Reagan did in "the Screen Guild" is quite similar to what he did in COINTELPRO.

expose governmental lies and its various political corruption, but also as a public questioning of American myth of freedom. For the radicals in “the Death to the Pig Nihilist Film Kollektive” and “the feminist 24fps society”, “a camera is a gun. An image taken is a death performed. Images put together are the substructure of an afterlife and a Judgment. We will be architects of a just Hell for the fascist pig” (Pynchon, 1990, p. 197). Pynchon has sensed the illusive nature of film making as a form of cultural rebellion, and fulfills his deconstruction of this illusive rebellion by the dramatic death of Weed Atman, the head of PR³. It is a big irony that the film making of the feminist 24fps does not fulfill its goal to expose governmental lies and frauds, but exerts its desired destructive force on the cultural rebels themselves by the fiction of Weed Atman's betrayal of PR³. Another irony is that Weed Atman is a university professor. Pynchon aims to let the readers know through this textual arrangement that Weed Atman is elected the head of PR³ not because of his superpower as a leader, but because of his status of a well-known professor which for the cultural rebels is thought to be more powerful to attract followers. Atman's status, his dramatic death and the decomposition of PR³ he symbolizes, for Thomas Pynchon, are true expression of the ideological defect of the 1960s countercultural movement, and so their “judgment” of the political authorities they fight against turns into something pale. And their history of failure suggests a molested dream of democracy and the public inability to protect this democracy when the authority institutions try to deny it.

Many readers interpret Frenesi in *Vineland* as the archcriminal of the countercultural movements in the 1960s, attributing the failure of this movement to her surrender to Brock Vond and the authority structure he represents⁵ as well as her betrayal of Weed Atman and the countercultural organization Atman represents. But different explanation of Frenesi may also be what Pynchon expects of his readers. Hite (1994) argues that like what her name suggests, the age Frenesi lives in is a crazy time in American history, infected with the rampancy of McCarthyism in the 1950s, anti-communist blacklisting in Hollywood, vigorous protests from labor unions, and various radical movements in the 1960s. Frenesi may symbolize the coming of a crazy age and embody this crazy age, symbolize both revolution and conspiracy (p. 150). What Pynchon really wants the readers to know is that the essential reason for Frenesi's failure to fulfill the goal of using film making to expose governmental lies and frauds is that the radical body she takes part in fails to distinguish between art and reality. So whomever should be responsible for the failure of this revolution is not any individual rebel like Frenesi, but the illusive ideology this revolution bases itself on.

As to Frenesi's relationship with Brock Vond and Weed Atman in connection with the failure of this countercultural movement, Pynchon tries to tell the readers about a truth of the real insignificant situation of American public in the face of the powerful political authorities. Madsen (1991), like Hite, also explains Frenesi as the archcriminal of the failure of the countercultural movements, but argues that:

Frenesi is led to blame herself for an act of betrayal which is more her response to a cultural imperative than a lapse into treachery. The failure of the '60s Revolution is seen as a victory for violent and reactionary politics rather than as individual failures of commitment. (pp. 127-128)

For Madsen and for Hite, Frenesi is both a betrayer and a victim and she should not shoulder all the faults for

⁵ Male readers tend to put Frenesi in the company of reactionary figures represented by Brock Vond, suggesting that Frenesi's intentional or unintentional betrayal leads to the failure of the revolution, but the feminist readers tend to focus on the positive elements of Frenesi. Pynchon's characterization of Frenesi may be of multiple intentions. As the author (2013) mentioned elsewhere, Pynchon's writing of female bodies and issues may be more feministic than feminists.

the failure of the 1960s countercultural movements. Madsen's interpretation of the failure is more to the point. They fail not only because of their ideological and political weakness, but mainly because of the disproportional, reactionary political power of the government. The role of Frenesi as a fictional figure in the 1960s countercultural movements is nothing important. Pynchon's portrayal of her is to expose the defective ideological nature of countercultural movement of this decade, more importantly to let the readers know about the role American government played in this part of history, and to provide as an insider a different angle for the readers to reexamine this part of American history in the long process of American democracy.

The PR³ in *Vineland* is the short form of an imagined organization "People's Republic of Rock and Roll". Pynchon's purpose is to arouse the readers to think over the expression of the 1960s countercultural movements in the fields of music. Pynchon (1984) defines the role music plays in the countercultural movements of the 1960s in his preface to *Slow Learner*. Besides the Beatles and the new leftists represented by Jack Kerouac, Pynchon lists Elvis Presley and other jazz and rock'n'roll singers as countercultural rebels (pp. 7-20). It's true that the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in the 1960s:

Caught the imagination and fired the spirits of millions of young people in the rebellious, activist sixties [singing] about the threat of nuclear war, about civil rights and racism, and about the power of the military-industrial complex [catching] the 1960s mood of bitterness and alienation. (Yudkim, 2002, p. 455)

It is recorded that the "rough, raucous, loud, electric and intense" quality of Elvis Presley's music exerted a tremendous impact on the rebellious youth, and this made it necessary for the local police departments to ban this form of entertainment (Yudkim, 2002, p. 447). *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) enjoyed its popularity although, and maybe because, it was banned year after year; Elvis Presley's music was popular for the same reason. The seemingly unimportant black-Indian rock'n'roll star Jimi Hendrix Pynchon mentions in *Vineland* is definitely a reflection of Elvis Presley for the implied political meaning of rock music. This echoes Clerc's statement that "progression in music represents these cultural, political, nationalistic changes" (Clerc, 2000, p. 148). Pynchon does not clarify what kind of destructive force the government exerts over countercultural movement in music field by means of economic enticement, but Frenesi's fate as a film maker and her role as a countercultural rebel highlight the governmental hypocrisy in its destruction of the 1960s countercultural movements. And the death of Weed Atman and the following decomposition of PR³, partly for its namesake, to a great degree, suggest that countercultural movement in music field like any other forms of cultural revolution cannot solve the social problems of democracy in American society. But their failure in doing this turns out to be an outcry of public doubt about American democracy.

For the youth of Pynchon's generation, drug was also once used as a weapon for countercultural protest to counterbalance "an establishment dominated by yuppies, non-smokers, Republicans, and other control fetishists" (Slade, 1994, p. 78). The readers can find shadow of Pynchon and his generation of youth in the wanderers in Kerouac's *On the Road* (2012), Mucho Mass in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Zoyd Wheeler in *Vineland*, and Doc Sportello in *Inherent Vice*. They use drug, maybe as a form of rebellion against American government in the 1960s. Mucho Mass's talk with Zoyd Wheeler in *Vineland* is quite suggestive of the rebellious significance of drug culture in this decade:

No wonder the State panicked. [...] acid gave us the X-ray vision to see through that one, so of course they had to

take it away from us. [...] They just let us forget. Give us too much to process, fill up every minute, keep us distracted, it's what the Tube is for, and though it kills me to say it, it's what rock and roll is becoming. (Pynchon, 1990, pp. 313-314)

Both Zoyd and Mucho know that drug, exactly like rock and roll music and film making, was once their weapon to carry out cultural revolt for spiritual freedom, but everything is different now, for the government has learned to make use of the paralyzing drug to fulfill its control of the rebellious youth. Drug becomes ironically the weapon the government uses to keep everybody under control.

And this kind of trick is not what Pynchon and his contemporaries dream to find in their government who prides itself on its democracy. Cultural rebels cannot fulfill their goals of counterchecking the government by means of film making or rock music, but the government knows well how to use the media of TV that film and music rely so much on to control the rebellious youth. In Pynchon's literary world, the Thanatoids in *Vineland* may be among those who suffer the uttermost infection of this TV culture. Solomon (1994) states that the Thanatoids in *Vineland* include not only those American soldiers who lost their lives in Vietnam War, but also native Americans whose land, property, and culture have all been snatched away, and all the political and cultural radicals in American society between the 1930s and 1960s (p. 164). In light of this, Hector in *Vineland* who loses himself in TV programs and arranges his life according to the plots in these TV programs is also a Thanatoid. The most fearful thing is that Hector is not alone in contemporary American society. The fictional plot in TV programs, like drugs, just as what Mucho Mass says to Zoyd Wheeler, distracts the rebels and paralyzes them to forget their avowed rebellion against the dissatisfying government.

Zoyd's experience of using drugs to rebel is quite disruptive. The drug as tool for rebellion turns out to be what the government makes use of to control the rebels. TV, under Pynchon's pen, is another kind of drug, playing the role of a government wand to fulfill spiritual control of its youth. Pynchon (1990) is deeply touched by this and gives it an utterance in *Vineland*: TV companies partitions the country into political zones "which in time became political units in their own right as the Tubal entrepreneurs went extending their webs where there weren't residents per linear mile to pay the rigging cost" (p. 319). Pynchon tries to remind his readers of the factual scene in American presidential or any kind of election where different TV companies provide services for different parties, as well as the propaganda that TV makes for the overseas invasion by American government. Media always plays the role of governmental voice, so the failure of countercultural movements of Pynchon's generation is something unavoidable. Isaiah Two-Four's fault-finding remark against Zoyd's generation is sharp, disturbing, but reasonable:

Whole problem 'th you folks's generation [...] is you believed in your Revolution, put your lives right out there for it—but you sure didn't understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato, just like 'th Indians, sold it all to your real enemies, and even in 1970 dollars—it was way too cheap. (Pynchon, 1990, p. 373)

Isaiah Two-Four's remark is Pynchon's utterance about his understanding of American government in his time. Isaiah, or rather Pynchon, has noticed the paralyzing effect of TV media on American public under the control of the government, and also the self-centered and even childish illusive nature of the countercultural movements by Zoyd's generation. More disturbing is the drugging process in which the government makes use of money, or more exactly the "1970 dollars", to buy over the rock stars who begin their music as a tool of rebellion. Hayles (1994) argues that the huge profits the government makes from the control of the drug provides a best

chance for the Rock and Roll stars to make more money, to share the revenue, and this economic share aborts and numbs their revolutionary impulses (p. 15). For Pynchon and his generation of young rebels, visible drugs and invisible TV media and monetary seduction turn into "a literal opiate of the masses, dulling the awareness of those in the counterculture and helping the authorities maintain and solidify their power" (Booker, 1992, pp. 32-33). Reconsider Frenesi's betrayal from this angle, and the readers can conclude that, just as what Isaiah Two-Four says, in the face of such a perfect conspiracy, the failure of Frenesi's fellows is unavoidable. This is the ultimate intention of Pynchon's rewriting of this part of American history.

Pynchon has implied this kind of government trick early even in his second novel *The Crying of Lot 49* about 20 years before. Metzger in *The Crying of Lot 49* is a lawyer in the narrative time, but an actor years before starring in a movie about what should be the World War I. Watching the movie again, Metzger senses something different. When Oedipa questions how he knows what really happens in the war, Metzger's reply mixes reality and fiction: "Wasn't I there?" (Pynchon, 1986, p. 32). This perplexing conversation between Oedipa and Metzger, or rather Metzger's perplexity, is rich in political implication. Metzger's perplexity about the difference is suggestive of what Pynchon wants his readers to know, that is, the censorship in film industry (Slade, 1994, p. 71; Porush, 1994, p. 37). Metzger's double statuses as a lawyer and an actor remind one of the censorship issue in film industry in the 1960s. According to Michael Bérubé, Pynchon's implication is that Reagan shared similar kind of double statuses, changing from an actor into the president of the country (Bérubé, 1992, p. 218). This connection may remind the readers of Reagan's role in the Hollywood Blacklisting campaign against the so-called communists in the 1940s, 1950s, and the 1960s during his administration as chief executive of California. Reagan's involvement in this campaign, for Pynchon and for his readers, implies the everlasting shadow over American myth of democracy, especially in the United States of the post-war era.

As it is mentioned above, the failure of the 1960's rebels using drugs as a weapon to rebel against the hypocrisy of the government lies also in American government's long-term plan to wage an overseas invasion under the pretext of drug war. The drug war staged by the federal government, in Pynchon's words, is like "they had invaded some helpless land far away" in order to force the frontier territories to rejoin, "operationally speaking, the third world" (Pynchon, 1990, pp. 349, 357). Cowart (1994) observes that the search of marijuana plants in Pynchon's story reminds one of the search-and-destroy acts of the U.S. army in Vietnam (p. 11). But it may have more to say. Thoreen (2003) states that the drug war in the United States in this decade is the fourth silent war inside its own territory in succession of the economic crisis in the 1930s, Cold War and President Johnson's War on Poverty, busying making preparations for a marginalized historical events called REX84. The objective of REX84 is to suppress any kind of rebellion, demonstration, strikes to prepare the United States for its invasion against Nicaragua (pp. 219-234).

As his habitual strategy of historical writing, Pynchon wants his readers and his fictional characters to reconstruct any possible history that they feel exist by combining various kind of historical fragments distributed in the corners of his fiction. DL tells Prairie that "better than us reminiscing and boring you [...] go to the library sometime and read about it. Nixon had machinery for mass detention all in place and set to go. Reagan's got it for when he invades Nicaragua" (Pynchon, 1990, p. 264); Zoyd also senses unconsciously that the drug business will someday be "taken back under government control" (Pynchon, 1990, p. 220). Neither DL nor Zoyd clarifies, and they are unable to clarify, and Pynchon avoids clarifying, that all this effort by the federal government is finally

directed towards that overseas invasion against Nicaragua. Yet Hector's ambiguous remark of vanity gives the sensitive readers some hints:

Was Regan about to invade Nicaragua at last, getting the home front all nailed down, ready to process folks by the tens of thousands into detention, arm local "Defense Force", fire everybody in the Army and then deputize them in order to get around the Posse Comitatus Act? [...] Could it be that some silly-ass national-emergency exercise was finally coming true? (Pynchon, 1990, p. 340)

Hector's remark is quite suggestive: First, both REX84 and the drug war are nothing but American government's cover to prepare for its overseas war, by sacrificing its people's rights and interests to serve its imperialist activities. This coincides with the wars staged by the new leftists or the countercultural movements in the 1960s. Second, the 1980s is an age of American government turning from radicalness to conservativeness, turning from Nixon's domestic suppression to Reagan's overseas fascism (Cowart, 1994, p. 11). And this needs the readers and Pynchon's characters to join in the task of historical reconstruction.

The overwhelming focus on the interpretation of the political issues in *Vineland* does not mean its absence in Pynchon's other novels. Earlier readers of *The Crying of Lot 49* often focus on the philosophical connotations of its labyrinth of fascinating language, while neglecting Pynchon's writing of American political movements in the 1950s and 1960s.⁶ The historical setting of this novel is the transitional time in American history from the silent 1950s in the shadow of white terror to the tumultuous radical years in the 1960s, an age of the United States "plagued with Babbitry—cultural, political, and educational dullness" (Chambers, 1992, p. 7). Pynchon (1984) is clearly very dissatisfied with this era, complaining that:

One of the most pernicious effects of the '50s was to convince the people growing up during them that it would last forever. Until John Kennedy [...] began to get some attention, there was a lot of aimlessness going around. While Eisenhower was in, there seemed no reason why it should all not just go on as it was. (p. 16)

The rampancy of McCarthyism turns the aimless country into silence, fearing that their outward speeches may destroy the cold war fortress it has built up against Soviet Union to lead to their personal disaster.

The muted horn of the imagined empire of Tristero in *The Crying of Lot 49* is in fact an embodiment of this silent decade. Petillon (2007) serves that the years from 1957 to 1963 is a period when American society especially the young society changed from silent to outcry, when everywhere was the anger, fear, and doubt after they witnessed the success of Soviet Union's success of satellite launch (pp. 132-135). And Pynchon also implicatively suggests to his readers the coming of an age obsessed by anti-war complex, civil rights movements,

⁶ Tanner (1978) suggests that "according to clues and inferences provided by various characters, it was often connected with rebellions and wars—perhaps responsible for the French Revolution, perhaps linked in some way to Nazism, perhaps, coming nearer home, perpetuated through some of the extreme right-wing secret societies of California, or religious 'Other', some kind of anti-God" (p. 43). Petillon (2007) also specifies some information about the Thirty Years' War (1616-1648) which dislocated the old imperial map of Europe, and connects this event with Jacobean Civil War (1642-1648) in England. According to Petillon (2007), Jacobean 1618 is the year when Richard Wharfinger staged his notorious play *The Courier's Tragedy*, which some believed predicted the beginning of the British Civil War and Charles I's beheading in 1649 (pp. 151-152). Petillon (2007) also reads the underground world along the railway as Oedipa's reentrance into the wilderness at the beginning of American history (p. 155). According to Chambers (1992), *The Courier's Tragedy* contains fragments of historical references such as Russian Revolution, the French Revolution, civil wars—Spanish and American—and the two World Wars (p. 109). Edward Mendelson's probation of Tristero's history is perhaps the most detailed, see Mendelson's "The Sacred, the Profane, and *The Crying of Lot 49*". What should be noticed, yet, is Pynchon does not satisfy himself by only letting his readers make this kind of textual comparisons. He is suggesting anything political about his country.

feminist movement, New Leftist Movement, and countercultural movements. Pynchon (1984) admits that it is at this time that he, at the rather conservative Cornell University, got some connection with the beatniks and the hipsters and their countercultural ideology (pp. 7-10). Following the same line of understanding, it can be concluded that the experiences of Oedipa Mass exploring the history of the Tristero Empire in *The Crying of Lot 49* and Doc Sportello investigating the case of Mickey Wolfman in *Inherent Vice* are in essence a reconstruction of American political and cultural history around the 1960s.

Oedipa Mass, Doc Sportello, and Pynchon's readers are encouraged to construct a history of the United States in the 1960s completely different from the grand historical narratives by rearranging the historical fragments Pynchon distributes in his fiction. Oedipa and the readers of *The Crying of Lot 49* cannot neglect Mexican Anarchist Jesus Arrabal's definition of Tristero. Arrabal defines Tristero as "anarchist miracle" (Pynchon, 1986, p. 120). For Oedipa, this Tristero may be a shadow of the underworld postal system that rivals against the American postal system, may be the underworld in contrast with the yuppie society, may be any so-called pro-communist individual or organization muted by the rampant McCarthyism, may also be any feminist group suffocating under patriarchal ideology or homosexual groups seeking peculiar way of showing their love. Oedipa finds that every group or society that may have certain relationship with Tristero is planning "a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery" (Pynchon, 1986, pp. 124-125), yet the ubiquitous sign of a muted horn as a symbol of Tristero is very suggestive. Unlike the rebellious group of the 1960s as depicted in *Vineland*, the rebellious voices Pynchon lets the readers heard piercing through the muted horn are not completely silenced by the white terror and conformism pervading the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. And Pynchon does not stop at just letting these voices heard no matter how weak they are. His ultimate purpose is to let the readers reflect on why there are these voices and why they are muted. A confession made by a teenaged boy at the end of *Against the Day* may be a good picture of American society at this time: "It means do what they tell you and take what they give you and don't go on strike or their soldiers will shoot you down" (Pynchon, 2006, p. 1076). Negative, passive, ironic, but it is true for the Americans at the beginning of the 20th century, and also true for Americans in the post-war era, for it is the fate of any radical movement inside the American historical frame. McClintic Sphere's motto in *V.* may be the best choice for these radicals of any time: "keep cool, but care" (Pynchon, 1981, pp. 365-366), but for Pynchon's readers, it may suggest the necessity to reflect upon the myth of democracy avowed by the United States everywhere.

Reconstruction of American Myth of Racial Equality

Discussion of the political and cultural revolts of the mainstream society as described by Pynchon in *Vineland*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Inherent Vice* may be misleading for the readers that Pynchon forgets American minorities in his narrative framework. Compared with the rebellious mainstream white society, Pynchon does not spend too much space to portray this group of social "Other", even the African Americans seemingly escape his attention especially in his novels. But Pynchon's peculiar strategy to depict African Americans and other minorities in a different way reflect his historical view about racial problems in the United States. In view of Pynchon's creative habit, his seemingly neglect of this group is on the contrary the manifestation of his deep concern for them, for there are too many historical narratives about this group in American literature and American social and political fields that have long been the bitter, central discourse in the grand historical

narratives, which makes any more writing of these familiar histories meaningless. But it does not mean that Pynchon chooses to ignore this special group.

The most active political force in the 1960s United States should be the African American communities of various fields and different social strata. President Kennedy's racial integration attempt, the black civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and their assassination that followed are all the important elements of the African American politics at Pynchon's time. And the fate of this group is depicted by Pynchon in the most implicit and the fiercest way in his fiction. But unlike African American writers of this age like Alice Walker, Tony Morrison, August Wilson, Pynchon does not lose himself in the stormy historical picturing of the forceful racial suppression African Americans suffered and their fierce protest, but provides a reexamination of the ideological source of American racism from the angle of the mainstream white society.

In view of the whole process of Pynchon's literary creation, his early short story "The Secret Integration" (1984) manifests clearly his attitudes towards the racial problems African Americans face. The story begins with several white boys' childish game—"Operational Sparticus", and their original objective for this game is to countercheck the authoritative control from the adult world, as Huckleberry Finn experiences, to build a utopian babyish society without suppression and with complete freedom, and the black boy Carl Barrington is only a small part of their game. Early readers often read the black boy's involvement in this game as an allegory of Kennedy's racial integration attempt, and provide a quite positive reading of the white boys' activities, arguing that their activities symbolize the utopian condition of American racial relations.

But there are also critics who provide a quite different reading about this story. Starting from the real status of Carl Barrington and his dramatic appearance and disappearance in the story, they conclude that the white boys' imagined utopian society characteristic of racial equality is nothing but their illusion to escape the authoritative control of the white adult world, and Carl Barrington is nothing but their "'imaginary playmate' [...] put together out of phrases, images, possibilities that grownup had somehow turned away from, repudiated, left out at the edge of towns" (Pynchon, 1984, p. 192). The utopia of racial equality in American society of Pynchon's age is only an illusory construction of equalitarian ideas and political texts, without any practical progress. What is meaningful is that neither the school teacher nor the boss of the drug store has noticed, or would rather not acknowledge, the existence of Carl Barrington.⁷ Pynchon is clear here to tell the readers that the so-called racial equality is only an illusion, because there are too many unreal "phrases, images, possibilities" inherent deep in the white unconsciousness. In other words, anything about racial conflicts involving African Americans or other minorities are nothing but the expression of the white society's subconscious self.

So the white boys' "Operational Sparticus" is illusive in nature; Kennedy's racial integration policy was in essence nothing different whatever his original objective was. This kind of illusiveness is certified by what follows in the story. The narrator of the story tells the readers that there are not children in the Barringtons. At the

⁷ Chambers (1992) and Curtin (2003) take the rise of automation as a metaphor to discuss the racism in "The Secret Integration". According to Chambers (1992), the children devised the Operation Spartacus to fight against any adult bureaucracy including racism. Their failure to resist racism is due to their lack of experience, equipment, money and the requisite ruthlessness, and also due to the invincible power of the system they fight against. But Chambers regards this story as a philosophical instead of a political one, grappling "with an existential problem that has political ramifications", describing a causal chain that leads to "dehumanization and subtler forms of oppression" (p. 37). Curtin (2003) identifies Pynchon with Ellison who also creates a black who is treated as non-existent by the white society (p. 63).

end of the story, the white boys:

Took leave of Carl Barrington, abandoning him to the old estate's other attenuated ghosts and its precarious shelter; and rollicked away into that night's rain, each finally to his own house, hot shower, dry towel, before-bed television, good night kiss, and dreams that could never again be entirely safe. (Pynchon, 1984, p. 193)

Pynchon's poetic language suggests that the white children, like Kennedy government, finally willingly or unwillingly accept "the structure of bigotry that is their cultural inheritance" (Madsen, 1991, p. 129), give up their utopian dream. Slade (1978) believes that these children, like Huckleberry Finn under Mark Twain's pen who tries to revolt against the adult world order, have no strength to break the wall set up between the white and the black to fulfill their dreamed racial integration. Carl to the white boys, like Jim to Huckleberry Finn, is just a metaphor of their impulse to fight against various authoritative narratives their parents represent (p. 82). What is different is that Pynchon's Huckleberry Finns live in the 1950s, 100 years after the end of American slavery.⁸ This repeated interval of 100 years in Pynchon's historical narratives is by no means accidental. Pynchon is even forcing his readers to rethink over the myth of American equality in light of its tradition, even going back to the age another 100 years before when the American forefathers drafted "The Deceleration of American Independence".

This kind of temporal connection in Pynchon's fiction is quite significant, for Pynchon forces his readers, especially his white readers who are proud of their country's avowed democracy and equality, into an embarrassing condition to reflect upon the still existent, even rampant, racial discrimination in the later part of the 20th century that Melba Pattillo Beals experienced.⁹ One of the most embarrassing situations is that white racists unconsciously treat the black as rubbish. Pynchon is exaggerating, but that Carl Barrington in "The Secret Integration" is depicted to be made by "auto parts in Etienne's Father's junkyard" (Pynchon, 1984, p. 192) and the Barrington's yard is also littered with the white rubbish.

However embarrassed the white and African American readers may be, this kind of association appears again in Pynchon's "Low-Lands". The warder of the rubbish yard in the story is a black who shares a same kind of living space with a Gypsy girl as an "Other" to the white society. It is possible that reading the black warder's status as metaphorizing the white racist association of African Americans with rubbish is a misreading, or a whimsy of Pynchon, but the existence of that Gypsy girl living in the underground tunnel in the rubbish yard is nothing accidental at all. Pynchon definitely wants to suggest through these two minority figures of "Otherness" that white racists' attitude towards the colored people in the United States is the unconscious, ineradicable

⁸ Both Solomon's and Dickson's studies are very important because they all mention one of Pynchon's favorable techniques, that is, "anachronism", which means his writing of one time in history is suggestive of another age near to our time. Many critics distinguish the time in Pynchon's fiction between "historical time" (past and future) and "the real time" (present). The present is the focus of Pynchon's historical writing. Another very interesting feature of Pynchon's *anachronism* is that the time span between the mentioned historical time and the implied one is often 100 years, and these historical times are often the crucial ones in American or world history.

⁹ Melba Pattillo Beals's story in her autobiographical novel *Warriors Don't Cry* (1995) is good expression of the rampant racial discrimination as late as in the middle of the 20th century. Beals chose to go to an all-white school, when she was 13 years old in 1955 and got enrolled as a student at the white Central High two years later, but there she had to suffer the white students and some parents spitting at and mocking her. The final nine black children Beals join in this white school had to face mobs that forced President Eisenhower to send in the 101st Airborne Division to protect their lives after the governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, used troops to block the Nine's entry to the school. Beals's story is a big irony for American government in the mid of the 20th century who never stops preaching about its politics of democracy and equality. Pynchon clearly has caught the essence of American society at this time, and his writing of the racial problems in the United States at this time is absolutely very significant.

sediment from several hundred years of American hierarchical history. Feminist readers explain Dennis Flange's visit to the black warder as a metaphor of the tendency of American male in the middle of 20th century to escape family duties, but it is also reasonable to say that the existence of the black warder as a subordinate "Other" makes up the loss they felt disappearing in their life.¹⁰ The black warder of the rubbish yard plays the role of Flange's spiritual comforter. Taking into consideration of the psychological analyses about the relationship between black male and white society in African American literary criticism, we may conclude that the true purpose of Pynchon in writing about racial relations in "The Secret Integration" and "Low-Lands" as is mentioned above is not difficult to comprehend.

Gavin Trefoil is a petty, often neglected figure in Pynchon's masterpiece *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), but his weird remark about blackness is quite suggestive:

Their feelings about blackness were tied to feelings about shit, and feelings about shit to feelings about putrefaction and death. It seemed to him so clear... why wouldn't they listen? Why wouldn't they admit that their repressions had, has lost, had incarnated real and living men. (p. 276)

Pynchon divides between the authorities and those they want to control in *Gravity's Rainbow*, defining the authorities represented by Blicero as "They" and those the authorities try to control as "We". Gavin Trefoil's ambiguous remark hints at these two groups. Blackness is the symbol of the African American "We", the object the white "They" want to control though "They" do not admit this control. Trefoil's point is that the white racist "They" do not want to admit their unconscious tendency to associate African Americans with shit and death, for it exposes their inherent disgust with the black and their fear of an imagined danger from the black community.

Slothrop's absurd journey down the toilet pipe to trace his harmonica is completely Pynchon's fabrication. Weisenburger (1981) argues that Slothrop's journey is nothing but a metaphor of the "fouled and castoff scraps in the shithole of history" (p. 148). What Weisenburger suggests in his metaphor is the ineradicable racist complex in white racists' unconsciousness. According to Weisenburger, what Slothrop finds underground is not human excrement, but the dirty, disgusting ideological sediments of American civilization against American minorities. What Slothrop feels about shit is white racists' feelings of disgust and fear about African Americans or other minorities:

Shit, now, is the color white folks are afraid of. [...] That's what that white toilet's for. [...] Shinola shoeshine polish happens to be the color of shit. Shoeshine boy Malcolm's in the toilet slapping on the Shinola, working off whiteman's penance on his sin of being born the color of shit 'n' Shinola. (Pynchon, 1973, p. 688)

Wolfley (1981) argues that Slothrop's absurd feeling is the projection of the "white stereotypes about blacks" (p. 110).¹¹ What should be added to Wolfley's conclusion is that Slothrop's absurd feeling is also a projection of the ideological source of white racism, that is, white racists' discrimination against and disgust with African Americans root in their fear of death, not physical death of their bodies, but a threat they feel as a result of

¹⁰ In his essay "'Closed Circuit': The White Male Predicament in Pynchon's Early Stories", Holton (2003) observes that the real freedom for white males lies in the pre-Civil Rights era of African America, and that the cultural significance of human body is not only that of a flesh-and-blood entity, but also that of a symbolic construct.

¹¹ Werner (1986) and Schwarzbach (1978) agree that Slothrop would rather dehumanize himself by entering the dung pool than accept the ambiguities of any relationship with the blackness of Malcolm. Pynchon's sympathy generally goes to the Preterite like Slothrop, but here Slothrop also becomes the target of Pynchon's satire (p. 52, p. 197).

the existence of African Americans and any other minorities who they think might snatch away the priority they enjoy for centuries on the mythical American land of democracy. The possible connection of Pynchon's Malcolm with that black civil rights movement leader Malcolm X makes this reading more reasonable.

Pynchon has found what is more secretly hidden beneath the American white racism. As is mentioned above, Flange in "Low-Lands" flees not only from his wife and the family responsibilities she represents, but from the white society he lives in, to the colored space represented by the black warder and that illusive Gypsy girl, in order to gain the authoritative comfort the white society denies him. Pynchon is exploring into the conflicting attitudes of the white society towards the colored minorities. While they feel disgusted with the colored, they have to depend on what they feel disgusted with to prove the existence of their social authority.

The sadomasochistic, pornographic carnival between Brigadier Pudding and Katje in *Gravity's Rainbow* is explained by many Pynchon readers as a philosophical scheme, shadowed with sophistry about life and death: "the stink of shit floods his nose, gathering him, surrounding him", reminding him of "the smell of Passchendaele, of the Salient. Mixed with the mud, and the putrefaction of corpses" and "he's thinking, he's sorry, he can't help it, thinking of a Negro's penis... it will not be denied, the image of a brute African who will make him behave" (Pynchon, 1973, p. 235). Yet it is significant if we read this passage by taking into consideration the ideological elements of American white racism. Pudding senses unconsciously the threat suggested by the color of black, but at the same time he enjoys the ecstasy brought forth by the black male body. This kind of ecstasy Pudding experiences is meaningful if read from the postmodernist moral point of view, but the most important is the comfort he feels by feeling his self-existence through the existence of a black "Other". Suppression arises out of fear, and desire arises out of suppression. This is what is real in the unconscious level of white racist ideology.

Another fabricated episode in *Gravity's Rainbow* that is often interpreted as a pornographic picture happens when American captain Pirate Prentice receives a mysterious letter with nothing on the paper but a picture of a woman. This letter is written by Katje with a mysterious ink invented by IG Farben which will turn into some words of "Negro-Brown" (Pynchon, 1973, p. 72) by pasting sperm liquid on it. Many readers read Pynchon's use of "Negro-Brown" as a metaphor of the white society's discrimination against African Americans for it embarrassingly associates African Americans with white excrement in the way the narrator of "The Secret Integration" associates rubbish with the black boy Carl Barrington. This kind of reading is a little farfetched, but in light of the African Russian descendant Enzian, this episode is given peculiar political significance. Enzian's father is a white European. No matter what is his real attitude towards Enzian's African mother, Enzian is undoubtedly the result of the colonial act of white Europeans. What is conflicting in Enzian's status as this lies with his half-brother Russian officer Tchitcherine's hatred of him and Tchitcherine's desire to get rid of him. This hatred is partly because Enzian tries to snatch away the technological documents about German rocket that Tchitcherine tries to get for his country, but Pynchon's ambiguous poetic language provides another interpretation possibility, that is, Tchitcherine's hatred of Enzian roots in "the deepest fears of the colonialist West" (Tololyan, 1983, p. 59) shared by European and American white society roots in the white racists' imagined threat of the black "Other".

Simmon (1981) makes an interesting comparison between *Gravity's Rainbow* and the film *King Kong*, concluding that King Kong is a metaphor of the white's fear of the black, while the attempts to kill King Kong reflect the white racists' desire to destroy the black community (p. 132). That King Kong demonized by the white

racist society and facing the threat of being terminated by this white society is nothing but a racist fabrication of the white society: "and so, too, the legend of the black scapeape we cast down like Lucifer from the tallest erection in the world has come, in the fullness of time, to generate its own children, running around inside Germany even now" (Pynchon, 1973, p. 275). If "the tallest erection" refers to the Empire State Building, Pynchon's attack may be pointed to American racists who desire to exterminate the black community to curb their fear in the face of the black "Other". Yet Pynchon does not limit his attack on American racist, but the whole white Euro-American world, because Enzian may be the product of Russian and German racism, but may also be that of American racism, yet what remains unchanged is that he is always the scapegoat the white racists to curb their own existence threat.

Of course, there are more to Pynchon's allusion to the story of King Kong, namely, the King Kong who is transported to North American from Africa is not any prehistoric individual, but the whole African American community. The absurdity is that the white racists who snatch the black "Other" away from his homeland to North America is always troubled or frightened by what they have done, which results their desire to exterminate the existence of this black Other in their space. King Kong's fate is not peculiar to African Americans. The Native Americans in North America, European Jews, and any other colonized race share the same fate. Pynchon's contribution to the historical writing of American racial problems is that he breaks the limit of space and time to excavate boldly the historical and spiritual root of contemporary racism throughout the whole white world.

According to Slade's reading, Pynchon's article about the 1965 Watts Racial Riot tries to prove that neither the white society nor American policemen should be responsible for the racist acts against the black people, and what should be condemned is the unconscious social ideology the American white society abides by for years and centuries (Slade, 1978, p. 85). That is what "The Secret Integration" and *Gravity's Rainbow* convey to the readers. Another petty figure in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Wimpe, knows this very well. Wimpe tells Tchitcherine that any individual in any country is only a part of IG Farben. Tchitcherine suddenly and bitterly awakes to the recognition that his hatred of Enzian is the result of the white society's rational cultivation. For Pynchon, any white individual should not shoulder the responsibility for American racism; it is the hierarchical ideology of American patriarchal society that Euro-American white society abides by that should shoulder this responsibility. Of course, Pynchon does not intend to free the white racists from this responsibility as Joseph Slade says. On the contrary, he expresses his doubt about American white society's understanding of its authoritative system.

Pynchon's historical writing of American racial relationships is objective. While anatomizing the ideological root of American racism, he does not deny the possibility the white society actively and self-consciously curb their racist tendency. Slothrop naively believes he is the American girl Ann Darrow to love and save King Kong. Ann does not save King Kong, yet Slothrop successively saves Enzian from his disaster Tchitcherine may bring over him. The Slothrop here is different from the Slothrop in the Malcolm scene. His attitude towards King Kong and Enzian is a reflection of Pynchon's fairness to the black. And this is emphasized in the story of Dixon beating the slave trader in *Mason & Dixon* (1997). Dixon's story affirms Pynchon's anti-slavery complex and his positive attitudes towards the black, though Thill and some other critics hold a different opinion

because they believe Dixon's heroic act presupposes the black's sufferings (Thill, 2005, pp. 51-53)¹². Foreman (2000) provides a more detailed analysis of Dixon's heroism, arguing that Dixon's heroic act results from his finding one girl is quite like the African girl Austra he loves (p. 154), which undercuts Pynchon's humanistic care about the black. The problem of Thill lies in the fact that he does not recognize slave trade is more evil than the physical sufferings the black people suffer, while Foreman overlooks Dixon's act is in reality an act against slave trade.

The critic cycle has different views about Pynchon's racial attitude. But as is illustrated above, this reveals Pynchon's postmodernist literary creation strategy. He allows his readers to make various, even conflicting comments on his fiction, his person. This gives vitality to his literary texts, and inspires his readers to reexamine contemporary American racial problems. A talk between General Washington and his slave Gershom clearly exhibits Pynchon's racial attitude. Gershom is a fantastic figure with multiple statuses of a black, a white, and a Jew, so his talk becomes highly suggestive:

Actually, they're slave-and-Master Joaks, retailer'd for these Audiences. King says to his Fool, "So, —tell me, honestly, —what makes you willing to go about like such a fool all the time?" "Hey, George", says the Fool, —"that's easy, —I do it for the same reason as you, —out of Want". —"What-what", goes the King, "how's that?" —"Why, you for want of Wit, and I for want of Money". (Pynchon, 1997, p. 284)

Pynchon's use of puns here is quite inspiring for the readers to rethink over American racial problems in a more extensive way. "Slave" may refer to the jesters in British King's court, and it may also refers to Gershom himself; the "master" may be Washington or British King; "George" may be Washington, and may also be British king George III. For any person who is dissatisfied with the tyranny of British King, Gershom's joke may be pointed to British King, but for any person sensitive to American racial problems, it may be a satire against American forefathers who were also slave holders, which is Pynchon's boldest trick to mock at the American myth of "All Men Are Created Equal". What is revolutionary about Pynchon's historical narrative lies with his boldness to subvert through Washington's posture about slavery the traditional grand image of American forefathers who claimed to build for their people a democratic, equal, and free country.

It is unnecessary for the readers to explore into the private life of Washington as a great figure in American history, but the American forefathers led by him neglected American constitution and its grandiose claim that "all men are created equal" to keep slaves in the new country, which needs more investigation though. It may be what Pynchon refers to as the ideological root of American racism in his article "A Journey into the Mind of Watts". In light of the national cultural revival staged by African Americans during the 1970s and 1980s, Pynchon's historical writing about American slavery is highly significant. Better political and economic life in contemporary America makes many black youth forget what their race has suffered, and therefore their culture is on verge of being completely assimilated by the mainstream white culture. Situated in the context of contemporary American racial relationship to reexamine Pynchon's historical writing of slavery 200 years before,

¹² Thill (2005) draws on Pynchon's essay entitled "Sloth" (whose title on *New York Times Book Review* of June 6, 1993 is "Nearer, My Couch, to Thee") to argue that people's numbness and inaction in the face of slavery is another kind of slavery. At least this sloth is a complicity of slavery. Thill even mentions Franz Pöckler's sloth in *Gravity's Rainbow* where he seems to choose to be ignorant about what is going on in the neighborhood Dora Camp. While the narrative voice outside the text damns Franz for his sloth, people who are silent in terms of slavery including historical figures like George Washington are condemnable also (pp. 65-67). So Dixon's activity is revolutionary.

the readers definitely can form a deconstructive reading of American racial relations, while Gershom's mixture of status as a white, a black, an Indian may let the readers of different ethnic statuses find more from his joke worthy of thinking over, to reconstruct their special picture of American racial equality.

Conclusions

We cannot deny that Pynchon's fiction lets his readers re-experience all the bitterness the United States experienced in the 20th century, inspiring them to excavate the sources of this bitterness from the spheres of American politics, economy, and culture. A passage from his article "Nearer, My couch, to Thee" may best summarize Pynchon's political view about the United States in this era.

In this century we have come to think of Sloth as primarily political, a failure of public will allowing the introduction of evil policies and the rise of evil regimes, the worldwide fascist ascendancy of the 1920's and 30's being perhaps Sloth's finest hour, though the Vietnam era and the Reagan-Bush years are not far behind. Fiction and nonfiction alike are full of characters who fail to do what they should because of the effort involved. How can we not recognize our world? Occasions for choosing good present themselves in public and private for us every day, and we pass them by. Acedia is the vernacular of everyday moral life. Though it has never lost its deepest notes of mortal anxiety, it never gets as painful as outright despair, or as real, for it is despair bought at a discount price, a deliberate turning against faith in anything because of the inconvenience faith presents to the pursuit of quotidian lusts, angers and the rest. The compulsive pessimist's last defense—stay still enough and the blade of the scythe, somehow, will pass by—Sloth is our background radiation, our easy-listening station—it is everywhere, and no longer noticed. (Pynchon, 1966, para. 16)

In this passage and throughout his fiction, the readers can sense Pynchon's dissatisfaction with the political life in the democratic frame of the United States. What touch Pynchon most deeply should be the political upheavals in the years from the 1950s to the 1980s. He provides a cool re-observation of various radical movements he has experienced, and implicates that the disproportionate power of the government and the illusive, unpractical nature of this generation of rebels abort their revolution plans. As to the racial problems in the United States, Pynchon does not endeavor to provide a bleeding picture of the struggle of American minorities to seek political and social equality, but focuses on the excavation of the ideological root of American or world white racism inherent in the unconscious depth of the white mentality.

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