

Science, Power, and Control in *Gravity's Rainbow*: Pynchon's Postmodern Critique of Technology and Systems of Domination

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ABSTRACT

Gravity's Rainbow is a very challenging postmodern novel written by Thomas Pynchon. The novel critiques the use of science and technology that contributed to overwhelming destruction and paranoia during World War II and its aftermath. The plot revolves around the metaphorical symbolism of the V-2 rocket and the protagonist, Slothrop, and explores how people become conditioned within extensive systems of power and technology. In this regard, this article examines how the notions of control, power, and domination are explored in *Gravity's Rainbow*, emphasizing the role of science and technology that Pynchon describes as a destructive force that resulted in dramatic events during the Second World War which in turn has influenced the course of history to a large extent.

Keywords- science, power, technology, *Gravity's Rainbow*, postmodernism, paranoia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is a work of fiction that tackles a wide range of discourses and disciplines. What is more interesting is that Pynchon develops a fruitful relationship between literature and science throughout the entire novel. That is, besides literary elements, Pynchon explores many scientific theories. He masterfully enriches his writing with technological, mathematical, and scientific elements that are employed in the service of literature and art, thereby making the novel of immense significance in the academic sphere. Therefore, *Gravity's Rainbow* is celebrated as an epic novel *par excellence*.

Throughout the novel, Pynchon makes recurring references to scientific information and the use of technology in the Second World War. *Gravity's Rainbow* concerns re-imagined historical events of WWII which resulted in chaos and mass destruction in the war's aftermath. Emphasizing the destructive role of technology, Pynchon combines ideas of science with death. From the very beginning of the novel, he develops

a harsh criticism of the governments waging wars for purely economic and capitalist purposes, as well as of technology as a source of power and domination. 'The murdering and violence are self-policing and can be entrusted to non-professionals' (*Gravity's Rainbow* 105). For Pynchon, power takes the form of a binary opposition between "Us" and "Them", between oppressor and oppressed. His reference to Pavlovian conditioning is a good case in point. That is, Slothrop's Pavlovian conditioning possibly represents the system's attempt to develop the means of control and domination by harnessing Slothrop as a resource and subject. He has been constantly under surveillance; 'IV handled Slothrop and nothing else' (*Gravity's Rainbow* 630).

Hence, this paper aims to elaborate on how the notion of control, power, and domination are explored in *Gravity's Rainbow*, emphasizing the role of science and technology that Pynchon describes as a destructive force that resulted in dramatic events during the Second World War which in turn has influenced the course of history to a large extent. The paper is divided into three major parts. The first of which explores Pynchon's criticism of

technology and the scientific developments of the twentieth century in general. Pynchon attributes the dramatic events and destruction that occurred during the Second World War to the military technology and the scientific developments of the time. The second section deals with technology and the V-2 rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The focus will be on the V-2 rocket's metaphoric implications and the apocalypses of technology that Pynchon develops in his epic novel. Technology is depicted in *Gravity's Rainbow* as the source of power and it is explored in its relation to human beings. The final section of this paper tries to develop a clear understanding of the binary opposition that Pynchon implies in his text. *Gravity's Rainbow* dramatically dichotomizes the relationship between "Us" and "Them", the "Elect" and the "Piretite", "force" and "Counterforce". In doing so, he explores how the capitalist states and the technological ruling class in corporation with business companies manipulate and oppress individuals to keep the system in power, through different control mechanisms

II. PYNCHON'S CRITIQUE OF WAR, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

Unlike traditional novels, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is a postmodern novel because it addresses myriad subjects and adopts a heterogeneous storyline. However, although the novel's plot remains very challenging for its readers, a close reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* shows that power, with the help of technology, is one of the main themes that prevail throughout the novel. The overwhelming references to war and technology in *Gravity's Rainbow* are not used at random; rather, Pynchon wants to convey through them his disapproval of World War Two; as well as of the technological developments of the twentieth century which are used purely for negative purposes. Pynchon indicts the West for the genealogy of death that it has constituted through the violation of developing countries in the name of progress:

America was the edge of the World. A message for Europe, continent-sized, inescapable. Europe had found a site for its Kingdom of Death, that special Death the West had invented. [. . .] In Africa, Asia, Amerindia, Oceania, Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in the last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe. It has learned empire from its old metropolis (*Gravity's Rainbow* 722).

Pynchon refers most often to scientific information that was developed or became more important during the Second World War and the information that resulted from the scientific developments of the period in question (*Pynchon's Fictions* 46). In fact, the message that Pynchon aims to convey is that these scientific developments have had a significant impact on the course of history. In this vein, according to John O. Stark, Arthur Porter claims that "all in all the impact of the World War II military technology on the world of today has been extraordinary" (qtd. in *Pynchon's Fictions* 46). To put it differently, in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon constantly refers to science and technology as the ultimate structuring principles of the war in the sense that they motivate geopolitical powers to enhance their progress by possessing the most advanced weapons. From the very beginning of the novel Pynchon's critique of the capitalist states seems obvious. He implies that these states foster industrial wars which result in unlimited casualties and the loss of human beings. To Pynchon, some impersonal force controls political (and other) power: "If you want the truth -- I know I presume -- you must look into the technology of these matters. Even into the hearts of certain molecules -- it is they after all which dictate temperatures, rates of flow, costs, profits, the shapes of towers..." (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 167)

Most of Pynchon's references to industrial warfare imply the governments' dependence on capitalist technology to extend control over the world. Thus, World War II and its aftermath signaled the end of the nation-state and the emergence of the corporate state: "Who'd know better than an outfit like Shell, with no real country, no side in any war, no specific face or heritage: tapping instead out of that global stratum, most deeply laid...?" (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 243); that is, the system in which technology and its manufacturers exercise a dominant influence on the decisions of governments.

According to Joseph W. Slade, *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts major corporations of Germany and the Allied powers working together before, during, and after the war. "In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Germans, Americans, Russians, and Englishmen form commercial chains, sell products and buy patents, and generally determine the orderliness of the markets before, during, and after World War II" (*Thomas Pynchon* 161), or as Pynchon says, "They" embracing possibilities far beyond Nazi Germany (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 25).

Furthermore, as Joseph W. Slade implies, the war itself becomes a product of a conspiracy, boosting the profits of the dominant powers and enhancing technological developments of key industries such as oil, steel, military technology, and pharmaceuticals. "War accelerates research and redistributes wealth" (*Thomas Pynchon* 161). In this regard, quoting Thomas Moore, Weber claims that "economic forces are interested in the emergence of military conflagrations *per se*, no matter

what be the outcome for their own communityA lost war, as well as a successful war, brings real business" (*The Style of Connectedness* 138). As is clearly remarked in *Gravity's Rainbow*, war is good for business and profit-making, or, as Pynchon's narrator puts it:

Don't forget the real business of war is buying and selling. The murdering and violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals. The mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways. It serves as a spectacle, as a diversion from the real movements of the War. It provides raw material to be recorded into History, so that children may be taught History as sequences of violence, battle after battle, and be more prepared for the adult world. The true war is a celebration of markets (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 105).

As this statement indicates, Pynchon's critique of the governments waging wars for purely economic and capitalist purposes is obvious. In fact, his criticism is not restricted to the quotation in question; rather, he develops it throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. For Pynchon, the wars are often fostered by holders of power and technology, 'a system whose only aim is to violate the Cycle' (*Gravity's Rainbow* 412). As Slade maintains, great business organizations such as General Electric, Siemens, Shell and Standard Oil, and I. G Farben include generals and admirals as well as politicians on boards of directors in these interlocking companies. Therefore, cartels, not governments, control the actual destruction during the war. However, this can be done either specifically or more generally: either by direct command or simply by exchanging the war materials between themselves (*Thomas Pynchon* 162). Within the same line of thought, Pynchon implies that what keeps the war going on, and at the same profitable, is a wide-ranging conspiracy, involving both "Dutch" (under the control of Nazis) and British Shell (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 251).

This conspiracy network seems to go beyond the control of the parties involved. As Steven C. Weisenburger maintains, the first part of *Gravity's Rainbow* contains a sequence of astrological correspondences. For him, events of the episodes of this part of the book "unfold under the sign of Pisces", and, more importantly, he implies that these events and actions everywhere take place in the twelfth house, which, symbolically, stands for death and dissolution as well as for warfare and strife (*Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 16). In the same respect, Melvin Ulm and David Holt state that events in this world are to be explained in terms of the characteristics of the astrological events with which they are in parallel. Roger Mexico, for instance, says that his statistics cannot be used to predict where the rockets will likely hit next, for it is impossible to translate his equations into a form that

is useful for those who would avoid the rocket: "Roger has tried to explain to her [Jessica] the V-bomb statistics: the difference between distribution in angel's eye, over the map of England, and their own chances as seen down here" (qtd. in *Pynchon Notes* 29-30).

In fact, *Gravity's Rainbow* uses many other references to astrology, which are connected to the notion of death to emphasize the destructive role of scientific developments in the twentieth century. For instance, we can notice that Pynchon makes a direct reference to the moon when he wants to explain the history of the Hereros:

The history of the Hereros is one of the lost messages. It began in mythical times when the sly hare who nests in the Moon brought death among men, instead of the Moon's true message. The true message has never come. Perhaps the Rocket is meant to take us there someday, and the Moon will tell us its truth at last (*Gravity's Rainbow* 322).

According to Steven C. Weisenburger, "the Moon" here is referred to as the hare's nest and, more importantly, is held responsible for the emergence of death among human beings by using wrong interpretations and delivery of a message from the Moon to humanity (*Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 198).

III. METAPHORIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE V-2 ROCKET AND THE APOCALYPSE OF TECHNOLOGY

The V-2 Rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* embodies the driving force of the novel from the very beginning of the novel and its implications are metaphorical. On the one hand, the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a symbol of the dominance of the capitalist states, and, more importantly, the integration of the destructive impulse and technology as a tool for the system. On the other hand, it is a total sexual symbol, by virtue of looking like a giant flying penis with fins. Additionally, its parabola looks like the shape of a rainbow, which is a part of the title that Pynchon chooses for his novel. In fact, the rainbow symbol can be traced back to the covenant between God and Noah that the earth shall not perish by water. Yet, ironically enough, the rocket seems to be meant to destroy the earth with fire (*Ideas of Order* 105), and the rainbow, rather than signaling a covenant, might not mean much. In one of the book's many songs, we see a greengrocer "wishing on a rainbow" (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 175) but the parody of the song implies no wish is possible to be granted.

Molly Hite calls *Gravity's Rainbow* a 'metaphoric novel, which derives its ultimate coherence from a governing structural metaphor' (*Ideas of Order* 97). She identifies the metaphor in the parabola of the V-2 rocket and the rainbow in the title; " *Gravity's Rainbow* is the arc of the V-2 rocket, which with its

sharply defined origin and terminus could claim to be the twentieth-century model of linearity". Furthermore, according to the general theory of relativity, Hite claims, that the Euclidean straight line is warped into a curve by the presence of a gravitational field (*Ideas of order* 97).

The crucial point that needs to be made with regard to the metaphor of the rocket parabola is the relationship between the rocket and control. That is to say, the curve or the arc shape of the rocket parabola can be read as manifestations and projections of power. That is to say, Pynchon gives the rocket a crucial significance in his text as it is often linked to power and control. According to Hite, the parabola represents the kind of conceptual system of authoritarian control that human beings use to circumscribe and rationalize their experiences to take charge of it. However, Pynchon implies in *Gravity's Rainbow* that this system is no longer fully controlled in the sense that it betrays its creators by claiming autonomy for itself (*Ideas of Order* 98); it gets out of control of its creators. To put it differently, in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon presents a pessimistic view of the twentieth century with its most developed technology and scientific advances. More importantly, he implies that human beings are partly responsible for such pessimistic aspects of the twentieth century's flight into totalizing systems. These systems, as Hite contends, do not have intrinsic authority because they are of human creation and are not imposed on them from outside. "It was necessary in some way to become one with Rocket, trajectory, and target -- "not to will it, but to surrender, to step out of the role of the firer. The act is undivided. You are both aggressor and victim . . ." (*Gravity's Rainbow* 403)

The point is when human beings have stepped out of the role of the firer, the rocket has begun to fire itself, according to its own needs; therefore, technocracy has grown so far out of control that it no longer seems to serve human motives at all. The criticism here is twofold. On the one hand, as far as the rocket is concerned, the critique is directed to the technology of war which is so far out of control that it seems to be serving purposes of its own, and of the routinization of society which makes that technology possible: "The War, the Empire, will expedite such barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together." (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 130) On the other hand, the critique is also addressed to the human rational thinking which provides this technology with such a driving force: "'Go ahead, capitalize the T on technology, deify it if it'll make you feel less responsible -- but it puts you in with the neutered, brother..." (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 521)

Furthermore, among the symbolic implications of the novel is that the arc of the rocket is connected to the notion of paranoia that Pynchon uses so often in his text. The V-2 rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* serves as a symbol of a paranoid vision of reality in which

everything is connected in a "way that contains history in a preordained pattern" (*Ideas of Order* 99). Paranoia is a central thematic aspect of *Gravity's Rainbow*. As the whole novel revolves around the V-2 rocket, paranoia is related to the information that people fear they might have about it. According to Pynchon, John Stark contends that two symptoms of paranoia are closely related to information; the belief that one has secret information about the rocket and the fear that one lacks important information that someone else might know (*Pynchon's fiction* 74). Paranoia is illustrated in *Gravity's Rainbow* through Slothrop and his imaginings: "Pale lines of force whirl in the sea air... pacts sworn to in rooms... suggest themselves... the conniving around him now he feels instantly, in his heart" (188).

In fact, the V-2 Rocket is central to the novel in the sense that it is essential to most of the characters in the text and the main symbol around which the central events revolve. Its threat and influence on the other characters are very significant to the extent that they already become used to the rocket's presence in their everyday life. For instance, Slothrop is haunted by the rocket almost throughout the whole novel. Furthermore, Pynchon's use of the rocket is very significant as his novel disapprovingly presents imagined events of the Second World War and the global devastation and mass confusion that accompanied the war's aftermath. Through his narration, Pynchon seeks to highlight the horrible terror that such advanced weapons create among individuals during World War II. His reliance on paranoia which pervades the text takes the reader close to the terror historically implicit in the V-2. That is to say, paranoia in *Gravity's Rainbow* symbolizes the chaos, death, and confusion that accompanied the violence and mass displacement of people both during the war and in the war's aftermath. The novel has a lot of paranoid voices that reinforce this theme: "It's control. All these things arise from one difficulty: control. For the first time it was *inside*... The control is put inside..." (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 30)

Pynchon's focus on the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* as a driving force of the novel is due to his interest in the dangers of science. He constantly links science to the military-industrial complex that has created and profited from the horrors of World War II and critically alludes to its adherents as naive followers who, blindly follow where Science leads them, without regard for the human and spiritual consequences of the technology it creates. In doing so, he enriches his text with references to the destruction that has resulted from the use of science and creates a symbolic order that challenges the dominance of Science by making the relations between science and humans a thematic focus and develops the theme through skillful integration: "Come-on! Start-the-show!... the pointed tip of the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second...reaches its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre..." (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 760).

In other words, the presence of the image of the V2 rocket arching over the text suggests that technology that man has created with Science is leading humankind dangerously close to its own destruction. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the V-2 rocket or technology, in general, is depicted as a source of power and therefore a source of evil. It serves as the mechanism that ushers the war's victims through death to a shadowy afterlife. "There is no way out. Lie and wait, lie still and be quiet. Screaming hold across the sky." (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 4)

To put it differently, Pynchon's rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts a world where technology is a source of power; a world in which everything is controlled, programmed, and conditioned by the system. In this regard, Christophe Den Tandt contends that "rocket technology is the centerpiece of Pynchon's reflection on power because it is precisely the practice that enables men to simulate the management of overwhelming forces" (*Pynchon Notes* 83). Following the same line of thought, Deborah L. Madsen also states that the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* is a symptom of a force greater than any particular ideology. The technology that gave birth to the rocket, she claims, has begun to spiral out of control by the late 1960s. "In an irony that Pynchon appreciates, the rocket, born out of scientists' dreams of one day traveling into space, became, in the words of *Operation Crossbow's* General Linz, the weapon of tomorrow" (*Pynchon Notes* 57). Pynchon characterizes the rationality and causal beliefs of Science as a destructive construct that serves Their purposes. This technology centers in the hands of the capitalists who run the world. These Elect ignore geographical and political boundaries and, with the help of science, expand their power and control to the extent that they become ready to destroy everything to serve their own interests and make a profit. Pynchon points to some technological offenders like Pokler, the cause and effect man as he is referred to on page 159 of *GR*, to reveal that the advancement of technological and capitalist systems abuses natural processes for profit. As Inger H. Dalsgaard contends, Pynchon's warnings are directed more against the systems that grant technology an autonomous power than against individuals (*Pynchon Notes* 105).

Furthermore, the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* implies that the war is not about politics; politics is merely a theater to distract people from the vampirism of autonomous technology:

It means this War was never political at all, the politics were all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted...secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology ... by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques, by something that needed the energy-burst of war, crying, Money be damned...The real crises were crises of allocation and priority, not among firms—it was only staged to

look that way—but among the different Technologies, Plastics, Electronics, Aircraft, and their needs which are understood only by the ruling elite...(*Gravity's Rainbow* 521)

The war, as this passage suggests, is being dictated by the needs of technology. However, immediately after these statements, Pynchon's narrator implies that technology only responds to human actions. Hence, it is Man who is responsible for the destructiveness and chaos that result from technology, which is, in fact, merely a tool. It is "someone, some specific somebody with a name and a penis" who wants to launch a rocket with specific aim of killing other people (*Gravity's Rainbow* 521). That is, the Man is held fully responsible for the destructions and holocausts that the war causes. According to John Stark, Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* implies that war is no more than a vast scientific laboratory where politicians and military leaders set policies to maximize scientific and technological progress (*Pynchon's Fiction* 46).

The V-2 rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* metaphorically represents an arrangement of information into a pattern. As John Stark claims, history records "battles against waste: inanimateness and other anti-human qualities". For him, history is formed as each age rises above its predecessor (*Pynchon's Fiction* 47). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Nora Dodson-Truck imagines her true identity as the force of Gravity; "I 'am gravity. I am That which the Rocket must struggle, to which the prehistoric wastes submit and are transmitted to the very substance of history..." (*Gravity's Rainbow* 639).

IV. THE "THEY SYSTEM" VS. THE "WE SYSTEM": STRUCTURES OF CONTROL AND RESISTANCE

As mentioned previously, in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon depicts a struggle based on a binary opposition between Elect and Preterite, Force and Counter-force, "Them" and "Us, and so on. This dichotomy is explored throughout the whole novel in the light of power, submission, and resistance; "For every "They", there ought to be "We". In our case there is" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 638). As Christopher Ames puts it, "Any reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* must notice how dramatically Pynchon dichotomizes his novel—from the capitalized collective noun of 'They' and 'Us', 'Elect' and 'Preterite' Force' and 'Counter-force' to the subtler opposition between zero and one, war and peace, and technology and waste" (*Power and the Obscene Word* 193). In exploring this point, Pynchon seems interested not in some great historical figures; rather, his interest centers on the relation of the individual to the System, militarily, scientifically, socially, and sexually. The desire of the ruling technological class to control and the individual's will to survive is all that this struggle is

about. The Elect, with the help of technology and the scientific advances of the twentieth century, try to manipulate individuals and turn them into objects that function only under their control. However, in the world of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon creates a counter-force to this authoritative class, which depends on technology as an oppressive tool. "For every kind of vampire, there is a kind of cross" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 540).

Before elaborating on this binary opposition, I will explain Pynchon's use of "Them" throughout the text. Generally speaking, 'Them' refers to the manipulative others. However, the perceptions of who they are vary depending on the positions of the perspective (*Ideas of Order* 120). According to Molly Hite, "They" can sometimes simply refer to any authoritative figures. For instance, the Elect of the Puritan Church, political leaders, corporate executives, or even parents can, in many ways, be seen as They. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, 'They' refers mostly to the controlling system or the ruling technological class, namely the politicians and state leaders in corporation with the men who direct business companies. These privileged figures play the role of the oppressive class. They run the world and facilitate technology, inventions, production, and the creation of jobs all around the world; however, in the process They homogenize, dehumanize and control their citizens and employees. As Joseph Sade puts it, "they interfere even in the lives of people they do not touch directly. Or perhaps, as Pynchon suggests 'They' do 'control' just about everybody".

This authoritative class is often referred to in *Gravity's Rainbow* as the System. In fact, the idea of the system is closely linked to the notion of control, which is obviously a crucial aspect in Pynchon's novel. Pynchon resorts to the concept of a higher power able to control and pull the invisible strings of the world's political, social and economical mechanisms, as we have seen, with the "super-cartel" (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 284). This power centers on a few chosen people called 'They', which stands for the despotic Elect or the System. In order for a system to keep going on it depends on power, and in order to succeed in this mission and function well, the system must have adequate mechanisms to exercise this power. The V-2 rocket, which is an emblem of power, control and domination in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a good case in point. In addition to the technological control, the rocket extends itself to the social control. "The architectural structure of Nordhausen in *Gravity's Rainbow* represents this symbolic extrapolation of the idea of control. The mathematical function of integration involved in the control mechanism of the rocket is written into the language of architecture itself, and is elided with ideas about social control" ('Authority and the Cold War in *Gravity's Rainbow*' 431). This results from the increase in the strength of Them, the controllers of the world, who oppress and control individuals, create wars and destroy human beings and other creatures for no reason at all except the need for technologies to be

put into practice and for making more profits: "and not only most of humanity—most of the World animal, vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 412). The core argument is, as Pynchon describes it, They System maintains its survival at the expense of We System. "We have to carry on under the possibility that we die only because They want us to: because They need our terror for their survival. We are their harvests..." (*Gravity's Rainbow* 539). It is possible this is another paranoid voice in the text, but the power of technology is something that exists outside of the control of characters, as we have seen in the Enzian passage, that even defines "Their" power.

Pynchon implies in *Gravity's Rainbow* that sexuality is one of the main mechanisms by which the system assures its dominance and control on the individuals. There is the suggestion in the text that the system controls Slothrop through the connection of his penis to the plastic in the rocket. Pynchon sees further sexual implications in the rocket, as with the possibility that Slothrop's sexual activities provide hints to where the bombs will fall.

The core argument is that in *Gravity's Rainbow*, pornography is depicted as one of the War's diversionary tactics; it uses sexuality, which occupy individual's attention much of the time, into its own service. In the respect, Pynchon writes,

It's true . . . look at the forms of capitalist expression. Pornographies: pornographies of love, erotic love, Christian love, boy-and-his-dog, pornographies of sunsets, pornographies of killing, and pornographies of deduction -- ahh, that sigh when we guess the murderer -- all these novels, these films and these songs that they lull us with, they're approaches, more comfortable and less so, to that Absolute Comfort". A pause to allow Rudi a quick and sour grin. "The self-induced orgasm". " 'Absolute'?" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 155)

Therefore, pornography, as Pynchon implies in *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a means by which the system wields power over its citizens or the Peretite, as he calls them, at the micropolitical level. Many case examples in *Gravity's Rainbow*, prove that it is systematically true that pornography seems to be specially tailored to every citizen. When Pirate Prentice, for instance, receives via rocket military orders written in an ink that requires an application of sperm to be visible, he finds included with the message a pornographic picture that plays to his private sexual preferences:

The woman is a dead ringer for Scorpiia Mossmoon. The room is one they talked about but never saw . . . a De Mille set really, slender and oiled girls in attendance . . . Scorpiia sprawled among fat pillows wearing exactly the corselette

of Belgian lace, the dark stockings and shoes he daydreamed about often enough but never.

No, of course, he never told her. He never told anyone. Like every young man growing up in England, he was conditioned to get a hardon in the presence of certain fetishes, and then conditioned to feel shame about his new reflexes. Could there be, somewhere, a dossier, could They (They?) somehow have managed to monitor everything he saw and read since puberty . . . how else would They know? (*Gravity's Rainbow* 71-2).

Almost like Slothrop, who has been conditioned to respond sexually to the rocket, Pirate's sexuality has been conditioned by the images that They have been providing him.

In this novel it is the Elect that exercises control: "a class wealthy powerful Europeans and Americans who are the inheritors and enforces of a bivalent intellectual tradition which has come to dominate life throughout the West. In the novel's present the Elect has begun to lose its grasp" (*Thomas Pynchon's Narratives* 64, 65). If the Elect is losing power, in other words, the Preterite might have an opportunity to appropriate it.

At the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* there appears what Pynchon calls the Counterforce, the Preterite resistance against the Elect. According to John Hamill, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "the Counterforce is an organization which is dedicated, as we have seen with Katje, to rescuing Slothrop, but also to providing resistance, not to Communism, but to Them and Their System. Milton Gloaming, for instance, advocates a counter to Them in the use "We system" based on "creative paranoia": "Of course a well-developed They system is necessary—but it is only half of the story. For every They there ought to be a We. In our case there is. Creative paranoia means developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-system—" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 638).

This concept of 'Counterforce' is not only explored implicitly in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but also, and more importantly, Pynchon uses it as the title of the last section of his novel. He depicts it as the attempt of the oppressed class to respond to the ruling technological class for the sake of obtaining its freedom. Slothrop, who has been a victim of the rocket, and seemingly of the industrial system throughout the major parts of the novel, seems to be losing his conditioning gradually as he roams through the Zone, where at some point he becomes able to enjoy his sexual freedom. However, the possibilities of an effective Counterforce are limited, as in the cases of Mexico, Pirate, Katje, and others. It may function in an ironic way, by unconsciously serving the

Elect: "They will use us. We will help legitimize Them, though They don't need it really, it's another dividend for Them, nice but not critical . . ." (*Gravity's Rainbow* 713). The Counterforce *Gravity's Rainbow*, as the narrator suggests, "are as schizoid, as double minded in the massive presence of money, as any of the rest of us, and that's the hard fact" (712).

V. CONCLUSION

Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* deals with the historical events of the twentieth century. More precisely, in this novel Pynchon tries to imagine events of the Second World War. The latter brought immense chaos and confusion to the world order. For Pynchon, technological and scientific information are to a large extent responsible for this. He often refers to the scientific information that the period of World War II and its aftermath and the destruction that resulted from this scientific development. Furthermore, he implies that the scientific and technological advances in the postmodern world have had a great impact on the course of history. From the very beginning of his novel, Pynchon develops a harsh criticism of the dominant capitalist states fostering wars and, more importantly, of the destructive impulse and technology as a tool for the system. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon depicts a struggle based on binary opposition between Elect and Preterite, Force and Counter-force, Them and Us. This dichotomy is explored throughout the whole novel in the light of power, submission and resistance. Pynchon's use of the V-2 rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* is of immense significance. It is the driving force of the novel in the sense that it is directly connected to the major themes of the novel; power, technology, paranoia, sex, control, resistance and so on. Through it, Pynchon wants to convey his disapproval of the destruction and disorder that the technology of the twentieth century and scientific developments in general have brought about.

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