Sexual/Gender Politics in Gravity's Rainbow (1973) and Vineland (1990): Reading Thomas Pynchon as a Story about America (Ⅲ)

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Sexual/Gender Politics
in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) and *Vineland* (1990):

Reading Thomas Pynchon as a Story about America (Ⅲ)

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I have been viewing Pynchon’s fiction sequentially. I am using the term “sequel” broadly to suggest a thematic continuation of his full-length novels rather than a continuation of plot or identifiable characters. The novels reflect, among other things, Pynchon’s desire to follow up his exploration of self-identity in America. As for *Gravity’s Rainbow*, I will focus, among hundreds of its characters, on Tyrone Slothrop, the protagonist.

After the ordinary housewife’s failure of self-realization because of the problematical discourse or sexual trap she is caught in, Tyrone seems not to resemble any characters in the former fictions. Or rather, he looks quite extraordinary and “unrealistic.” His sexual potency is uncomparable, and he is so manly as to be called “Rocketman.” In the end, however, he becomes the “Earth.” Turning to Mother Earth, a “woman,” and waiting for a V2 rocket to pierce his body, he is content and feels that would be natural.

I have already discussed *GR* concerning the following questions. What do Tyrone and Vaslaf Chicherine, the quester-doubles of *GR*, identify themselves with? Do they acquire personal integration? How do they react to their Otherness? What is really being a man or the “Father” in “patriarchy” and be (com)ing a woman like? Is becoming a “woman” needed in order to be a consummate narrator-artist? Sexual allusions foregrounded, *GR* is characterized by the protagonist’s sexual/gender politics in the quest of artist/narrator self in America. As the reader who needs to decode the mystery of his identity, Tyrone has the same defect as Oedipa Maas in reading/narrating/communicating with the undescrivable. In *49* and *GR*, Pynchon explores sexuality — be (com)ing a woman — and reading the inexpressible.

In *Vineland*, the thematic continuation further elaborates how a woman identifies her self and her sexuality in the postmodern highly-technologized America and in her broken family. An Oedipa or a Paola in TV culture of the 1980s, in a sense, Prairie seeks identity through questing for her lost mother and her paternal origins. During the search in her own contemporary time and in her mother’s 1960s America, she witnesses various female underground allies and East-oriented radical strategies against institutional or traditional values, and as well as her identity, she has to consolidate her sexuality and decide how to act and behave as a woman in the world. Her mother, Frenesi, is another quester/decoder of identity and an artist who is a filmmaker. *VL* investigates how a
woman and a girl can reach fullness of self and sexuality in present-day American society and family, and what the contemporary institution has to do with the quest. Pynchon’s investigation of the sexual/gender politics of self-realization in America culminates in GR, and VL focuses on identity and sexual fulfillment in a broken family, one of the most current problematic topics.

1. The Rocketman-Turned-Woman

As Blicero/Weissmann in GR understands, America was once a land of promise, but now American Death has covered all the land and occupied even Europe. The history of America is changing the green of forests into the white of papers/civilization. Seemingly a comical reference, shit, money and the Word of the Puritan God were the three truths, and they empowered structures of America’s devouring mobility. The WASP predators are well described by a black character in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*:

> they had not the dignity of wild animals who did not eat where they defecated but they could defecate over a whole people and come there to live and defecate some more by tearing up the land and that is why they loved property so····. And especially the Americans who were the worst because they were new at the business of defecation spent their whole lives bathing bathing bathing washing away the stench of the cesspools as though pure soap had anything to do with purity.5)

Born in such a powerful patriarchal country, Tyrone Slothrop, now a soldier in Europe, is obsessed with the mysterious correspondence between his erection and the V2 bombing in London, and he is driven in his quest to fill in the blanks in his identity. He tries to rationalize the mystery, which is attributed later to his infantile experience, in which his erection was stimulated by the smell of Impoplex G, the erectile plastic used in V2, a plastic created by a German scientist, Laszlo Jamf, in exchange for financial assistance for his education at Harvard University. Thus he has developed a sensitivity to the Rocket. It was “Their” conspiracy, and in many ways “They” continued to bust “the sod prairies of his brain,” till and sow there, and subsidize him “not to grow anything of his own” (210). The name of the person who made the blank, Jamf, means “I,” and he is in a direct chain of cause-and-effect with Justus von Liebig, August Wilhelm von Hofmann and Herbert Ganister. Exploring this mystery offers something to Tyrone about his lost identity. His quest turns out to be not only to find his lost identity, but also to realize what is wrong with America and what he has to abandon to make that discovery.

The process of rationalization is reflected most in government and military bureaucracy. During his solitary quest, Tyrone has the “obsession with getting papers” (623), especially a discharge certificate. Though it might only make him free to continue his search, he tries diligently to get it. While trying, he comes to realize how much he has been obsessed with American values. As if “she” were an honest lover, he has cherished America, “the woman,” and respected her so much that he could not do without her. He
loves her and senses that “she” continues to whisper to him “Love me.” He finds himself a typical “man” of patriarchy, and that he has loved America and the patriarchal values, as though he would a cherished love. Here, America is contradictorily a “man” in respect to its values, and at the same time, a “woman,” the object of his heterosexual love.

Tyrone is “changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose — but the one ghost-feather his fingers always brush by is America” (623). For him, “albatross” signifies not only the difficult problem of identity but a person’s brain where “They” station “Their” branch of authority — America’s headquarters — or the stronghold of “Their” valued rationalization. In his quest, Tyrone first relies solely on rationalization, knowing there is still a way back but wondering, to where? Feeling he might be able to leave America, his love, some day, he knows he can not at that juncture.

In his symbolic journey to forsake America, Tyrone displaces his identity with those of Ian Scuffling, a British war correspondent, and Max Schlepzig, a juggler. He also puts on the clothes of Rocketman and Pig-Hero Plechazunga; and changes clothes with Vaslav to cover him up, until he realizes his “stripped” (712) identity. At first, his quest is fruitless because of his own displacing and surplussing of his self. Through stripping, which can be thought of as a feminine image from vulgar culture, he gradually gains sensory awareness of his sexuality, identity and his entire existence. He is becoming a “woman,” while giving up solipsistic reasoning. Also as underground people, such as Blodgett Waxwing and Emil “Säure” Bummer, help Tyrone, his quest begins to bear fruit. Its success is predicated not in logical reasoning, but because of the underground people and metaphorically, underground discourse — non-logical, sensory experiences, including alcohol or drug-induced hallucinations.

While many went westward, assaulting and conquering Mother nature, the Slothropes did not but stayed east in Berkshire, out of some kind of reasoned inertia. Seemingly a loser, his family had a tradition against the fanatically self-destroying trend in America, and his ancestor, William, helps Tyrone deconstruct the present values during his quest. William wrote On Preterition to negate the superiority of the “Elect” and to argue for the holiness of the “Preterite.” He transcended “Their” binary system, and Tyrone senses, when he hears him whisper to him during his quest, that this might be a route back to “Pre-Christian Oneness” or “the gathered purity of opposites” (321), both for himself and America: the place to go back to is where all “patriarchal” values begin — rationalization, subjective authenticity, strict binary opposites with their middles excluded, and their hierarchical standards. Tyrone needs to truck down to the crossroads where all these begin, where something went wrong. And yet he is still caught in the binary discourse, and feels he is sliding between paranoid and “anti-paranoid part[s] of his cycle.” Anti-paranoia is to him “a condition not many of us can bear for long” “where nothing is connected to anything” (434).

A quantum jump in his quest is made in Part Four, when Tyrone draws near to
a spiritual medium, and writes more than half a dozen graffiti in a public lavatory. As well as letters and pictures, musical instruments cue him to intersensory experience. Soon after his mountain life begins, he comes across a set of bagpipes and practices playing them. He makes such remarkable progress that even offerings of food are left for him, as if he were "a bagpiper's ghost, or just purely sound itself." Now he knows "enough about solitudes and night-voices to figure[ou]twhat[is]going on." The next day after he quits playing the bagpipes, he finds his long-lost harp, another obsession of his, which appears in his confession extracted under the influence of a truth drug, and he hears "a visual blues being played by the clear stream." Moreover, when he goes down to the river to fetch the harp, he senses there are harpmen and dulcimer players in all the rivers, wherever water moved. He could even "find and make audible the spirits of lost harpmen." Just sucking on his harp, not thinking of anything, he is "closer to being a spiritual medium" (622), though he does not know it.

When Tyrone sees the slogan on the wall of a public lavatory: "If you want the V-2/V4, then work," he is also attracted to the message: "ROCKETMAN WAS HERE." First he just thinks he had written it while he put on the Rocketman's garment. As the narrator of GR guesses, however, Tyrone "was starting to implicate himself, some yesterday version of himself, in the Combination against who he was right then," when "the albatross stirred" in "its sluggish coma" (624). The blank in his identity is beginning to be disclosed. Drawing more than half a dozen of the same pictures on the wall, he realizes that what he is drawing repeatedly is the A4 rocket seen from below. The numb Tyrone becomes sensitized again and "tuned to" (624) anything which would reveal his identity. Finally, he knows he has drawn patterns of a cross: the cross comprising the four fins of the Rocket shape; the cross of a pregnant religious mandala; and the crossroads, the very place he desired to get back to, where he could hear the voices of this World and the "Other One," which can not be heard by a person controlled by the exclusive discourse of rationalization.

Music and these pictorial messages lead Tyrone to his destination of self-integration. As well as the logical, the non-logical are needed to reach it. Or rather, such a binary discourse itself is just misleading. His quest is the process returning from solipsistic rationalization to harmoniously regained sensitization, the undivided place or in-between of rationalization and sensitization. At the edge of "Plague in the Zone," Tyrone finds himself become a cross, or rather, the crossroads, a place of execution, literally and symbolically, where solipsistically logos-dominated men are executed. Not such a man anymore, he knows himself becoming the "Earth." With America, the woman he loved, his logos-oriented self/male body becomes fragmented and scattered, to be born as a different being, that is, a female body in his consciousness. Now as the Earth, or as the extension of America the woman, he can go anywhere, can be any place any time. In Säure Bummer's kitchen, he finds "in every bone and cabbage leaf paraphrases of himself" (625). Regaining what he lost in the rationalized world, he becomes tuned to every wave-length of the world, and can hear and voice any person's speech as it is, even everything, since he is the
person and the thing. He is thus born as omnipotent narrator-artist. His ability to become everything and everybody in the world is essential for a narrative artist. The way to reach this privilege is to lie in-between the “male” and “female” discourses.

As Tyrone’s quest is called “Schwarzphänomen” (513) [black phenomenon], the white protagonist tries to find the “Otherness” within himself and finally finds it in “womanhood” /a female body in sexual binary opposition. The lost part of his identity is “woman,” now becomes internalized. Being androgynous — in the sense that both male and female values are internalized harmoniously — is, therefore, essential to becoming a consummate narrator-surrogate, and this original state of artistic mind, or the harmonious integration of the “masculine” and the “feminine,” is represented in GR as the place of Kirghiz Light. Only a “true” poet can reach it and “[senses]all Earth like a baby” (358).

Neither a “man” nor a “woman” but a baby, not alienated from itself and its outer world, this infant can narrate various stories. The place of Kirghiz Light/God suggests a source of poetry, where narrative art is born. Tyrone reaches his narrator-self through integrating the Otherness, while his quester-double, Vaslav, tries not to integrate himself but to annihilate his Otherness, symbolized by his trying to kill his black half-brother Enzian. As a foolish coward, he cannot acknowledge his Otherness, is not yet ready for birth.

When his identity quest develops to the point in which he becomes a “woman,” Tyrone grasps his sexual opposite, Otherness, as his finally-integrated self. Newly born as a true narrator-artist and yet, he is foolishly conscious of his being a “woman” and senses it is natural to him. His discourse becomes more sexually-oriented. The Rocketman-turned-woman, Tyrone, sees a rainbow in the sky, that is symbolic of hope and the same parabola emblem of the Rocket, as a cock. Supposing there is some relevance between the rocket-bombing and his erection, he has thought of the Rocket and its representation as purely phallic. The Rocket does not look phallic, however, to Kurt Mondaugen, a rocket specialist who comprehends it materially, not sense-orientedly. For him, it is an androgynous, complete system, with the paired opposites of fuel and oxidizer united, “male and female principles uniting in the mystical egg of the combustion chamber: creation and destruction, fire and water, chemical plus and chemical minus.” To the specialist, the Rocket and its parabola are suggestive of integrated binary opposition. An aerodynamics man points out another misunderstanding concerning the Rocket. For Fahringer, a Zen-fanatic, the Rocket is a fat Japanese arrow, and it is “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 firer’” (403). In this Eastern philosophical discourse, the binary opposition is deconstructed, and the subject is not caught in a subject-object binarism. Whether these are right or whether the Rocket represents just an androgynous myth of transcendence, these two understandings of the Rocket show Tyrone’s associative and superficial understanding and reaction to the rainbow in the last stage is not enough. As his consciousness as a “woman” in his final, integrated self and as a narrator-artist, he still cannot go beyond the sexual binary opposition. Or rather, running to the other extreme, he is
more deeply trapped in it. It is a crucial, paradoxical trap like that of ideological androgyne: when one refers to androgyne he is more conscious of the sexual binarity. As his tarot shows, Tyrone is a Fool and Underdog, so the narrator regards him as "a novice medium... corrupted, given up on" (627).

Created in its own image by the Power, men are forced to play the role as a domineering conquerer and they try to maintain the power as they are expected to. Women are also motivated by the power, by the myth of becoming a "man." This is the Power's cunning strategy, making them fight against each other for the vacant idea of "Father" in "patriarchy." Both sexes are trapped and at the mercy of the indescribable Power of America. Tyrone's foolishness and his failure as a "reader" of the unnameable is evident in his sexual identification, or sexuality internalized in its extremity, and this shows it is quite difficult not to be trapped by the vacant idea of "patriarchy" and its binary discourse, as well as a misleading conception of sexuality.

Exploring Tyrone's self-realization as a woman, GR demystifies narrative art which has much to do with sexual consciousness and gender strategy, and suggests what is needed for a narrator-artist. First Tyrone grasped America as a woman, the object of his heterosexual love, when he was strongly conscious of his male sexual potency. It was a foolish, narcissistic love of a man who mistakes "man" for "woman" and loves the very manly, especially the solipsistic rationalization. Forsaking it to be in harmonious integration of the masculine and the feminine, in other words, reaching back the crossroad at which he lost his artistic self, he can be a true narrative artist. However, he is, in the end, at the other extremity of the sexual or bodily binarity. Aspiring after bodily love and waiting to be conquered by the phallic rocket, he feels it is natural. He is thus trapped by the sexual binarity or the discourse of the body, which is as problematic as what Oedipa is in. His failed self-integration as a narrator-artist has much to do with his sexual/gender politics and how he identifies or relates himself to America.

2. Child Quester in the New Paradise

Prairie's quest in VL is for the fullness of identity and sexuality in the 1980s American TV culture and its family where the basic nuclear family triangle of Dad, Mom and the Child — the Child helpless but with parents' help expected to build its consummate self and sexuality — is being destroyed. Prairie's identity and sexuality cannot be realized until the child or adolescent is reunited with her lost mother and finds her paternal origins. Unlike in Pynchon's former novels, the quest theme in VL appears to develop in a fantastic or "unrealistic" mode, specifically with references to Japanese ninja art. Though many historical/political/social facts are reflected in VL, it must be read, therefore, as an allegorical fantasy or fable after Pynchon's heavily-loaded or metaphorically complicated GR, a book on sabbatical yet continuing with the serious problematization of the identity quest in America.

Prairie's mother, Frenesi Gates, also searches for self-realization in her maternal line.
NAKATANI : Sexual/Gender Politics In *Gravity's Rainbow*(1973) and *Vineland*(1990) 39

of political radicalism. Her mother, Sasha Traverse, and grandmother, Eula Becker, were devoted activists in the 1900s and 1930s labor movements, while their husbands were losers: Jess Traverse, Eula’s husband, was hurt in an accident schemed by the employer, and Hub Gates, Sasha’s husband, could not win in the labor strike and was left to retire from any social movement. Zoyd Wheeler, Frenesi’s husband, is also a failure, though he is a “big idealist” (29). He cannot reconstruct his broken family and pretends to be insane, throwing himself from a high window annually to achieve mental-disability checks. Sasha and Eula are ideologically radical, and maybe because of it, they are excited by men in uniform even like the Nazis, which suggests their political extremity distorts natural sexuality. Born in such an undaunted female line of political activism, Frenesi fought in the campus unrest against the College of the Serf to establish PR³ [People’s Republic of Rock and Roll]. She lived through the 1960s marijuana culture and the Vietnam War, which was, in other words, the time of the counter-culture of rock’n’roll and drugs. In such turbulence American traditional values were exposed to drastic changes. For Frenesi, her maternal radicalism, family values, and sexual roles are touchstones for reaching her sexual identity. As identity quester or a decoder/writer of her identity, she is also an artist in describing the “truth.” She aims to film a documentary, 24fps [-frame-per-second : the old guerrilla movie outfit], with her comrades DL, Ditzah, and others. They are obsessed with lighting techniques and think film should be able to reveal the real truth. Her daughter traces her quest of identity and ways of expression.

Prairie’s grandmother, Sasha, is “push-button lefty [and a woman of] ideology before family” (305) in Sasha’s own words. When Frenesi feels emotionally against her mother and wishes for death because of post-birth depression, she thinks “Prairie could be her guaranteed salvation,” but pretending to be her mom is “the worst lie, the basest betrayal” (292). When Brock Vond enters the picture, she goes out of her mother’s line of female radicalism to participate in Brock’s view of life. As an attorney for the lefties, he then fights against drugs. A “control-freak” (349), he is a personification of the Establishment which represses liberty and the labor movement, therefore, he tries to convert the activists through his Political Re-Education Program. His use of family values and functions is extended into some national fascist Family, and he acts as a father to Prairie. Frenesi rejects playing the role of mother in the basic family triangle and works for him and the Establishment. She cannot reach self-fulfillment, however, or find the way out of the maze of her quest. She is an eternal quester and endangered to forget her former self as a fighter when she is given the medicine by him. Even after being helped to escape from him, she goes again to him to work as an informant.

Besides her three-generational political radicalism against patriarchy, Prairie has female allies against institutions and patriarchal rationalization: the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives in California, a Zen-oriented group that implants mysticism united with technology. Though all of them are “wearing ninja gear and unpromisingly distant expressions” (108), the Sisters are mostly non-Asian, and there are many African-
Americans and Mexicans. Looking for some cash flow themselves, the kunoichi began by the 1960s "to edge into the self-improvement business" (107). With radical ideas, its Head Ninjette, Sister Rochelle, speaks about a renewed version of Paradise lost. According to her, long ago in the Garden of Eden there was no man: Paradise was female, just the sisters of Eve and Lilith, and the first man was the Serpent, whereas Adam, who is believed to be the first man, was inserted later into the story "to help make men look more legitimate." The Serpent was a "sleazy, slippery man who invented [good, evil and morality] where before women had been content to just be" (166). The knowledge Prairie receives is totally different ideas, values, ways of life, and the possibility of the female allies. It is acquired through her mother’s friend and helper, DL [Darryl Louise Chastain] who trained in Japanese martial arts, achieved ninjutsu or special Japanese ancient spells used by ninjas, and experienced sexual harassment as a sexual slave in a brothel of Tokyo. The Sisters try to heal her partner, Takeshi, correct her errors, bond her to him as a sort of karmic bodyguard, and help them deepen their ties to Prairie. As the Sister Rochelle says, however, the true meaning of her life is business. However ideologically pure, this female organization cannot escape from the system of business to maintain their system and creeds. Its pure ideology and self-contradictory impure acts show a limitation of the female allies. The female radicalism of her mother’s line and the women’s allies are incorporated in Prairie’s education during her quest.

Another thing to be incorporated in her education is the understanding of the “reality” of America. The 1980s America is a “whole alternative America” (373) of the America in the 1960s when her mother was an activist. The former Tube-oriented culture is more alienating than the latter world of movie-culture or “the Mellow Sixties, a slower-moving time, predigital, not yet so cut into pieces, not even by TV” (38). In TV mass media various illusions or unreal images are mixed with each other to make schizophrenic “reality,” as we can see, for example, the “reality” concerning the presidential candidate Kennedy is made/faked through TV debating. TV in the 1980s gives people “too much to process, [fills] up every minute, [keeps them] distracted” (314). As a house hymn goes, it poisons their brain, and drives them insane. To the passive viewers of TV, there is “no difference between the weirdness of life and the weirdness of death” (218). Unlike “the visible world” (38) of the 1960s, in the 1980s “reality” is intangible and unstable.

The 1980s America presented in VL and clarified by Prairie is both “realistic” [in the sense of documentarily true] and “unrealistic” world, a bizarre one co-habitated by the living and the dead — the Thanatoids: “Thanatoid” means “like death, only different” (170). Their population in “the strange ‘lost’ town of Shade Creek” (320) has been growing steeply since the end of Vietnam War. With this dead people’s world within, and with the Eastern values or foreign ways of life flowing into traditional America, the country looks quite different from any period of her history. The quester-protagonist is not in the same America any more. Out of the America of Frenesi’s “game time, underground time, time that could take her nowhere outside its own tight and falsely deathless perimeter” (293),
NAKATANI: Sexual/Gender Politics in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *Vineland* (1990) 41

Prairie is in a “scabland garrison state the green free America of their childhoods even then was turning into” (314).

Prairie is in a desolate land, much different from the pastoral landscape of the former America: devoid of trees — *white* [in both senses of WASP and treeless] patriarchal and industrial culture that “turns everything to shit” — full of defect families. There she must find the way to realize her self and womanhood. At the end of her quest witnessing her mother’s own quest, and witnessing various values and female allies, with the help of Takeshi and DL, especially, she seems to be left with little hope to fulfill her self. The choice is hers, however. She can choose her own family: whether she continues to seek the old family unification with Frenesi, who is “more Zombie than human being,” and Zoyd; identifies the dead Weed Atmen with her true father; makes a dangerous family with her mother and Brock Vond; or be taken in a big family of the Sisters; or chooses DL and Takeshi. To make new family values as she wishes:

they could wake into something more benevolent and be three different people, only some family in a family car, with no problems that couldn’t be solved in half an hour of wisecracks and commercials, on their way to a fun weekend at some beach. (191)

DL was taught by Inoshiro Sensei in Japan to “become the egoless agent of somebody else’s will,” though its difficulty often makes her act “instead out of her own selfish passions” (252). So it seems hard for Prairie to build a brand new type of family and make her quest successful in their family threesome. The book is open-ended and we cannot know what Prairie will do, and yet there is a possibility for this family by adopting some Eastern values and ways of thinking in highly-technologized America. Both Frenesi’s and Prairie’s quests promise them little hope. Unlike her mother, however, Prairie has as much knowledge as in “American History 101” (288), much more than her mother’s, about female political radicalism through tracing her mother’s quest. Not just a decoder/“reader,” she can now be a “writer” who chooses her own family members and decides how it should function so as to write her identity and develop her sexuality as she wishes.

And yet, Prairie cannot do it since she has no words to speak, metaphorically, and cannot reach her identity and sexual definition by defining herself in the family relationship. Leaving Justin, her half brother, and Isaiah Two Four, her boyfriend, she goes back to where Brock visited her. She falls asleep, dreams even of him, then she is waken by her dog, Desmond, licking her cheek. The dog outlives his grandmother Chloe and is himself left alone now, so they are both lonely and helpless without an adult’s help. Seemingly a faithful accomplice and comfort to her, the dog foretells the nullified possibility of Prairie’s success in her quest. The biblical connotations of Justin’s and Isaiah’s names as a father of the Church and a prophet also indicate, after leaving them, that she has no clue for the answer to her identity quest and fulfillment of sexuality from these wise men.

As a narrative artist, in order to write/tell her story of identity and sexuality, Prairie has to know how to reach the unsayable. Identity and sexuality need a place to be defined,
which could be a family for the child, since it is the first community. Unable to find her family at the end of her quest, the child in VL looks as though she is beginning to build a family with the dog. Prairie is alone with the dog in “Vineland the Good” (322), an imagined county and once a hippie paradise. Her being alone in Paradise is ironical and well suggestive of a lost family or destroyed holy family threesome in America now. As its name suggests, Vineland seems to be a land full of grapevine trees, a new Paradise the American child of destroyed nuclear family in the 1980s is placed in after the adults’ fail to reach fulfillment of self. Can she succeed in her quest in the future? The question is, in other words, whether the girl, with the name of an open green space made of flowers, weeds and grasses, can symbolically grow into a tree and forest later, that is, can she reach a consummate self and sexuality? We find the landscape is already overshadowed by the threats of destruction and death, which also suggests there is little hope for her:

As crops in the sun grew fatter, flowered, more densely aromatic, as resinous breezes swept out of the gulches to scent the town day and night, the sky over Vineland County, which had allowed the bringing of life, now began to reveal a potential for destroying it. (221)

All the clues in the book suggests negative anticipation. The predator of the blue jays, the dog, even suggests a danger in her further quest.

Pynchon’s sequential theme of quest comes again to the starting point after its fantastic presentation of the problem in current highly industrialized and cross-cultural America. VL is a fantastic version of a serious meditation on the American social reality and a child’s quest for fulfillment of sexual identity. It is also a fable version of 49 to present the quest theme with its story of a child quester without parents to help, but not yet achieving sexual politics and therefore having no risk to fall sexually-oriented trap like Oedip Maas in 49 does.

Notes
1. Thomas Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow (1973; London: Picador, 1975). It will be referred to as GR later and all references will be cited internally.
3. Ibid.
4. Pynchon, Vineland (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990). It will be referred to as VL later and all references will be cited internally.