CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, Pynchon’s portrayal of the manifold expressions of the decadence of Western culture, as well as his metaphorical application of the concept of entropy for that purpose has been discussed. The thermodynamic phenomenon of entropy, even when applied as a socio-cultural metaphor, connotes consistent decline and disintegration. The western society with its culture is constantly undergoing degeneration owing to the presence of entropic elements. In fact, the western culture is morbid and moribund according to Pynchon, as a result of the powerful sway of disintegrating factors like war, racism, slavery, exploitation, colonization, moral decline, and above all discard for spiritual values. The entire atmosphere is tense with fear, uncertainty, hatred, conspiracy, and cutthroat competition. People living in such a culture of exasperating tension might show preterite tendencies of slothfulness, aimlessness, anxiety, paranoia, psychic perversions etc. Many of Pynchon characters show one or several of these inclinations. Benny Profane is a typical preterite who wanders lazily and aimlessly. The Whole Sick Crew embodies moral debauchery, laziness and irresponsibility. V., the mysterious figure is not the symbol of victory, but the paradigm of moral failure, physical disintegration, psychic perversion, conspiracy and homicide.
Oedipa Maas exemplifies infidelity, sexual licentiousness, and paranoia. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Slothrop, a slothful wanderer, undergoes perpetual moral decay. As mentioned earlier, Katje and Blicero are incarnations of the forces of darkness and evil. In *Vineland* Zoyd Wheeler shows suspicious mental sanity. One can find Frenesi, inheriting the characteristics of her fictional predecessor V.. In Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*, Cornelius Vroom, his wife and daughters represent the treachery, duplicity, and licentiousness of western culture. Like the characters, the fictional atmosphere also is murky and discouraging. Certainly Pynchon charts the decay of the west, sometimes despairingly and sometimes sarcastically. But he does not belong to the group of artists who believe in “art for art’s sake.” As mentioned earlier, he is an extremely committed artist, who explores the civilization’s hidden possibilities for reversing the trend right from the beginning. So in his fictional works one can trace bylanes of anti-entropic forces at work. In fact, he juxtaposes entropy with its counterforce in all his works. Especially in works written after *V.*, he insists repeatedly that things should not have to be the way they are.

The very air of uncertainty so peculiar to Pynchon’s work suggests that possibilities remain open even if unrealised, that cultural heat-death as Callisto thought, is not inevitable and irremediable. After all, the thermodynamic principle of entropy is perfectly applicable to machines or closed systems of physics. It seems unreasonable to think of any society
consisting of large number of human beings as an absolutely closed system. As Norbert Wiener himself points out, human beings can amass information and then use it to increase organization in "local enclaves" of a generally entropic universe (HUHB 20). Human beings have the potential to open themselves anywhere, any time, for giving and taking of information and ideas.

It can be noted that Pynchon does not portray humankind as totally deserted without hope in an alienated and dying world of chaos. This fact becomes clear from the Wernher von Braun epigraph with which Pynchon opens Gravity's Rainbow:

Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. (GR 1)

George Levine in his essay on Gravity's Rainbow comments that the readers are warned by the epigraph, "physics will become metaphysics" (PCCE 185). Though terms like chaos, waste, disintegration, decay and death recur symbolizing the entropic drift in Pynchon's fictional world, he retains also the implicit potential for establishing order, recycling the waste, regenerating the socio political ambience, revitalizing the world form entropic lethargy, and restoring the value system. It seems that he uses Lucky Bland, a character in Gravity's Rainbow, as his mouthpiece to give
vent to his vision of the earth as a living organism having tremendous potential for revitalizing itself by recycling waste:

Because it is hard to get over the wonder of finding that the Earth is a living critter, after all these years of thinking about a big dumb rock to find a body and psyche, he feels like a child again, he knows that in theory he must not attach himself, but still he is in love with his sense of wonder, with having found it again, even this late, even knowing he must soon let it go (…) having hugged to its holy center the wastes of dead species, gathered, packed, transmuted, realigned, and rewoven molecules to be taken up again by the coal-tar Kabbalists of the other side, the ones Bland on his voyages has noted, taken boiled off, teased apart, explicated to every last permutation of useful magic, centuries past exhaustion still finding new molecular pieces, combining and recombining them into new synthetics—. (GR 590)

In “Low Lands” Pynchon began to develop the notion of waste or garbage as potentially positive. Dennis Flange who fails to establish a lifelong bond of love with Cindy, his fashionable wife, sets up a human bond at the dump hill with garbage men Rocco and Bolingbroke. That night Flange also meets a beautiful gypsy girl who seems ready to heal his frustrations and sense of personal decay by loving him. Pynchon, like his
character Dennis Flange, romanticizes or idealizes the "disinherited," a tendency that surfaces in much of his writing. The American society has, in effect, discarded the preterite as if they were waste. They were treated even as dumping grounds. But they offer unchannelized sources of wisdom and energy.

The children of "The Secret Integration" spontaneously share Pynchon's conviction in the salvation of the preterite and in avoiding the waste by admirable human effort. Here Pynchon suggests that the action of condescension on the part of white children towards the socially rejected classes with a view to integrating them into the one human community is a token of hope. Though the mainstream white community treat the Negroes as worthless and rubbish, at least the children realize their real nobility and worth. They are able to find some unusual illumination in Carl, a Negro boy:

Even in the grayness of this afternoon and this district they had entered (which it seemed, was deprived of its just measure of light because part of it belonged to the past), Carl brought a kind of illumination, a brightening, a compensation for whatever it was about the light that was missing. (SL 162)

Father Fairing's funny mission of evangelisation among the rats of the sewers of New York may be normally read as an act of insanity (V. 118). But in the context of extending salvation to the preterite, it can be read as a symbolic gesture of a clergyman going down to the underdog of the society
in order to enable him to enjoy the fruits of salvation. The poor and deprived of the modern world are often treated like waste.

The Hereros of Gravity’s Rainbow are a preterite community of people living relocated in the Zone. Their leader Enzian, who optimistically fights against Josef Ombindi’s idea of mass suicide, believes that “The people will find Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place…” (GR 319). In spite of his dreadful awareness of their plight, he is steadfast in his faith: “somewhere, among the wastes of the World, is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and to our freedom” (GR 525). He literally looks for the key in the wastes of the world, and assembles a rocket out of cast off parts. Then by shooting his rocket, the 00001 towards north. Enzian hopes that his people can rise above the “Final Zero” of tribal suicide and be regenerated.

As mentioned earlier, Pynchon shows a special concern for the preterite or the social outcasts, by asserting that salvation lies in those whom the societies cast off or consider as filth or garbage. William Slothrop in his heretical tract, On Preterition, argued “holiness for these second Sheep without whom th’r’d be no elect” (555). Pynchon then affirms his point that America has gone wrong in discarding the “Slothropite heresy”, with a rhetorical question: “Could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped wrong from?” (GR 556).
As entropy presupposes also the loss of man’s harmony with nature, re-establishing harmony with nature is also envisaged as one of the prerequisites for fighting entropy and assuring a peaceful living. Pynchon’s aimlessly wandering protagonist, Tyrone Slothrop gradually develops some capacity to love nature. Though there was much discord in his life, he loves trees deeply:

Trees now—Slothrop’s intensely alert to trees, finally. When he comes in among trees he will spend time touching them, studying them sitting very quietly near them and understanding that each tree is a creature, carrying its own individual life, aware of what’s happening around it, not just some hunk of wood to be cut down. (GR 552-553)

In _The Crying of Lot 49_, the theory of entropy is challenged by an equally powerful theoretical possibility, i.e., the Maxwell’s Demon. Along with the principle of disintegration, Pynchon juxtaposes the suggestion of an ordering principle. Here he compares thermodynamic entropy with informational entropy. As mentioned earlier, the machine invented by John Nefastis claims to be able to violate the second law of thermodynamics, because it connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow. Actually, he admits that the two fields are entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell’s Demon. The system is said to lose entropy, when a Demon sitting in the middle of it, sorts the molecules
into hot and cold ones. The reader, like Oedipa herself, will be confronted with numerous misleading possibilities and alternatives, often beyond grasp.

At the beginning of Oedipa’s quest, the Tristero was thought of as a clandestine conspiracy with certain anti social motives. But as the quest progresses, it appears increasingly like a positive counterforce to the rampant and grotesque entropic forces that spoil contemporary America. Connected to an underground postal service system, the Tristero sorts out informational entropy or the social entropy just as the Nefastis machine is supposed to do. The Pentecostal power of miraculous communication is a social as well as a spiritual counterforce. Besides, the acronym “W.A.S.T.E.” presumes patient waiting for a radical political change. As Peter L. Cooper remarks, “Through W.A.S.T.E., the human waste may become a unified and powerful anti-entropic concentration of political energy” (94). Accordingly the Tristero is a threat to the malicious exploitative Yoyodyne and the apparently “exitless” San Narciso. It poses a radical alternative to the “spiritual poverty” and “absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American” (CL 170).

The domineering power of social entropy, symptomatically present as chaos and hatred in Pynchonian fictional world, can at least to some extent be thwarted by the ability to love. It fills the vacuum, minimizes apparent chaos, and lends meaning to life. Though genuine love is a rare and fragile
Phenomenon, Pynchon does hold out love, either fraternal or sexual, as a possible form of escape.

Callisto of “Entropy” enriches his “hermetic enclave,” in his attempt to prevent entropic drift, also by ensuring the loving presence of Aubade, his fiancée. Similarly, when Meatball Mulligan realizes that the party really goes out of control, he moves on to others, trying to calm everybody down, one by one. He directs his energies towards creating order through personal interaction, communication, and treatment of individual cases with concern.

Pynchon makes basically the same point in V., his least hopeful novel. Fausto’s love for his wife Elena can be picked out as one of the rarest examples of faithful marital love treated in the novel. The depth of love encourages him to persevere through air raids and desperate situations of war. Towards the end of the book, his daughter Paola too emerges as a responsible wife. Her faithful love for Pappy Hod cures his mental ill health and rejuvenates him. It suggests the redemptive possibilities of love. When Pappy can simply say, “I love you,” she gives him the token of her renewed faith (V. 443).

Love opens before Benny Profane the possibility of liberation from his schlernihlood. Fina Mendoza, for example, helps him by taking him home to her parents, when she finds him aimlessly yo-yoing on the subway. Benny and Fina run through the station, beneath the chains of green lights, and when the mechanical jaws of the subway door close on Benny, she saves
him from death: “With a frightened little cry she took Profane’s hand and tugged, and a miracle happened. The door opened again. She gathered him inside, into her quiet field of force” (V. 31). Rachel Owlglass, with whom Benny has much intimacy, even asks him to settle down with her and hold steady work at Anthroresearch Associates. Rachel is one the Pynchon characters who shows care and concern for the downtrodden and does whatever she can to help them. Rachel’s timely help is a great consolation for Esther who is sexually exploited by Schoenmaker and the Whole Sick Crew. In her need for love and in her ability to care, Rachel anticipates Oedipa Maas.

Oedipa Maas embodies the strength and frailty of modern womanhood. She had hoped that her lover, Pierce Inverarity would deliver her from “the tower” of bondage (CL 11). But that relationship failed and she had to marry a disk jockey “hoping forever for love” (CL 114). She falls a prey to the advances of Metzger, and later many others, with a desire to be loved deeply. Finally, she extends her helping hand to the old and dying sailor (CL 93).

Acts of kindness and love, performed by several characters in Gravity’s Rainbow, offer a welcome relief to the pervading atmosphere of doom and dismay. Most of those characters seem to inherit the legacy of Fausto, McClintic, Rachel, and Fina. Despite the frustrations and strained relationships in her life, Leni Pökler continues to love and care her daughter
Ilse. She can love because she has the strength to face uncertainty and death, to lose herself in her commitment to a person and an ideal. Pökler himself, though unfaithful and loveless as a husband, finds meaning to his life later on by generously helping a dying woman. Thus he performs atonement for the many sins he had committed and overcomes the vacuum of his life.

Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake manage one of the few affairs in Pynchon unblemished by sadomasochism, fetishistic substitutions, and other psychic perversions. Their love affair sprouts during the turbulent days of the war. It looked so innocent and deep: "Roger and Jessica were merged into a joint creature unaware of itself" (GR 38). When war ended Jessica drifted away, back to a safe and reassuringly routine life with Jeremy. Though their relationship turned out to be a transitory one, it helped Roger to overcome his loneliness at least for some time.

In Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon has drawn on heroic instances from history to illustrate that intimidating forces, even the immediacy of death, could stimulate and deepen love, not only the perverse but also the ennobling kind. The characters of Pynchon's world confront forces that threaten to isolate, alienate, dehumanise, or even kill them. But they find chances for escape in caring and attempting human contact. Love is a powerful counterforce that opposes entropy. Citing the examples of English
soldiers who involved in World War I, Pynchon asserts that even the threat of death can enkindle love, which would combat fear and death:

In the trenches of the First World War, English men came to love one another decently, without shame or make-believe, under the easy likelihoods of their sudden deaths, and to find in the faces of other young men evidence of otherworldly visits, some poor hope that may have helped redeem even mud, shit, the decaying pieces of human meat [...] while Europe died meanly in its own wastes, men loved. (GR 616)

*Gravity’s Rainbow* ends with a bizarre kind of advice to extend help to the neighbour. Even as the Rocket “reaches its last unmeasurable gap… the last delta-t” above the head, the narrator advises: “There is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you” (GR 760). And Pirate Prentice is one such character who acts in an unusual manner to please his friends under the threat of an imminent V-2 Rocket blast: “Pirate hunches his shoulders, bearing his bananas down the corkscrew ladder” (GR 7). He realizes that there is not enough time to warn his friends. Picking bananas while the rocket falls may seem stupidity, but he does that to make a strange but sumptuous “banana breakfast” for his comrades.

Pynchon describes the miraculous power of love to save life and transform human beings with the example of Vaslov Tchitcherine. Tchitcherine had vowed to kill his enemy Enzian. But his love for a young
girl apparently transforms him, making him blind to the realities around him. He becomes “blind now to all but” her (GR 734). Indeed the love affair softens his anger and hatred, making him a different person. Tchitcherine failed to recognize Enzian, who had stopped his motorcycle and talked to him for a while. The narrator concludes: “This is magic. Sure—but not necessarily fantasy. Certainly not the first time a man has passed his brother by, at the edge of the evening, often forever, without knowing it” (GR 735).

In *Vineland*, the motivating force behind Prairie’s quest is filial love. Though the love is not properly reciprocated, it prompts her to suffer pains for her cause. So, love for the mother enables her to liberate herself from self imposed closure and degeneration caused by monotony of life. And paternal affection impels Zoyd Wheeler to commit acts, which even surpassed established boundaries of sanity.

Finally in *Mason & Dixon* one can find altruistic love as the basic drive behind the surveyors’ adventurous endeavours. Towards the last stage of their mission, the surveyors were daring enough even to risk their own lives for the cause of the liberation of the slaves, the preterite of the eighteenth century, who were treated like animals or things. Both Mason and Dixon were working zealously to prevent the society form entropic decay.

This brief analysis of Pynchon’s fictional works especially his novels, shows that the author who has serious concerns for the society, offers a critique of the western culture. He draws on entropic decadence of culture
as the basic thread of his fictional works. Naturally his vision then is one of pessimism. However, his pessimism is not absolute in that he offers possible solutions and grounds for hope in fighting the decadence and entropy. But the reader should not exaggerate his optimism as very few of his characters are saved despite the real chances or salvation. In most cases he offers love as a solution to entropy. But the characters are not always strong or noble enough to defend against the deadening forces of entropy. At times he proposes a scientific theory or a political counterforce as the solution, but that too collapses. In fact one cannot find either overt didactism or frightening prophecy in his venture. As Smith and Toloyan remark, "No other modern author, to our knowledge, has created a work so thoroughly infused with this sense of recurring but fragile possibility" (178). Indeed his vision of life resembles a salad of despair spiced with hope.