CHAPTER II

THE PROTEAN WO/MAN: IDENTITY AND/IN ANONYMITY

 Truthfully he didn't know what sex V. might be, nor even what genus and species.

 THOMAS PYNCHON, V.

 ... the individual is not individual after all, any more than the atom is really atomic: he can be divided further ...

 JOHN BARTH, THE END OF THE ROAD

2.1.0 What constitutes the making of a character or a personality is the pressure that the existing social order exerts on the inner psychic structure of an individual. The inner character structure tends to become shaky in a disintegrating sociological process. Experiencing life mostly in a post war regimented and conformist society the identity of the postmodern individual has become anonymous. Manipulated by obscure and collective forces the individual is dissolved into the collective. The collective attenuate the postmodern personality of a fragmented, polymorphous, fluid constitution. For John Barth and Thomas Pynchon this involves a certain magnitude or breath of vision that militates against an interest in detailed characterisation. They are interested in depicting characters that represent the general condition or the collective consciousness rather than those reflect the intricacies of personality. Accordingly, it is almost impossible for the reader to point out a fully rounded character in the works of Barth and Pynchon. In fact, the conventional notions of character and personality are invalid for them. Such notions, as Robert Jay Lifton points out, indicate fixity and permanence; whereas, the present stress is upon change and flux. (1968, 13). The real
interest of Barth and Pynchon lies not in characters or personalities but at the forces that shape them. This chapter proposes to analyse the shape or shapelessness that the forces effect on these human beings as represented by these novelists in their fictional world.

2.1.1 Two articles; one by Scott Sanders entitled “The Disappearance of Character” and the other by Lifton, “The Protean Man,” have brought out succinctly the forming of the fluid personality that are very much relevant for the description of the dismembered selves of the writers chosen for study. At the outset though Sanders’s observation appears to comment solely on the characterisation in Science Fictions, it is also pertinent to the works of Barth and Pynchon since he considers them well in many respects under the same category. The main contention of Sanders is that in Science Fictions characters are neglected for ideas or situation or plot. Yet the reason for such a genre to flourish in the present century is primarily sociological. He states:

In its treatment of character science fiction reproduces the experience of living in a regimented, conformist society, within which the individual has become anonymous: persons are interchangeable, relating to each other through socially defined roles; actions are governed by procedure, and thus do not characterize the actor; emotion is repressed in favour of reason; the individual is subordinated to the system. Science itself, increasingly bureaucratized and collectivized has fostered an impersonal model of knowledge which, however ill-suited to the actual work of scientists, has
become the most influential epistemology in industrial civilization (emphases added) (1979, 131-132).

He continues to argue emphatically that "in the twentieth century science fiction as a genre is centrally about the disappearance of character, in the same sense in which the eighteenth and nineteenth century bourgeois novel is about the emergence of character" (132). In this regard, the following quotation functions as an appropriate linking point between Sanders and Lifton: "While writers such as Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, and Samuel Beckett have recorded the dissolution of character under the pressures of recent history, SF begins by assuming that dissolution, and explores the causes" (emphases added) (132). Like the novels that have assumed the dissolution, Lifton's article presupposes the assumption and offers to explore the causes.

2.1.2.1 Lifton proposes to examine "a set of psychological patterns characteristic of contemporary life, which are creating a new kind of man--a 'protean man'" (1968, 13). He makes a starting point with Eric Erickson's concept of identity which is an attempt to get away from the principles of fixity and permanence. Lifton's term to convey still more specifically 'the idea of flow' is 'self-process.' Identity is not a rigid something that one acquires the moment he or she is born, it is a flexible term that indicates a process of evolution. Similarly, self is considered as the person's symbol of his organism. Lifton's Protean Man's self-process is the continuous psychic recreation of that symbol. This also involves him in 'the process of thought reform.' And in the process, he appeals to "identity fragments--of combinations of belief and emotional involvement--each of which could readily be abandoned in favor of another" (emphases
added)(14). This finally results in dramatic shifts in self-process. Henceforth ideological shifts could occur so quickly, within a year or even a month, and so painlessly. Lifton explains why he calls this type of contemporary man, “The Protean Man” as follows:

We know from Greek mythology that Proteus was able to change his shape with relative ease--from wild boar to lion to dragon to fire to flood. But what he finds difficult, and would not do unless seized and chained, was to commit himself to a single form, the form most his own, and carry out his function of prophecy. We can say the same of protean man, but we must keep in mind his possibilities as well as his difficulties (16-17).

His possibilities and difficulties lead him to a protean style of self-process that involves a series of experiments and explorations conducted in all areas of human experience. The identity diffusion and/or confusion that follows instigates the use of masks to cope with the polymorphous versatility that the process demands.

2.1.2.2 Moreover, the Protean Man for Lifton is a victim basically of a historical or psychological dislocation. There is a ‘break’ he conjectures, “in the sense of connection which men have long felt with the vital and nourishing symbols of their cultural tradition--symbols revolving around family, idea systems, religions, and the life cycle in general” (14). Also there is a disappearance of the classical super-ego which Lifton defines as “the internalization of clearly defined criteria of right and wrong transmitted within a particular culture by parents to their children” (19). He continues to say that the Protean Man requires freedom from precisely that kind of superego--he
requires a symbolic fatherlessness—in order to carry out his explorations. Ultimately this symbolic fatherlessness along with a spiritual homelessness outlines the protean personality. But to be fatherless, even symbolically, not only implies autonomy but also anonymity.

220 Seen in this perspective we find most of the characters of Pynchon and Barth lacking a strong setting. They do not come from clearly defined family background. They are either fatherless or motherless or know not anything about their parents. To cite few instances, Sidney Stencil in Pynchon’s _V_, as the author fondly calls him ‘the century’s child,’ was raised motherless. There are no facts on the disappearance of his mother. Pynchon says “Died in childbirth, ran off with someone, committed suicide some way of vanishing painful enough to keep Sidney from ever referring to it in all the correspondence to his son which is available” (V 52). There is a vague suggestion in the novel that _V_ may be his mother but still the identity of his mother remains a mystery throughout. Stencil’s father too has died under unknown circumstances while investigating the June Disturbances in Malta. Moreover, Stencil’s relationship with his father was also not so intimate even when he was alive. Once when his father sent him a picture-postcard asking him to write and cheer him up, Stencil did not reply. Half a year later when he hears about his father’s death, he realises that neither of them had communicated since the picture-postcard.

221 Stencil’s background and his relationship with his father closely parallels Todd Andrews’s in Barth’s _The Floating Opera_. Todd’s father was a widower, who
committed suicide. Only after the death of his father, Todd realises that their meetings were always few and far between. There is no reference in the novel about Todd's mother. Similarly, Barth begins his novel *Giles Goat Boy* with the protagonist pondering over these questions: "Who misbegot me, and on whom, who knew, or in what corner of the University I drew first breath?" (*GGB* 7). He could not get concrete answers for these questions but for the fact that he was the product of an abortive experiment executed by the mighty WESCAC computer. He knows no facts pertaining to his own existence and nature; no birthdate, birthplace, or ancestry to define him. ‘George,’ as he came to be identified later, is half-goat and half-man. He has legs that do not straighten out completely. In his attempts to move from a goat to boy, he ends as no longer goat but not quite man too. He is a mutant of sorts—and as a mutant, he has no clear identity. In the same way, Barth’s Henry Burlingame III in *The Sot-Weed Factor* has no idea about his parents, or about the ones who gave his name and numeral.

2.2.2 The twin children, Ebenezer and Anna Cooke, in Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* are raised motherless since their mother died bearing them. But soon Ebenezer they are cut off from their father too. Towards the end of the novel Ebenezer wonders: “I know not whether I am Magus, Messiah, Lazarus or the Prodigal” (*SWF* 479). This tells a lot about the symbolic fatherlessness he suffers from. All the figures, he has likened himself to, are Father-dependent and their agony is caused because of the severed relationship with their Father. The Magus underwent lot of sufferings in his search for the newly born Son of God. His quest indicates his need to relate himself
with the other to identify himself. Finding the son of God would mean restoring the 
faith he is having in his God; which would give him a sense of identity. In the same 
way, a Messiah would suffer to execute the chosen mission assigned to him by the 
Absolute Father—like Moses, whose identity was caught in a situation between the one 
he believed and the other whom he wanted to believe. Lazarus regained his lost 
identity when Jesus raised him from the dead. Similarly, the Prodigal Son restored his 
identity once he returned back to his Father. Ebenezer is a bit of all these people in his 
chase for an elusive identity.

2.2.3 Pynchon’s Benny Profane, in the novel *V.*, is no exception from the above 
characters. The author says that he “was only half catholic.” His mother was Jewish 
but of “whose morality was fragmentary”(*V* 19). Profane’s anonymity is further 
emphasised by his fear for empty spaces. He cannot make himself belong to open or 
strange places. Pynchon remarks, “Some of us are afraid of dying; others of human 
loneliness. Profane was afraid of land or seascapes like this, where nothing else lived 
but himself. It seems he was always walking into one, turn a corner in the street, open 
a door to a weather-deck and there he would be, in alien country” (*V* 20-21).

2.2.4 Pynchon’s Oedipa Maas, who appears in his *The Crying of Lot 49*, from her 
namesake reference to Oedipus Rex, suggests a child abandoned by the real parents 
that grows with an obsession to find out its ancestral roots. Whereas, Paola Majistral’s 
anonymity, in *V.*, is due to the mystery that envelops her. There is nothing clear about 
her background. Paola says she is sixteen, “but no way of letting because she had been
born just before the war and the building with her records destroyed" (V 14). The author says of her, "[her husband Pappy Hod] was to lie about her age to get her into the country. She could be any age she wanted. And you suspected any nationality, for Paola knew scraps it seemed of all tongues" (V 14).

2.3.0 Besides the protean characters do not show any interest in conforming to such institutions as marriage and family. And if at all they have yielded to one, it is already in its doldrums. The numerous extra-marital affairs, strained marital relationships or divorces explain the scant disregard for such institutions. For instance, both Barth’s Todd Andrews and Jacob Horner are guilty of having extra marital affairs with their close friends’ spouses. The former commits it with the consent of the husband and the latter, without. Hence in the latter’s case, when the secret is revealed events get so confused that it finally leads to the eventual tragic death of his friend’s wife. In like manner, though Pynchon’s Mucho Maas gets to know the affair of his wife with her co-executrix he does not bother much. And the fact that he does not bother much, pains Oedipa.

2.3.1 Oedipa finds an absence of love with every one she meets, or a loss of love in too-casual sex or selfish forms of relationship. Mucho, her husband, eventually deserts her, taking refuge in LSD. Metzger, her lawyer, deliberately and cleverly plots to seduce her, boasting afterwards that Pierce Inverarity (Oedipa’s ex-boyfriend and for whose will she is a co-executor) had told him that she “wouldn’t be easy,” and then leaves her suddenly and carelessly, with “no word to recall that Oedipa and Metzger had ever been more than co-executors. Which might mean, thought Oedipa, that that’s
all we were—"(CL 148). Nefastis, another mysterious figure in *The Crying of Lot 49*, casually assumes that he will have a sexual relationship with Oedipa after meeting her for only a few minutes. Even Miles, the hotel manager, and Oedipa’s lawyer, Roseman, approach her in the same way: throughout the novel, Oedipa seems to exist as a sexual object, but never as a person to be loved. This aspect of lovelessness reaches its extreme in “the Inamorati Anonymous,” a group that avoids contact with any one in order to escape from the pain which love might involve. Unfortunately it is from a person from the nameless Inamorati that Oedipa eventually most needs help. She needs a clue from him to unravel the mystery of a secret organisation named Trystero. But it is impossible for him to do that because to free Oedipa from her complete and total uncertainty about the Trystero would mean establishing the human contact he fears.

2.3.2 In addition, the cause for marital discords is often physical and trivial than being emotional or deep. Winsome’s disappointment, in *V*, begins with the horrible fact that his wife wears ‘falsies.’ But the realisation has come so late, only after the marriage, that he prevails a helpless victim. His wife, named Mafia, is equally disappointed that her husband does not suit her theory of Heroic Love—which in practice meant having sexual intercourse five or six times “a night, every night, with a great many athletic, half-sadistic wrestling holds thrown in”(*V* 125). Unfulfilled expectations and want of mutual concern allow their marriage deteriorate. Musing over their incongruous alliance for years, Winsome concludes that, “in five years of marriage all he knew was that both of them were whole selves, hardly fusing at all, with
no more emotional osmosis than leakage of seed through the solid membranes of contraceptive or diaphragm that were sure to be there protecting them” (V, 126). The use of the word ‘contraceptive’ conjures up the picture of insecure protean figures manipulating the birth process that may result in the perpetuation and duplication of their identities. Similar marital strife between Pappy Hod and Paola, in the same novel, leads to a split up though it was an abortive affair.

2.4.0 Often the protean man lack any interest to develop intimate relationship with woman, on the one hand, in fear of expressing his vulnerability at the time of total sexual surrender, and on the other, if at all he surrenders, he is apprehensive of the reproduction of offsprings that implies an act of creating a fixity of identity. The idea of procreation is basically non-existent for a protean personality. As a remedy for Horner’s strange disease his Doctor specifically advises him not to become involved with women. Todd also prefers to remain a bachelor.

2.4.1 The spermatozoon-protagonist, in Barth’s “Night-Sea Journey,” while swimming along with millions of its companions in a tough survival of the fittest, is advised by a companion not to fret about the completion of journey as that does not give them heroism. He says that the journey closes with a merging of identities with “She, which is to say, Other-than-a-he.” (LFH 10). But he finds the whole business ridiculous and dreary. In the words of the author:

He himself, he declared, was not even going to try; the whole idea repelled him, . . . a swimmer-hero plus a She equalled or became another Maker of future nightseas and the rest, at such incredible expense of life. This being
the case—he was persuaded it was—the merciful thing to do was refuse to participate; the genuine heroes in his opinion, were the suicides, and the hero of heroes would be the swimmer who, in the very presence of the Other, refused Her proffered 'immortality, and thus put an end to at least one cycle of catastrophes (LFH 11).

Thus merging of identity by union with the opposite means dissolution of it, hence they prefer to retain their identity or non-entity through anonymity.

2.4.2 In like manner, we find characters shunning away from females in Pynchon too. Profane as such is "girl-shy." Many other counterparts of Profane prefer to remain, like the spermatozoon company of Barth, as spectators than participators. About Pig Bodine, a funny character in L, it is said that "in times of crisis he preferred to sit as voyeur" (V 17). Comparably, "the voyeur Mondaugen could lip-read each obscenity" (V 238) even from a distance. Morris Teflon, from the same novel, is another spectator whose habit is to take photographs of couples on bed and sell them to avid sailors.

2.5.0 In this manner, the protean figures do not possess the conventional features of a male protagonist and act as anti-heroes or non-heroes. They lack such typical male trait as audacity and remain frightened weaklings. For instance, Stencil as a questor would go to any place except, "... the island Malta, where his father had died, where Herbert had never been and knew nothing at all about because something there kept him off, because it frightened him (emphasis added) (V 62).
2.5.1 Not only they are inadequate symbols of masculinity but also they contain features of femininity. Pynchon, for instance, could suggest this degeneration by giving funny names like Mike Fallopian and Stanley Koteks to his characters. Both the names give embarrassing references to aspects of female body. Fallopian tube is also called oviduct through which ova pass from the ovary to the uterus. And ‘Kotex’ is the commercial name of an American sanitary towel. In truth, among the protean personalities, there is no difference in gender concerning the roles they play. Irrespective of the gender, both of the sexes are vulnerable and helpless. Though Lifton calls such a person, ‘the Protean Man,’ in the fluid context of Barth and Pynchon, s/he is actually ‘the Protean Wo/Man.’

2.5.2 Josephine Hendin recognises this as the emerging trend in all the contemporary fictions. He observes: “In the emerging fiction of vulnerable men, male characters are playing the roles once assigned to women. Self-absorbed and self-pitying, they practise the politics of helplessness” (1979, 273). Besides what we call ‘character’ is often, as said by Wilhelm Reich in his Character Analysis, is a defensive ‘armor.’ “The individual is ‘characterologically armored’ against the outer world and against his unconscious drives” (qtd. Tanner 1971, 430). In this perspective, the fluidity of the protean clan's identity is the result of a conflict between the external accouterments represented by parents, names, masks and roles and an internal mummified mind.

2.6.0 Being characterless individuals, the parentless, nameless protagonists of Barth and Pynchon assume plurality of faces and roles. Jacob Horner is the one who
suffers from the problem of multiple faces in *The End of the Road*. He has "an all pervasive cosmic awareness" (ER 99), which means an ineradicable sense of the plural possibilities of movement both in the physical and mental spheres, "a recognition of the fact that when one is faced with such a multitude of desirable choices, no one choice seems satisfactory for very long by comparison with the aggregate desirability of all the rest, though compared to any one of the others it would not be found inferior" (ER 6). Psychologists would term Horner’s problem approach-approach conflict because it is the multiplicity of approaches that makes Horner’s choice difficult.

2.6.1.1 Contrary to Horner’s dilemma, Stencil’s identity in *Y* is at stake because of his approach-avoid conflict. The root of the conflict lies in his obsession for the quest of a ‘mysterious something’ identified with the letter ‘V.’. Finding V. would mean finding himself. But Stencil is not interested in both—either to find V. or to find himself out. He is interested in the approach rather than the conquest. Hence he only goes thus far but no further and restraints revelatory moments. To this end, he always refers to himself only in the third person. The author remarks:

> This helped ‘Stencil’ appear as one among a repertoire of identities. ‘Forcible dislocation of personality’ was what he called the general technique, which is not exactly the same as ‘seeing the other fellow’s point of view’; for it involved, say, wearing clothes that Stencil wouldn’t be caught dead in, eating foods that would have made Stencil gag, living in unfamiliar digs, frequenting bars or cafe’s of a non-Stenciilian character; all this for
weeks on end; and why? To keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person (V 62).

Ironically, only to place himself in the third person gives him a lot of personal security.

2.6.1.2 Further the search for V. makes him active. It gives him 'an acquired sense of animatedness.' He has decided to go for this search even without sleep. Hence he never bothered himself about finding V. and putting an end to his search:

Finding her: what then? Only that what love there was to Stencil had become directed entirely inward, toward this acquired sense of animatedness.

Having found this he could hardly release it, it was too dear. To sustain it he had to hunt V.; but if he should find her, where else would there be to go back into half-consciousness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any end to the search. Approach and avoid (V 55).

So long as Stencil 'avoids' he can actively play roles like V.. And as his name indicates, he is literally a 'stencil'--a recording instrument incapable of any personal identity. Hence he impersonates correspondingly with the endlessly changing guises of V., "... worst of all, disguise itself not out of any professional necessity but only as trick, simply to involve him less in the chase, to put off some part of the pain of dilemma on various impersonations" (V 62). Thus as Tanner remarks: "He thinks of himself as 'quite purely He who looks for V. (And whatever impersonations that might involve).’

This definition may mean that he is in fact a vacancy, filled in with the colours of his obsession, not a self, but in truth a stencil" (1971, 164).
2.7.0 Cut off the Absolute self, the unidentified self in reality moves like a phantom self. As a man who has lost his limb initially may not record its absence and feel a sensation of its presence for quite some time, the protean personality still moves with a faint sense of self. Nevertheless, this faintness helps in change of phantom selves easily and quickly. Thus the use of disguise is of utmost necessity for the protean personality. Persona is only the Latin word for the actor's mask. Characteristic features are represented by the multiple use of masks.

2.7.1 Pynchon shows in Gravity's Rainbow that Katje Borgesius's innocence is "microscopically masked" (GR 93). Similarly, about one-third through the same novel, Slothrop takes on a new name, Ian Scuffling, and a new role as an English war correspondent. Soon he becomes a Russian named Semyavin. He also takes the shape of "the Rocketman" and "the Plasticman." When Slothrop transforms into the Rocketman about him it is said that, "his talent is just to fade when he wants to." (GR 201). As the Rocketman, he sports a cape and helmet looted from a Wagnerian opera Company. He picks up another title and another costume in a small German town where at the behest of some little kids, for whom he will always do anything, he plays the role of "Plechazunga," or the Pig Hew, in the yearly pageant to celebrate a tenth-century liberator who appeared in a flash of lightning. He continues to wear his pig costume through a whole series of subsequent adventures.

2.7.2 Barth's Todd, an accomplished practitioner of masks, takes the changes in his life without qualms and gives access to them through his masks. He explains as follows: "... all the major mind changes in my life have been the result not of
deliberate, creative thinking on my part, but rather of pure incidents--events outside myself impinging forcibly upon my attention--which I afterwards rationalized into new masks” (ER 22). Todd suffers from a strange disease with “a tendency to myocardial infarction” (FO 5). That is, he is a weakling and his heart is so vulnerable and he is susceptible to death any moment. Yet like all of his protean counterparts, his masks were assumed only to conceal this vulnerability. He confesses this towards the end of the novel:

My masks were each first assumed, then justified. . . . those masks were not assumed to hide my face, but to hide my heart from my mind, and my mind from my heart. Understand it now, because I may not live to end the chapter! To be sure, each mask hid other things as well, as a falseface hides identity and personality as well as nose and mouth; but it was to hide my enigmatic heart that I became a rake, a saint, and then a cynic. For when one mask no longer served its purpose of disguise, another had perforce to take its place at once (FO 223).

2.8.0 What is so striking in Lifton's article about 'the protean man' is that he is not all that pessimistic. On the one hand, he contends that protean volatility is the result of a fear to hide one's vulnerability as in the case of Todd; on the other, he suggests that the endless possibilities of the protean man can make him exert power and become invincible too. Therefore we find two groups of the protean clan: the one that is victimised, oppressed and manipulated and the other that is represented by the victimisers, oppressors and manipulators. Most of the characters fall into the first
category; typical examples are Pynchon’s Stencil, Oedipa, Profane, Slothrop and Barth’s Horner, Todd, Ebenezer and George—the goat-boy. To the second category only a few special personalities like Pynchon’s V., Pierce Inverarity, Katje, and Barth’s Henry Burlingame III and Harold Bray belong.

2.8.1 Old Andrew II employed for Ebenezer and Anna Cooke when they were ten, “a young Cantabridgean of many parts, named Henry Burlingame III” (SWF 24). Burlingame is a master of all the arts and sciences. His researches into his parentage the origin of his name and numeral had directed all his life, led him deep into the politics of colonial America and involved him in a dozen disguises. The operations of “the Protean Burlingames . . . have been at once so multifarious & so covert” (SWF 23). And like the mythical Proteus, Henry Burlingame III, “was by his own denomination a ‘cosmophilist,’ who not only lusted after both his charges, Anna & Ebenezer Cooke, but claim’d to have had carnal connection as well with sundry sorts of barnyard animals, plants, inanimate objects, the very earth itself” (SWF 25).

2.8.2.1 Harold Bray in Giles Goat Boy is another of the potential protean types of shape-shifters. He possesses all the cardinal traits as elusiveness, ability to be all things, unanticipated appearances and disappearances. Like Burlingame, he is a man who traffics in masks and antimasks, in roles and counter-roles. He is a gross impostor. For Eierkopf it is difficult to believe that the several roles attributed to him under different names and appearances had been played by a single man. Eierkopf thinks that “he’s a species instead of one man. At least he must be quintuplets” (emphases added) (GGB 328). He used to be an avant-garde poet, a psychotherapist, a field entomologist. An
explorer and survival expert, he was able to flourish indefinitely in the wilderness without so much as a pocket-knife or canteen or water. But he refused to disclose his methods to anybody. His past as well as present existence is absolutely mystified. The author says of him: "He had no ID-card; rather, he had such a variety of forged and stolen ones that no one could say what his actual, original name was. No one had seen him eat, sleep, or relieve himself; no one knew where he lived; . . ." (GGB 329).

2.8.2.2 He can appear from nowhere and disappear anywhere and could change his colour and physiognomy at his will. He could even walk on the pool water. And if needed he can even metamorphose himself. He exhibits all these qualities in the end of the novel where he competes with George for the Grand Tutorship. To become the Grand Tutor, one needs to possess the characteristics of a messiah. Bray proves himself to be the one most competent for the job though people know him to be a fraud. He does this by impersonating all his rivals and contenders. The narrator describes this event in the following words:

... he began another series of metamorphoses more remarkable even than the earlier: not only did the color and apparent cut of his vestments change at each halyard-heave, but his face and form as well. Stroke: he was Max himself! Stroke: pretty Anastasia! Stroke: the late G. Herrold! Now Bray was The Living Sakhyan, now great black Croaker and then in rhythmic series Maurius Stoker, Kennard Sear, Elbis Eierkopf, Lucius Rexford, the brothers Hector (both at once), hat-faced Classmate X, Leonid Alexandrov,
and my passed lady mother! Last of all he assumed the semblance of myself, . . . (GGB 694-695).

2.8.3.1 Perhaps the most enigmatic and the most versatile of all the protean figures is Pynchon’s V. “Disguise is one of V.’s attributes” (V 385 & 462). Stencil associates V. with a girl named Victoria Wren who appears later as Victoria Maganese, Viola and Venus. Yet truthfully, Stencil himself does not know ‘what sex V. might be nor what genus and species’ since V. is known to be “a remarkably scattered concept”. (V 389). The first time when it appears in the novel it is as “mercury-vapor lamps, receding in an asymmetric V” (V 11); secondly, as V-note, the name of a jazz club, and thirdly, as Veronica, a female rat. Later, V. is pervasive in place names: Venezuela, Valletta and a strange outlandish region--Vheissu. It is found in ideas as victory, virgin, Virgin, vantage, view, vision, violence, Vatican, various, vagrant, etc.; also as energy, the symbol of verb, volt, vector, velocity and so on.

2.8.3.2 Critics have not only exhausted the probabilities of the letter V. in the novel but also its alternative possibilities: V turned upside down and made ‘A’ (e.g.: alligator, asexual); double V: ‘W’ (e.g.: Waterspout, World); and inverted double V: ‘M’ (e.g.: Malta, Mara) (Greenberg 1969, 58-65). One ingenuous interpretation considers V. just Pynchon’s play on words with his readers and V. here represents a reader- surrogate, “for V. is nothing less than interjects the paronomasic encoding of ‘V is you’. With that pun Pynchon the visionary experience of V. into his readers once and for all” (Vella 1989, 139). In spite of all these surfeit of interpretations, the-he-she-it-they-V. stays, to borrow a term from Salman Rushdie, a P2C2E, that is, a process too
complicated to explain. As old Stencil claims in his report: “There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she.” (V 53). “With her myriad identities,” according to Elizabeth Campbell, “V. suggests the condition of twentieth-century identity—elusive, plastic, diffused, defined by its appurtenances and accessories, by the ease with which it can fragment, in short, by its lack of soul” (1988, 62).

2.8.3.3 What V. holds is not an answer to a crossword puzzle but cross-references to exemplify, as well as to mock what it exemplifies, the complicated identity-formation/fabrication process in a thoroughly capricious postmodern climate. Compared to all other fabricators of protean identity, who struggle to maintain at least a vague sense of it, Hendin observes that only V. emerges as the victor. Apart from all the interpretations of V., he adds that, “V. may be vulnerability conquered—victory that comes out of overcoming vulnerability” (283). The vulnerability here refers to the Protean wo/man’s inability to assign roles/masks for himself and suffer because of that.

2.8.3.4 The similarities that Tony Tanner finds between Hester Pryne and Moby Dick is true of V. too. She describes as follows: “She has this much in common with Moby Dick, that she can mean different things to different people and is susceptible to apparently conflicting names. Finally she is of course more than the sum of letters and appellations that have been, or could be, applied to her, just as reality lies for ever outside the fixities of language” (1971, 24-25). V. is a representation of the protean and at the same time the impeccably unrepresentable reality that is protean. As Charles B. Harris points out, “Since in terms of the novel V. comes to represent, if not truth,
then some clue to its ultimate nature, these manifold references suggest that the essential nature of truth is one of boundless multiplicity. Its essence is uncertainty” (1971, 81).

2.8.4 Pierce Inverarity in *The Crying of Lot 49*, as Walton Litz observes, is like V., except that he is not the goal of the chase, nor do we ever even see him. All we know of him is the dismembered voice that Oedipa recalls having awakened her at three in the morning a year before the action begins. The last voice he used was of Lamont Cranston, who became famous through the radio programme, “The Shadow.” He was an invisible agent capable of appearing anywhere, anytime. In the same way, Pierce Inverarity is introduced as a shadow undergoing continual transformation. Throughout the rest of the novel he is identified only with San Narciso—the place to which Oedipa drives to begin her quest. And, as the novel develops, Oedipa learns that San Narciso has “no boundaries” in space or time. Remarks Litz, “Pierce Inverarity is shadowy and gratuitously protean” (emphasis added) (1981, 632).

2.9.0 Thus when the universe itself is multiple and uncertain it becomes a difficult task to name anything that exists in reality. “There may be no gods, but there is a pattern: names by themselves may have no magic; but the act of naming, the physical utterance, obeys the pattern,“(GR 322) are the words of Pynchon who with Barth shares his preoccupation for the act of naming. The act of naming a person has got some implications. Naming is what constructs categories. It is done with an intention to reveal or hide some characteristics. And it is part of the masking-process involved in the act of personality or character-making. Says Barth through Horner: “Assigning
names to things is like assigning roles to people: it is necessarily a distortion, but it is a necessary distortion if one would get on with the plot, and to the connoisseur it's good clean fun” (ER 138).

2.9.1 Names are used as identity markers to observe and indicate human beings who have existence. Infants that die in the womb are not named. In most of the cultures, newly born children are named only after a month or two of their survival. Only when they acquire their real animatedness they are given names indicating their ancestral backgrounds. Destitutes are not named by their respective parents. They are named by the surrounding society according to their physical appearance or dominant traits. For instance, a person who is of dark complexion may be named ‘Blackie.’ In these regard names function either metaphorically or metanomically. The namer who names a thing gives it certain characteristics. The abandoned children of our novelist-fathers are given names according to the roles their author-fathers want them to perform.

2.9.2 Pynchon gives such names as ‘Slab’, ‘Dolores’, ‘Pilar’. Slab means thick flat piece of stone, wood or other solid substance usually square or rectangular. Slab thus is essentially lacking in the animatedness to be called by proper human name. Further his name implies that he is literally another brick in the wall. Dolores (of gold) and Pilar (of stone) are the names of two call girls. Their name implies the materialistic and mechanical activity they are involved in and that which is devoid of vitality in a protean environment. ‘Ploy’ is a name that suggests that he could be used for manoeuvring. Hence the Navy plays the forcible removal of his teeth and replace them with a false
set. The name of Metzger’s actor-lawyer friend, ‘Manny Di Presso’ suggests manic depression that fits the paranoiac atmosphere created by the other characters in the novel, The Crying of Lot 49. ‘Profane,’ antonymous with the sacred, represents that which is common and irreverent. All the barmaids of Mrs. Buffo’s bar, in the novel V., are named Beatrice. The Beatrices are indistinguishable with a resultant loss of individual identities. “As Terry Caesar has pointed out, Pynchon seems to parody the very act of naming, making it virtually impossible to believe that there is an identity behind them” (qtd. Seed 1988, 75).

2.9.3 The “anonymous or polynomial narrator”(SWF 225) of Barth’s “Ambrose His Mark” is better identified by his ‘birth mark’--a port-wine stain near his eye--than by his name/s. Owing to the hectic circumstances of his birth, for some months he had no proper name. His mother calls him Christine in honour of an opera character she had admired. To aunt Rosa he was Honig (for Honey). But the narrator says “Honey soon lost the quality of endearment and took the neutral function of a proper name” (LFH 15). Uncle Konrad preferred to call him Hector after his father’s name. But his aunt believed that calling him Thomas might improve relations between Grandfather and his youngest son. For all these possibilities, “Baptism was delayed, postponed, anon forgot” (LFH 15). But the fact did not perturb others. Only once his mother happens to allude to his namelessness, some two or three months after his birth. Finally, he is named Ambrose after his birthmark that in his aunt’s observation resembles a bee in flight. While Saint Ambrose was a baby, bees swarmed on his
mouth while he was asleep in his father's yard very much like the incident that had happened in Ambrose's infancy. Yet the narrator wryly remarks,

... years were to pass before anyone troubled to have me christened or to correct my birth certificate, whereon my surname was preceded by a blank. And seldom was I ever to be called anything but Honig, Honeybee (after my ambiguous birthmark), or other nicknames. As toward one's face, one's body, one's self, one feels complexly toward the name he's called by, which too one had no hand in choosing. (LFH 34).

2.9.4.1 However, for the novelist, the choice of a name can often help in the function of his novel, as for instance, in the case of Pynchon's Oedipa. The name of the protagonist of the novel The Crying of Lot 49, Oedipa Maas, has much to do with its function. The novel tells the way Oedipa perceives the world, and the effect this has upon her. Events, characters, and their significance are seen almost entirely from her point of view. Her first name is a female form of Oedipus, King of Thebes in the Greek tragedy Oedipus Rex by Sophocles. Oedipus was tormented by the question of man's place in the universe, and one faced with religious, philosophical, political and moral problems, he was forced to continue his quest to the very end. He was very confident that the disorder in his society was not caused by him, and might be solved by his famous talent for understanding riddles. He learned late that he himself was indeed the cause of the troubles around him. Oedipa likewise first approaches her confusing experiences like a detective trying to solve a puzzling case, but learns towards the end of her quest that the truth is not so easy to discover, and that her own way of looking
at things may be the cause of the problem she is trying to solve. Like Sophocles, Pynchon gives enough clues for his readers to grasp Oedipa’s plight. For instance, Oedipa visits strange places like ‘San Narciso’ and ‘Echo Courts’ during her quest. In Greek legend, Narcissus rejected the nymph, Echo and instead fell in love with his own image reflected in a pond. He died by falling into the water. Hence names like ‘San Narciso’ and ‘Echo Court’ suggest in the beginning itself that Oedipa may be involved with some sort of reflection of herself. To reinforce this idea further, outside Echo Court, where Oedipa breaks a mirror, there is a statue of a nymph whose “face was much like Oedipa’s” (CL 26).

2.9.4.2 But her quest itself is a falsification of the truth. Mike Fallopian, like Tiresias, tries to open Oedipa’s eyes. He queries: “Has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody’s putting you on? That this is all a hoax, may be something Inverarity set up before he died? (CL 167). Oedipa’s surname, ‘maas,’ indicating, mass, a formless piece of material free to be moved and shaped by the forces acting upon it, exemplifies what Fallopian implies. Oedipa’s quest as the executrix of the will of Pierce Inverarity, a wealthy business man who had once been her lover ends with Oedipa coming to doubt her own sanity and the nature of reality. The complicated web of Inverarity’s business possessions bestows her with disturbing connections or coincidences which she cannot fully understand or explain. In the end her discoveries so alarm and confuse her that she is left unsure how much of her experience of the world is real and how much is created by her own mind or by Inverarity’s will.
2.9.5.1 If the act of naming has some significance, the act of not naming too has something overt to convey. The best way to maintain the anonymity of one’s identity is by abstaining from the use of any name. Barth’s mysterious quack in *The End of the Road* is nameless; throughout the novel he is simply referred to as “the Doctor.” “Inamorito Anonymous” in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* is a group of nameless, anonymous people who have preferred to remain so in their life. The protagonist of Barth’s “Night-Sea Journey” is one among the billions of nameless, unidentified, unlabeled spermatozoa. The narrator of “Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction,” who resembles the protagonist of “Night-Sea Journey”, says: “Among other things I haven’t a proper name. The one I bear’s misleading, if not false. I didn’t choose it either” (LFH 36). In like fashion, the protagonist of Barth’s “Anonymiad” is “a nameless minstrel” that dwells in a “nameless isle” and attempts to write “a nameless tale” in “first person anonymous.” Correspondingly, the candidate who claims the ownership of the original version of *Giles Goat Boy* is of unknown whereabouts and his very existence is questionable.

2.9.5.2 The narrator of Barth’s *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor*, who is identified as the legendary ‘Sindbad,’ is in truth not the original Sindbad. He knew that his proposed last voyage to Serendip would not materialise by plotting a course for it as usual. He ought to set out in good faith for elsewhere and lose his bearings serendipitously. Hence he did not set for that voyage but arranged for a duplicate. Thus the one who underwent the voyage was “that other, self-styled Sindbad, that nobody whom folks called (for convenience’ sake) the Landsman” (LVSS 13). But he
had never returned from Serendip. The author says about him: “And the chap’s real name wasn’t Sindbad the Landsman; it was . . . something else. Somebody took that name because then and there, at the time we tell of, he was a street castaway from the Here and Now who happened to know a thing or two about S. the So-Called Sailor . . .” (LVSS 13). Thus he is “Somebody, the Sailor,” and throughout the novel he is referred to as that Somebody—the nameless nobody.

2.10.0 Like Sindbad, all the protean hero/ines are questors, voyagers or travellers. Stencil is on a mysterious quest after V.. Oedipa, as an executrix, is on a quest to identify the places that Inverarity own. Her quest spreads further to find out the mysteries encloaking such secret organisations as the Trystero and WASTE. Todd Andrews search is to find out the motive and understand the reason for his father’s suicide. This accompanied by his own quest as why he did not follow suit. Fenwick Turner and Susan Seckler are on a sabbatical voyage in Barth’s Sabbatical. And like all the other questors they lose track of their voyage and become directionless. It happens for them because they lose an important navigational chart at a sea storm and nearly their boat and lives. Comparably, Katherine Sherritt Sagamore and her husband Peter Sagamore set out to cruise Chesapeake Bay in Tide Water Tales; the novel is about the task set by Katherine to Peter as to tell her a story. Telling as well as listening to a story can give people a sense of integrity.

2.10.1 The characters believe that a symbolic sense of integrity is necessary for the formulation of a self. Having realised the absence of an inner formula for the making of a self, they start to search it outside. They look for clues, connections and interpret.
them to work out a formula for their identity. According to Norman Holland, interpretation is a human act and is a major function of identity. (1975,816). In fact, for him, it is the act of interpretation that re-creates identity. (820). Holland also subscribes to the Descartean dictum that it is difficult to separate the knower from the known. Reality and meaning of the external world exist alone, independent of the perceiving self. For these reasons too, truth continues to evade the protean wo/men. Finally, even they question the validity of reality since it is also a perceived fact and no one set theory exists as to the validity of it, subsequently, they gain multiple perceptions resulting in the reception of a fluid identity.

2.10.2 Stencil’s obsessive search for clues and their hidden connections to the V. mystery, makes him take any rot seriously. He madly believes that a false tooth set built by a dentist has a valuable cue for his hunt and hence he investigates the dentist. But the dentist, Eigenvalue, amused at such fixation reflects like this: “Cavities in the teeth occur for good reason. . . . But even if there are several per tooth, there is no conscious origin there against the life of the pulp, no conspiracy. Yet we have men like Stencil, who must go about grouping the world’s random caries into cabals” (V 153). Yet that is how the protean figures go about with their pursuit. And as one of the characters remarks, “here we [they] are in the thick of a grand cabal and we [they] haven’t the slightest notion of what’s going on”(V 193).

2.10.3.1 Oedipa Maas, named as the executrix of her ex-lover Pierce Inverarity’s will, like her eponymous archetypal male counterpart, starts her quest. While investigating Inverarity’s assets, she wanders into “Yoyodyne,” a government contracted industry
since then she starts getting mysterious clues and connections. The whole novel is a
narration of her frustrating attempts to link occurrences in order to establish a point of
order in what seems to be a random system of information. Her desire to bring order
to the mass of confusing interests left by Inveriarity leads her to the discovery of
"Trystero," a mysterious organisation involving a bizarre underground mail system
called WASTE. Oedipa sets out to discover the nature and extent of WASTE and
Trystero, an obsessive hunt which takes her all over Southern California. But she faces
the difficulty of ever discovering what, in its entirety, the mysterious "Trystero system,"
"the same slick labyrinthine" (CL, 109) like V., might mean. And ends in utter
bafflement. "Now here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of God knew how many
parts; more than two anyway. With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she
looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Trystero, to hold them together" (CL,
109). Ironically, she cannot give up her quest halfway because she achieves
'recognitions' only by undertaking it.
2.10.3.2 But inadvertently Oedipa becomes entangled in a web-like set-up where even
the little recognition she had for her self is dissolved. The Dutch meaning of maas, the
stitches of a net, is highly suggestive of Oedipa's frequent feelings of entrapment; and
to the way she so often encounters net-like, or web-like, arrangements and connections
in her experience. The narrator says, "... these follow-ups were no more disquieting
than other revelations which now seemed to come crowding in exponentially, as if the
more she collected the more would come to her, until everything she saw, smelled,
dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into the Trystero (CL 81).
In her pursuit, the divulgence of additional information only adds to her confusion. Like 'V.,' Trystero too appears to be 'a remarkably scattered concept' and pursuing the meaning of this word becomes a grotesque and ludicrous venture. Oedipa finally feels that a mysterious agency may be controlling and organising her experiences: "They, somebody up there, were putting her on" (CL 28).

2.10.4 "They" are the controllers of international technology; the Orwellian Big Brothers who watch every inch of "Their" people's thoughts and movements. "They" are the postmodern counterparts for the omniscient God. "They" are referred to in many ways in the course of Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon's novel of the World War II. The War is "Their" invention, a means for dismembering individuals into complex beings. As one of the characters in the novel remarks:

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. The war does not appear to want a folk-consciousness, . . . it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity . . . (emphasis added) (GR 131-132).

At the core of the novel are the V-2 missiles: German long-range rocket bombs of the Second World War, fired at the south of England. But V-2 does not simply denote the name of a rocket but also it implies double V. in its ensnaring power to capture crippled victims and anonymise and fragment their selves in order to use them as "Their" conditioned robots. As characters, they are analogous to rockets. The rocket in its developmental phases is always changing, adapting itself to new context: so, too,
the men and women involved in rocketry. Like so many other characters in the novel, Slothrop is also "a being thing They assembled, a being they would dismantle" (GR 374).

2.11.0 Eventually, the protean questors understand that their attempts are in vain. Subsequently, a break down in the relationship between inner and outer worlds occurs revealing that the symbolic integrity they crave for can only be a fantasy. Though this can urge them to undertake as many voyages as possible, nevertheless, they are fraught by self-doubts in their course. Barth’s spermatozoon-protagonist is on a quest that is imposed on it. In many ways it is analogous to Oedipa’s quest. Like Oedipa, its journey as well as its destination is not clear. Whether it will survive till the end of its chosen mission, like Andrews, is uncertain. Hence it remains a confused self-doubter like Oedipa. It reflects: “Is the journey my invention? Do the night, the sea, exist at all, I ask myself, apart from my experience of them? Do I myself exist, or is this a dream? Sometimes I wonder. And if I am, Who am I?” (LFH 3).

2.11.1 As in the case of Oedipa it comes to believe that an external mysterious agent has put it in this journey. It broods as follows: “I have supposed that we have after all a common Maker, whose nature and motives we may not know, but who engendered us in some mysterious wise and launched us forth toward some end known but to Him--” (LFH 3). Similar to Oedipa, the quest for meaning ends with the realisation that the kind of search they have undertaken may not have any meaning at all. The spermatozoon suspects that their “night journey is without meaning.” (LFH 4). Oedipa finally is forced to think herself a paranoid and consider that the clues and
connections to the places owned by Inverarity may be her own fabrication. Identically, the 'night-sea journey' protagonist wonders: "what if the Shore exists in the fancies of us swimmers merely"... (LFH 5).

2.11.2 Barth's Menelaus in Lost in the Funhouse is another of his doubter-questor. Barth pictures Menelaus, contrary to the mythical counterpart, as a powerless, and insecured person who is weakened further by his enclouding self-doubts. The setting of his story is Menelaus grappling with the shape-shifter, Proteus, on the beach at the Pharos. Menelaus has become a doubter because of the nature of the person he depends on to reach his destination safely. Menelaus as the de-centred hero of Barth's "Menelaid" speaks:

My problem was I had too much imagination to be a hero... My time was mortal, Proteus's im--; what if he merely treed it a season or two till I let go? What was it anyhow I held? If Proteus once was Old Man of the Sea and now Proteus was a tree, then Proteus was neither, only Proteus; what I held were dreams. But if a real Old Man of the Sea had really been succeeded by real water and the rest, then the dream was Proteus. (LFH 142).

2.11.3 The shape-shifter who is held can affect the shift in the thinking of the holder. Menelaus changes his mind as the year passes. He is forced to think as why should not Proteus change himself into Menelaus and into Menelaus holding Proteus. He muses: "Could it be, could it have been, that Proteus changed from a leafy tree not into air but into Menelaus on the beach at Pharos, thence into Menelaus holding the Old Man of the Sea?" (LFH 150). Thereafter he continues to remain a doubter. Even
after he meets Helen, he is not sure whether the Helen he holds is true or a clouded one. “He continues to hold on, but can no longer take the world seriously. Place and time, doer, done-to have lost their sense” (LFH 166).

2.1.4 These protean characters suffer from an inner sense of absurdity and hence they parody the self or the other. By their voyages they are actually mocking the traditional quest-heroes in search of something valuable. The protean-voyagers are aware of the ‘wandering heroes’ myth they are demythifying. As Susan, one of Barth’s wandering hero mock figure observes, “... the middles of myths of wandering heroes from many cultures share the feature of the hero’s losing or concealing his name, just as he may lose his bearings, his companions, his ship, his clothes, his genital organs, and any other ties to the daylit waking reality he has left behind for the twilit zone of his adventure” (S 236). Though the mock wandering hero figures also undergo the same set of events, they fail to have the sense of heroism the mythical ones possessed. This is mainly because of the psychosocial dislocation they suffer from.

2.12.0 The reason many postmodern characters fail to develop a psychosocial intimacy by which they can establish their identity is that, it requires a firm sense of identity as prerequisite. As Erickson observes, “the development of psychosocial intimacy is not possible without a firm sense of identity” (1968,186). To have this firm sense or identity, unlike the protean people who accentuate empty-action, interaction is required. So when they find that they have reached a state of no interaction, they let go their identities and end up in an extra-social or isolated situation, often immobilised and impotent.
2.12.1 Tantivity, Slothrop's roommate, remarking about the extent of Slothrop's isolation says that he seemed to have no one else in London, beyond a multitude of girls he seldom saw again, to talk to about anything. The Sailor-narrator of The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor too realises in the end that he has lost all those people who were close to him before he set for the voyage. Then he finds himself all alone and a stranger to their world. He says:

I began to comprehend at last (if scarcely to accept) that off "Serendip" I had lost not only my beloved Julia Moore and all my former selves but the very world in which they and I had lived, together with my daughter, my grandchild-in-the-womb, my brother, my town and time and native tongue—my whole world (LVSS 430).

2.12.2.1 A nagging sense of isolation sprouts in Oedipa concurrently with her search. And it grows at an expeditious pace. The author says:

As things developed she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix (emphases added) (CL 20).

Not only Oedipa is immobilised by her progressive loss of contact with all the men she has known but loveless and alone she also feels precariously isolated.
2.12.2.2 Her personal sadness increases as she loses contact with her husband, her lover, her psychiatrist, and Randolph Driblette, one of her last hopes of reaching the truth about the Trystero. Her last hope is the anonymous member of the “Inamorati Anonymous,” an organisation of isolates who communicate by phone and when he hangs up her, she stands, “her isolation complete.” Oedipa feels a moment of intense pain and loneliness, reflecting on the men who are one by one vanishing from her life. She ponders:

They are stripping from me, she said subvocally—feeling like a fluttering curtain in a very high window, moving up to then out over the abyss—they are stripping away, one by one, my men. My shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself and away, hopelessly away, from what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love; my one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved fifteen-year-old; my best guide back to the Trystero has taken a Brody. Where am I. (CL 152-153).

2.12.2.3 At length, Oedipa’s experience of her contemporary society is so full of its “arid betrayals of spiritual poverty,” (CL 170) that she is forced to believe “in some principle of the sea as redemption for Southern California . . .” (CL 55). Only natural, disordered ocean can present a hopeful alternative to the unhappy, artificial world which lies along its edge. As an ardent believer of this dictum, Randolf Driblette, the director of The Courier’s Tragedy, drowns himself in the Pacific Ocean before Oedipa
can find out what he knows about the Trystero. Thus protean individuals go back to the embrace of the shape-shifter God of ocean when they find themselves misfits in the terrestrial world.

2.13.0 Retreating away from character fixities, the postmodern protean figures turn into icons of formless jellies. This unfortified structure and style of functioning are common for both the sexes. For that reason when Barth and Pynchon wish to exemplify them through prototypical images they are not fastidious about being discriminative. The representative images and metaphors that Barth and Pynchon use to describe this contourless vulnerability of the characterless individuals are quite scientific.

2.13.1.1 Jacob Horner, Barth’s prototype of the contemporary, postmodern man in his *The End of the Road* says that “the individual is not individual after all, any more than the atom is really atomic: he can be divided further. . .” (ER 139). The analogy of atom to an individual in its divisibility is to be noted since it crystallises the motif for the use of other microscopic image clusters in the novel. Making an analogy between weather and moods, Horner conjectures that a day without weather is unthinkable whereas there were frequent days in his life without any mood at all: on these days Jacob Horner, except in a meaningless metabolic sense, ceased to exist, for I was without a personality. Like those microscopic specimens that biologists must dye in order to make them visible at all I had to be coloured with some mood or other if there was to be a recognizable self to me (emphases added) (ER 37).
Devoid of a personality, Horner finds himself a microscopic specimen that ought to be coloured to be seen.

2.13.1.2 According to the principles of Rennie and Joe Morgon, two other major characters in the novel, Horner does not exist at all. Rennie tells Horner, "I think you don't exist at all. There's too many of you. It's more than just masks that you put on and take off—we all have masks. But you're different all the way through, every time. You cancel yourself out. You're more like somebody in a dream. You're not strong and you're not weak. You're nothing" (ER 66). The plight of Horner is emblematic of Barth's characters in general. As Hendin points out, "Barth's characters are caught in the experience of nobodyness, the sense that they are blank as interstellar spaces, or selves so protean that they are nothing but pure possibility" (emphases added) (1973, 102).

2.13.2.1 Pynchon shows equal concern for microscopic images to describe his protean 'specimens.' He pictures Benny Profane in V, "a great amoebalike boy" (V 36). A further definition of an 'amoeba' from a dictionary fittingly characterises Profane. It defines as follows:

One of the simplest living animals, consisting of a single cell and belonging to the group protozoa, found in fresh water. The body, which is just visible to the naked eye, consists of colourless protoplasm. Protoplasm is the greyish translucent jelly-like material within and including the plasma membrane of a cell. The chief organ within the body is the nucleus which largely controls the amoeba's activities. The amoeba feeds by flowing round
and enclosing organic debris, etc., which it encounters. It has no eyes or other sense organs, and no sexual reproduction.

Profane does not differ much from this definition of amoeba.

2.13.2.2 The first detail mentioned about Profane is that he is “a schlemihl and human yo-yo” (V 9). ‘Schlemihl’ is a slang for an ineffectual, bungling person who habitually fails or easily gets victimised, and ‘yo-yo,’ literally means a spool like toy with a string attached to the pin holding its two halves together. Again it is a slang for a person regarded as stupid, ineffectual, inept, eccentric, etc. He is, in fact, the simplest of ‘all animals’ in the novel. Slightly varying from the amoeba that lives in the fresh water, he finds a job in dirty water: hunting alligators in the underground sewers of New York. And he feels completely at home with one of the hunted alligators in the sewers, “just letting the stream float him out with pornographic pictures, coffee grounds, contraceptives used and unused, shit, up through the flushing tank to the East River . . .” (V 122). Figuratively, he has ‘no eyes,’ he wanders listlessly and moves where streets and other people take him. He is not deeply inclined towards women since they are instrumental to sexual reproduction. And he always shuns their advances.

2.13.2.3 Pynchon makes use of the comparison, ‘amoebalike,’ for a second time in the novel in relation to one of the alligators that Profane shoots. He describes: “The alligator jerked, did a backflip, thrashed briefly, was still. Blood began to seep out amoebalike to form shifting patterns with the weak flow of the water” (V 123). Obviously, Pynchon is making a link between the killer and the killed, but ironically enough, he does not even compare Profane with the alligator, instead with its seeping
blood that mixes with the drainage water to form *shifting patterns*. Pynchon is keen on relating the protean characteristic of Profane with that of amoeba. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Greek word *amoibe* literally means change and *Amoeba Proteus* is the name of the most commonly found species of this kind. This also reveals the author's discreet choice of a fitting image to identify his protean people precisely.

2.13.3 Barth shows almost an obsession for the use of the image *amoeba*. Habitually, he considers amoeba synonymous with spermatozoa. In *Sabbatical*, Susan muses upon the paradox that she and her husband were taking precautions against their helpers on their voyage and she likens the circumstance to "the paisley scarf trouvée, pinned with other wet items on the lifelines to dry, its ciliated teardrop pattern swarming like *amoebae* or *fat sperm*." (emphasis added) (S 57-58). Fenn alludes to the same comparison again when he tells Susan, "You once said that those paisley things looked like fat spermatozoa. That's what the slithey toves were, in my dream. Not just Angleton: John Arthur Paisley, Doog, Count, me too--we were all swimming along together, upstream, like giant sperm. *With* sperm! *As* sperm!" (S 204-205). The occurrence of amoeba-comparison can be so widespread that one may find it even in the description of a T-shirt in *Tide Water Tales* that, "It's man-sized, long, crew-necked, plain white, unmottoed, clean combed cotton--except for a palm-sized, *amoeboid inkblot* over the heart" (emphasis added) (TWT 633-634). In this context, amoeboid is used as an adjective to describe an *inkblot*.

2.13.4 'Blot' is another image for Barth and Pynchon to define their protean characters. Dr. Hilarius, the eccentric psychiatrist in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*
theorises "that a face is symmetrical like a Rorschach blot" (CL 18). His counterpart, Dr. Rozsavolgyi, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, proposes to implement 'Rorschach ink-blot' test on Slothrop to identify his personality. Hermann Rorschach is the Swiss psychiatrist who invented a test of personality and intelligence in which the patient tries to find a pattern or picture in a blot of ink of no particular shape. As Dr. Rozsavolgyi explains:

The basic theory, is, that when given an unstructured stimulus, some shapeless blob of experience, the subject, will seek to impose, structure on it. How, he goes about structuring this blob, will reflect his needs, his hopes--will provide, us with clues, to his dreams, fantasies, the deepest regions of his mind (GR 81).

The pattern that the patient makes out would reveal the nature of his personality traits and identity. But it is this 'shapeless blot' that helps one find out the shape of a face. And conversely, the psychologist believes that people are invariably faceless but for his test. If at all they seem to have a face; they do not have one but many and again the psychological test is essential to find out and determine the one that is real.

2.13.5 Like Rorschach blot, the stain on the plate of a maid servant, Hanne, in the novel *V.*, seem to exemplify the protean condition of her identity in correspondence with the surroundings. While cleaning the plates, she finds a stain on the last plate. In spite of her persistent efforts to remove it, it evades and lingers on the borders of visibility and non-visibility. Furthermore, it continues to change its angle, colour and even shape. In the words of the author:
The stain was still there. Hardly visible. Roughly triangle, it extended from an apex near the center to a base an inch or so from the edge. A sort of brown color, outlines indistinct against the faded white of the plate's surface. She tilted the plate another few degrees toward the light and the stain disappeared. Puzzled, she moved her head to look at it from another angle. The stain flickered twice in and out of existence. Hanne found that if she focused her eyes a little behind and off the edge of the plate the stain would remain fairly constant, though its shape had begun to change outline; now crescent, now trapezoid (emphases added) (V 90-91).

Hanne starts wondering whether the stain was real and would it never go away. But by the time she makes up her mind to give it up and stack the plate, the stain gets "fissioned, and transferred like an overlay to each of her retinae" (V 91). Thus the stain not only prevails but has also merged with her vision and identity.

2.13.6 Tony Tanner's comment on the functional use of the "jelly-image" by the American writers in general is relevant to the ongoing discussion in particular. Tanner remarks, "what this image cluster suggests is the dread of utter formlessness, of being a soft, vulnerable, endlessly manipulable blob, of not being a distinct self" (emphases added) (1971, 141). Most of the shapeless and vulnerable individuals feel like a blob. Rennie Morgan, in The End of the Road, confessing her past life to Jacob Horner says that she, "just dreamed along like a big blob of sleep." (ER 56). Esther Harvitz, in V, when she undergoes a plastic surgery, experiences a "delicious loss of Estherhood, becoming more and more a blob, with no worries, traumas, nothing; only Being. . ."
Esther feels such an excultation that she has no remorse for the loss of ‘Estherhood’, that is quintessentially human, and revels in her drifting down to become a ‘blob’, that is typically protean.

2.14.0 Such objects and/or images like ‘amoeba’, ‘blob’, ‘blot’, ‘stain’ are normally not visible to the naked eye and are better seen in a clearer perspective through a microscope. Hence Barth and Pynchon use microscopic images to throw light on the anonymity and indeterminacy of their protean wo/men. Their indeterminacy is further highlighted by the fluid medium that muffles these images. The peculiar characteristic of these images is that they are not only microscopic but also watery in nature. The objects are either water borne or use water as their medium or natural habitat. Comparisons to animals from marshland and the ones living in or near seas abound. This is fundamentally because the authors bear in mind heavily that the images they use to describe fluid personalities allude often to their mythical father: Proteus.

2.14.1 Proteus actually is a prophetic sea divinity; son of either Poseidon or Oceanus, both being sea gods. He would foretell the future to those who could seize him. When caught, he would assume all possible varying forms to avoid prophesying, but when held fast despite all, he assumed his usual form of an old man and told the truth. The final shape he shifts into before revealing his true identity is flood. Accordingly, water and water-borne, water-related creatures personify the volatile disposition of the Protean Wo/Man.

2.14.2 One of the references to sea imagery happens in V when Pynchon uses the word sponge to describe his characters. Profane, for example, is supposed to have a
"sponge brain." (V 40). Sponge, on the one hand, refers to the kinds of simple sea animal with light structures of elastic material full of holes and able to absorb water easily. On the other hand, it refers to something of a similar texture that is soft, porous and elastic. Pynchon has a penchant liking for those words replete with meanings. In this context, Pynchon wants to imply that the Postmodern individual possesses a brain like that of the sea animal as well as the synthetic material that is frail, plastic and accessible to outside control.

2.14.3 What is striking in a sponge, the sea animal, is its amorphous and unidentifiable nature. Identifying living sponges is difficult due to the variation of shape within a single species. Depending on its environment, a single species may develop an encrusting form in areas open to rough seas, or may grow upright and branched in sheltered areas or deeper water. Colour is also variable; sponges that grow in shade may be a different colour from those that grow in the sunlight. Sponges are variable in their sizes too. They range from minute encrusting species under rocks to massive structures, one and a half meter high, in deep waters. Sponges that live in temperate waters possess greatest diversity in shape, colour and species. Temperate sponges exhibit every colour of the rainbow. And their shapes are as flamboyant as their hues. The commonly identified sponges belong to the phylum, Porifera, which literally means 'Pore bearers,' and figuratively refers to those marginal and vacuous bearers of identity like Profane. Other sea creatures that are used to illustrate the same are mostly crustaceans like crab, oyster, nautilus and mollusc.
Identity is just a mask or protective layer that covers the inner jelly-like manipulable blob, as it does for the crustaceans. Barth's Todd often likens himself to crustaceans. When he sees a 'doubler' crab that is supposed to take fourteen hours for copulation, he is amused at the fact and wants to tell Jane that there are "other creatures who took longer than him" (FO 54). At another instance he again makes a reference to the doubler crab relating him and Jennie with the animal (FO 212).

Also for Todd his occupation has not much value. He says, "... but truthfully I consider advocacy, jurisprudence, even justice, to have no more intrinsic importance than, 'oyster-shucking'" (FO 72). The twelfth chapter of The Floating Opera entitled "A Chorus of Oysters" is a brief interlude on the life and social behaviour of Captain Osborn and his colleagues of the 'loafer's bench.' Barth has used oysters to refer to this group of people. By the use of oyster image, Barth mostly refers to their immobility. He describes them as follows: "They sat immobile on their antique benches like a row of crusty oysters... The life of Cambridge passed by and through them like sea water through an oyster's gills" (emphases added) (FO 112).

Barth's image or symbol of story telling is the Nautilus or the so-called 'Maryland marsh snail.' Nautilus belongs to phylum, Mollusca (Molluscs). Mollusc is one of the class of animals, like oysters, mussels, cuttlefish, snails and slugs, with soft bodies and often hard shells. Hence, the small boy Edgar clings to Susan's leg like a "bright-eyed mollusk" (S 280). The chambers in the nautilus shell are filled with gas and by means of this tube the mollusc can adjust the amount of gas in each chamber, allowing it to rise or sink at will. This snail makes its shell as it goes along out of
whatever it comes across, using its own juices as cement, always selecting the best materials possible. It carries its history on its back, lives in its shell, as snails do, and adds new spirals from those already existing. It literally creates itself, its development matters of choice, its materials always at hand. The fully matured nautilus contains thirty chambers. The animal lives in the outer most chamber. The first four chambers of the shell are formed while the young nautilus is still within the egg. A new chamber is then added every two or three weeks. The chambers are filled with gases dissolved in the body fluids and therefore shell is heavy relative to the body. Barth interprets: “The nautilus’s latest chamber echoes its predecessors, but does not merely repeat them, and it is where the animal lives; he carries the history on his back, but as a matter of natural-historical fact, that history is his Personal Floatation Device, not a dead weight carrying him under” (FB 170). The above statements epitomise the fabricated protean personalities that float their identity owing to evacuous historical chambers on their back.

2.14.7 Another crustacean but an amphibian is the tortoise. And of the other animals Horner compares himself with, he also feels “tortoise-like” (ER 99). Tortoise is a cold-blooded egg-laying animal that creeps or crawls. Like the animal, Horner is callous and hardhearted. Moreover, the tortoise falls under the category of reptiles like alligator and chameleon. Profane’s intimacy with the alligators brings out his kinship with Horner in this regard. Horner also compares himself with a “chameleon” (ER 117). Todd finds his friend Harrison behaving in a chameleon-like manner on given situations. He observes: “... Harrison simply assumes, in time, the intellectual as well
as the manneristic colour of his surroundings" (FO 22). Just in the same way, "often, chameleon-like," Ebenezer too, "was but a reflection of his situation" (SWF 44). Henry Burlingame's eyes are "herpetonic" (SWF 609). All these references to the crustaceans and reptiles indicate the plurality and shape-shifting tendencies of the protean characters.

2.15.0 In conclusion, the fluidity of the individual identity is only a replica of the collective and of the society that the individual mixes with. The protean form of identity possessed by the characters as well as their authors is typical of the American society they come from. The general contention of the article "Wrestling with Proteus" is that the country America is represented as Proteus. Roger Henkle points out that it is the role of the American novelists to grapple with the kind of protean reality that their country exhibits. He says:

For the (American) novelist, Proteus stands for both America and the inheritance of illusion through which all men must fight to achieve reality . . .

Our task then is always to challenge the apparent forms of reality--that is, the fixed manners and values of the few, and to struggle with it until it reveals its mad, vari-implicated chaos, its false faces, and on until it surrenders its insight, its truth . . . On its profoundest level American experience as a whole. Its truth lies in its diversity and swiftness of change (1970, 198).

2.15.1 As writers of American fictions though Barth and Pynchon seem to have similar concern towards the creation of their characters, as human beings they seem to
represent their protean identities differently. Unlike Barth whose marks of identities are felt ubiquitous in the fictional as well as the real world, Pynchon strives for anonymity, as if he were trying to become one of the dropouts of *The crying of Lot 49* or the preterite of *Gravity's Rainbow* and searching for clues to his life is like entering one of his novels. Mathew Winston discovered that there is no picture of him on his book jackets or in the freshman register of his class at Cornell, that his transcript mysteriously vanished from the University, and that his service record was burned after an explosion at the navy office in St. Louis. “Does he exist?” Charles Hollander wonders, or, “Is he, as some suggest, a committee?” (1990, 8). Oedipa’s quest and her attempts to unravel the various masks of reality and to fix it in its original form, may as well represent her author’s attempts to come to terms with an encompassing fluid reality. Nevertheless, ubiquitous or anonymous, Barth and Pynchon react analogously in a fictional world that is typically postmodern where the inadequacy of external accouterments makes the protean kinsmen easy victims of “Cosmopsis” (Barth) and “Entropy” (Pynchon). The following chapter exemplifies these two terms in order to explain the pathological aspect of identity.