The Sacred and Sacrifice within an Economy of Wasteful Expenditure in Thomas Pynchon’s *V.*

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1. Introduction

Thomas Pynchon’s first novel *V.* has always attracted criticism from readers and critics who often feel baffled, confused or entertained, but particularly none the wiser about who or what *V.* is about. The novel’s multiple plots and characters, fragmented narratives in time and geographical place thwart our ability to make sense of the narrative. This inability to make sense is inextricably tied to the novel’s preoccupation with the motif of waste. In “Caries and Cabals” Tony Tanner describes this succinctly:

Every situation reveals some new aspect of decay and decline, some move further into chaos or nearer death. The book is full of dead landscapes of every kind – from the garbage heaps of the modern world to the lunar barrenness of the actual desert. On every side there is evidence of the ‘assertion of the Inanimate’. Renaissance cities seem to lose their glow and become leaden; great buildings progress towards dust; a man’s car is disintegrating under tons of garage rubble. Benny Profane’s late feeling that ‘things never should have come this far’ is appropriately ominous if you allow the first word sufficient emphasis. For the proliferation of inert things is another way of hastening the entropic process. On all sides the environment is full of hints of exhaustion, extinction, dehumanization. (157-8)

For Tanner, waste is linked to the inanimate and the entropic process. However, most of the criticism levelled at *V.* is precisely concerned with the novel’s preoccupation with meaninglessness. In “Vacillating in the void? Verbal Vivification in *V.*,” Deborah L. Madsen ascribes these motifs to “the existence of a ‘V-metaphysic’” which establishes from the outset “the primacy of meaninglessness […] that is unchanging in its resistance to coherent explanations other than those sanctioned by the V-metaphysic” (34). The implication is that *V.* reinstates a hegemonic pretextual discourse by “relegating to waste those signs that are inconsistent with the pretextual ideology” (32). In “What is Pynchon Telling Us?” Josephine Hendin argues that *V.* limits humanity’s choices to a progression towards nihilism: “Pynchon did his bit to limit life further by boxing experience into one either/or: the mechanical symbiosis of *V.* or no life at all […] affirming limitation as the sole purpose of existence”

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1Tony Tanner elaborates how Pynchon applies the term ‘entropy’ to a system “which tends increasingly towards destructive chaos and ensuing torpor” (153). In “The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon”, David Seed argues that Pynchon examines the different meanings of entropy in relation to disorder and chaos. In thermodynamic theory, entropy “measures the amount of energy unavailable for conversion to work in a system”. In communication theory, entropy “demonstrates a measure of the inefficiency of a system in transmitting information”. Entropy also refers to the heat-death of the universe which is the “ultimate state reached in degradation of matter and energy” as a result of the absence of differentiation, form pattern or hierarchy (36-37). However, Seed argues that Pynchon ironizes all theories in way which “makes it very difficult to locate Pynchon’s own view-point” (52).
In “Finding V”, Kenneth Kupsch reacts to critics who assume that the novel is “purposely insoluble or simply irrelevant” (428). Consequently, Kupsch boldly attempts to oppose this notion by arguing that “there is a knowable, unequivocal, and essentially irrefutable answer to the question “Who or what is V.?” by outlining the various stages and incarnations of V. as a goddess.

According to Tony Tanner, this dread of meaninglessness and waste as a conditioning force to the point of paranoia, is detectable in the novel’s preoccupation with its own fictional status. He observes that this is characteristic of contemporary American writing between 1950 and 1970. In his introduction to City of Words Tanner claims:

The possible nightmare of being totally controlled by unseen agencies and powers is never far away in contemporary American fiction. The unease revealed in such novels is related to a worried apprehension on the part of the author that his own consciousness may be predetermined and channelled by the language he has been born into. (16)

The author is situated in the paradoxical position where fiction, language or any given system may both “define” and at the same time “confine” the writer (17). Faced with this problem, the contemporary American writer tries to resist traditional ways of making sense and seeks to demonstrate “to himself and other people that he does not accept nor wholly conform to the structures built into the common tongue, that he has the power to resist and perhaps disturb the particular ‘rubricizing’ tendency of the language he has inherited” (16). Tanner’s observations indicate how the refusal to subscribe to traditional ways of making sense is thematized in novels such as V. However, I argue that the resistance to traditional ways of making sense also evokes an anxiety and a resistance to waste and meaninglessness as critics like Madsen, Hendin and Kupsch attest to.

Another critic, such as Maarten Van Delden, portrays V. as conspiring towards the apocalyptic. In “Modernism, the New Criticism and Thomas Pynchon’s V”, Van Delden argues that unlike the modernist attempt which hopes for some mythical revelation or “consolatory potencies” from disorder, the “narrative of V., however, leads not towards a vision of a higher unity, but towards an increasingly pervasive state of disintegration” (120). What is interesting to note in Van Delden’s reading is that notwithstanding his analysis of the novel’s parody of the modernist interest in myth, Delden argues, nonetheless, that Lady V. represents a mythical emblem of the twentieth-century which bears “a frightening and appalling” message, a message associated with “violence, and with the process of dehumanization” (120). In other words, Delden reinscribes V. within the modernist myth of
the apocalyptic which still hopes for a consoling revelation.² Yet, it is precisely the anticipation of this frightening and appalling apocalyptic message, the sense that it is better to construct plots, conspiracies, malign entities or a ‘purposeful meaninglessness’ than ‘meaninglessness’, that V. subverts via the motif of waste.

In “Risking the Moment”, George Levine addresses critics and readers whose readings are not supported within the novel since, according to him, V. raises a problem that cannot be answered by traditional tools:

Pynchon’s novels disorient. They offer us a world we think we recognize, assimilate it to worlds that seem unreal, imply coherences and significances we can’t quite hold on to. Invariably [...] they make us feel the inadequacy of conventional modes of making sense – of analysis, causal explanation, logic. (59)

The implication is that just as the character Herbert Stencil accumulates clues and linkages obsessively to arrive at the meaning of V., some critics and readers similarly respond to the novel with readings that reinstate conventional coherence and are resistant to the inadequacy of “conventional modes of making sense”. Levine’s observations illustrate how conventions of reading and making sense are thematized and parodied in V. In fact, Stencil’s scholarly quest for V. is portrayed as a form of ‘fetishism’: “As spread thighs are to the libertine, flights of migratory birds to the ornithologist, the working part of his tool bit to the production machinist, so was the letter V to young Stencil” (V. 61). Stencil’s employment of conventional narrative tools such as ‘impersonations’ and his use of the third person narrative device as a way of assuming an objective stance, are tricks and disguises resisting some form of ‘dilemma’:

But somehow in his hands the traditional tools and attitudes were always employed toward mean ends: cloak for a laundry sack, dagger to peel potatoes; dossiers to fill up dead Sunday afternoons; worst of all, disguise itself not out of any professional necessity but only as a trick, simply to involve him less in the chase, to put off some part of the pain of dilemma on various “impersonations”. (V. 62)

² In Writing the Apocalypse, Lois Parkinson Zamora explains how the term ‘apocalypse’ is not merely a synonym for disaster, cataclysm or chaos. It is also a synonym for ‘revelation’. Zamora states that in the conventional apocalyptic myth, the notion of an anticipated end or destruction will ultimately “have the cleansing effect of radical renewal” (10). He observes that the word ‘apocalypse’ originally derives from the Greek word apokalypsis, meaning to ‘uncover’, ‘reveal’ or ‘disclose’.
In *V.*, traditional tools and reading conventions are foregrounded and involve the reader who, like Stencil, works through the process of making sense of *V*. However, I argue that the conventions of reading and the failure to make sense of *V.* are related to waste.\(^3\)

In “The Importance of Thomas Pynchon”, Richard Poirier points out how the inadequacy of traditional systems of classification in *V.* is related to the notion of waste. He argues that rather than attempting to link the allusive elements in *V.* as a clue to meaning or a point of stabilization, *V.* confronts the reader with a literature of waste: “[t]hat is not to say literature is waste but that in certain works there are demonstrations that the inherited ways of classifying experience are no longer a help but a hindrance” (51).

In *V.*, waste is associated with a host of characters who form part of The Whole Sick Crew and particularly with Benny Profane. Profane opens the novel by yo-yoing through the streets littered with people, the “screwees and schlemihls” of the city who make up the “highly alienated populace”.\(^4\) While Stencil’s narration is contiguous with the desire to reconstruct the ‘past’ history of *V.*, Profane’s narrative is associated with the novel’s ‘present’ and the streets of 1950s New York.\(^5\) Stencil’s movement is characterized by purpose and meaning, whereas Profane’s yo-yoing and aimless meandering in the streets parody Stencil’s *V*-quest.\(^6\)

However, when Profane and Stencil converge in the sewers, an important incident occurs which grants Profane’s parody a more subversive force. Profane descends into the sewers to hunt for alligators as a means of employment. Myths, sacred writings and the anticipation of the resurrection of “sexy V.” are alluded to, parodying Stencil’s descent into the sewers which is motivated by the belief that Veronica the rat is related to *V.*, his “white

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\(^3\) In Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Gravity’s Rainbow: A Study in Duplex Fiction, Danuta Zadworna-Fjellestad illustrates how the failure to make sense is thematized in certain novels. Fjellestad coins the term “duplex fiction” to distinguish it from traditional modernist fiction. She argues that unlike modernist fiction where “signals do indeed lead the reader to an uncovering of patterns that unify the meaning of the text”, in duplex fiction “the reader’s elicited expectations and forecasts are constantly frustrated; instead of progressing, he is jammed in the narrative. No matter which of the signals of coherence he chooses, he will be left with residues of meaning that cannot be recuperated by his interpretation” (108).


\(^5\) David Seed argues that Profane is associated with the “bums and derelicts, and repeatedly demonstrates a nostalgia for the 30s Depression when he was born” (*Fictional* 72). On the other hand, Stencil “is the ‘century’s child’” and is “representative of modern man in search of meaning” (84). In fact, Stencil embarks on a search for clues to the meaning of *V.* This leads him across Egypt in 1898, Florence in 1899, South-West Africa in 1922, Malta in 1942-43 and Paris in 1919.

\(^6\) Seed maintains that Profane’s yo-yoing and his alliance with The Whole Sick Crew parodies 50’s Beat fiction: “Profane represents an attenuated and lethargic version of Beat mobility reduced absurdly to moving in order to fill the monotony of life.” (*Fictional* 74). Slade argues that Profane “is the proletarian of the novel, the Sancho Panza to Stencil’s Don Quixote, the citizen of the secular world” (“The Street” 75). However, in “Valletta (meta)fictionalized historiographically in Thomas Pynchon’s *V*”, Peter Vassallo observes that “Pynchon also sees Profane and Stencil as modern versions and distortions of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza” (207 footnote).
While hunting for the alligator, an epiphany occurs which undermines conventional notions of the epiphany as a sacred moment. The notion that the epiphany yields a higher knowledge, transcendental meaning or revelation is parodied and differs from Stencil’s and the modernist’s use of the sacred moment in the epiphany. Moreover, Profane’s epiphany in the sewers is one of several sacred moments throughout the novel which critics describe as having a disturbing effect on the reader. Tony Tanner claims that these moments throw the reader into “sudden depths of horror” (“Caries” 156). George Levine similarly states that these moments evoke “disorientation and almost visceral disturbances” (“Risking” 59-60). Maarten Van Delden observes how V. elicits the modernist epiphany “but with a horrifying twist to it” with the result that the epiphany deprives the reader of revelation leaving one with a feeling that is “bizarre and profoundly unsettling” (“Modernism” 123, 128).

I would like to argue that Pynchon’s employment of the unsettling epiphany or sacred moment in the sewers is intimately related to waste, to the inadequacy of traditional tools and their necessary failure to provide consoling meanings or revelations. Pynchon’s sacred moments as “moments of vision” through which a higher knowledge or revelation can be apprehended is undermined by “this yoking together of horror and epiphany” (“Modernism” 130). Like a domino effect, the discomfort which Profane’s epiphany provokes in the sewers, is further intensified in other epiphanies throughout the novel foregrounding a violence and anguish which are in turn related to Stencil’s narration and our reading of them.

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7Jay Losey argues that the epiphanic mode is used in a variety of ways by modernist writers such as James, Woolf and Joyce to describe “privileged moments”, “moments of vision” in order to “discover meaning”, “self-understanding” (“‘Demonic’ Epiphanies” 379). However, postmodernist writers such as Heaney contest this notion of “transcendence” or the possibility of acquiring a “core identity” (384) and instead conjoin the epiphany with “the savagery, the horror, of the late twentieth century” ever since Auschwitz and Hiroshima, colonial oppression and dominant capitalist power (382-384). In “Modernism, the New Criticism” Maarten Van Delden argues that modernist writers in the 1950s used the epiphany as a method to transcend disorder via “the representation of heightened states of consciousness” in order to discover “value and meaning, however tentative and provisional, in certain transitory moments of intense, luminous awareness that gave focus and coherence to an otherwise disjointed world” (122). He argues that the epiphanies in V. parody “Joyce’s epiphanies, Proust’s moments privilégies, and Virginia Woolf’s moments of vision” by “this yoking together of horror and epiphany” (131). The events or objects of memory and nostalgia do not guarantee wholeness of vision or discovery of self, but “have become so repellent that the narrative seems to lose all coherence” (130). In The Visionary Moment: A Postmodern Critique, Paul Maltby investigates how the epiphany has thrived in American writing since 1945 and has been used by a wide variety of writers such as Ginsberg, Kerouac, DeLillo, Bellow and others.
1.1 Methodology

George Bataille’s concept of waste within a restricted and general economy offers an important contribution to our understanding of the unsettling epiphanies or sacred moments and their relation to the necessary failure of traditional tools to find consoling meanings. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille makes some important distinctions between the concepts of a restricted and general economy. A restricted economy is one in which no matter what is expended for the wealth and growth of a system (for instance production, energy, or meaning), there is an assumption about a return on that expenditure to usefulness, utility and production, thus restricting “its object […] with a view to a limited end” (AS I 23). From the point of view of a restricted economy, the waste that is expelled from a given system is considered superfluous or useless to the wealth and growth of its system. In terms of writing, a restricted economy of language is one in which all meaning can be accounted for and signs hit their signifieds. A restricted economy of writing reinvests excess waste and loss of meaning back into usefulness by attempting to recover or to expect the outcome and meaning of the text.  

From the perspective of a general economy, waste is not simply what is rejected by a system as useless, but a form of excess or expenditure that is essential for the system’s operation. The growth of a system entails the necessity of losing, squandering excess and waste – but without a return to useful production. In this reading, waste is tied to unproductive expenditure without a return to usefulness or profit:

I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically. (AS I 21)

From the perspective of a general economy, waste implies an “expenditure without reserve”, that is, an expenditure without a return to an economy of useful production (“From Restricted” 328). Writing within a general economy refers to the loss and wasteful

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8 In “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve” Jacques Derrida applies Bataille’s critique of a restricted economy to a form of writing “which conserves the stakes, remains in control of the play, limiting it and elaborating it by giving it form and meaning […] this economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction as the reproduction of meaning” (323).
expenditure of meaning where meaning or the final outcome of the text is perpetually deferred.

An important consequence of Bataille’s distinction between a restricted and general economy is that a restricted economy cannot tolerate the necessity of wasteful expenditure. Rather, it rejects waste, the “accursed share”, as irrelevant to useful production and also reinvests waste into productive consumption, thereby perpetuating an economy which refuses to recognize its dependency on useless, unproductive expenditure:

Minds accustomed to seeing the development of productive forces as the ideal end of activity refuse to recognize that energy, which constitutes wealth, must ultimately be spent lavishly (without return), and that a series of profitable operations has absolutely no other effect than the squandering of profits. (AS I 22)

For Bataille, the exclusion and appropriation of wasteful, unproductive modes of expenditure is a form of violence which strengthens the accumulation of economic power over others and marginalizes other forms of economic exchange which are based on loss and unproductive expenditure. He states: “Like an unbroken animal that cannot be trained, it is this energy that destroys us; it is we who pay the price of the inevitable explosion” (AS I 24).9

Bataille’s critique of a restricted economy attempts to take into account a different economy of waste that acknowledges the disruptive, irrational process of wasteful expenditure and resists appropriating “the accursed share” back to usefulness, production or meaning. The notion of waste as the “accursed share” within a general economy illustrates how the accumulation and production of a restricted economy is always inhabited and haunted by wasteful, unproductive expenditure which it tries to repress. For Bataille, it is the marginalized economy of unproductive expenditure, waste and loss which is necessary for the functioning of any given system since growth can only occur through “the luxurious squandering of energy” (AS I 33). This is not to dispense of a restricted economy, but to illustrate how an economy which is open to loss and unproductive expenditure challenges and reveals the violence of a restricted economy based on the accumulation of economic power.

In *The Accursed Share*, waste as the “accursed share” within a general economy acquires a sacred status. Bataille’s economy of the sacred differs from the traditional notion of the sacred which is opposed to “profane life”, that is, the life of production and utility. Rather,

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9 Bataille accounts for the economic institution of ‘potlach’ as a way of acquiring social dominance but which is primarily based on an economy of “limitless loss” or material loss, that is, unproductive expenditure (Visions of Excess 122-123). This economy of exchange which is based on wasteful expenditure is unaccounted for by a restricted economy.
the economy of the sacred already contaminates or inhabits “profane life” and refuses to protect itself from the “accursed element” - that which is cast out of “profane life” as prohibition or taboo. Bataille argues that “what is sacred is precisely what is prohibited. But if the sacred, the prohibited is cast out of the sphere of profane life (inasmuch as it denotes a disruption of that life), it nevertheless has a greater value than this profane that excludes it” (AS II 92). Waste acquires a sacred value by acknowledging that the sacred already inhabits “profane life” and transgresses “the course of an existence subordinated to ordinary ends” (AS II 93). Unlike “profane life” which seeks to maintain prohibitions, boundaries and taboos, thus denying the “accursed element”, the sacred transgresses prohibitions without returning the “accursed element” - that which is rejected, prohibited - back into production, utility or a stable, consoling framework. This is not to eliminate rules, prohibitions and taboos, but to expose how the maintenance of rules, prohibitions and taboos constitute a form of violence which exclude and reject that which they are unable to take into account.

The notion of waste, the “accursed share” as sacred, also constitutes a form of violence. However, Bataille argues that this violence is related to an economy of sacrifice which confronts us with the issue of *how* to dispense of excess waste. The economy of sacrifice is a high form of expenditure involving a consecration of pure loss which some societies manifest by destroying what is most useful through sacrifice, rituals and festivals. Similarly, literature illustrates “the law by which we seek the greatest loss or the greatest danger” (AS II 105). This is manifested in the way “without anguish” or “misfortunes of a hero”, the sense of endangerment would not “captivate us, excite us” (AS II 105-6). According to Bataille, fiction sacrifices useful economy by “plunging the spectators into anguish tied to a vertiginous, contagious destruction, which fascinated while it appalled” (AS II 106). The fictional representation of sacrifice or death is not ‘real’, but a performance for the spectators by the sacrificer and the victim. Fiction presents us with a violence which sacrifices usefulness, gain or profit, confronting the reader with an economy of waste and meaninglessness, thereby evoking anguish.

The implication is that through the fictional representation of death and sacrifice, a violent transgression occurs which entails the loss of *both* the sacrificer and the victim. Traditionally, the sacrificer is not lost along with the victim when faced with an economy of loss, but profits from the latter’s loss by rejecting waste or meaningless expenditure and by reinscribing the “accursed share” in an economy of useful and meaningful production. This act of rejection and reinscription not only maintains a distance or a refusal to confront the “accursed share”, but it also strengthens the violence of a restricted economy which resists the
anguish of meaninglessness or wasteful expenditure. For Bataille, it is precisely these sites of resistance which sacrifice useful, meaningful production, thereby evoking anguish and which represent the sacred. Like the sacred, the economy of sacrifice necessitates a violent transgression since it requires contamination with the “accursed share”, with waste and loss of meaning; a violence which mingles “abhorrence and desire” and holds “the one who considers it […] in a state of anxious fascination” (AS II 95). Bataille’s economy of the sacred and sacrifice stand to irk us and provoke distress precisely because they demand a state of uncertainty, loss and wasteful expenditure which prevent us from reinscribing rationalisations or justifications. Yet, it is the inability to justify or reinscribe a restricted economy of meaning that offers the reader the possibility to experience and confront that which is excluded and repressed from an economy of usefulness and meaningful production.

The anguish, violence and transgression provoked by Bataille’s economy of the sacred and sacrifice are linked to Bataille’s notion of erotic activity. According to Bataille, sexual activity is maintained by rules and taboos. However, the maintenance of rules is possible only through the ritual destruction or transgression of those rules. In Erotism, Bataille argues that erotic activity is “the domain of violence, of violation” which transgresses rules and taboos concerning sexual activity and “presupposes a partial dissolution of the person”, opening the subject to fearful excesses (16). Erotic activity entails loss and wasteful expenditure demanding that “the object we desire most is in principle the one most likely to endanger or destroy us […] to sustain great losses of energy or money – or serious threats of death” (AS II 104). In other words, eroticism requires the necessity of both positing prohibitions and transgressing them, but without returning the experience of loss to mastery or rational discourse; demanding a state of “uncertainty, of suspension”. In Erotism, Bataille says that “the victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals. This is the element of sacredness” (22). The fictional representation of erotic activity confronts the spectator with an experience of loss and wasteful expenditure which compels us to share this experience, but without returning this experience to a restricted economy. While the domain of sexual anguish is exhibited in the “abhorrence” of the body, death, decay, putrefaction and fear of sexual relations, erotic activity foregrounds the “avidity, fever and violence” and “anguish” of that which is rejected from the restricted economy of sexual activity (AS II 83-4).

10 In “‘Recognition’ by a Woman!: A Reading of Bataille’s L’Erotisme”, Suzanne Guerlac says that Bataille’s notion of eroticism requires the necessity of positing a mediator, a “paradoxical object” such as the woman who is already the sign of transgression that is lacking in a man. Yet, there is “no pure origin of transgression” or immediacy since “what is figured through the dialectic of the erotic object, what is seized by consciousness, is, precisely, loss or expenditure. With eroticism we are left with a fiction which does not represent anything but which must nevertheless by staged or performed – a fiction of death” (102, 104).
Bataille’s resistance to the reinscription of the sacred, sacrifice and the erotic within a restricted economy leads to Bataille’s notion of sovereignty. Bataille argues that the “sovereign moment partakes of the divine, of the sacred, of the ludicrous or the erotic, of the repugnant or the funereal” (AS II 201). For Bataille, sovereignty affirms “the consumption of wealth”, “life beyond utility”, a consumption and expenditure without reserve. Sovereignty is in relation to waste as the “accursed share” within a general economy. In reading Bataille, Derrida emphasises the importance of sovereignty and its relation to a general economy of writing. Derrida cites from Bataille:

‘The general economy in the first place, makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning. It is this useless, senseless loss that is sovereignty.’ (FR 342)

A general economy of writing acknowledges its dependency on this “exceeding energy” that is “lost without the slightest aim” without a return to an economy of plenitude, of full meaning (FR 344). Paradoxically, the “exceeding energy” of an irrecuperable waste and meaninglessness, is not to decimate meaning, but to open the text to an excess of meaning. Derrida says:

It multiplies words, precipitates them one against the other, engulfs them too, in an endless baseless substitution whose only rule is the sovereign affirmation of the play outside meaning […] a kind of potlatch of signs that burns, consumes and wastes words in the gay affirmation of death: a sacrifice and a challenge. (FR 347)

According to Derrida, a crucial effect of sovereign writing is Bataille’s notion of laughter. Derrida says: “Absolute comicalness is the anguish experienced when confronted by expenditure on lost funds, by the absolute sacrifice of meaning: a sacrifice without return and without reserves” (FR 324). It is a certain laughter which bursts out in those moments which leaves us gasping for breath, exceeding rational or logical discourse and which is irreducible to recuperation:

Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls abstract negativity. A negativity that never takes place, that never presents itself, because in doing so it would start to work again. (FR 323)

Bataille’s economy of the sacred, sacrifice and the erotic within an economy of wasteful expenditure provokes a certain laughter which laughs in the face of an expenditure on lost
funds and opens one to the sovereign operation of writing. However, this laughter is rejected by rational discourse which regards it as irrelevant, useless or senseless. Rather than appropriating this senseless, wasteful laughter within rational discourse, laughter and sovereignty constitute a “slipping away” of knowledge, an “unknowing” which cancels “every operation of knowledge […] in the grip of strong emotions that shut off, interrupt or override the flow of thought” (AS III 203).

I would like to argue that Pynchon’s *V.* dramatises notions of the sacred and sacrifice within an economy of wasteful expenditure and have profoundly unsettling effects on the reader. The sacred moments or epiphanies foreground the violence of a restricted economy which is unable to tolerate waste. At the same time, the sacred moments portray the violent and transgressive force of wasteful expenditure. The notion of waste within a restricted and general economy is also thematized in Stencil’s narration and the readerly involvement in trying to make sense of ‘who’ or ‘what’ *V.* is about. The trajectory of the sacred, from Profane’s episode in the sewers, until Mélanie’s sacrificial death allude to Bataille’s “exhausting detours” of the “accursed share” which in *V.* are portrayed as meaninglessness, death, laughter, the inanimate, erotic activity, entropy and apocalyptic endings.

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11 Derrida argues how “laughter is absent from the Hegelian system”. Citing Bataille, he states “[i]n the ‘system’ poetry, laughter, ecstasy are nothing. Hegel hastily gets rid of them: he knows no other aim than knowledge. To my eyes, his immense fatigue is linked to his horror of the blind spot” (324).
1.2 Aim and Approach

The aim of this essay is twofold: (a) to analyse how the sacred moments or epiphanies throughout the novel dramatise the necessary failure of a restricted economy or traditional ways of making sense. This is not to exclude a restricted economy or traditional modes of thinking, but to expose our resistance to an economy of wasteful expenditure, which we repress to another place such as waste, meaninglessness, death, laughter, the inanimate, the erotic, entropy, apocalyptic endings. (b) To illustrate how Profane’s episode in the sewers and his association with waste and the streets carries a violent force which powerfully subverts Stencil’s narrative quest for V.

My critical analysis will proceed as follows: First, I will examine the sewer episode in the light of Tony Tanner’s discussion of it in his celebrated essay “Caries and Cabals”. The sacred moment in the sewers undermines traditional notions of the sacred moment which refer to revelations and meanings. Next, I will illustrate how Profane’s epiphany in the sewers is rearticulated throughout the novel via other sacred moments which allude to Bataille’s notion of the sacred, sacrifice and waste. I argue that the violent, disruptive force of waste can be traced in the sacred moments which increasingly provoke anguish, violence, transgression and a resistance to wasteful expenditure. Yet, these sites of resistance offer the possibility of reconfiguring our reading of the sacred and waste. They also show the impossibility of maintaining a closed, restricted economy. This is portrayed in Stencil’s employment of the epiphanies by recording past events in order to establish his identity as an objective narrator and custodian of his father’s historical quest for V. However, the economy of waste and the sacred reveals how Stencil’s narration is associated with the violence of colonial discourse.

Finally, the Epilogue and ending will analyse how the “exceeding energy” of waste portrayed by Profane, the sewers and the streets powerfully undermine Stencil’s epilogue. The trajectory of waste as a re-reading and re-writing of modernist notions of the sacred moment subverts Stencil’s authority on representations of the sacred by illustrating how Stencil is unable to take into account wasteful modes of expenditure. The desire to arrive at an ultimate configuration of V. is perpetually deferred in a way which affirms a sovereign form of writing associated with a certain type of laughter which is irrecoverable by rational discourse.
2.1 The Sewers

Benny Profane joins the Alligator Patrol, a “weird collection” of a group of “bums” (V. 112) who hunt alligators in the sewers under the streets of New York, since they cannot procure employment on the streets. Rejected as waste, they represent the “highly alienated populace”. The sewers are described as a place “with pornographic pictures, coffee grounds, contraceptives used and unused, shit” (V. 122). In “Caries and Cabals” Tanner acknowledges that the episode of Benny Profane and the alligator parodies the myth of the unconscious, turning it into a “dark farce”, signifying how the trope of descending into our dreams is “so customary” within our traditions. In fact, the novel deliberately signals this convention with the reference to the sewer’s underground “tortuous” tunnels and “crazy angles”. Yet Tanner also says: “At the same time [Pynchon] seems to want to preserve the notion that somehow it is more ‘real’ under the street than in it”. More importantly he says:

The sewer or under-the-street (also compared to under the sea) is that area of dream, the unconscious, perhaps the ancestral memory, in which one may find a temporary peace or oblivion, and into which the artist must descend, but where fantasy can run so rampant that you may start seeing rats as saints and lovers if you remain down there too long. (CC 166)

His reading shows the desire to bring to light the notion that it is more ‘real’ in the sewers, thus reinstating modernist notions of the descent into the unconscious where despite its “tortuous” tunnels, the unconscious/sewers may illuminate what is ‘real’. His description also portrays the sewers as a sacred place for the artist, where some form of revelation does take place, even if this revelation is rampant fantasy. However, a closer analysis of the effect of this sacred moment or epiphany in the sewers, shows what is left out of Tanner’s reading.

While Profane is hunting for the alligator in the sewers, he expects some form of revelation to take place at this particular moment. Similarly, the reader is tantalized into such an expectation with the text’s explicit reference to this special moment: “Profane had moved across the frontier, the alligator still in front of him. Scrawled on the walls were occasional quotes from the Gospels, Latin tags” (V. 120). As Profane slowly approaches the alligator, he suddenly comes across a scary light which frightens him. The anticipated epiphany is accompanied by a phosphorescent light “giving off an uncomfortable radiance” and “whose

exact arrangement was indistinct” (V. 122-3). Profane interprets this uncomfortable light as a sacred moment in the mode of a traditional anticipation of an epiphany, expecting some form of revelation:

He waited. He was waiting for something to happen. Something otherworldly, of course. He was sentimental and superstitious. Surely the alligator would receive the gift of tongues, the body of Father Fairing be resurrected, the sexy V. tempt him away from murder. He felt about to levitate and at a loss what to say where, really, he was. In a bonecellar, a sepulchre. (V. 122)

However, when Profane kills the alligator, the anticipated epiphany or expected revelation fails to take place. It dissipates into nothing: “He fired. The alligator jerked, did a backflip, thrashed briefly, was still. Blood began to seep out amoebalike to form shifting patterns with the weak glow of the water. Abruptly, the flashlight went out” (V. 123). There is no illumination, no “gift of tongues” or resurrection of the “sexy V”, no sense of something more ‘real’ as Tanner had pointed out, but a disruption of our expectations, depriving us of an anticipated revelation. The epiphany parodies our conventional familiarity with the modernist notion of the sacred moment, with its accompanying anticipation of a transcendent revelation or meaning. The sacred is parodied with the comical allusion to the expectation of a revelation which fails to occur, and the alligator receiving the ‘gift of tongues’, or Profane’s fetishistic vision of the resurrection of “sexy V”. In other words, the sacred moment is different from Tanner’s and Profane’s expectation of it and in a way which alludes to Bataille’s notion of the sacred.

In this reading, the sacred affirms an economy of wasteful expenditure, that is the loss of a transcendental revelation of meaning. It prevents the reader from recuperating or reinscribing the sacred moment within an economy of “profane life”, that which provides consoling meanings and revelations. The economy of the sacred takes place in the sewers, showing contamination with the “accursed share” which “profane life” is unable to take into account and which it relegates as unproductive expenditure. Yet, Tanner’s reading of Benny’s hunt for the alligator in the sewers ultimately reinscribes the sacred moment within the modernist notion of the sacred since Tanner interprets the epiphany and its accompanying “uncomfortable light” in the mode of a traditional anticipation where some form of revelation does take place. In Tanner’s reading, waste as the “accursed share” is appropriated within a restricted economy of meaning. The reinvestment of waste, loss of meaning or revelation into a restricted economy of meaning shows the resistance to wasteful expenditure. A reading of
waste within a restricted and general economy reveals what is inadvertently left out of Tanner’s reading.

Significantly, Profane also resists the economy of wasteful expenditure which the sacred moment is demanding. In fact, later in the novel he tries to make sense of this unsettling epiphany by affirming his shlemihlhood and explaining in rational, useful terms that he has signed a covenant, a useful economy of exchange with the alligators in which he gives death to the alligators and the alligators give him employment in exchange (V. 146). Joseph Slade argues that Profane’s shlemihlhood “is a method of preserving the self, of defining it in a world always trying to violate that self” (“The Street” 74). Bataille argues that “profane life […] knows nothing of destructive and violent changes” (AS II 94).

On the other hand, even though Benny Profane resists wasteful expenditure, yet, Profane’s intimate association with waste and the sewers throughout other sacred moments in the novel, has profound implications for Stencil’s narration. Profane’s comical vision of “sexy V” parodies Stencil’s historical quest for V., his “white goddess”. Stencil descends into the sewers in the vain attempt to track down a V-symbol (Veronica the rat) as a clue to his V-quest, but he is wounded and shot in his “left buttock” (V. 131). Even though one is tempted to locate Stencil as the butt of comic ridicule - perhaps performed by Profane - yet the reader is unable to ascertain who shot Stencil. Similarly, the reader is unsure whether Stencil or an omniscient narrator is narrating Profane’s episode in the sewers. Just as the expected revelation or resurrection of ‘sexy V’ fails to occur in the sewer episode, our traditional expectations of understanding and reading V. are parodied and undermined, creating discomfort. This is further intensified throughout other epiphanies in V.
2.2 Esther’s nose operation

Esther participates in the activities of The Whole Sick Crew, activities which dramatize the progression towards waste, exhaustion and disorder. Fergus Mixolydian is described as the “laziest living being” in New York whose “incomplete” creative adventures lead him to become “an extension of the TV set” by wiring himself to the TV which flicks on whenever he falls asleep (V. 56). Slab paints meaningless copies of cheese danishes, while the crew discuss art and life using trendy monosyllables or “proper nouns”. Mafia writes novels to a “faithful sisterhood of consumers” in order to expound her theory that “the world can only be rescued from certain decay through Heroic Love”. However, “in practice Heroic Love meant screwing five or six times a night with a great many athletic, half-sadistic wrestling holds thrown in” (V. 125). David Seed argues that The Whole Sick Crew party is a parody of 50s Beat fiction writers such as Kerouac who often portray the party as “a set piece, a supposedly spontaneous event which extravagantly contradicted such bourgeois values as thrift or sobriety.” However, in V., the party also dramatizes “an entropic drift towards disorder or a purely mechanical process” (Fictional 7). In fact, the narrator Herbert Stencil, laments how the patterns of the party and the artists hint towards exhaustion, decadence and waste:

The pattern would have been familiar – bohemian, creative, arty – except that it was even further removed from reality, Romanticism in its furthest decadence, being only an exhausted impersonation of poverty, rebellion and artistic “soul.” For it was the unhappy fact that most of them worked for a living and obtained the substance of their conversations from the pages of Time magazine and like publications. (V. 56-7)

Moreover, the Crew’s conversations are portrayed as variations on the same old values and stereotypes: “Conversations at the Spoon had become little more than proper nouns, literary allusions, critical or philosophical terms linked in certain ways. Depending on how you arranged the building blocks at your disposal, you were smart or stupid” (V. 298). Thus, the traditional tools employed by the Crew fail to produce anything new. Ultimately, the Crew deceive themselves that they have dropped out of a system (or rebelled) when in fact they are perpetuating the very passive imitations which that system produces.

13In his “Introduction” to Slow Learner, a collection of his early short stories, Thomas Pynchon describes his unease with the polarization of “traditional vs Beat fiction” during the post-war period in the U.S. (7). By “traditional” Pynchon means “the more established modernist tradition” of the 50s (9). Thus, Pynchon employs traditional tools but subverts them and subjects them to a wasteful expenditure.
This notion of waste which is recycled back into productive consumption is further dramatized by Schoenmaker who performs Esther’s nose operation in order to recreate her nose “identical with an ideal of nasal beauty established by movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations” (V. 103). When Rachel Owlglass visits Schoenmaker prior to Esther’s operation, the waiting room is described as a sacred chamber with Schoenmaker as the priest capitalizing on willing victims and their notions of ideal beauty. For Rachel, Schoenmaker’s operations represent an inescapable dialectic, a “long daisy chain of victimizers and victims, screwers and screwees”. She entrenches this argument by saying: “Screwer and screwee. On this foundation, perhaps, the island stood, from the bottom of the lowest sewer bed right up through the streets to the tip of the TV antenna on top of the Empire State Building” (V. 50). The patients in Schoenmaker’s waiting room are portrayed as waste products of mass consumerism which are recycled back into productive consumption, in a vicious cycle.

However, during Schoenmaker’s operation something more disturbing and unsettling happens. The violence of the operation is foregrounded as Schoenmaker shoves two-inch needles up Esther’s nose during the operation with Schoenmaker’s assistant Trench saying: “Keep chanting, ‘Stick it in…pull it out…stick it in…ooh that was good…pull it out’” (V. 105). Even though one might involuntarily laugh at the “sexual metaphor”, yet this is commingled with the disturbing notion that Esther seems to welcome the violent operation with its accompanying loss of selfhood in the mode of a sacred moment or a “mystic experience”. She wonders: “What religion is it – one of the Eastern ones – where the highest condition we can attain is that of an object - a rock. It was like that; I felt myself drifting down, this delicious loss of Estherhood, becoming more and more a blob, with no worries, traumas, nothing: only Being” (V. 106). The sacred moment violates the modernist epiphany where usually one’s loss of selfhood is released from the mundane in order to transcend it or achieve a sense of well-being or some form of higher spiritual knowledge. Instead, the epiphany affirms dehumanization and loss, evoking discomfort in the reader who, as voyeur, witnesses the violent operation in the mode of a wasteful expenditure since the ambiguity of Esther’s response and the violent operation prevent the reader from recuperating the epiphany within rational discourse. George Levine observes that Esther’s operation “is physically discomforting and unpleasant” and adds that “we are not allowed by the language to come to terms with what we feel” (“Risking” 64-5). Joseph Slade comments about “the violation of

14 In “Modernism, the New Criticism” Maarten Van Delden describes how within the modernist Proustian epiphany, “the instant of intense, subjective illumination is normally triggered by an extremely mundane event” (125). Jay Losey argues that modernist writers such as Joyce and Woolf employ the epiphany to portray how a character may achieve “sudden insights” or self-awareness in order to transcend “chaos” (“Demonic” 378-9).
the operation and its bizarre sexuality using outrageous puns and analogies” (“The Street” 77). The disorientation evoked by the epiphany is further exacerbated by the technical skill of the prose which uncomfortably matches Schoenmaker’s surgical skill.

However, it is significant that the sexual violence of the operation is foregrounded and staged like a spectacle which forces the reader to participate voyeuristically like Trench who “[t]hrough a crack in the curtains opposite...looked on” (V.109). Herbert Stencil narrates this episode referring to himself in the third-person. His narration is seamlessly woven with that of an omniscient narrator, giving the impression that he stands ‘outside’ the violent economy of the operation. Yet, his voyeurism is not as impartial and objective as he would like it to be. Ultimately, Stencil’s interest in this episode is related to his V-quest: “He’d come to the party at the invitation of Esther Harvitz, whose plastic surgeon Schoenmaker owned a vital piece of the V.-jigsaw, but protested ignorance” (V. 55). Stencil’s writing of the epiphany is not objective but tainted by his Stencilized narration which reveals how Stencil’s attempted objectivity is a way of distancing himself from contamination with Esther’s violent operation.

Of course, the reader constitutes another voyeur and is similarly implicated in the sexual violence of Esther’s epiphany. However, the loss and wasteful expenditure offers the possibility to confront an economy of sexual violence. Reading requires violence and contamination with this violence in order to expose what Schoenmaker’s economy of sexuality - or the dialectic between “screwer and screwee” - are unable to take into account, that is, their own implication in perpetuating an economy of sexual violence. In this reading, the foregrounding of the violent operation is similar to Bataille’s notion of eroticism. Unlike sexual relations which conceal violence by maintaining rules and prohibitions, thus reinforcing a vicious cycle of productive consumption, erotic activity transgresses these prohibitions and confronts the subject with anguish and violence demanding the subject to share or participate in this wasteful expenditure without recuperating this experience within rational production (E 22). This is not to exclude the production of sexual relations, but to illustrate how the inability to confront the expenditure of loss and waste constitutes a violence which perpetuates sexual violence and the productive consumption of beauty in a vicious cycle. Rather than confronting this violence, Stencil’s positioning of himself ‘outside’ the violence of the operation reinforces the economy of Schoenmaker’s operations. However, the discomfort evoked by the violent operation accedes to Bataille’s notion of the sacred with its expenditure of loss and waste which is irrecuperable by rational discourse. The economy of wasteful expenditure challenges and reveals what a restricted economy is unable to confront.
2.3 Crossroads, streets and V.

In the chapter ‘She Hangs on the Western Wall’, crossroads and streets acquire special significance and are portrayed as sacred places offering transcendental knowledge. For example, many characters and plots overlap and converge in central points in Florence, such as the German Scheissvogel’s café where Evan Godolphin meets his father old Godolphin who tells the story of his journey to the centre of Vheissu to Mantissa. In the meantime, Evan’s encounter with Victoria at the crossroad between Via del Purgatorio and Via dell’Inferno acquires a sacred meaning together with the anticipation of a revelation or miracle. Standing “stone-still at the crossroads” Victoria describes this sacred moment: “How strange tonight, this city. As if something trembled below its surface, waiting to burst through” (V. 201). Narrative plots multiply such as Gaucho’s plot to stage riots at the Venezuelan embassy by the Venezuelan nationalists, and Mantissa’s plot to steal Botticelli’s “Birth of Venus” from the Uffizi art gallery. V-symbols suddenly proliferate and Vheissu, Venus and Victoria are ambiguously linked to the history of V. Unlike Esther’s nose operation, the epiphanies are staged within multiple plots and the reader is deliberately put in Stencil’s position with the desire to assemble these clues and plots with the hope of finding some revelation or connection to V. However, the various plots, crossroads and streets generate confusion and do not yield insight about the central quest for V.

Victoria experiences a particular epiphany at a point where multiple plots and conspiracies converge in the street near the Venezuelan consulate. During this culmination point, she stands in the middle of a crossroad, observing the bloody riots in the street in a detached manner displaying the Machiavellian notion of virtú and individual agency:

She stood as still as she had at the crossroads waiting for Evan; her face betrayed no emotion. It was as if she saw herself embodying a feminine principle, acting as complement to all this bursting, explosive male energy. Inviolate and calm, she watched the spasms of wounded bodies, the fair of violent death, framed and staged, it seemed, for her alone in that tiny square. From her hair the heads of five crucified also looked on, no more expressive than she. (V. 209)

The notion that violent riots and deaths instigated Victoria’s epiphany is disturbing. In fact, Deborah Madsen argues that this culminating point at the crossroad is symbolic of “the movement away from a coherent moral order” which, according to her, is a “characteristic effect of V.” She says that at this point Victoria “shows an initial recognition of her
possession by V” (“Vacillating” 48-9). In other words, Madsen ascribes the violence of Victoria’s epiphany to V.

During Victoria’s epiphany, a V-symbol appears, an ivory comb with “the heads of five crucified”. The reader is deliberately tempted to connect the ivory comb to V, but the ivory comb keeps wandering and popping up in different places, disrupting the notion that it must converge in V. In Thomas Pynchon’s Narratives, Alan Brownlie describes succinctly how the ivory comb continually shifts and escapes the reader’s grasp, despite being lured by this symbol, particularly during the disassembly of The Bad Priest’s body parts which is assumed to symbolise V.’s alleged death-scene:

Yet, the ivory comb does not converge in The Bad Priest/V.’s death-scene. Instead, the ivory comb is sent once again on a wasteful expenditure when Paola returns to Malta to meet her husband Pappy Hod. Paola gives him the ivory comb as a token of her promise to return to him: “I will sit home in Norfolk, faithful, and spin. Spin a yarn for your coming-home present” (V. 443). Moreover, the ivory comb which is found during the death-scene is based on Fausto’s confessions, that is, a reconstruction of the scene of the Bad Priest’s death when her body parts are dismantled by children, so that the connection between The Bad Priest, Victoria and V. becomes tenuous. Interestingly, when Fausto IV mentions the ivory comb which “a child” (his daughter Paola) had taken from the dying priest, he does not attach any importance to the ivory comb. It is Stencil’s reading of Fausto’s confessions which gives importance to the ivory comb.

Therefore, by linking Victoria to The Bad Priest and ultimately V., Madsen’s reading of Victoria’s sacred moment is complicit with the violence of a Stencilized reading which replicates Stencil’s desire to connect any clues that cross his path to V. The notion that Victoria’s sacred moment offers a revelation or connection to V. never occurs, but is deferred and subjected to wasteful expenditure. However, this notion of waste is feared and discarded as a symbol of “the movement away from a coherent moral order” (“Vacillating” 48).
Madsen’s reading of Victoria is symptomatic of the resistance to an economy of wasteful expenditure which Victoria’s epiphany is foregrounding.

The notion of an ineffable centre is further dramatized at Scheissvogel’s café. Old Godolphin narrates the story of his journey to the centre of Vheissu to Mantissa. Godolphin journeyed to the centre of Vheissu but failed to find a revelation or meaning at the centre. Instead, he discovered a void which he describes in terms of waste: “It was Nothing I saw”, just a “heap of red, purple and green debris”. As if to mock his desire to find meaning, all he finds at the centre is nothing but a frozen spider monkey beneath the barren, lifeless, empty place (V. 205). Of course, the failure of Godolphin’s colonial enterprise parodies colonial discourse. In fact, Vheissu is linked to the colonial violence of European imperialism: “Vheissu is hardly a restful place. There’s barbarity, insurrection, internecine feud. It’s not different from any other godforsakenly remote region. The English have been jaunting in and out of places like Vheissu for centuries” (V. 170). Old Godolphin’s desire to associate Vheissu with a “dark woman tattooed from head to toes” and to discover what lies beneath the skin is portrayed as a violent penetration associated with colonial writing:

But soon that skin, the godawful riot of pattern and color, would begin to get between you and whatever it was in her that you thought you loved. And soon, in perhaps only a matter of days, it would get so bad that you would begin praying to whatever god you knew of to send some leprosy to her. To flay that tattooing to a heap of red, purple and green debris, leave the veins and ligaments raw and quivering and open at last to your eyes and your touch. (V. 171)

Godolphin’s fetishistic vision of Vheissu portrays the violence of colonial discourse which tries to appropriate and reinscribe Vheissu within a rational, productive economy of exchange which ultimately aims to strengthen colonial economic power. However, his colonial discourse is contaminated by images of waste, debris, void and meaninglessness. Unable to tolerate this “dream of annihilation” which threatens an economy of colonial power based on accumulation and appropriation, Godolphin attempts to fill in this void by constructing a malign purpose behind a plot. He believes that Vheissu is an evil plot, a conspiracy constructed by “them” to annihilate “us”, thus perpetuating the Manichean discourse at the heart of colonial discourse. He says: “I think they left it there for me. Why? Perhaps for some alien, not-quite human reason that I can never comprehend...A mockery, you see, a mockery of life” (V. 206). Godolphin’s inability to tolerate the void, waste and meaningless at the centre signifies his inability to tolerate the existence of an economy of wasteful expenditure which threatens an economy of useful production. Conversely, it is the refusal to acknowledge
an economy of wasteful expenditure and other modes of unproductive expenditure that strengthens and perpetuates economic power over other modes of expenditure.

Interestingly, in this chapter, it is hard for the reader to distinguish between Herbert Stencil as the narrator and his father Sidney Stencil. When Gaucho and Evan Godolphin are captured by the British intelligence, it is Sidney Stencil who feels compelled to fit old Godolphin’s obsession with Vheissu, and Gaucho’s plot with V. Sidney Stencil also acknowledges that “The Situation” had no objective reality, yet his obsession to connect it to his historical quest for V. “was a neat theory, and he was in love with it. The only consolation he drew from the present chaos was that his theory managed to explain it” (V. 189-90). The inability to distinguish between Herbert Stencil and his father Sidney Stencil is parodied by Evan Godolphin.

Evan Godolphin’s continuation of his father’s quest for Vheissu mirrors Stencil’s continuation of his father’s quest for V. In the comical mode of a farcical spy-thriller Evan Godolphin looks for clues relating to Vheissu. Unsurprisingly, Evan Godolphin comes across his father’s hidden message and concludes that this had happened for some ineffable purpose. On the basis of this sacred moment, Evan Godolphin restores faith in his father’s legacy:

He felt that belief in Vheissu gave him no right any more to doubt as arrogantly as he had before, that perhaps wherever he went from now on he would perform like penance a ready acceptance of miracles or visions such as this meeting at the crossroads seemed to him. (V. 200)

The employment of the doppelgänger motif, that is, the doubling of Vheissu and V. is used fetishistically by Herbert Stencil, just as Godolphin fetishises Vheissu. In fact, Stencil’s hunt for V. is described in fetishistic terms, as a “forbidden form of sexual delight” (V. 61). However, the excessive use of the doppelgänger motif is also comically foregrounded and subjected to a wasteful expenditure, without yielding any insight or knowledge about who or what is V. The inability to distinguish between Herbert and Sidney Stencil unmasks Herbert Stencil’s desire to replicate his father’s quest by assembling the multiple plots and Vheissu into his central quest for V. The wasteful expenditure of the doppelgänger motif betrays Stencil’s monolithic and Stencilized quest for V. which cannot tolerate the possibility of waste and loss. In fact, as Eigenvalue points out later, one can hardly “tell when Stencil stops or starts narrating, even though what he tells undergoes ‘considerable change’ in being Stencilized” (V. 228).
The streets also illustrate what Stencil’s solipsistic and monolithic quest tries to repress. The streets are portrayed as places of violence and disruption bringing no overarching mythical order. Of course, the streets of New York are strongly associated with Benny Profane. Joseph Slade argues that the streets “offer no safety for Profane” who “feels menaced by them” and is unable to “understand the street” (“The Street” 74). He cites a passage from *V*.

Road work had done nothing to improve the outward Profane, or the inward one either. Though the street had claimed a big fraction of Profane’s age, it and he remained strangers in every way. Streets, roads, circles, squares, places, prospects had taught him nothing. (*V*, 27)

David Seed similarly claims that Profane’s yo-yoing in the streets without meaning or direction parodies the road quest in Beat fiction which is “a metaphor of possibility and hope” (*Fictional* 74). However, in *V*, Profane’s yo-yoing in the streets parodies Stencil’s movements which are characterized by purpose and meaning. Even though the streets align Profane with Stencil’s V-quest, yet Profane and the streets are associated with waste, particularly in the emblematic image of Profane walking through the streets in the opening of the novel: “overhead, turning everybody’s face green and ugly, shone mercury-vapor lamps, receding in an asymmetric V. to the east where it’s dark and there are no bars” (*V*, 10). Ultimately, the streets disrupt any expectation of narrative resolution about V. the reader may have entertained. Profane is absent from this chapter, yet, his intimate association with the streets highlights what Stencil’s narrative attempts to repress. Like the disruptive force of the “accursed share” as a form of wasteful expenditure which cannot be recuperated by a restricted economy, the streets disrupt Stencil’s monolithic quest for V.

This chapter offers the possibility of reading an economy of waste and loss of meaning via Mantissa’s plot to possess Botticelli’s “Birth of Venus”. While Cesare is digging the knife into the canvas, Mantissa feels that this is a special moment which also brings horror:

Light, shining in from the street, reflected from the blade, flickering from the lantern they had brought, danced over the painting’s gorgeous surface. Signor Mantissa watched its movement, a slow horror growing in him. In that instant he was reminded of Hugh Godolphin’s spider-monkey, still shimmering through crystal ice at the bottom of the world. The whole surface of the painting now seemed to move, to be flooded with color and motion. (*V*, 209)

Confrontation with the failure to possess the central knowledge of Venus is associated with a “dream of annihilation,” Vheissu and V. However, despite Mantissa’s fetishistic vision of
Venus, he realises that he cannot possess Venus: “What of her God, her voice, her dreams? She was already a goddess. She had no voice he could ever hear. And she herself […] was only […] A gaudy dream, a dream of annihilation” (V. 210). Unlike Godolphin’s reaction to Vheissu, Mantissa refuses to possess the painting which he leaves “hanging on the western wall”. He sacrifices possession of his beloved object and resists appropriating it. This contrasts Godolphin who cannot tolerate the existence of wasteful and meaningless expenditure within colonial discourse and attempts to appropriate waste by reinscribing it within Manichean discourse. It also contrasts Stencil’s monolithic narration, for whom all crossroads and streets, as sacred moments, must invariably connect to his father’s V-quest.

The streets portray an economy of the sacred, acknowledging contamination with the disruptive force of wasteful expenditure. The parodying of several sacred moments which occur in the streets at central points reveal how traditional notions of the centre as a sacred space mask the hidden ideology of a monolithic and Manichean discourse which perpetuate the ideologies of a restricted economy. Mantissa’s action offers the possibility of taking into account wasteful expenditure as the “accursed share” which cannot be appropriated by a restricted economy of reading.
2.4 Mondaugen’s Story

Mondaugen’s story is told within the fortressed house of Foppl’s Siege Party which is sealed off from the outside. The gathering of people at the siege party are representatives of various colonial nations thrown together “all creating the appearance of a tiny European Conclave or League of Nations, assembled here while political chaos howled outside” (V. 217). The landscape outside is described in terms of waste, threatening the enclosed siege party. Mondaugen surveys the landscape consisting of:

an uninspiring view of ravines, grass, dry pans, dust, scrub; all repeating, undulating east to the eventual wastes of the Kalahari; north to a distant yellow exhalation that rose from far under the horizon and seemed to hand eternally over the Tropic of Capricorn. (V. 235)

Like The Whole Sick Crew’s parties, Foppl’s siege party closes itself off from the world by decadent activities. The difference here is that Foppl’s wasteful activities are heightened via perverted sado-masochistic rituals, viewed voyeuristically by Mondaugen. For example, Mondaugen catches glimpses of Vera Meroving beating Weissman, and Foppl beating a native. Moreover, the wasteful activities of Foppl’s party are linked to colonial writing. Europe’s colonial history merges with bizarre fetishistic sado-masochistic rituals and is presented as a nostalgic vision of ‘the good old days’ of imperialistic power. Foppl’s current 1922 siege party against the Hereros rebellion is portrayed as a nostalgic vision of the previous 1904 genocidal campaign of the German general Von Trotha who had nearly annihilated the Hereros. In a parody of apocalyptic imagery, Foppl anticipates the second coming of Von Trotha and tells a native servant whom he is brutally beating:

Your people have defied the Government […] they’ve rebelled, they have sinned. General von Trotha will have to come back to punish you all. He’ll have to bring his soldiers with the beards and the bright eyes, and his artillery that speaks with a loud voice. How you will enjoy it, Andreas. Like Jesus returning to earth, von Trotha is coming to deliver you. Be joyful; sing hymns of thanks. And until then love me as your parent, because I am von Trotha’s arm, and the agent of his will. (V. 222)

Foppl’s fetishistic nostalgia for a colonial past and genocidal campaigns are portrayed as an ideal model to be emulated. However, the wasteful, fetishistic activities of Foppl’s siege party reveal ‘cracks’ and ‘leaks’ within their enclosed system. This occurs via Mondaugen’s
epiphanies within Foppl’s fortressed house, epiphanies that intensify the wasteful, degenerate activities of Foppl’s colonial siege party.

Like Esther’s epiphany, Mondaugen’s epiphany of Firelily’s rider is described in terms of sexual imagery:

> It was a glorious day, December and hot, a bird somewhere gone mad with the season. Firelily under him, seemed sexually aroused, she curveted and frolicked so about the line of march, covering five miles to the prisoners’ one. (V. 262)

However, unlike a modernist epiphany where “the intense, subjective illumination is normally triggered by an extremely mundane event” (“Modernism” 125), Mondaugen’s epiphany is triggered by the brutal murder of a native Hottentot prisoner who is clubbed to death and tossed “behind a rock for the vultures and flies” (V. 263). It is this act of killing that prompts the moral climax and moment of vision in the epiphany:

> Things seemed all at once to fall into a pattern: a great cosmic fluttering in the blank, bright sky and each grain of sand, each cactus spine, each feather of the circling vulture above them and invisible molecule of heated air seemed to shift imperceptibly so that this black and he, and he and every other black he would henceforth have to kill slid into alignment, assumed a set symmetry, a dancelike poise. (V. 264)

Horror increases as the epiphany announces itself as something new, ushering in a new world order based on the bizarre bond between the victim and victor, as something: “different from the official language of von Trotha’s orders and directives […] It had only to do with the destroyer and the destroyed, and the act which united them, and it had never been that way before” (V. 264). This act of killing uniting the destroyer and the destroyed is further intensified with phrases such as “operational sympathy” or “functional agreement” (V. 261).

During another epiphany, a sixteen year old Herero girl seems to look forward to her violent death. After Firelily’s rider violated the Herero girl, he “hesitated a moment between side-arm and bayonet. She actually smiled then; pointed to both, and began to shift her hips lazily in the dust. He used both”. Whereas Esther seemed to welcome her loss of self, the native Hereros paradoxically seem to welcome their death and the violence of the colonial masters with sexual pleasure.

The foregrounding of horror, violence and the Hereros ambiguous response is distressing, particularly since it is difficult to understand what seems to be a gratuitous display of violence. Maarten Van Delden argues that Pynchon undermines the modernist notion that

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15 Van Delden, “Modernism”, (125).
the juxtaposition of life and death leads towards reconciliation and transcendence. He states that Pynchon “submit[s] them to an almost brutal form of exaggeration and distortion. What could be more astonishing, after all, than the notion of an epiphany being triggered by the perpetration of a murder?” (“Modernism” 128). For Deborah Madsen, the new significance of the bizarre acts of killing which unite life and death or the destroyer with the destroyed, are complicit with a “totalitarian cultural discourse” where “meaninglessness triumphs over intrinsic value” (“Vacillating” 43).

However, the epiphany’s announcement of itself as something new, ushering in a new world order is significant. It parodies the literary use of the epiphany which announces itself as a sacred moment which transcends the mundane. In Mondaugen’s epiphany, the sacred moment does not yield illumination but foregrounds horror, violence and wasteful, useless expenditure. Moreover, the modernist epiphany is rewritten in such a way that the epiphany exhibits and makes public the literary conventions of the sacred moment. Since the epiphanies are embedded within the context of colonial history, this suggests an uneasy coupling between the announcement of sacred moments and colonial power. The writing of the sacred moment foregrounds a violence which is complicit with colonial discourse, but which is usually hidden or suppressed. In Erotism, Bataille argues that the foregrounding of violence disrupts the usual role of the subject who wields power and who conceals violence beneath a reasonable justification: “As a general rule the torturer does not use the language of violence exerted by him in the name of an established authority; he uses the language of the authority, and that gives him what looks like an excuse, a lofty justification” (187). Mondaugen’s epiphanies transgress the sacred moment, foregrounding the violence of resorting to lofty justifications and subjecting them to a wasteful, useless expenditure without reinstating a new world order.

Rather than being complicit with a “totalitarian cultural discourse”, the epiphanies’ wasteful expenditure are complicit with the useless, senseless act of the Herero’s self-destruction, an act which exposes the reader to an anguish which is irrecoverable by rational discourse. In Erotism Bataille says that “in sacrifice, the victim is divested of life or the object is destroyed. The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals. This is the element of sacredness” (22). Similarly, the Hereros confront the reader with a violent, senseless death which entails the sacrificial loss of both the reader and the victim, demanding a state of “uncertainty, of suspension” without returning the experience to an economy of useful, meaningful production. The violence of the sacred moment suspends our understanding and contrasts the use of epiphanies which announce a heightened state of
consciousness “that gives focus and coherence to an otherwise disjointed world” (“Modernism” 122). The violence of wasteful expenditure invites a type of reading which sustains and resists the temptation to reinscribe a writing of the sacred within an economy of power and authoritative discourse. Rather than rejecting this violence, it is by sustaining an irrecuperable loss that reveals the violence of a restricted economy.

The inability to recuperate the violence of the Hereros and the epiphanies within rational understanding is further intensified by the epiphanies’ embeddedness within multiple narrative voyeurs such as Stencil, Mondaugen and the reader. Herbert Stencil collects archival sources in order to arrive at an ideal configuration of V. But Stencil narrates Mondaugen’s story thirty-four years after the incidents had happened and like Firelily’s rider, he “becomes a searcher after lost time in the Proustian mould” (“Modernism” 129). Significantly, Eigenvalue interrupts Stencil’s narration of Mondaugen’s story by questioning the credibility of the recorded events. He points out that Mondaugen is hardly likely to remember the entire conversations that probably “meant nothing to Mondaugen but Stencil” (V. 249). Eigenvalue’s interruption of Stencil’s narration illustrates how Stencil’s appropriation of Mondaugen’s story must inevitably lead to his V-quest. Moreover, Stencil is unaware that his retrospective vision and retelling of the story is subjected to uncertainties, gaps and losses which cannot be recuperated by his archival memory. It is not that historical crimes of colonial imperialism cannot be recuperated, but that Stencil fails to acknowledge that the retelling or rewriting of the story is contaminated with gaps, waste and loss.

Stencil fills these gaps with fetishistic reconstructions which are complicit with Foppl’s wasteful, fetishistic activities. The narrator/voyeur describes Sarah in fetishistic terms: “He noticed then how long and snakelike her thighs were; how clearly the musculature of her hips stood under the skin, skin with a certain glow, but finely striated because of her long fast in the bush” (V. 271). However, one can hardly tell the difference between the wasteful fetishistic activities of Foppl’s party, Mondaugen’s epiphanies and Stencil’s narration due to the blurring of narrative frames within which the epiphanies are embedded. Reading as an erotic activity, that is, confronting and sustaining an economy of loss, violence and anguish, challenges a fetishistic economy of reading which appropriates the text. Instead, by acknowledging the wasteful expenditure of the Hereros and the epiphanies, the violence of Stencil’s appropriation of archival sources is exposed and revealed as complicit with colonial discourse.

Maarten Van Delden claims that history within Mondaugen’s epiphanies is viewed as a “spectacle of horrors”. Both narrative and history fail to recreate wholeness of vision. As a
result of this fragmentation and multiplicity, history is presented as “an omnipresent, a crushing, terrifying force” trapping the subject “inside a deterministic framework” (“Modernism” 134). However, this claim fails to take into account how both history and the writing are implicated and reconfigured within the Hereros’ and epiphanies’ wasteful expenditure. The brutal deaths and murder of the native Hereros and Hottentots in the epiphanies are described by the colonizer in terms of a nostalgia for the “personal, random array of picaresque acts” associated with the good old epiphanies of colonial imperialism which Foppl desires. Thus, the natives’ deaths represent “the dearest canvases in his soul’s gallery” in order to fill in a meaningless void, “to substitute the bleak, abstracted” and “rather meaningless hanging on which he now turned his back” (V. 273). The Hereros and the epiphanies unmask what colonial discourse is unable to take into account: its fetishism, sadistic waste or death-wish behind the illusion of an economy of exchange, where the colonials supposedly exchange western enlightenment values for the natives’ natural resources and power.

This inability to take into account an economy of wasteful expenditure is contiguous with Godolphin’s journey to Vheissu. Godolphin is present in Foppl’s fortressed house and converses with Vera Meroving, another supposed link to V. Vera laments about the current siege of the Bondel natives which threaten the colonial enclave. She expresses the need for the nostalgic days of imperialism which Vheissu represents: “‘But the need,’ she protested, ‘its void. What can fill that?’”. Meanwhile, Godolphin, laments further that “our Vheissus are no longer our own, or even confined to a circle of friends; they’re public property” (V. 248). The enclosed “private dreams” of colonial imperialism in the form of Vheissu - together with the enclosed private space of the sacred moments in the epiphanies - are showing cracks, bursting open into the public world when contaminated by the wasteful expenditure of the Hereros. Vera and Godolphin resist and reject contamination with an economy of waste and loss by attempting to reinscribe waste within a restricted economy, that is by filling in the void. In “Imperium, Misogyny, and Postmodern Parody in V”, Stefan Mattessich observes how Pynchon employs parody by what is ‘left out’, not what ‘is said’. He says:

The writer of parody, like the positivist historian, absolves himself of any responsibility for his discourse by disappearing from it. The difference is that Pynchon draws attention to the signifiers of his discourse by that censorship, whereas the historian […] refers to the signifieds of his, or the referents that “speak for themselves.” The parodist’s game is of a different order, centered on the question of responsibility rather than avoiding it, but in such a manner that what it means to be responsible admits of no easy answer, no resolution. (31)
The epiphanies significantly occur within a range ‘inaudible’ to human ears via Mondaugen’s sferics. Like Foppl’s siege party, Mondaugen is self-enclosed in a room, cut off from the world, littered with tables, equations and graphs accompanied by clicks, chattering and scratching noises. Mondaugen’s job is to detect atmospheric radio disturbances which occur in a low audio-frequency range. He desires to detect an ordering pattern, to break the code, but the sferic signals accumulate more waste and noise which mock him and prevent him from finding a pattern:

As he looked now at the cryptic pen-scrawls, he detected a regularity or patterning which might almost have been a kind of code. But it took him weeks even to decide that the only way to see if it were a code was to try to break it. His room became littered with tables, equations, graphs; he appeared to labor to the accompaniment of twitterings, hisses, clicks and carolings but in reality he dawdled. Something kept him off. (V. 246)

His scientific endeavours are continuously interrupted by malfunctionings in the oscillograph which “broke, chattering and scratching away madly” (V. 246). However, Mondaugen cannot tolerate the inability to find a pattern or code and out of sheer desperation he imprints – or rather stencilizes - the sferics, with an anagram of his own name, “Kurt Mondaugen: GODMEANTNUURK”. The comic gesture of this stencilization reveals the absurdity of relentlessly pursuing a restricted economy of meaning, that things have to ‘make sense’ or must have some ‘meaning’. Mondaugen’s absurdist action is juxtaposed against Wittgenstein’s proposition in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “The world is all that the case is” (V. 278) which is similarly stencilized as an anagram:

DIGEWOELDTIMSTEALALENSWTASNDEURFULRLIKST

Mondaugen comically performs a reversal of Wittgenstein’s proposition by transforming such a meaningful proposition into a meaningless proposition.16 The comical juxtaposition of Wittgenstein’s often-quoted proposition with Mondaugen’s relentless desire to find a restricted economy of meaning illustrates the absurdity of a self-enclosed world (or system) that excludes the existence of the nonsensical, or that which does not fit into one’s logical-philosophical system.17

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16 According to Tony Tanner, this reference to Wittgenstein’s proposition, which has been used very often, “seems to haunt contemporary American writers” who use it to repudiate “the very notion of plots” and to leave “things and events in precisely describable inexplicability” (CC 168).

17 Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of the ladder in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to describe the method of the *Tractatus*: “My sentences serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually
The disruptive sferics are also juxtaposed against Foppl’s planetarium, highlighting Foppl’s self-enclosure. Tony Tanner argues that Foppl’s artificial construction of a self-enclosed planetarium parodies the space of writing, illustrating “an avoidance of reality” and the desire to substitute it with “a fetishistic construction” (CC 171). However, I argue that the self-enclosed planetarium is disrupted and contaminated by the waste and noise created by the sferic signals. By acknowledging the disruptive processes of waste, writing does not avoid reality, but exposes the solipsistic enterprise of Foppl’s colonial fetishistic discourse which is unable to take into account wasteful expenditure.

The native Bondels who are usually represented as mere waste products excluded from the economy of colonial imperialism, are significantly associated with the sferic’s disruptions, noise, waste and laughter. Mondaugen’s efforts to detect a code in the sferic signals are continuously disrupted by sudden bursts of laughter, by the “scurrying bands of Bondels” who move along “the edges of his field of vision”, mocking his efforts by imitating the sferics, giggling, laughing and whistling (V. 234). These bursts of laughter occur within the range of Mondaugen’s absurdist attempt to stencilize the anagrams. The Bondel’s laughter and wasteful expenditure allude to Bataille’s notion of sovereignty. According to Bataille, sovereignty is “the consumption of wealth, as against labor and servitude which produce wealth without consuming it” (AS II 198). In Derrida’s reading of Bataille, this kind of laughter shows the difficulty of escaping dialectics or the reinscription of a restricted economy. Derrida says:

Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls abstract negativity. A negativity that never takes places, that never presents itself, because in doing so it would start to work again. (FR 323)

It is at the cost of this laughter and heedless sacrifice in the face of an economy of waste and death, that exceeds logical understanding and is irreducible to recuperation by production, utility or rational discourse.18 The Bondels’ laughter and wasteful expenditure mocks

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18 Derrida argues that this burst of laughter “is absent from the Hegelian system” since within Hegel’s notion of Aufhebung, “there must be meaning, that nothing must be definitely lost in death, or further, that death should receive the signification of ‘abstract negativity,’ that a work must always be possible which, because it defers...
Mondaugen’s desperate efforts to reinscribe meaning even at the cost of stencilizing an anagram with his own name. It is an inarticulate laughter which bursts out at “the edges” and is contiguous with the Hereros’ senseless, wasteful expenditure in the face of death during the epiphanies. It is a laughter which threatens an economy of accumulation and productive consumption. Derrida argues that this is how Bataille’s notion of laughter and sovereignty need to be read:

And the word “laughter” itself must be read in a burst, as its nucleus of meaning bursts in the direction of the system of the sovereign operation (“drunkenness, erotic effusion, sacrificial effusion, poetic effusion, heroic behavior, anger, absurdity,” etc., cf. Méthode de metitation). This burst of laughter makes the difference between lordship and sovereignty shine, without showing it however and, above all, without saying it. (FR 323)

The Bondel’s laughter, associated with the sferics and the wasteful expenditure of the epiphanies, rupture the enclosure of Foppl’s colonial enclave which is also threatened by the “wastes of the Kalahari” (V. 235). The wasteful, senseless expenditure of the natives, the epiphanies and the sferics reveal the “accursed share” that already lies within the ‘lie’ of Foppl’s nostalgia for colonial imperialism. The epiphanies’ wasteful expenditure foreground the literary use of the sacred moment which conceals its violence beneath lofty justifications of assumedly transformative literary moments of insight, revealing its complicity with a nostalgia for colonial discourse. This exposes Stencil’s narrative and historical quest for V. as being complicit with Foppl’s nostalgic vision for the ‘good old days’ of colonial imperialism.

enjoyment, confers meaning, seriousness, and truth upon the ‘putting at stake’” (FR 324). In other words, Hegel’s notion of Aufhebung ultimately reinscribes the absolute risk of death within a restricted economy.
2.5. Fausto’s Confessions

Fausto’s confessions are motivated by a traumatic event. After witnessing the death of the Bad Priest, Fausto IV tries to reconstruct the death-scene by working through his journals, taking note of the development of his identity in different stages as Fausto I, II, III until the time of Fausto IV who is writing the confession. Thus, Fausto IV justifies his confessions saying:

We can justify any apologia simply by calling life a successive rejection of personalities. No apologia is any more than a romance – half fiction – in which all the successive identities taken on and rejected by the writer as a function of linear time are treated as separate characters. The writing itself constitutes another rejection, another “character” added to the past. (V. 306)

Fausto’s reworking of his personalities acknowledges that identity is contiguous with the process of writing his own autobiographical confession. The implications of identity and autobiographical writing in Fausto’s confessions acquire huge significance the moment he witnesses the death and disassembly of the Bad Priest’s body. However, the Bad Priest is also the alleged V. of Stencil’s quest and seems to represent the proper place of V.’s death. The reconstruction of the Bad Priest’s death has implications for Stencil’s narrative.

Fausto IV describes his phase during Fausto II as having taken on “much of the non-humanity of the debris, crushed stone, broken masonry, destroyed churches and auberges of his city” (V. 307). It is amidst waste, debris and ruins that he witnesses the death of the Bad Priest who is trapped under a fallen beam (V. 341). Out of this waste and debris emerges the figure of a prosthetic body made up of detachable parts which the children disassemble piece by piece. Echoing Godolphin’s desire to find meaning at the centre of Vheissu, Fausto is tempted with the desire to discover the meaning of her body parts:

Surely her arms and breasts could be detached; the skin of her legs be peeled away to reveal some intricate under-structure of silver openwork. Perhaps the trunk itself contained other wonders: intestines of parti-coloured silk, gay balloon-lungs, a rococo heart. (V. 343)

However, Fausto is not offered any revelatory consolation. Like Godolphin, Fausto fills this void by explaining that he saw “suffering Christ foreshortened on the bare skull, one eye and one socket, staring up at me: a dark hole for the mouth, stumps at the bottom of the legs”. He goes further by writing:
I detected a sincere hatred for all her sins which must have been countless; a profound sorrow at having hurt God by sinning; a fear of losing Him which was worse than the fear of death. (V. 344)

Fausto’s confession becomes suspect on the grounds that he hadn’t heard the Bad Priest’s confession, nor understood the meaning of her confession since her speech was beyond comprehension. He adds: “I could not hear her confession: her teeth were gone and she must have been past speech”.

It is at this precise moment that Fausto’s confession slips from the grips of his intentions. This slippage occurs at another crucial moment when Fausto IV describes the Bad Priest’s cries “so unlike human or even animal sound”. Fausto desires to disassociate himself from her inhuman cries:

Her lips were cold. Though I saw and handled many corpses in the course of the siege, to this day I cannot live with that cold. Often, when I fall asleep at my desk, the blood supply to an arm is cut off. I wake and touch it and am no further from nightmare, for it is night’s cold, object’s cold, nothing human, nothing of me about it at all. (V. 344)

The scene of the prosthetic body of the Bad Priest creates an anxiety for Fausto, an anxiety inextricably linked to writing, identity and the inanimate. Previously, Fausto II had acknowledged that “[t]here are no epiphanies, no ‘moments of truth’” and consequently “the old covenants, the old agreements with God would have to change too” (V. 330). Fausto had also welcomed the new mode of identity, that as a poet, he is “acutely conscious that metaphor has no value apart from its function; that it is a device, an artifice” (V. 326). However, after hearing the Bad Priest’s cries, the “inhuman sounds” which “had nothing to do” with him, the confession slips from his intentions and inadvertently reveals that he is still reluctant to accept the new supplementary identities he had acknowledged: Fausto I, II, III, IV. The Bad Priest’s death-scene raises the spectre of the “accursed share”, that is the contamination of his identity with waste, the inanimate and the supplement.

Bataille’s critique of a restricted economy is linked to Derrida’s notion of the supplement. According to Derrida, the ‘I’ of the subject present-to-itself in autobiographical writing requires the violence of supplementary ruptures such as Fausto I, II, III and IV, which are disturbingly contiguous with the Bad Priest’s prosthetic parts. Fausto’s denial of the...
inanimate is at the same time a denial of supplementary identities which are now perceived as waste, the “accursed share” which have nothing to with the originary wholeness of the ‘I’ in autobiographical writing. Fausto reveals the nostalgic desire to reinscribe writing and identity to their proper sacred status, that is, to the assumed wholeness of identity and “old agreements with God” (V. 330).

However, the scene of the Bad Priest’s disassembly threatens Fausto’s desire for a return to the “old covenants” of identity and truth. Like Bataille’s notion of the sacred, the Bad Priest’s body parts are contaminated with the “accursed share”, that is the inanimate and the supplement. Just as the Bad Priest’s prosthetic body is broken down into parts which can be exchanged and disseminated, writing and identity are similarly caught within the supplement in a series of substitutions which can be exchanged as ‘devices’. In Writing Pynchon: Strategies in Fictional Analysis, Alec McHoul and David Wills point out that confessional writing is “the space of writing” and that “the practice of writing is tied closely to the events which constitute its conditions of possibility, which give rise to it” (180). A rewriting of waste within a general economy reveals Fausto’s resistance to the “accursed share”, to the supplement, the inanimate and prosthetic within his confession.20 Waste within a general economy acknowledges contamination with the supplement, the inanimate or the “accursed share”.

Even though Profane is absent from this narrative, yet Fausto’s journals are also supplemented by Benny Profane’s episode in the sewers. In the sewers, Father Fairing’s autobiographical journals are comically narrated via the absurdist story about Father Fairing’s conversion of the rats to Catholicism. Father Fairing’s journals parody Fausto’s autobiographical journals. However, what is significant is that the sacred space of writing is deliberately elicited the moment Profane crosses into the prescribed territory of Father Fairing in the sewers:

lack added to the positivity of a presence. “Somewhere, something can be filled up of itself . . . the sign is always the supplement of the thing itself” (144-5). This means that the ‘I’ or ‘auto’ within autobiographical or confessional writing as present-to-itself or immediate is contaminated by supplementary substitutions. In fact, Derrida states: “Immediacy is derived” (157).

20 Post-structuralist writers of ‘prosthesis’ such as David Wills argue that since the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, the notion that the ‘body’ or the ‘I’ in autobiographical writing are whole, natural and originary is no longer valid. Prosthesis lays bare the deficiencies of this essentialist and organicist metaphysics showing how the ‘body’ and the ‘I’ are themselves already fragmented and in relation of dependence – in short – supplementary/prosthetic. For Wills, “the act of writing, criticism or whatever, is a [supplementary] prosthetic act par excellence, the articulation of two heterogeneities” (Prosthesis 28). Moreover, Wills argues that prosthesis “deals with inclusion and exclusion, with the boundaries between what remains and what is discarded, with the facts and functions of the cut-off or fragment” (38). Thus, a rereading of prosthesis within Bataille’s notion of a general economy shows that V’s assimilation and disassembly of prosthetic parts displays what has been left out or discarded as waste from a restricted economy.
Profane had moved across the frontier, the alligator still in front of him. Scrawled on the walls were occasional quotes from the Gospels, Latin tags (Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem – Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, grant us peace). (V. 120)

Profane enters a sacred space with allusions to sacred writings “preserved in an inaccessible region of the Vatican library” (V. 120). The implication is that people like Profane only ‘hear’ stories which are relegated as waste or apocrypha from the private space of sacred texts:

The stories by the time Profane heard them, were pretty much apocryphal and more fantasy than the record itself warranted. At no point in the twenty or so years the legend had been handed on did it occur to anyone to question the old priest’s sanity. It is this way with sewer stories. They just are. Truth or falsity don’t apply. (V. 120)

This statement discloses the power of those who are privy to the sacred as a private subjective space of arcane knowledge which has the power to reveal knowledge and which excludes people like Profane who only hear apocryphal stories. Profane’s entry into the sacred space is a disruptive movement which reveals how sacred texts are impure and contaminated by waste and the sewers. In this manner, the sewers, as the place of the “accursed share” re-write the sacred by disclosing and making public what has been left out or discarded as waste from Stencil’s reading of Fausto’s confessions as a representation of the sacred.

The enclosed space of Fausto’s confessions is alluded to by Fausto in the beginning of his confession when he describes the “windowless” room sealed off from the outside world in the ‘present’ in order to deal with ‘past’ history:

Why use the room as introduction to an apologia? Because the room though windowless and cold at night, is a hothouse. Because the room is the past, though it has no history of its own. Because...as a high place must exist before God’s word can come to a flock and any sort of religion begin; so must there be a room, sealed against the present, before we can make any attempt to deal with the past. (V. 305)

However, just as Fausto’s sacred space of autobiographical writing is contaminated by the sewers, the “accursed share”, Fausto’s enclosed room is also contaminated by Stencil’s consciousness. Even though Fausto’s confessions represent an original document given to Stencil by Fausto’s daughter, Paola, yet the confessions are not autonomous or unstencilized,

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21 The word ‘apocrypha’ is associated with writings that have no authority nor authenticity. It also means something which is kept hidden and secret. It is also associated with the heretical, that is, as something outside the accepted scriptural canonical documents. Like waste, it is the “accursed share” which is left out from the restricted economy of archival knowledge and canonical texts.
but are contaminated by Stencil’s reading of it. Stencil interrupts his reading of Fausto’s confessions and confesses to himself that until now, he has avoided Malta since it represents the scene of his father’s death and also the death of his quest for V. - should he successfully find V. For Stencil, the Bad Priest’s death is inextricably connected to his quest for V. and to his father’s death:

Stencil would have liked to go on believing the death and V. had been separate for his father. This he still could choose to do (couldn’t he?), and continue on in calm weather. He could go to Malta and possibly end it. He had stayed off Malta. He was afraid of ending it; but damn it all, staying here would end it too. Funking out; finding V., he didn’t know which he was most afraid of, V. or sleep. Or whether they were two versions of the same thing. (V. 346)

Stencil’s reading of the Bad Priest’s death gives the death-scene the impression of an ‘ending’ and of having found the proper place of V.’s death. However, V.’s death never arrives in this scene, but is deferred. Like Fausto, Stencil’s writing is contaminated by the “accursed share”, that is by the supplement and substitutions which defer the proper place of V.’s death. In Of Grammatology, Derrida argues that whatever form of autobiographical confession one is dealing with, there is always a logic of supplement, a work of substitution going on: “One wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognize that there is a supplement at the source” (304).

However, Stencil denies that his writing, identity and his V-quest are contaminated by the supplement which the Bad Priest’s disassembly is demanding; that there is a tenuous connection between the Bad Priest and V. This is manifested in the way in which Stencil, like the reader, is tempted to re-assemble the V-symbols as clues leading to the Bad Priest/V. such as: the ivory comb, the high-heeled golden slipper, the artificial foot, the navel with a star sapphire, the set of false teeth and the glass eye in the shape of a clock. The reader is also tempted with the desire to attach other characters such as Victoria, Vheissu, Venezuela, Venus, Veronica and Vera, to V. Even though Profane is absent from Fausto’s Confessions, yet, a reading of Profane’s supplementary relation to the sewers reveals Stencil’s failure to attain objectivity since his writing is perpetually contaminated by waste, the sewers and the supplement. It is Profane’s supplementary relation to the sewers that acknowledges Profane as

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22 My reading contrasts Takashi Aso in “Pynchon’s alternative ethics of writing in V”. Aso argues that Fausto’s confession is “outside the economy of the V. system” since the whole book’s design, both present and past “is all Stencilized, with the single exception of Fausto’s confession, which alone is immune to Stencil’s consciousness or the effects of V.” (2). Bataille’s notion of the sacred which occurs precisely within an economy of useful-useless exchange doesn’t support this notion. In V., the contamination of waste shows the impossibility of maintaining an autonomous or self-enclosed system.
an ex-centric character who is left out of Stencil’s narrative history. The autobiographical journal as a sacred text which has the authority to reveal knowledge is tainted by Profane and the sewers.

Despite Stencil’s fantasy of his identity as “a quick-change artist” in which he does “eight impersonations” of ex-centric characters such as Aieul, Yusef, Max, Waldetar and Gebrain, Profane’s contamination of the confessions reveals how the dilemma of Stencil’s various impersonations is nothing but a fetishising of the narrative convention of “a dislocation of personality” (V. 62). Profane unmasks the hidden autobiographical discourse within Stencil’s fetishistic use of “eight impersonations” and attempted objectivity, but which Stencil hides and represses. In fact, just as Fausto fetishises the disassembly of the Bad Priest, Stencil replicates a fetishistic vision of V. with “photoelectric cells”, “silver electrodes” and “nylon limbs” during the Mélanie-V. story.

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23 In “Creativity and Power” Katrin Amian argues that chapter three presents the reader with seven short narratives through the eyes of seven underprivileged Egyptians in different locations in Egypt. Stencil seems absent and outside these narratives. However, according to Amian, the seven narratives are contaminated by Stencil’s vantage point since the seven narratives are linked to V. via their focus on imperialism, tourism and the spy trade. Amian argues that Stencil’s “presence ‘inside’ the narrative texture” simultaneously affirms and subverts Stencil’s fantasy to stand ‘outside’ the narrative as a detached observer. This reading lays bare “the power structures at work” in Stencil’s modernist fantasy of detached vision which is complicit with the violent colonial gaze of Western imperialism with its fantasies of total vision and conquest (94).
2.6 Mélanie and V.

Mélanie’s bizarre death in this chapter occurs after V.’s alleged death in Fausto’s confessions. Mélanie’s death raises issues of representation, death, the inanimate, the sacred and sacrifice, all of which we have encountered in the other epiphanies. However, this is where these issues reach their apotheosis - with the difference that her sacrificial death, as a sacred moment, is staged within a fictional/theatrical performance called ‘Rape of the Chinese Virgin’.

The staging of her sacrificial death within a spectacle or a fictional performance recalls Bataille’s notion that “sacrifice is like fiction”. It is not ‘real’ but the enactment of a sacrificial death performed for the spectators. Like Mondaugen’s epiphanies, the representation of sacrifice and death carries violence within. In fact, Mélanie’s impalement is staged amidst images of waste, chaos and violent riots among the Porcépiquistes and anti-Porcépic factions, and those who wanted to suppress the performance so that “[b]y intermission it had degenerated into near-chaos” while the police fail “to restore order” (V. 412). The disturbance and noise caused by Mondaugen’s sferics reach a particular climax in this scene. During Mélanie’s impalement, the music “explored the furthest possible reaches of dissonance, tonal color” and “orchestral barbarity”. Amidst the extreme violence and chaos surrounding the “Sacrifice of the Virgin”, Mélanie performs the role of Su Feng during the climax and is “impaled at the crotch on the point of the pole and slowly raised by the entire male part of the company, while the females lamented below” (V. 413). Her bizarre impalement is the focal point of the performance and the chapter itself. It is a spectacle that leaves the audience shocked and speechless, unable to articulate the experience:

A terrible hush fell over the audience, gendarmes and combatants all turned as if magnetized to watch the stage. La Jarretière’s movements became more spastic, agonized: the expression on the normally dead face was one which would disturb for years the dreams of those in the front rows. Porcépic’s music was now almost deafening: all tonal location had been lost, notes screamed out simultaneous and random like fragments of a bomb: winds, strings, brass and percussion were indistinguishable as blood ran down the pole, the impaled girl went limp, the last chord blasted out, filled the theatre, echoed, hung, subsided. Someone cut all the stage lights, someone else ran to close the curtain.
It never opened. Mélanie was supposed to have worn a *protective* metal device, a species of chastity belt, into what the point of the pole fit. She had left it off. (*V*, 414 my italics)

Mélanie’s sacrificial death is inexplicable and creates anguish in the spectators who are unable to make sense of what they have witnessed. The horror of her sacrificial death is not so much that it is ‘fictional’, but that it is ‘real’. A bizarre, violent transgression has occurred. Mélanie dies on the stage during what was supposed to be a theatrical performance. In an ironic reversal of Bataille’s notion of the fictionality of sacrifice, Mélanie’s sacrificial death performs a return to the ‘real’. However, Melanie’s sacrificial death on the pole has not merely reversed the ‘real’ and the ‘fictional’, but also united the ‘real’ and the ‘fictional’ by bringing them into close contact with one another. One recalls that the previous epiphanies had also brought life/death, sacred/profane and the inanimate in close proximity. However, it is during Mélanie’s sacrificial death that this unity, contamination, or point of contact reaches a climax and creates the most discomfort or anguish. Her death performs a violent transgression of boundaries on various levels illustrating how boundaries and their transgression are constituents of one another. Bataille argues that erotic activity is “the domain of violence, of violation” which transgresses rules and taboos but without returning the experience to an economy which posits another boundary or limit. Instead, the reader is faced with an “endless denial of limits” (*AS II* 99) which is “analogous to that aura of sacred terror”. Bataille says that “The crux of a convulsion as complete as this comes at the moment when life, assuming in death the look of impotence, appears, *at that cost*, in its endless breaking-loose” (*AS II* 95).

The violence and anguish portrayed by Mélanie’s agonized moments doubly increase, since her death does not yield a higher notion of truth, meaning or revelation but an affirmation of violence, waste and loss. The sexual implication of her impalement on the pole further increases our abhorrence. However, it is this site of horror, of resistance, which paradoxically offers the reader/spectator the possibility to move from denying or feeling repulsed by the “accursed share”, to a state of accepting and desiring that which is prohibited. Bataille argues:

> By overcoming a resistance, desire becomes more meaningful; resistance is the test that assures us of desire’s authenticity and thus gives it a force that comes of the certainty of its dominion. (*AS II* 95)
The act of ‘closing the curtain’ after witnessing the spectacle is tantamount to denying confrontation with what creates anguish and abhorrence. Bataille argues that “profane life” denies its dependence on the “accursed element” which we relegate as taboo or prohibition in order to protect ourselves. However, Bataille says that this “negation is fictitious”. He argues that it is “neither possible nor desirable for man to be truly protected, to be so protected that the accursed element would permanently cease to matter” (AS II 92).

For Bataille, erotic activity is equated with wasteful expenditure and requires that “the object we desire most is in principle the one most likely to endanger or destroy us […] to sustain great losses of energy or money – or serious threats of death” (AS II 104). Even though Mélanie is presented as an object, yet the reader is unable to regain Mélanie. This is highlighted in Mélanie’s failure to wear the protective device, which is the most crucial point of Mélanie’s spectacular death. Spectators and readers alike cannot decide whether Mélanie had deliberately failed to wear the protective device. However, Mélanie is embedded within layers of supplementary narrative voyeurs who pass judgement on her and analyse her as an object to be appropriated within rational discourse.

Gerfaut the writer argues that the young girl has “become the mode in erotic fiction” (V. 402). Itague states one can define Mélanie through “her clothes, her accessories” (V. 400). However, his inability to penetrate beyond the artifice of Mélanie (and Lady V.) constitutes “a falling-away from what is human” since “we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories” (V. 405). Meanwhile, Porcépic and the troupe fantasise about “the possible combinations” Mélanie and Lady V. could be practising so that each person “conjured up a different scene; machines of exquisite torture, bizarre costuming, grotesque movements” (V. 408). Stencil attempts to provide an answer arguing that Mélanie had failed to wear the protective device due to her love for the fetish and the inanimate.

Adorned with so many combs, bracelets, sequins, she might have become confused in this fetish-world and neglected to add to herself the one inanimate object that would have saved her. (V. 414)

He claims that Mélanie and Lady V. are merely victims of the fetish and the inanimate:

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24 In Suzanne Guerlac’s reading of Bataille in “‘Recognition’ by a Woman! A Reading of Bataille’s L’Erotisme”, Guerlac maintains that it is essential for Bataille to posit the woman as the “erotic object” in order to “figure it or present it to consciousness through the mediation of visual form”. However she argues that “what is figured through the dialectic of the erotic object [i.e. prohibition and transgression], what is seized by consciousness, is, precisely, loss or expenditure” (104).
As for V., she recognized – perhaps aware of her own progression toward inanimateness – the fetish of Mélanie and the fetish of herself to be one. As all inanimate objects, to one victimized by them, are alike. (V. 410)

For Stencil, their love and fetishism is merely another artificial version of ‘tourism’ or an infiltration of death “served by fetish constructions like V.’s” (V. 411). However, Stencil is blind to the complicity of his own fetishistic voyeurism:

[T]he pattern of three was symbiotic and mutual. V. needed her fetish, Mélanie a mirror, temporary peace, another to watch her have pleasure […] She needs, it seems, a real voyeur to complete the illusion that her reflections are, in fact, this audience. With the addition of this other – multiplied also, perhaps, by mirrors – comes consummation: for the other is also her own double. (V. 409-10)

Like the other voyeurs, Stencil fails to realise that his own fetishistic voyeurism has become another mirror-effect emptied of content. Just as the inanimate mirror-image looks back at Mélanie and V. in the “pattern of three”, it also contemplates the reader/observer who is now put in the position of a fetishised subject. Caught within this supplementary relation, Stencil’s reading and the reader him/herself become fetishists. However, it is a Stencilized reading that constitutes a form of fetishism which violently appropriates the significance of Lady V. and Mélanie’s fetishism and Mélanie’s failure to wear the protective device. Stencil and a Stencilized reading, fail to grasp this, believing that one is merely an objective observer, unaware of one’s own supplementary relation to the object.

Stencil resists this supplementary relation and attempts to distance himself by employing psychoanalysis as though Lady V. is merely an object to be determined and arranged by humans: “she became - to Freudian, behaviourist, man of religion, no matter – a purely determined organism, an automaton, constructed, only quaintly, of human flesh” (V. 411). Mélanie and Lady V.’s fetishism is appropriated and Stencil cannot but help connect them to his V-quest. The sacred moment of Mélanie’s death is fetishised and appropriated by multiple male voyeurs, just as Stencil constructs a fetishistic vision of V. at age seventy-six with “eyes containing photoelectric cells” and “a marvellous vagina of polyethylene” (V. 411-12). His vision of V.’s prosthetic body echoes the prosthetic parts of the Bad Priest in Fausto’s Confessions thus showing how his vision of a prosthetic V. is a protective device, a denial of contamination with the “accursed element” such as the body, blood, death and putrefaction.

On the other hand, the wasteful, meaningless expenditure of Mélanie’s sacrificial death offers the reader the possibility to confront the “accursed share” without returning it to
rationalisations and judgements. The sacred moment of Mélanie’s death is staged and fictionalised - its artifice laid bare. Mélanie is embedded within representation as her stage name Jarretière indicates. Yet, it is the acknowledgement of the sacred moment as a fictional representation and a form of fetishism that offers the possibility to reconfigure our reading and to accept contamination with our supplementary identity to the fetish. Mélanie’s sacrificial death on the pole is the ultimate affirmation of the fetish as ‘fetish’, a wasteful expenditure which cannot be returned to an economy of productive relations. It contrasts the use-value of the fetish which passes judgement on Mélanie and Lady V. and which appropriates them within male discourse. In fact, Lady V. inscribes the words “ma fêtiche” on Melanie’s body with her cigarette (V. 403). This act of re-writing the fetish is a form of fetishism within an economy of wasteful expenditure that acknowledges the fetish as ‘fetish’. Lady V. refers to Melanie’s stage name “Jarretière” which affirms the fetish as ‘fetish’:

“Do you know what a fetish is? Something of a woman which gives pleasure but is not a woman. A shoe, a locket . . . une jarretière. You are the same, not real but an object of pleasure.”

Mélanie could not speak.

“What are you like unclothed? A chaos of flesh. But as Su Feng, lit by hydrogen, oxygen, a cylinder of lime, moving doll-like in the confines of your costume … You will drive Paris mad. Women and men alike.” (V. 404)

The inability to regain the proper significance of Mélanie’s death is a form of inarticulate violence which has been portrayed in other sacred moments during Esther’s nose job, the Herero’s deaths and the Bad Priest/V.’s death. However, unlike the previous epiphanies, Melanie’s spectacular death-scene heightens the artifice of representation and the writing of the sacred moment, producing an excess of reality. Rather than repeating the previous sacred moments like a mise en abyme, the excessiveness of Mélanie’s spectacular death does not lead towards a higher order of knowledge or reality, but opens the reader to an endless

25 In “The use-value of the impossible”, Dennis Hollier argues that Bataille’s notion of fetishism is a fetishism which “defines the ‘hard’ requirements of the thing itself”. It is by affirming ‘undisguised’ fetishism, that is, the fetish as ‘fetish’ within the mode of wasteful expenditure, which “unleashes real desires” (147). Hollier contrasts Bataille’s notion of ‘undisguised’ fetishism with Marx’s ‘transposed fetishism’ which analyses fetishism within terms of ‘use-value’. Hollier argues that “the transposed fetish is the fetish that no longer works as a fetish: it has been discarded and framed to be put on the market; it has been degraded to become a commodity” (147). The implication is that Marx’s notion of fetishism recuperates it within a restricted economy of meaning, whereas Bataille’s notion of ‘undisguised’ fetishes affirms the wasteful and useless expenditure of the fetish as ‘fetish’. Hence, Bataille’s famous phrase in Documents: “I challenge any art lover to love a canvas as much as a fetishist loves a shoe”. I argue that Pynchon’s V. offers Mélanie the possibility to reconfigure notions of the fetish which have been appropriated by the male voyeurs.
wasteful expenditure, to a mise en abîme, to the heedless sacrifice of a useful economy, “plunging the spectators into anguish tied to a vertiginous, contagious destruction, which fascinated while it appalled” (AS II 106). Mélanie’s violent contamination and transgression of boundaries, shatters limits, heralding an “endless denial of limits” which is irrecoverable by a rational economy.

The sacred moment during Mélanie’s death parodies authorial notions of representations of the sacred. This loss of authority is evidenced by the author of the ballet, Satin, who had originally wanted the “Sacrifice of the Virgin” to be the focal point of the performance. Satin is annoyed when one of the mechanical hand-maidens interrupts this important moment, undermining his control over authorship of the production:

Suddenly one of the automaton hand-maidens seemed to run amok, tossing itself about the stage. Satin moaned, gritted his teeth. “Damn the German,” he said, “it will distract.” The conception depended on Su Feng continuing her dance while impaled, all movement restricted to one point in space, an elevated point, a focus, a climax. (V. 413-14)

Writing the sacred encounters its “accursed share”. One recalls that Melanie’s name is also ‘l’Heuremaudit’ which translates as the ‘cursed hour’ and constitutes the point where writing acknowledges the endless “denial of limits”, waste and loss. Paradoxically, this “passage from authority” to an endless, wasteful expenditure is also “a power of proliferation” which exceeds meaning and reinforces the existence of wasteful expenditure.

Stencil, however, denies the loss of authority on the writing of the sacred. In fact, Stencil appropriates the meaning of Mélanie’s violent death by connecting her sacrificial death to the death of his father and V.’s death. Earlier in the novel, Stencil confessed that his father had felt like a “sacrificial virgin” (V. 63) during his quest for V. He interrupts his reading of the Bad Priest/V.’s death and confesses to himself that he has avoided Malta in order to avoid confronting the meaninglessness of his father’s death. Yet, the proper meaning of Mélanie’s death, his father’s death or V.’s death never arrives but is perpetually deferred.

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26 In “Sacrifice and violence in Bataille’s erotic fiction” Leslie Boldt-Irons argues that ‘mise en abyme’ is usually used to describe “the repetition of doubling, in miniature, of structural or representational elements appearing in the larger context of the work itself.” However, Bataille alters the word ‘abyrne’ to ‘abîme’ in order to denote “both the well-known structural technique of framing or replication within a larger frame (usually identified as a mise en abîme) and the capacity of his images to deliver notions and fictional characters to loss in continuity, a mise en abîme, understood as a ‘putting into the abyss’” (92). In V., Stencil employs Mélanie’s death-scene as a ‘mise en abîme’ in the form of a repetition or doubling of his restricted economy. However, Mélanie’s erotic, spectacular death which represents the extreme point of the anguish of death, loss and waste, offers the reader/spectator the possibility to participate in or fall into this wasteful abyss or ‘abîme’. In fact, earlier I argued that Mélanie’s violent proximity between life/death and the fictional/real paradoxically opens the reader/spectator to the possibility of risking or desiring confrontation with the “accursed share”.
Stencil’s attempt to reconstruct the history of V. via the sacred moments which are scattered throughout the novel, cannot escape writing and layers of representation. The act of reconstructing the sacred moments (in the mode of a mise en abyme) throughout the novel in order to arrive at an ideal configuration of V. is contaminated with gaps, layers of representation, supplementary substitutions and endless deferral – all of which cannot be regained. Stencil denies this endless deferral with his relentless desire to pursue V.

The fictional representation of Mélanie’s violent transgression of boundaries also contaminates the writing of the sacred which is associated with the assumed wholeness of the natural law of the father. Mélanie violates the natural law of the father precisely by bringing the natural/artificial within the phallus/pole in close proximity, showing its self-division; its contamination with the “accursed share”, the body, blood and death. In *Prosthesis*, Wills argues that the replacement of the natural phallus or law of the father with a prosthetic object such as a pole, has the effect of showing “artificiality attached to or found within the natural” which ruptures the assumed wholeness and “indivisibility of the phallus”, that is, the natural law of the father. It denies a return to a “reconfirmation of sameness that freezes its differential effect” or a return that “rigidifies the oedipal structure, and ultimately represses the feminine” (44). Mélanie’s violent proximity with the prosthetic pole submits the law of the natural father to a radical waste and loss, acknowledging contamination with the “accursed share”. Her sacrificial death offers the reader the possibility to confront the “accursed share”, to open or disseminate the restricted economy of Stencil’s authorial narrative of his V-quest. This has implications for the ending and Epilogue of V.
3. Conclusion: Epilogue and Endings

Prior to the Epilogue, Profane accompanies Stencil to Malta and the two converge on the island just like they had converged in the sewers. Stencil meets Fausto in Valletta, Malta’s capital city and the central place of V.’s alleged death. Despite Stencil’s failure to find the meaning of his V-quest or of his father’s death in Malta, Stencil flees and travels to Stockholm in search of another clue, thus reinforcing his identity as “He Who Looks for V.” Profane also disappears from this chapter, however, in a way which is significantly different from Stencil. Profane recedes into the streets and fades into the night:

Hand in hand with Brenda whom he’d met yesterday, Profane ran down the street. Presently, sudden and in silence, all illumination in Valletta, houselight and streetlight, was extinguished. Profane and Brenda continued to run through the abruptly absolute night, momentum alone carrying them toward the edge of Malta, and the Mediterranean beyond. (V. 455)

This image of Profane in the streets recalls the opening line of the novel which had associated Profane with V. and images of waste: “overhead, turning everybody’s face green and ugly, shone mercury-vapor lamps, receding in an asymmetric V. to the east where it’s dark and there are no more bars” (V. 10). Profane’s disappearance leaves traces of waste which proliferate the streets of Valletta.

Strait Street in Valletta is portrayed as the “gut” of the populace on whose filthy, latrine walls is inscribed the image of Kilroy which had “acquired the reputation of a schlemihl or sad sack”. Its “foolish nose hanging over the wall was vulnerable to all manner of indignities: fist, shrapnel, machete” (V. 436). The image of the inanimate Kilroy on the filthy street walls springs to life as the “Grandmaster of Valletta tonight” and is humorously depicted as a re-energizing force or energy (V. 436). Profane’s disappearance and supplementary relation to the streets and Kilroy acknowledges the necessary energy and existence of the “accursed share” which cannot be eradicated, even though it is repressed. The increasing presence of waste discloses how Stencil’s restricted economy is always inhabited and haunted by wasteful unproductive expenditure, no matter how much he tries to avoid it. On the other hand, Stencil’s technique to “approach and avoid” is an escape, a flight from waste and meaninglessness at the heart of his father’s death and his quest for V.:
Finding her: what then? Only that what love there was to Stencil had become directed entirely inward, toward this acquired sense of animateness. Having found this he could hardly release it, it was too dear. To sustain it he had to hunt for V.; but if he should find her, where else would there be to go but back into half-consciousness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any end to the search. Approach and avoid. (V. 55)

Yet, the “accursed share” will always be there, just as the graffiti and writing of “Kilroy was here” is a perpetual proliferation of absence which spreads like a virus no matter how one tries to efface the graffiti. Moreover, Profane and Stencil’s disappearance from Malta gives the impression of an ending. This ending which occurs prior to the Epilogue is one which acknowledges the marginalized, ex-centric status of subjects like Profane who acquires a significant status by portraying the re-energizing force of waste that is suppressed from Stencil’s narrative.

Profane’s comical hunt for the alligator in the sewers parodies and demystifies Stencil’s hunt for mythical V., his “white goddess”. Profane’s comical hunt for the alligator in the sewers parodies and demystifies Stencil’s hunt for mythical V., his “white goddess”.27 Myths are infected by waste, stories and apocrypha, but they are also presented as a destabilizing force undermining the mnemonic reliability of Stencil’s accumulation of archival sources and sacred moments to arrive at an ideal configuration of V.28 The commingling of myths and the sewers disassemble Stencil’s mythical V., subjecting myths to a wasteful expenditure – but without reinstating another myth since the meaning of mythical V. never arrives in the novel but is always contaminated by waste and the supplement.29 The autobiographical journals of Fr. Fairing and Fausto as sacred texts are ‘profaned’ by waste, but the effect is to disclose and make public how the subjective space of the sacred moment which assumes the power to reveal transcendental knowledge, excludes subjects like Profane. Moreover, the wholeness of the ‘I’ in autobiographical writing as autonomous or self-sustaining, is tarnished by the sewers and supplementary identities. Seen from this perspective, Profane’s parody of Stencil’s quest is not merely in opposition or complementary to Stencil, nor is his parodic status used to disclose and make public how the subjective space of the sacred moment which assumes the power to reveal transcendental knowledge, excludes subjects like Profane.

27 In Fictional Labyrinths, David Seed argues that “Stencil’s search parodies the mythic journey and the retracing of a mythical figure degenerates into a comically frantic pursuit of clues. Proliferation of V-shapes mocks the search for resemblances and the notion of metamorphosis” (87).

28 In Archive Fever Derrida illustrates how the desire for the accumulation and conservation of the memory as a “hypomnesic archive” is infected by a “mal d’archive” or “anarchivic” which it represses or forgets, but yet works in silence to destroy the economy of the “hypomnesic archive” (10-12). Like waste, the “anarchivic” shows the unreliability of full archival memory, yet this is repressed and censored.

29 This reading clearly contrasts Kenneth Kupsch’s reading, who, very much like Stencil, attempts to trace the development of V. as a goddess in order to arrive at a meaning of V. (“Finding V”). It also contrasts Peter Vassallo’s claim that by bringing in the witch enchantress Mara (another goddess) and her seduction of Suleiman the Sultan in order to explain the mysterious retreat of the Turks during the Great Siege, Pynchon creates his own “mythical version of history”. Vassallo argues that “[m]yth prevails in the end for it is born out of the ‘colourful whimsy of history’ and has the beguiling power to dissolve the chronicles of mundane historical facts” (“Valletta (meta)fictionalized” 212).
momentarily to destabilize the prevailing norms, only to reinstate those norms. The enunciative act of Profane’s parody is marked by an absence of authority, that is, the sewers, the streets and Kilroy which threaten Stencil’s authority as an objective narrator. This reveals how the failure to distinguish between Stencil’s third person narrative and an omniscient narrator in the sewers, betrays Stencil’s desire to present himself as the custodian of narrative, historical and archival knowledge. Stencil’s attempted objectivity is threatened by the existence of waste, gaps, and the supplement but which he is unable to take into account. It is not just Stencil who is the butt of comic ridicule but also a Stencilized reading. By acknowledging the supplementary intrusion performed by Profane, writing/reading supplements Profane and reconfigures his identity as a ‘profane’ mode of experiencing the ‘sacred’ which acknowledges the necessary cohabitation and contamination with waste, the sewers and the supplement.

The rewriting of the sacred moment in the sewers spreads like a virus, infecting the sacred moments which are dispersed throughout the novel. The discomfort experienced in Profane’s epiphany intensifies so that horror is yoked with the epiphanies. However, the effect is to open the text to the uncontrollable force of waste, foregrounding the violence of representations of the sacred which resort to lofty justifications in the name of an established authority. Stencil’s employment of the sacred moments which nostalgically refer to past events in order to find an over-arching meaning is associated with colonial discourse and ultimately betrays a nostalgia for “metaphysical and ideological assumptions”. This is contiguous with Stencil’s covert employment of the third person narrative device which is seamlessly woven with an omniscient narrator, but which ultimately betrays the “power structures at work” in Stencil’s modernist fantasy as a detached observer which is “emblematic of violent and imperialist Western” culture (“Creativity” 94).

The transgression of the sacred moments foregrounds another type of violence – a violence which provokes an uneasy blending of laughter and horror which is irrecoverable by

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30 Profane distorts Linda Hutcheon’s notion of parody as an “authorized transgression” which ultimately focuses on the normative and renewing aspect of parody. Hutcheon acknowledges that “parody can also be seen as a threatening, even anarchic force, that puts into question the legitimacy of other texts”. Yet, she discards this threatening aspect of parody and argues “[n]evertheless, parody’s transgression ultimately remain authorized” and “inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence. It is in this sense that parody is the custodian of the artistic legacy, defining not only where art is, but where it has come from” (Theory of Parody 75).

31 In The Visionary Moment Paul Maltby critiques the “ideology of the visionary moment” which is “often validated in the name of a transcendent power or force”. He argues that writers such as Bellow, Kerouac, DeLillo and Ginsberg employ the visionary moments as a narrative strategy to move the narrative forward into new territory, and ultimately reinstate their authority on the representation of these visionary moments (3, 16). In “‘Demonic’ Epiphanies” Jay Losey argues that postmodernist writers affiliate “revelation with economics” in order to reveal “its domination by capitalism” (384).
rational discourse. This is particularly dramatized via the Bondels and the Hereros. To appropriate this laughter is to increase the violence of colonial discourse which can only explain or justify its logic within the boundaries of economic accumulation and appropriation. To reject this laughter is to reject an inarticulate violence which does not resort to logical justifications but to a certain ‘immediacy’ which leaves us gasping for breath, unable to describe its proper meaning.

The staging of the sacred in Mélanie’s spectacular death exposes the writing of the sacred as a form of fetishism which is contiguous with Stencil’s fetishistic quest for V. The sacred as fetish is dramatized in the way multiple male voyeurs pass judgement on Mélanie and in so doing portray the representation of the sacred as an object to be manipulated and appropriated. This of course implicates previous representations of the sacred moments dispersed throughout the novel. However, the heightening of the artifice of representation, its violent transgression and contamination of boundaries such as fictional and real, subjects the writing of the sacred to a radical wasteful expenditure without reinscribing other authoritative announcements of sacred moments. The writing of the sacred encounters its “accursed share” which is contaminated by waste and a loss of authority. Rather than appropriating the sacred as a fetishistic object to be mastered and manipulated, Mélanie’s sacred moment articulates a sacrificial act which requires the reader to actively share and participate in this economy of sacrifice, waste and loss. Mélanie’s paradoxical return to the ‘real’ does not stand outside, opposed to the ‘fictional’, but acknowledges the limitless contamination of boundaries. The violent contamination of boundaries as a rewriting of the sacred moment actualises another type of reading which enjoys contamination with multiple selves and our supplementary identity to the “accursed share”, but without controlling its disruptive force.

The violence and transgression of sacred moments gestures towards a kind of erotic reading that reconfigures the economy of the sacred and acknowledges the impossibility of maintaining a clear distinction between a restricted and general economy, affirming contamination of boundaries and heedless sacrifice, waste and loss. Paradoxically, this wasteful expenditure, this “endless breaking-loose” is also “a power of proliferation” which reconfigures our reading and writing of the sacred, opening the sacred to the disseminating force of radical waste and loss (AS II 99). This is contrasting to Stencil who fetishises the

32 In “The Significance of Trivial Things”, Tim Wigges claims that an epiphany can be triggered off by an object which could “include fetishism as a manifestation of epiphanic ‘luminosity’” and what Jung calls the “passionate and creative pursuit of a theme” (29).
33 Bataille’s erotic activity acknowledges dependency on the play between a restricted and general economy. This is similar to Barthes’ notion of the play between the text of pleasure and the text of bliss. In The Pleasure of The
sacred moments as objects to be manipulated, thus reinforcing and perpetuating the violence of economic accumulation, the productive consumption of beauty, sexual relations and Manichean colonial discourse.

Stencil represses and tries to control the disseminating effects of waste. This is intimately related to the Epilogue and the end of his V-quest. The Epilogue looks back at the past in Malta during 1919. This ending resurrects Stencil’s father and the scene of his death through the sudden appearance of a waterspout. However, once again, no revelation or ‘ending’ occurs. In fact, this incident “showed nothing at all of what came to lie beneath, that quiet June day” (V. 492). I had argued that Stencil’s reconstruction of the sacred moments in the mode of a mise en abyme are performed in order to regain the full meaning of V. and his father’s death. However, the act of reconstructing the sacred moments are contaminated with the accursed elements, that is, gaps, waste and endless deferrals. Stencil denies the endless deferral of the meaning of his father’s death. In order to fill this lack or void, Stencil adds the Epilogue as a supplement to the ending in an effort to protect himself from the “accursed element”, that is, the meaninglessness or endless abîme which lie at the heart of the sacredness of his father’s legacy, thus betraying his desire for a closed ending.  

Mélanie’s violent proximity with the prosthetic pole violates the law of the natural father, by showing its self-division and contamination with the artificial, the body and blood – the accursed elements. According to David Wills, “[t]hat radical sense of self-division, of division into otherness, also has the effect of pluralizing the father. Once something is no more single, then it is also no more simply double” (44). One doesn’t know whether Mélanie deliberately removed the prosthetic device which would have saved her life. However, it is significant that Stencil adds the Epilogue as a prosthetic device to protect himself from the accursed element, that is the pluralizing and dissemination of the law of the father. It is the

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Text, Roland Barthes does not oppose the text of pleasure with the text of bliss. Rather, Barthes argues that the subject “keeps the two texts in his field” so that he “enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse” (14).

In “Border Lines”, Derrida argues that the abîme or abyss is “not self-mirroring or mere mise en abyme”. There is no “folding back upon itself or reproducing itself within itself in perfect self-correspondence” (105). Rather, one is drawn into a thinking of the “suspended relation” of a reflexivity without depth or bottom. Pynchon’s employment of wasteful expenditure of abîme contributes to another critical “re-reading and re-writing” of “duplex fiction”. Zadworna-Fjellestad argues that duplex fiction “transmit[s] simultaneously two ‘messages’” by “telling a seemingly traditional story [and demonstrating] at the same time their own functioning as strategies, conventions, themes, and medium. Thus every recurrent motif in such a novel or short story may be read as a double for the text itself” (“Alice’s” 6). Yet V. eludes this notion of “duplex fiction” which already contains within itself the “accursed share”, a bottomless abîme which does not reproduce itself “within itself in perfect self-correspondence”.

In Positions, Derrida uses the term ‘dissemination’ to refer to the principle that a text can never be completely exhausted and that no text can be owned, controlled, limited or appropriated in the name of some legitimate authoritative source. Dissemination prevents the re-appropriation of a restricted economy and instead pluralizes
penultimate ending, associated with Profane, the streets and Kilroy that acknowledges the endless, proliferating existence of waste, but which Stencil’s restricted economy tries to repress.

Critics point out that \textit{V.} progresses towards death, chaos and entropy all of which are sublimated in the image of prosthetic \textit{V.} Tony Tanner argues that the pervasive images of waste move towards the “entropic process” and the “assertion of the inanimate” (CC 157). In “Pynchon’s Gravity” Edward Mendelson claims that the “life of \textit{V.} is a series of coincidences and connections, all relating to the world’s progress toward entropy and the inanimate” (15). Deborah Madsen laments that the novel’s collapse of differentiation embodies “a decline towards closed systems in which entropy eventually triumphs, deflecting attention away from matters of the soul” (“Vacillating” 36). This collapse of differentiation constitutes the much-dreaded entropic heat-death which occurs when there is total equilibrium, sameness and uniformity in a self-enclosed system.\footnote{David Seed refers to this notion of entropy as a state of “inert uniformity”, absence of pattern, hierarchy or differentiation (FL 45).} However, in \textit{V.}, this notion of entropy as a closed, self-sustaining system is contaminated by the wasteful squandering of energy. In \textit{V.}, entropy requires the necessary contamination of useless consumption of energy in order to re-energise life. This has been amply portrayed in \textit{V.}, particularly by Stencil’s failure to assume autonomy and objectivity, Foppl’s colonial enclave and Mondaugen’s self-enclosure which are threatened by the sferics, waste and the Bondel’s laughter. Yet, there is a resistance to this notion of waste which is feared and repressed to another place such as the ‘inanimate’ or ‘\textit{V}.’. But this claim fails to take into account that \textit{V.’s} assimilation or contamination with the accursed elements, particularly the assimilation of inanimate matter into her body does not indicate death or annihilation, but rather evokes the energizing existence of waste. In \textit{V.}, the sacred moments bring life/death, in/animate, the fictional/real and the sacred/profane into close proximity emphasising their contamination with waste.

The ‘final’ image of the waterspout attached to the Epilogue gives the impression that Sidney Stencil’s death by the waterspout was chaotic, destructive, governed by unpredictable and random causes. Yet, the waterspout also appears in a guise which suggests a desire to reinstate a conscious plan and the suspicion that history is governed by a master plot or a cabal. From the point of view of Stencil’s closed, restricted economy, entropy appears as chaos, randomness and destruction. Yet, it is also a necessary process by which new energy
can be released within a system by showing how the necessary existence of wasteful expenditure is what moves the narrative forward and opens the text to the disseminating force of wasteful expenditure, which the penultimate ending attests to.

Fear of confronting the “accursed share” is also related to the apocalyptic. Lois Parkinson Zamora argues that allusions to the apocalyptic are intimately related to narrative endings. In *Writing the Apocalypse* Zamora states that the apocalyptic “is concerned with final things, with the end of the present age and with the age to follow” (10). The implication is that the anticipation of disaster is also tied to a future revelation. Moreover, at the heart of apocalyptic discourse is the notion of an authoritative elect who are initiated into the secret codes of apocalyptic discourse and who have the power to reveal and conceal, to provide revelation or structural patterns. In this manner, Zamora argues that the apocalypse “presents not only a model of historical desire but also of linguistic desire” (15).

However, in *V.*, apocalyptic discourse betrays Herbert Stencil’s desire for a restricted economy. Like Mondaugen, Stencil ascribes meaning to any code or clue that crosses his path, all which must be related to *V*. Similarly, in the Epilogue, his father Sidney Stencil resurrects apocalyptic discourse saying: “The matter of Paraclete’s coming, the comforter, the dove, the tongues of flame, the gift of tongues: Pentecost. Third Person of the Trinity. None of it was implausible to Stencil […] What next? What Apocalypse?” (*V.* 472). The irony is that the much expected apocalyptic ending fails to arrive in *V.* just as the death of the mythical *V.* is never present. David Seed states that “the possibility of Armageddon which hovers constantly in the background of *V.* thus remains firmly in that background by Pynchon’s refusal to give a climatic ending” (FL 110). In doing so, Pynchon undermines the myth of apocalyptic endings by showing how Sidney Stencil’s apocalyptic discourse and Herbert’s reading of it, is an avoidance of the “accursed share” and reveals Herbert Stencil’s hidden authoritative discourse to reinscribe endings and revelations.

The sacred moments or epiphanies which occurred in the novel, from Profane’s episode in the sewers until Mélanie’s sacrificial death, emphasise contamination with waste, sacrifice, the sacred, death and the erotic. Even though Profane fears contagion with the inanimate by avoiding sexual relations and is repulsed by Rachel who makes loves to her MG, yet Profane, the novel’s self-proclaimed “schlemihl and human yo-yo” (*V.* 1) is also associated with the comic and absurdist episodes which affirm laughter and wasteful expenditure. Profane witnesses Beatrice’s Suck Hour, a chaotic and useless activity by 250

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37 In “Visions of Excess”, Mark Robberds points out that “despite Profane’s defenses, his strict segregation of animate/inanimate and biological/mechanical continually breaks down” (22). This is evidenced in Profane’s
sailors who fought to suck beer from seven beer taps “made of foam rubber, in the shape of large breasts” (V.12). During another occasion, Profane is clumsily knocked off a billiard table, falls on the floor and comes face to face with a billiard ball with a “white circle” and a “black 8 inside it”. The absurdity of being on the same eye-level with the inanimate billiard ball provokes Profane into a burst of laughter (V. 144). His laughter spells out the absurdity of fearing confrontation with the “accursed share”, the inanimate as supplement and waste. Profane’s laughter interrupts Stencil’s fear of confronting the “accursed share”, who like Mondaugen, frantically pursues any clue in order to Stencilize and arrest the meaning of V. which continually eludes his grasp.

The sacred moments in the epiphanies are like a conduit through which the V-symbol proliferates and multiplies in various configurations very much like the prosthetic parts found at the scene of the Bad Priest/V.’s death such as a false eye, false teeth, artificial feet and a star sapphire implanted in her navel (V. 342-3). V. becomes “a manifestation, a vision, of excess” and “expenditure”.38 The inability to arrive at a precise meaning of ‘who’ or ‘what’ is V. is not a violent destruction of meaning, but a way of showing that there is always an excess of meaning which already inhabits a restricted economy, but which is suppressed. In fact, despite the pervasive decline towards waste, critics have also referred to the “overburdened architecture” of V., to the abundance of literary conventions and the virtuosity of its literary style (Levine 60-61).

The sacred moments or epiphanies also celebrate the heedless sacrifice of meaning in the face of death and apocalyptic endings. The re-writing of the sacred moments is a writing which “laughs at itself” in relation to death in order “to be in relation to itself in the pleasurable consumption of itself” (FR 324). The proper place of V.’s death never arrives but continuously eludes appropriation or definition. Instead, we are left with a proliferation of traces of V. which at the same time are ‘not’ V. Like sovereignty, the effect is a “slipping away” of knowledge, an “unknowing” which cancels “every operation of knowledge” (AS III 203). Yet, we attempt to arrest its meaning by assigning names such as the ‘apocalypse’, ‘entropy’, ‘meaninglessness’, ‘death’, ‘laughter’ and the ‘accursed share’. Bataille is aware of the difficulty of writing about the “accursed share” within a restricted and general economy. Writing and theorizing imply mastery of a conceptual framework, so how is it possible to write or theorize the “accursed share” which ultimately cannot be reduced to any conceptual
mastery but involves loss of mastery, “unknowing” and sovereignty? However, Bataille
argues that writing about the “accursed share” within a general economy constantly slips
away from his control. Rather than attempting to contain the disruptive force of the “accursed
share”, Bataille resists appropriating it by “tracing the exhausting detours of exhuberance”
(AS I 13) of this “exceeding energy” and acknowledging “a kind of consumption of energy
generally considered base” (AS II 16).

Just as the “accursed share” eludes Bataille, Pynchon’s V. constantly eludes theorizing
and cannot be regained by Bataille. To do so constitutes a form of violence, yet one cannot
escape this violence. As Benjamin Noys argues, perhaps it is by “recognising the violence of
reading”, by acknowledging that “reading is always the reading of a remainder that has not
been read and a remainder that cannot be read”. The failure to recuperate V. is where “we
begin reading […] as opposed to a will-to-power” (129) and is a testimony to how Pynchon’s
V. refuses to be grasped.
Works Cited


