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“God, hieroglyphics”:
Extrapolating the Third Dimension in

*Go Down, Moses* and *The Crying of Lot 49*

By

Jacob Alexander Waddy

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Abstract

*Go Down, Moses* and *The Crying of Lot 49* share a rare trait. Each text contains a hieroglyphic image—a depiction of an inverted delta in the Faulkner, and a muted post horn in the Pynchon. This thesis endeavors to explain how these hieroglyphs function in relation to their respective texts as well as to each other. Faulkner’s delta will be read through a number of word constructs from the text proper, ultimately allowing the delta hieroglyph to be understood as a two-dimensional blueprint for an over-arching, metaphoric caveat against what J. Hillis Miller refers to as the “performative effect” of narrative ideology.

This thesis will operate from a space that is both metaphorical and literal: a space between the material figure and the figural language on the printed page. Faulkner’s delta will be approached as possessing an over-abundance of potential interpretations, which forces the reader to decipher the hieroglyph via the alphabetic text. Conversely, once the delta’s numerous meanings have been pared down to an effective few, the delta will serve to enhance the underlying meaning of the alphabetic text. Such exposition will also open a space for a discussion pertaining to the effects of narrative from its inception in the hieroglyphic writing system of constellations, through its dissemination via the pre-alphabetic hieroglyph, and finally in the critical mass of the printed, post-alphabetic word.

With Faulkner’s delta properly understood, this thesis will describe Pynchon’s post horn as a response to Faulkner’s delta. Once again, this description is possible only through a very close reading of the text itself—words and word constructs—and an observation of certain parallels between the two texts. Faulkner’s hieroglyph operates as
a blueprint for a “system” that is both physical and metaphorical. It indicates that narrative contains the danger of ideology. Pynchon’s hieroglyph assuages that fear by suggesting that entropy has hampered the “performative effect” of narrative ideology.
Introduction

Shortly into Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, when Oedipa Maas first encounters a depiction of the muted post horn, she thinks to herself, “God, hieroglyphics” (38). The same has likely been thought of Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* wherein the reader is confronted with another hieroglyph, the inverted (retreating) delta figure in “Delta Autumn.” Consternation like Oedipa’s is an apt response when faced with such a flagrant juxtaposition between two systems of communication seemingly so far removed from one another. The presence of a single hieroglyphic in a novel otherwise made up of written words demands an explanation. Pynchon’s hieroglyph, at least, is reflexively examined in the text of 49. The narrative, through the efforts of the novel’s protagonist, Oedipa Maas, serves to explore its impetus and extract an ultimate (if impotent) meaning. Conversely, Faulkner conceals his hieroglyph’s function by infusing the delta with *multiple* interpretations that tend to resist cohesion at the level of logic. But that is the nature of hieroglyphics—they, more so than even written text, inherently carry multiple meanings. The Egyptian Hieroglyphic writing system remained a mystery to scholars for centuries for the very reason that a triangle, for example, etched onto a stone had no definitive referent for meaning. Without context, a triangle refers to any/everything a triangle can potentially represent.
Not surprisingly, the function of these hieroglyphics remains largely unaddressed in literary criticism. Triangles and post horns are not words, and literary scholars have little training in close-reading shapes, but that does not mean that they can not be read closely with special consideration to the context of the novel and to specific words within the text. Context will align the multiple meanings of the hieroglyphics. Faulkner’s delta, for example, pertains to, or evokes: a Greek letter, an Egyptian pyramid, a river delta, a simple machine and an asterism at the same time, to name a few. The individual functions of the delta hieroglyph have no natural alignment with one another, but the text of *GDM* uses each evocation as a point that may be connected, or “pinged” between, using individual words, narrative action, and metaphor so that an “image” of meaning ultimately coalesces. In the Faulkner, the image that materializes operates as a visual metaphor warning against, as J. Hillis Miller suggests, the “performative effect[s]” (207) of narrative ideology. Pynchon’s post horn functions as a response to Faulkner’s hieroglyph by suggesting that a new danger—entropy—lurks in narrative; that the orderly (albeit detrimental) effect of narrative ideology has been usurped by entropic disorder caused by an over-abundance of narrative information.

Frank Palmeri attempts to locate 49 between the literal and the metaphorical discourses in the novel as an extension on the book’s widely accepted theme of entropy: that “Pynchon’s narrative thinks about the concept of entropy rather than with it” (981). In doing so, he axiomatically employs an idea put forth in Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that suggests “production of meaning can only take place on the basis of models” (979). Kuhn’s (and by his embracing of the Kuhn, Palmeri’s) theory further states that:
normal science operates within the framework of a paradigm—a set of partially grounded assumptions, definitions, conventions, questions and procedures. The experimentation that the paradigm makes possible paradoxically produces anomalous data that call the validity of the model into question as they accumulate (979).

Palmeri suggests a new model of interpretation is required when this occurs, one that addresses the issues brought about by the “anomalous data.” Which is not to say that literary text can be defined as data, *per se*. “Anomalous data” is simply analogous to, say, a hieroglyph that defies conventional interpretation. As to how this idea applies to literary criticism, Palmeri suggests that: “Myths and genres, like scientific paradigms, serve as conventional models of explanation” (979). Palmeri works with this idea as he makes a very strong case for how Pynchon handles the concept of entropy, but as with most of the criticism concerning 49, he fails to apply his theory to the elephant in the room. He does not acknowledge that the post horn hieroglyphic is a sign of (possible/impossible) misdirection. More importantly, just because the post horn can not be explained by any currently available model of literary symbolism or any preexisting model of genre or myth does not necessarily mean that it requires a new model. The information required to make sense of the hieroglyph may be found within the text, as well as within the shape[s] it/themselves.

The primary concern of this essay will first be to define Faulkner’s two-dimensional delta drawing as a blueprint for the text’s central, over-arching caveat against the potential danger of ideology. Once the delta is properly defined as such, the essay will establish Faulkner’s hieroglyph as the antecedent (in almost every sense of the
word) of Pynchon’s muted post horn, thereby allowing for a thorough unpacking of the
two hieroglyphs as they pertain to both one another, as well as each text as a whole.
I

“Junctureless Backloop[s]” and “Bright Intact Repetition”

John Limon makes a crucial error in logic when he attempts to prove that “Rider, the central character in William Faulkner’s short story ‘‘Pantaloons in Black’ cannot be understood’” (422), and therefore “Go Down, Moses has an enigma at the center of its mysteries, around which it cannot be made to cohere” (422). While exploring what Rider’s “real name” (432) might be, he refers to the moment in the tale when “Rider walks into the gambling scene (reverting, ‘crossing the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan,’ to his preconnubial dissolution)” (432). Limon’s error is with his postulation that “the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan” (147) refers to Rider reverting back to his old ways. That is not to say that Rider does not do so, he certainly does in a way, but only up to the point of said “crossing.” In fact, the very shape of the “junctureless backloop” holds a significant cipher that not only allows Rider’s role in GDM to be understood, but allows that role to inform how the shape of the delta hieroglyphic in “Delta Autumn” may be read. A close reading of the two shapes presented in “Pantaloons in Black” and “Delta Autumn,” will elucidate a motif of the cyclic operating in the novel. Faulkner’s cyclic pattern may then be linked to an idea he touches upon at the end of “The Bear,” where he invokes a third shape—that of a maelstrom/vortex. When juxtaposed with J. Hillis Miller’s ruminations on Faulkner and what he terms as ideology, the two-dimensional shapes in GDM begin to take on a three-dimensional quality, one which illustrates the potential menace of not only the written word, but of any and all narrative vehicles that pass ideologies down through time. Most importantly, the three-dimensional
model—the inverted delta, the material triangle printed on the physical page—functions as a two-dimensional blueprint for a reading of *GDM* that falls somewhere between the literal and the metaphorical: metaphor manifest in shape, or the figure of the figurative.

As is the case with so much of Faulkner’s work, the hints contained within the “backloop” sentence carry a multiplicity of effects. Each word sings in more than one register at once, which makes Limon’s paltry engagement with the sentence all the more suspect. The most intriguing part of the sentence is the prepositional phrase, “of time’s trepan,” trepan, of course, being a word of some confusion. It seems unlikely that the word is simply a signifier for a (brain) surgical instrument, or a military siege engine, which are two of the definitions of trepan. But that leaves only the verb operations of the word, one of which refers to the act of using a trepan (as noun), the other meaning to trap, or ensnare, neither of which would make much sense did the description, “junctureless backloop” not immediately precede the phrase in question. The image of a snare, used for the purposes of trapping animals (or humans, for that matter), is evoked when the two are considered together, and quite fittingly considering the motif of the hunt which runs (or perhaps “loops” is a better choice) through the novel. The concept is simple; a snare works on the same principle as one of the loops in the shoe-tying process: a length of rope or wire (junctureless in its singularity) loops back around itself in such a manner that it may cinch about some part of its intended quarry. Reworded, the sentence would suggest that Rider crossed a “trap of time,” which happens to be in the shape of a backloop.

And a trap of time is just that—a backloop of time in which it is possible to be ensnared. The word, “crossing” then becomes a problematic. The sentence is clearly
figurative, so Rider is not physically “crossing” a literal snare, which introduces the difficult prospect of determining how to translate such a literal word as “crossing” into a figurative meaning. Fortunately, a snare is so singular in purpose that its presence aids in the decryption. If one goes anywhere near a snare, it stands to reason that one of two binary outcomes is imminent: either one will be ensnared, or one will escape ensnarement. Thus, if one is ensnared in a backloop of time, one will be caught in a pattern of repetition, but if one eludes this backloop, one breaks the pattern and is free of the trap. Rider does not “skirt” the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan, however, he “crosses” it, thereby indicating a greater likelihood of ensnarement. Limon (although he has not done the reckoning of the “backloop” sentence) would aver that Rider has indeed fallen into the old pattern to which he held before his marriage to Mannie—a temporal ensnarement of sorts, but this argument dissolves upon close examination. If Rider were truly reverting to his old ways, a new pattern would need to be established, but one is not.

The old pattern Rider followed involved “women bright and dark,” (134), and yet between Mannie’s death and Rider’s lynching there are no non-familial women, “nameless” (134) or otherwise. Furthermore, the old pattern would see Rider gambling and drinking “the Saturday and Sunday dice and whisky” (134), whereas after Mannie’s burial (which was on Sunday (133)), Rider goes to work on Monday morning before he is “laid off” (142), asks, “Whar’s my jug” of the white bootlegger, then subsequently attends the dice game. Not only is the old pattern subverted by Rider’s Monday indulgence of whisky and dice because it occurs on a different day, but it also occurs only on that day. A pattern, by definition, must be comprised of usually more than, but at least one line, not straight but one that loops to create the pattern. And a line must, by
definition, be comprised of more than one point between which the line is drawn. Rider’s activities on Monday night constitute a single point, and as a matter of temporality, events occurring at one point in time cannot constitute a pattern.

Further evidence not only disproves Limon’s interpretation of the “backloop” sentence, but also disproves his greater point that “Presumably, [Mannie] did not call him by the name the nameless women gave him” and “for his six months of married life, he had been called but had not been ‘Rider’” (433). Limon’s presumption is erroneous. After Rider “saw Mannie, whom he had known all his life, for the first time and said to himself, ‘Ah’m thru wid all dat,’” (134), six months before her death, the text gives no indication that he was called otherwise. His sawmill crew and his immediate family continued to call him Rider, so what evidence is there to support the theory that Mannie did not? Additionally, the “was called Rider and was Rider” line comes a mere page after the reader receives an explanation of his earlier, adolescent name, “Spoot” (146). Such proximity would suggest that the line is a response to the earlier onomastic exposition.

But such evidence does not necessarily suggest Rider has broken free of some sort of cyclic pattern. In fact, “Pantaloone in Black[’s]” primary function in GDM is to impress upon the reader a sense of cyclic patternization, as well as the idea that even if one is able to break free of one cycle, there is always the inescapable cycle of life and death from which none are emancipated.

Significantly, Rider’s tale is yet another recapitulation of the hunt motif. While the majority of the tales concerned with this motif revolve around a literal hunt, “Pantaloone in Black” is concerned, again, with the figurative. When “His aunt’s husband” (140) brings Rider lunch at the mill, he suggests that Rider “put [his] faith and
trust in Him” (140), meaning of course, God. Rider responds by asking “Whut faith and trust . . . Whut Mannie ever done ter Him?” (140). Such questions place Rider in the role of hunter of answers, or hunter of meaning, as does his statement that he “just misread the sign wrong” (145), double negative notwithstanding. Certainly, his walking across the countryside with a dog at his heel for more than twenty-four hours also enhances the image of a quest, or hunt. His hunt is a figurative one, which alludes to how this story should be understood as an integral part of the novel. The reader should be more concerned with whatever overall conceptual effect the story has (please note that as the story opens, Rider is wearing “overalls” (131)) rather than hunting for more concrete, traditional thematic structure or balanced mimetic counterpart to the “backloop” figure.

Paul A. Harris’s essay, which asserts itself from a place “between Hayles’s suggestion that fractal representations stimulate us to reconsider our ideas of space in relation to literature and Franke’s claim that fractals are spatial forms that incorporate their own temporality” (627), seeks to “reconfigure modernist literary form within a fractal spatial model” (627). Toward this end, Harris develops an outstanding argument, one which comes perhaps closest to fulfilling Palmeri’s desire for new interpretive models. While Harris also fails to acknowledge the inverted delta hieroglyphic in his otherwise tight and thorough offering, he does wisely spend a great deal of time unpacking “Pantaloon in Black,” and more specifically the junctureless backloop sentence contained therein. Moreover, he (almost casually) mentions that although most of the stories included in the novel were heavily revised versions of Faulkner’s earlier short stories, “The component which underwent the fewest textual transformations (i.e.,
the least revised original story) is “Pantaloon in Black” . . . the strongest independent part . . . the least integrated to the book” (640). This begs the question, why?

“Pantaloon in Black,” given Palmeri and Harris’s respective scientific approaches to examining their respective texts, may be viewed as both/either a control to a scientific experiment and/or a constant in a mathematical equation, respectively. If Faulkner chose to include a story so seemingly unrelated to the rest of his text without tampering with its original functions, it only stands to reason that its functions are somehow central to the novel as a whole. The story assumes a position of significance. Furthermore, if the rest of the novel was heavily revised, it seems logical that the revisions were implemented so that they more carefully link to the “overall” functions in said story of centrality.

The overall effect of “Pantaloon in Black” is repetition, “bright intact repetition” (144). More than any other story in the novel, Rider’s is replete with repeated words and phrases, the sum of which may be viewed as its purpose for, or at least its function in, inclusion. While repetitions abound, there are some few that stand out above others as central. The word “panting” (143-, 44, 45, 46, 52) appears five times, “panted” (144) appears once, and “pants” (137) one time, as well. The root, “pant” evokes the title of the chapter, to be sure, but it also refers to the act of breathing, which is both a concept of the cyclic on its own, as well as a material example of repetition in the text: “breathe” (135-, 36, 43, 45) appears five times, and “breathing” (136-, 37, 41) four times. Moreover, the text refers to the act of breathing in Rider with “the labored heave and collapse of his chest,” (138), “the steady arch and collapse of his chest” (136), “his chest arching and collapsing” (137), “the deep, strong, troubled inhalations” (139), and “breasting” (144), for a total of twenty-one references to the act, but never once a reference to a single
breath. The act is of the greatest import, which forces the reader to note that the act of breathing is an ebb and flow, a cycle upon which the life engine runs. Therefore, although the text contains repeated references (which shall remain un-tallied here but will be re-invoked later) to words such as “shadow” (143), “moon” (143), “silver” (144), “slanting” (145), as well as many others, it is centrally concerned with a cyclic act. While the aforementioned repetitions serve a second purpose, the heart of which this essay will later unveil, they and others (unmentioned here, but plentiful) serve to reinforce the overall conceptual effect of repetition.

This life-cycle, if you will, is then juxtaposed with the abundance of a death motif in the story. The tale opens on Rider engaged in a burial act and ends (at least for Rider) with his lynching, while in between he kills a man. He observes death, causes death, and experiences death. Taken as a whole, the story may be read as being concerned with illuminating the “bright intact repetition” (144), the “junctureless backloop of time’s trepan” (147), of life and death. The word “crossing,” as brought up previously, then begins to cohere. Rider crosses the “boiler shed” (147) (a repetition of an almost exact phrase on page 138), he approaches the “door of the tool-room” (147). Here Rider “crosses the junctureless backloop,” (147) because it is here that he has accepted that his life is forfeit. In the eyes of fate, he has already (figuratively) “crossed over” from life to death, is “snakebit and bound to die” (147), “bound” being especially appropriate given the trapping/tying nature of a snare. It is apparent that Rider is close to this crossing from the time he sees his wife’s ghost and pleads “Wait . . . Den lemme go wid you, honey” (136). Then, the next day at the sawmill, the reader learns that he “need[ed] to invent to himself reasons for his breathing” (141). Thus, it is not the pattern of Rider’s “reverting .
. . to his preconnubial dissolution” (432) that Limon posits is this case, for that would be too simple and too literal a reading of Rider’s “crossing.” “Pantaloon in Black” establishes part of the central metaphor in GDM using Rider as its agent, but the metaphor remains impotent and incomplete without further exposition. The question then becomes: how does Rider’s cyclic, repetitious time-trap interface with Faulkner’s inverted delta, and to what ends?
At its essence, the delta shape is just that, a geometrical figure. But it also functions as a signifier of something more than it appears to be. One might be tempted to indulge in explorations of classic literary symbolism here, but as Nabokov once wrote of reading colors in writing, “When the intellect limits itself to the general notion, or primitive notion, of a certain color it deprives the senses of its shades” (364), and it is the subtlety, the shades that the delta figure evokes, or pings between, that is of interest to this essay. Indeed, the evocation of every shade of meaning that such a triangle can muster allows Faulkner’s two-dimensional hieroglyphic to be viewed as a blueprint for the three-dimensional caveat.

Above all, the delta figure brings to mind the fourth Greek letter: delta. Such an evocation allows the reader to mark it as establishing two primary “shades” of meaning. The first is as an ambassador of the alphabetic and by extension, the post-literate world. The second is as a sign post that simply points to the ancient Greeks and all the implications having to do with western civilization such a connection brings to bear.

While the first “shade” becomes more important later in this essay, the second finds corroboration in the Harris. Harris refers to the “gradual accretion of layers of time, events, and significance” in GDM as the novel’s “textual memory: its seminal moments [that] echo and resonate with other elements in the book as well as with particular moments in the reading experience” (635, his emphasis). Faulkner’s obtuse (in the angular sense of the word) referent to all-that-is/was-Greek is what Harris might
acknowledge as a “particular moment in the reading experience,” where all that the reader perceives as “being Greek” is brought to bear on the text. More specifically, the fact that delta is a letter also connects the hieroglyph to the Homerian language: perhaps the most important (antecedently speaking) to Western narrative. Generally speaking, Greek is a language—a system of communication—but more expressly, the Greek language, and the myths and stories generated under its verbiage and cultural ideologies, are still powerful influences in the modern cultural ideology and communicative systems. The Greek “way” not only crops up continuously throughout *GDM*, but its prominence is corroborated by the presence of the inverted delta itself. Once said prominence is established, the reader begins to hear the echo, feel the resonance of the particular “Greek” moment in the reading experience.

In the final story, the title story of the novel, Gavin Stevens sports a “Phi Beta Kappa key” on his lapel as he translates “the Old Testament back into the classic Greek” (353, my emphasis). Gavin Stevens is a lawyer (a secular vocation) who is executing an *inverted* translation of the Bible, which is a religious endeavor as well as a *linguistic* one. He goes “down” the timeline, goes *back* to the Greek as a representative of modern law, which serves to attach the underpinnings of modern secular *and* spiritual America to the *ur*-spring that is the ancient Greek influence. Fittingly, the Greek connection loops back from the final chapter in *GDM*, full circle, to the first chapter, “Was.” There (then), Uncle Buck’s real name is given as “Theophilus” (11), Theophilus being a Greek name meaning “friend of God” or “God’s love”, and also belonging to Theophilus of Antioch who purportedly penned the Gospel of Luke as well as the Acts of the Apostles. Again, this attaches the culture and language of the Greeks to the Bible and by extension, to *GDM*. 
Additionally, according to John Mauck, Theophilus may also have been Paul the Apostle’s lawyer during his trial in Rome, which links “Was” even more closely to “Go Down, Moses” and Gavin Stevens the lawyer, but also ties the Greek (Theophilus) to the Roman culture/history/tradition in such a way that it compliments Uncle Buck’s twin brother’s real name, “Amodeus” (11), Amodeus being (a variation of) the Latin iteration of Theophilus, both meaning “God’s love.” These looping, resonating evocations of Greece and Rome, secular and spiritual, translation and narration, the “then” and the “now” all begin to align themselves. Their echoes gather in a chorus as they are pulled one by one from the “annealing dust,” (133) and examined through Faulkner’s consternating hieroglyphic. Still, these are only echoes. They may be acknowledged and marked as pertinent, but they have yet to convey any meaning.

The delta figure also suggests another three-dimensional shape. Ignoring for the moment that Faulkner’s delta is inverted, the shape itself resonates with that of a pyramid, which evokes Egypt, another ancient culture and dominant civilization. Again, this fits neatly into a number of ideas looping through *GDM*, especially pertinent to the final title chapter’s references to the Jews enslaved in “Egypt” by “Pharaoh” (353). The reference to Egypt incorporates the biblical (once again—repetition) while simultaneously discussing all the connotations evoked when the modern Western reader ponders Egypt as a whole. To reiterate Harris’s position as it pertains to these “particular moments”, he states that “the delicate formal balance of *Go Down, Moses* is a product and expression of larger historical and ideological forces” (642). Faulkner’s use of Egypt and Greece is emblematic of what Harris is discussing in that passage. When *GDM* points
to these cultures/times/places, it is doing so in order that the reader situate them inside a “larger historical and ideological” framework.

For instance, Egypt is the primary home (at least in common thought) of the hieroglyph. Such an effortless connection further suggests that the hieroglyph in “Delta Autumn” must be a critical piece of whatever puzzle GDM would have pieced together. Beyond that, Egypt, and more specifically the Nile, was the source of the literate world’s supply of papyrus. Papyrus (Latin) or papyros (Greek) being, of course, the first truly portable medium for creating, keeping, and passing along information. It was the original, material, non-verbal vehicle for narration to be widely disseminated. From this larger historical and ideological Egyptian perspective—that which concerns both the hieroglyph (one of the most ancient forms of writing) and a medium (papyrus) that would forever enhance the availability of writing—one begins to recognize the echo of narration and translation from the Greek moment coalescing inside the Egyptian moment. Narrative, through the medium of both paper and the stone on which hieroglyphs were traditionally etched, is being marked as having some figurative importance via the figural presence of the delta.

There is a cipher that reifies these vague figurative allusions, these “particular moments” that “echo and resonate with other elements in the book” from a “larger historical and ideological framework.” Again, the delta itself lends its aid in decryption. If the delta is taken, in this instance, as describing a river delta—resonating with that one, particular meaning—and said river delta is then juxtaposed with the “idea” of Egypt, something chordal begins to take place. The singular resonance begins to blend with other voices that resonate at their own frequencies producing a multiplicity of potential
meanings (meanings that otherwise would appear to be non-cohesive unto themselves) that are self-resolving in the sense of a harmony. That is to say that Faulkner’s evocation of Egypt—the references to Pharaoh; the Biblical ramifications of the Old Testament as they pertain to the Exodus paradigm; the delta as both hieroglyphically functional as well as materially resembling a pyramid—do not really lead the reader to any underlying meaning in the text. Not by themselves, at least, but when the voices of each allusion or evocation are taken with the others, they strike a chord, as it were.

For instance, *GDM* takes place in the United States along this country’s largest river, the Mississippi. Moreover, Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County is located between the city of Memphis and the great Mississippi delta. On the obverse side of the earth, Egypt’s river happens to be the Nile—the world’s largest river and by extension, the world’s largest delta. Also mirroring Faulkner’s geography, the ancient Egyptian city of Memphis is located up river from the Nile’s delta. A tentative connection, but one that necessitates further inquiry, especially given the inverted nature of Faulkner’s delta. The Mississippi flows from north to south with its delta’s apex “pointed” up. But Faulkner’s delta “points” down, which makes aligning his delta with the Mississippi’s a difficult prospect from a material standpoint. When applied to the Old Man’s Egyptian counterpart, however, the inverted delta begins to sing a more recognizable number. The Nile flows to the north in Egypt, with its delta’s mouth opening into the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the delta’s “apex” points down. On its own, this connection might not seem to carry any profound meaning, but due to Faulkner’s material delta, it can be situated in the same space as the pyramid evocation as well as narrative attributes of hieroglyphs and
papyrus. Taken concomitantly, a triad of meaning sings out from within the space of the delta.

Well, perhaps not quite “meaning” as of yet. The particular moment when the perceptive reader first hears the echoes of an ancient Egyptian delta construct only draws attention to ambiguities. The text of *GDM* does not indulge the reader with exposition on the matter, it only produces a space for query. The reader is left on his or her own to dig into the impossible silt and murky brine of the delta that Faulkner so graciously provides.

Fortunately, the difficult work of unearthing a cipher from the mouth of an Egyptian delta has already been done. In 1799, the Rosetta Stone was “found by a French artillery officer called Boussard, among the ruins of Fort Saint Julien, near the Rosetta mouth of the Nile” (2). The Rosetta Stone is important to *GDM* because of what is inscribed on it: three ancient languages working in translation with one another. Translation is, in fact, the Rosetta Stone’s claim to fame. Before its unearthing, Egyptian Hieroglyphics were a mystery to linguists and historians alike. The best scholars could attempt were educated guesses as to what the drawings they encountered might be depicting.

Although the Stone contained three scripts: Greek, Demotic, and Egyptian Hieroglyphic, it was the Greek language that allowed the hieroglyphs to eventually be deciphered in 1822 when “Champollion . . . read his Memoire on the hieroglyphics and exhibited his hieroglyphic Alphabet, with its Greek and Demotic equivalents, before the Academie des Inscriptions” (31). This moment marked a linguistic triumph for archeologists and like-minded scholars around the world in that it finally opened the doors to the ancient Egyptians and what they felt was important enough the write down. It
was the sort of moment that would continue to resonate with the passing of time, even unto today, when the world’s most popular digital linguistic learning software takes its name from the ancient stele.

Faulkner’s text speaks to that resonance. Of course, GDM never once mentions the Rosetta Stone or Egyptian Hieroglyphics, and there is certainly no mention of translating them via Greek or any other language, but Faulkner has never been accused of overtness. The text does offer something, though: something far more subtle. Each particular moment—a delta figure with inarguable Egyptian connotations that does not line up neatly with the primary American river delta from the narrative action; the delta figure as a (Greek) post-alphabetic marking; references to Pharaoh; a Phi Beta Kappa man translating a book that deals (in part) with Pharaoh and the Egyptians into the Greek language; two brothers who share the same name albeit in translation (one of which is Greek), etc.—functions as a point between which the active reader may “ping,” repeatedly, in order to connect the points. “Lines” (visual trails left in the wake of pinging?) are drawn between the points just as the three points of a triangle are connected by three drawn lines, only the points are materially “spaced” throughout the text, and therefore exist on a literal, three-dimensional plane. In a sense, any pinging between them will draw a three-dimensional shape on that physical book-plane. These moments (points) in the reading experience, once connected, are both figurative and figural hieroglyphics in their own right. They take on the shape of the “Pantaloon in Black” chapter’s cyclic time-trap construct as if to intimate the material make-up of the “time’s trepan” metaphor. That is to say that the trap of time Rider crosses is literally (literally)
comprised of language/translation/narration as they pertain to two of the oldest and most influential literate societies—the Greeks and the Egyptians.

Faulkner’s “time” in GDM is linked inexorably to the idea of a “trap,” allowing the points-become-hieroglyphic-shape material metaphor to be read as a critique of some sort. The word “trap” has mostly dubious connotations, even at the level of the word’s Old English etymological antecedent, *treppan*, meaning more toward, “to tread.” Of course, “to tread” has no inherent negative connotation on its own, but consider the verb along side “Pantaloon in Black” for a moment. Rider “treads” the night with his jug of moonshine as he prepares himself to be “snakebit and bound to die” (147), so in that light, the verb attaches itself to the negative by association. The term “trapping” also once referred to the act of “riding,” as on a horse, which turns the word back, once again, to the name of the chapter’s protagonist. Furthermore, the word can be phonetically read as the word “treed,” which, as will be discussed shortly, has an important (and negative) relevance to GDM, but for the moment can be understood as yet another backlooping moment in the reading experience as the verb “to tree” literally means “to trap” an animal by baying it in a tree. Again, these moments resonate well enough on their own, but require an active “pinging” by the reader in order to arrive at (or draw) any clear meaning.

One point that is clear is that disseminating information (read “ideology” and mark the word for future exposition) is a fluid endeavor. Linguistic and cultural boundaries might conceal information for a time—the edicts on the Stone were etched around 200 BC—but eventually, the information will be passed down through time. One of the edicts on the Stone allows for a tax exempt status for the priests of the temples
(65), and it also declares that “those who are boatmen (by trade) shall not be seized (and made to serve in the Navy)” (65). This is ideology, in a sense of the word. Furthermore, consider the “overall” of cyclic patternization. These edicts that were decreed over two-thousand years ago are/were still topical in recent history. Even in America, where church and state are to enjoy a healthy separation, the church pays no tax to the state. Apparently, this is not a new idea, and if what was still is, one can assume that we as moderns still hold to the ancient ideal. Likewise, the practice of pressing sailors into military service is also a tried and true approach to enlistment. While Ptolemy IV saw fit to outlaw the practice, the ideology lived on in Western culture even two-thousand years later. Thus, not only does ideology worm its way down through the ages, it is apparent that even when any given practice is determined to be a “bad idea,” humans are likely to miss the lesson and return to said “bad idea” sooner or later—bright, intact repetition. This reading of “time’s trepan” is vital to understanding Faulkner’s delta as referring to cyclically repeating ideology.

But the delta figure offers a far more intriguing possible allusion for the erudite Faulknerian. Ihab Hassan, in a wonderfully buoyant conference paper on reading Faulkner in the postmodern era (buoyant, at least, in the nihilistic atmosphere often associated with postmodern thought), suggests that Faulkner’s work may be read with an eye toward fulfilling the privations concerning the contemporary zeitgeist. In doing so, he quotes Faulkner as, when asked if he believed in god, replying “‘I do believe in God, yes’ . . . And the proof of God lies ‘in the firmament, in the stars’” (9). In the Hassan, Faulkner goes on to state that “man ‘writes the books and composes the music and paints the pictures’ for these ‘are the firmament of mankind’ (29)” (9). Upon reading such a
quote, Faulkner’s “Ad Astra” immediately comes to mind; the title of the short story is Latin for, “To the Stars.” Of particular interest is a scene in the story where the subadar, an Indian officer in the motley company of English and American soldiers as well as a German prisoner, replies to the question, “So you see further than we see?” (409), in reference to a conversation about race. He replies, “A man sees further looking out of the dark upon the light than a man does in the light and looking out upon the light” (409). While the statement’s ramifications on the topic of race are many, they need not be explored here. However, the statement offers a third space for an exploration of the delta figure in “Delta Autumn.”

The subadar uses the word “further” instead of “farther,” indicating a figurative “seeing” rather than a literal one, but the text of GDM tends to blur the delineation between the literal and the metaphorical. The reader may look from the darkness (earth’s night) to the light (the stars) both figuratively and literally, thereby allowing the delta figure to be viewed through an astronomical lens. The ancient Greeks certainly turned an eye to the stars. They linked the characters of their mythology to them, and vice versa, creating a text etched upon eternity in the night sky. The metaphor of Greek mythology, like the “points” in the text of GDM, is laid out upon a literal space, which allows for both a “further” and a “farther” “seeing.”

The Egyptians also seemed preoccupied with the heavens, given that the pyramids at Giza appear to have been built from an archeoastronomical perspective. For that matter, most cultures that ever graced the earth have held the stars as either spiritually or scientifically sacrosanct if for no other reason than they represent the predictable marking of time, especially in a cyclic fashion. Furthermore, both the Greeks and Egyptians are
examples of once influential civilizations that rose to great heights and fell in time, which, while admittedly a vague generalization, has great bearing on *Go Down, Moses*.

As to the specific, one of the many definitions of the word “delta” is as a noun for the fourth brightest star in a given constellation. Such a fact almost demands that the reader look for bright stars and triangle shapes in the night sky. The most commonly known and brightest asterism in the shape of a triangle is known as the Summer Triangle, a name closely linked (in the cyclic temporal manner of changing seasons) to the title, “Delta Autumn.” When the names (slightly reworded) are placed in tandem, they reenact the movement of time via the stars: summer triangle—triangle autumn, as the Summer Triangle, setting in the west in August signals the onset of autumn, the season in which “Delta Autumn” takes place. Again, this maps a cyclic temporality as it directly relates to hunting season (and therefore hunting motif as emblematic of the cyclic) in “Delta Autumn,” especially when coupled with narrative assertions that “the fierce long heat of the next summer would renew [Ike.] Then November would come again” (320).

Furthermore, the words and phrases, “star,” “star-filled,” and “starlight” appear ten times in total in *Go Down, Moses*, with three of those occasions linking the stars to the month of August: “the August stars of more than midnight” (86), “where the fierce stars of late summer swam” (89), and “under the high, fierce August stars” (167). Therefore, if August stars and more specifically, the Summer Triangle appear to carry such textual weight, it becomes pertinent at this point to return to “Pantaloon in Black” for further exposition.

Of particular interest, “Pantaloon in Black” takes place in the month of August (133) and therefore the Summer Triangle would have been visible to Rider in his
nocturnal meanderings. But more importantly, the aforementioned and un-tallied word repetitions here come into their significance. The word repetitions, “moon,” “silver,” “shadow,” and “slanting,” occur in the highest frequency between the pages 143-147, or rather from the moment Rider takes his first drink to the moment he posits his “crossing” (147), as discussed above. The repetitions begin in earnest after the phrase, “unbreathing blackness” (143), which, while in reference to the valley’s bottom land, nevertheless evokes outer-space: the environment of the stars. After this phrase, the word “moon” feels particularly weighty. It buttresses the concept of space both in its proximity to the “unbreathing blackness,” as well as in its appearance (or variants thereof) five times (143-, 44, 46, 47).

Building upon this premise, the word “shadow,” appearing six times (143-, 45, 46, 47) serves the space motif as the darkness from which, as the subadar says, “A man sees further” (409). The word, “silver,” appearing as it does five times (143-44), when viewed against the backdrop of the two previous space words may well be read as relating to stars. And finally, the word “slanting,” appears three times, and may be read as the angular sides of a triangle that would connect the “silver” stars in the delta asterism.

The triangle angle is further reinforced by the trope of “threes” that abounds within the novel. The trope’s presence in “Was” is significant to the whole of *Go Down, Moses*. In essence, it ties the Ike McCaslin narrative together with a looping through-line. The word “delta” is really the word “dealt” with a misplaced “a,” which evokes the crucial final scene in “Was” where Mr. Hubert inquires of Uncle Buddy (Amodeus), “Who dealt these cards?” (28). During the card game (another backloop to the gambling scene in “Pantaloon in Black”), Mr. Hubert needs “a trey and there aint but four of them
and [he] already got three” (28). The repetition of the two variants of the word “three” resonates with the three points and three sides of the delta figure, as well as the cyclic motif of the hunt as is outlined at the onset of “Was,” and the image of the dog-chased fox that “had treed behind the clock on the mantle” (5). “Tree” certainly sounds like “trey,” which invites a connection that would seem less than coincidental. More on the word “tree/d” in short order.

Furthermore, the “three” trope is echoed in “Pantaloon in Black” when Rider steps “over the three-stranded wire fence” (133), and again when “He drank, filling his gullet for the third time and lowered the jug one instant ahead of the bright intact repetition, panting” (144). A third “three,” while unnamed, occurs during the dice game when the “white man” throws three times before the dice came “to [Rider] at last” (148). “Bright intact repetition,” indeed.

Interconnectedness of threes aside, the star motif as a reading of the delta figure in “Delta Autumn” may be taken a step further. The modern names of the three stars that make up the Summer Triangle are all derived, not from the Greek, Egyptian or even Latin, but from Arabic. The first star, Vega, which was known as Lyra to the Romans who, according to Richard Hinckley Allen, “made much of it, for the beginning of their autumn was indicated by its morning setting” (285), comes from the Arabic word meaning “falling,” and is the fifth brightest star in the sky (284). The second, Altair, the twelfth brightest star, is an abbreviation of an Arabic phrase meaning “Eagle” (59). The third star is called Deneb, and is the nineteenth brightest star, the name of which means “Tail” (195) in Arabic. So, not only does the delta figure index, via the firmament (in a written tome penned by a man who claims that written tomes are man’s firmament), a list
of ancient civilizations who at one point or another in time reached their respective apexes and have since fallen, it connects these three stars in its asterism. When considered concomitantly, these points lead one to consider the names of these stars more closely, to look “to” them, if you will. “Falling” resonates with the concept of fallen civilizations. It is not a far stretch to link up the “Eagle” star with the aviary mascot of the United States, and the star “Tail” is a perfect homonym for the word “tale,” which certainly applies to “Delta Autumn” and even the whole of *Go down, Moses*. Linked at the level of diction (the firmament of man), as they are in the sky (firmament of God), they could easily be constructed into what sounds like a title: *The Tale of the Falling Eagle*. Surely, such a leap is pure speculation, but it does seem to connect with how Faulkner describes the delta figure, as an “inverted-apex” (326). The previously named civilizations appear to have all “inverted” from their “apex,” just as the South enjoyed its apex in the antebellum (as depicted, and distorted, in “Was”), and suffered its inversion in the reconstruction. But perhaps this idea may be applied to the totality of the United States, as well, as per the eagle. After all, Ike’s exclamation that “No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution! he thought: The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge” (347) foretells a natural “going down” in the South that, as logic and retrospect would dictate, would see itself repeated across the nation, thereby evoking, in a sense, a fallen America, a fallen eagle. As Robinson and Town remark (in their exposition on the conspicuously absent female narrative voices that seem to dictate the action of the novel from the margins), “Ike’s idyllic vision of the woods . . . runs up against a sordid present and bleak future” (199).
Additionally, the institution of slavery is another ideological trait shared by these “fallen” civilizations. The Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Arabs all engaged in the practice, particularly at the height of their existence if to varying degrees. One could rightly question whether or not they would have risen to their respective heights without an institution of slavery to fuel the engines of their progress. The same could be said of antebellum America, as well. The country was literally built, economically and physically, by the slave population. Again, logic would dictate that there is no reason why America, sharing many of the same traits (read ideologies) as these civilizations, should not succumb to the same fate, the same global and infinite cyclic pattern from which mankind has shown no ability to escape.
III
Readers, Writers, and the Arboreal Vortex of Ideology

Robinson and Town’s work on *Go Down, Moses* acknowledges the cyclic as they discuss the meeting in “Delta Autumn” between Ike and the black woman, who is “Tennie’s Jim[’]s” (344) granddaughter, and their conversation pertaining to her (and Roth Edmonds) baby. They propose that “Although the visitation cuts off Ike’s daydreaming about the past, it is a genuine return to his biological past, referring to . . . a repetition of the sins of racism, incest, and child abandonment” (199). Furthermore, they state that the woman’s “is the voice both of the past and the future” (200). These observations support the idea that the final chapter of Ike’s narrative functions, much like the inversion of the delta figure does, as a textual operative of the cyclic motif. The reader is then invited to view this turn of events in relation to the incestuous McCaslin/Edmonds family tree, and in doing so the reader realizes that the entire process has started over, that which “was” is once more. Even Ike appears to grasp this ironic fact when he states, “It’s a boy, I reckon. *They* usually are, except that one that was its own mother” (345, my emphasis).

The delta (as inverted tree figure) metaphorically mirrors the actual narrative events in “Delta Autumn” in that the top of the family tree (the “apex,” if you will) is now the bottom and the McCaslin family tradition of miscegenation and incest is doomed to continue *ad infinitum*. But also, it functions as a textual directive to invert the apex of the narrative, which is to say that the end (bottom) of the novel should be transposed with the beginning, or apex, or top of the novel. Hence, in a perfectly cyclic fashion, the end of
Ike’s story forces the reader back to its opening chapter much as the final chapter, “Go Down, Moses” also loops back to “Was” via the Gavin Stevens/Theophilus/Amodeus triangulation discussed previously. Most importantly, however, one should note that this backlooping into “Was” is happening concentrically, at least on the material level. What is happening here can not be described by the circle, but by the spiral. “Delta Autumn” loops back to “Was,” loops back through “Pantaloon in Black,” loops back through “Go Down, Moses,” etc. A spiral is, after all, another potential reading of a “junctureless backloop.” This spiraling, backlooping line is the line that figurally/figuratively connects the points (moments in the reading experience) in order to draw the material/metaphorical hieroglyph of the Greek/Egyptian moments addressed earlier.

Interestingly, if one literally inverts the title of the apex chapter, or top chapter if you wish, the result is the word, “saw,” and the chapter which resonates most intimately with a saw (or sawmill) is “Pantaloon in Black.” As with the Nile being the ancient world’s source of papyrus, a sawmill (and Rider’s, in particular, is very close to the Mississippi) is the modern world’s source of paper. Indeed, the “Delta Autumn,” “Pantaloon in Black” connection becomes a bit less tenuous in this light. Furthermore, the idea of inverting an apex, or turning the top toward the bottom, may be likened to a sort of “going down” in its own right, which aligns the title of the novel with this essay’s asterism of points.

Overall, the asterism is an apt metaphor for the material construction of Go Down, Moses for the simple fact that, in accordance with Limon’s earlier stated thesis and according to Robinson and Town, “Critical debate concerning William Faulkner’s Go Down, Moses has been absorbed with the problem of whether the text coheres as a novel”
The reason for such debate is clear. The Ike McCaslin narrative, as Limon asserts, is at the very least touched upon, or at the center of every chapter except two: “Pantaloon in Black,” and the title chapter, “Go Down, Moses.” Certainly, these anomalies resist cohesion at the level of traditional narrative, but this should not surprise the Faulknerian in the least. Self-referential inter-textuality is not something Faulkner shies away from. He flat out references his novels, *Sanctuary* and *The Sound and the Fury* within the same sentence in “The Bear” (272). Would it be so beyond the pale that “Delta Autumn” may carry a reference to *As I Lay Dying*? When Faulkner describes the inverted delta “-shaped section of earth between hills” (326), the sentence calls to mind his character, Dewey Dell Bundren (perhaps his most hilarious name in the punning sense) from *AILD*. A dell is, after all, “a section of earth between two hills,” and if it does reference *AILD*, might it not be to recall the fractured structure of its narrative. To do so would certainly throw light upon the chapters in *Go Down, Moses* as functioning in the capacity of points. These points, just like the stars in the sky, must then be connected into constellations within each chapter, and points within those constellations must then be connected to form the asterism of the novel as a whole, which should look something like a concentric, spiraling line. As Robinson and Town remark, *Go Down, Moses* is “neither a seamless garment nor a cacophony of unrelated voices.” (192).

Once these points, illuminated by repetition, are connected under the cyclic motif of the spiral hieroglyph, an outline on how to read the book begins to coalesce. Consider Ike’s attempt to break the cycle of his familial “repetition of . . . sins” (199) through his act of repudiation in “The Bear.” For all his right-minded effort, he is exposed in the end as still harboring (and if not, acquiescing to) his family’s racist attitude when he advises
the mother of Edmonds’ baby to marry “a man of your own race” (346). But more importantly, just when it seems that the legacy of incest and miscegenation has come to an end in the McCaslin family, it cycles back around with the appearance of the black woman and yet another all but unacknowledged male child, abandoned except for a monetary pittance (345) and “The horn . . . which General Compson had left [Ike] in his will” (346). Ike is no more able to interrupt that cycle than Rider is able to do anything more than succumb to the cycle of life and death.

This is the “time trap” at work. Even Ike is caught in the cyclonic repetition of sin that has been passed down through time, through blood, and through the written account of it all as described in the “the ledgers in their scarred cracked leather bindings . . . the yellowed pages scrawled in fading ink by the hand first of his grandfather and then of his father and uncle” (250). In fact, the ledger is the perfect textual device for describing Faulkner’s narrative “time trap” because it indicates the precise passing of time in its narration and via the written word. A “single page” covered “less than a year, not seven months in fact” (252). Each entry is marked first with a date followed forthwith by a narrative action pertaining to that date until, finally, the ledgers and all they represent are passed down to Ike. He imagines the ledgers “being lifted down one by one in their fading sequence . . . the brown thin ink in which was recorded the injustice and a little at least of its amelioration and restitution faded back forever into the anonymous communal original dust” (250). The ledgers in section four of “The Bear” are one of the few non-veiled metaphors in GDM, and as Harris notes, “the fourth section of ‘The Bear’ [is] original to Go Down, Moses” (640). Hence, as intimated earlier, if “Pantaloon in Black” is the least revised chapter in the book, then any new material (or heavily revised
material) in *GDM* must have been added in order that it link up more thoroughly with the least revised (central) material. The temporally bound ledgers (written, dated narrative) metaphorically represent “the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan” in this way.

Then there is the matter of Rider’s names as they relate to the idea of the cyclic trepan. “[T]he name he had gone by in his childhood and adolescence” (146) was Spoot. It was a moniker designed to describe a state of pre-maturity, while Rider was the name given him when he came into his own, as it were. Neither of these names are what one would consider classically derived or properly Christian and therefore can not be situated within an existing model of name etymology. Palmeri would insist that a new model be devised to account for the protagonist’s names, but this is not truly necessary. The names can be effectively dissected from within their own space and on whatever terms their mere existence allows.

Unfortunately, “Spoot” *means* nothing. It is a sign that signifies only that which it applies to, which in this case is the immature “Rider” himself. Rider, in its turn, certainly has its own meaning structure: the most applicable to a person/character being, “one that rides.” Only Faulkner’s Rider is not one that rides in any literal sense, which leaves only the figurative sense of “riding”, much like the figurative, earlier discussed “crossing.” One might posit that Rider “rides” (or as discussed earlier, “traps,” meaning “to ride’) the winds of fate in his wandering fugue, to guiltily employ a cliché. But such a conclusion, however pertinent to the narrative action, seems too banal when faced with such a text.

What if, then, “Spoot” and “Rider” are examined through a sound construct, especially with consideration to the Spoot/Rider maturity timeline? To begin with, Rider resonates with an interesting aural quality of sounding similar to the two words, “reader”
and “writer.” By the time Faulkner forces one to contend with his character’s onomastic oddities, he has already informed the perceptive reader to read his black characters from a phonetic footing. For example, he imbues his black characters with incessantly misspelled dialect. The first time occurs in “Was” when Tomey’s Turl asks, “Whut they doing now” (12)? If “whut” is a phonetically written representation of “what,” then “Rider” could certainly be read as a misspelled, yet phonetically correct “writer.” By extension, the “ri” in Rider could be read not with an “i” sound, but with an “e,” thereby turning a “(Rid)er” (writer) into a “r(ee)der” (reader), and/or vice versa. This approach situates “Rider” as somehow evoking the reader/writer relationship. More to the point, the reader/writer relationship is manifest in a singular corporeal entity: the character of Rider himself. This indicates that there is something singular about the reader/writer relationship. Perhaps the relationship is something of a symbiotic one, or better yet, perhaps the relationship shared is a communicative one that operates singularly from within a greater construct. That is to say that whatever is passed (or whatever crosses) between one who reads and one who writes supersedes those who take part in the passing. Giver and receiver of narrative are merely secondary players to the process that is occurring when information/language/ideology is passed between them.

Spoot, in its turn, is curiously similar to a number of words. If one were to play with the last letter of the word, replacing the “t” with an “f,” for example, one could spell “spoof,” which resonates with the title “Pantaloon in Black.” A pantaloon is, after all, a character in the 16th century Italian commedia dell’arte—therein known as Pantalone—and such theater displays attributes that are unquestionably spoof-like. Furthermore, it is
important to note that the letter “T” in Spoot is only one material line shy of the letter “F” from spoof: further exposition of this point is forthcoming.

Likewise, if the “t” in Spoot is replaced with the letter “k,” (another letter created by the addition of a mere material line, although arranged in an oblique fashion) the word “spook” is spelled. “Spook” carries its own lavish connotations with respect to Faulkner’s text. According to www.etymonline.com, spook comes (ultimately) from the Middle Dutch, *spooc*, meaning “ghost.” Spook’s use as a racial epithet “is attested from 1940s, perhaps from notion of dark skin being difficult to see at night,” and while (again, according to said website’s etymology) the Tuskegee Airmen “called themselves the *Spookwaffe,*” the date of origin is both too close to Faulkner’s penning of *GDM* and too vague in its reported time of conception to be convincingly held up as an evoked echoing of the sonic utterance of “Spoot.” However, the etymology also suggests that spook may be associated with the Danish, *spøg*, meaning “joke.” Such a connection to “spoof” is handily backlooping in the opinion of this essay.

The most noteworthy reconstruction of Rider’s adolescent name has to do with the removal of an “o,” (a singular line, albeit round) thereby leaving the word, “spot.” To do so couples the immature/mature name timeline with the idea that “Rider” suggests a reader/writer relationship greater than the reader/writer involved. Consider for a moment the timeline of narrative as a whole and across human history. If the reader/writer dynamic marks a post-literate expression/narration, as it corresponds to “Rider” being a name of maturity, then “Spoot,” or “spot,” would occupy a position of the immature, the pre-literate. Indeed, a spot indicates a mark of singularity, one which prefigures the written character of the letter proper. This may be observed materially, as in the first spot,
or dot, or mark made by a writing implement in the moment before a letter is formed—the letter, of course, using the first spot as the primary point in a line/series of lines, which in turn form a pattern (a recognizable letter) that may then be used in conjunction with other letters (repetitions of recognizable patterns) to form words, then sentences, etc. In essence, this describes the finite, material (post) literate system known as writing with the “spot” acknowledging the immaterial (pre) literate system that came before. Enter the delta figure. The inverted triangle is both a hieroglyphic and a Greek letter—pre and post-alphabetic writing system—that represents both and neither at the same time while concomitantly acknowledging and/or evoking the Greek and Egyptian writing systems and cultures.

Or the spot may be viewed with consideration to the primary source of all narration, which is once again, the stars. Each star in an asterism may be understood as a “spot” in the night sky. In the pre-literate world, these spots were connected via imaginary, non-material lines in order that they depict characters from myth. Just as the spot prefigures the letter characters of the post-literate world in the material sense, the star-spot prefigures the hieroglyph in the sense that the constellations were the early narrative vehicles of the myths themselves as depicted in the stellar system of writing. In essence, the constellations were the first hieroglyphs, albeit metaphorical ones—figurative figures, if you will, but also ones that were drawn between real, physical, and massive celestial bodies otherwise known as suns. The “spots” are real, but the lines are imaginary. It would not be until the written word appeared with its material lines that narrative would take on its own mass and density.
Taken this way, the Spoot/Rider timeline serves to enhance “Pantaloon in Black [‘s]” overall effect of cyclic patternization. The trap of time that Rider crosses may then be linked securely to the notion of narrative: a narrative time-trap where something (read ideology) crosses between readers and writers. The cyclic pattern of life and death in “Pantaloon in Black,” as discussed earlier, functions simply as a metaphor for the inescapability of the more pressing trap of narrative as begun in the hieroglyphic firmament of pre-literate man.

Thus far, this essay has described a number of points that connect (after the reader pings between the moments in the reading experience with enough repetition) in a cyclic, looping fashion—concentric, spiraling and ensnaring. Faulkner’s allusions and referents (particular moments in the reading experience), which so often defy a straight linear cohesion, manifest themselves through the backlooping figure as well as through the backlooping figurative aspects of his metaphorical language. And inversely speaking, they literally turn the material text into a three-dimensional metaphor of cyclic patternization that implicates the civilizations most influential to modern, Western culture. Moreover, Faulkner implements this strategy using as metaphor the one constant narrative tome throughout time: the firmament. To reiterate, the narratives plotted in the stars are two-dimensional, as if the stars were laid out flat against the night’s backdrop. In reality, those stars not only have a reified mass and density, they exist in three-dimensional space, which aids in reading the delta as a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional reality. That said, all that is required at this point is a final cipher that allows the inverted delta hieroglyphic to be inarguably employed as a two-dimensional blueprint for the three-dimensional metaphor.
At the very end of “The Bear,” Ike hears the “steady savage somehow queerly hysterical beating of metal on metal” (315). The source of the sound, he soon finds, is “Boon, sitting, his back against the trunk . . . hammering . . . with the barrel of his dismembered gun . . . at the breech of it” (315). While Boon is uselessly employing part of a tool of violence against itself in the hopes of fixing it, Ike notices that:

the tree seemed to be alive with frantic squirrels . . . forty of fifty of them leaping and darting . . . until the whole tree had become one green maelstrom . . . while from time to time, singly or in twos or threes, squirrels would dart down the trunk then whirl without stopping and rush back up again as though sucked violently back by the vacuum of their fellows’ frenzied vortex (315).

Here we find classic Faulkner misdirection. He uses the terms “maelstrom” and “vortex” to describe the movement of the squirrels in the tree, but while a maelstrom usually connotes a downward spiraling movement (such as draining water in a sink), a vortex (such as in the meteorological event of a tornado) tends to suck things (cows, trailers, Dorothy, Toto, etc.) upwards while concomitantly drawing air down from the higher levels of the atmosphere. Such contrasting metaphors would seem to form a resistance to elucidation; however, given the presence of the already inverted delta hieroglyph, they tend to strengthen the forthcoming “blueprint” argument.

An inverted delta—with the apex pointing down—is a perfect (two-dimensional) visual representation of both a (three-dimensional) maelstrom and a (three-dimensional) vortex as they are both enclosed and singular systems. Ironically, the inverted delta does not perfectly represent that which it is employed by Faulkner to depict: the “. . . – shaped
section of earth between hills and River” through which the wilderness, “two hundred miles from Jefferson when once it had been thirty,” retreated (326). He is not using the delta hieroglyph to depict a birds-eye view of the River’s delta (as that would exist between the land/river proper and the Gulf, not hills and River), but instead the cross-section of earth through which the river runs—a valley (or dell) from the side view, mid-river. The appropriate pictorial representation of a valley would not be a delta, enclosed by a third line at the (inverted) top, but a V “-shaped section of earth between hills and River” (326). The earth, after all, forms the valley but does not enclose a valley system. It is open to the sky above. So, why the third line?

To begin with, the third line’s inclusion transforms a letter (V) into a hieroglyph, which in turn suggests that Faulkner wanted to use a hieroglyph specifically. Otherwise, a letter “V” would have sufficed. If, then, Faulkner’s hieroglyph is insistently included even in contradiction to what it is used to describe, he must have employed it for another purpose, such as the purposes discussed above pertaining to the Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians and the Arabs. Furthermore, if Faulkner required a pictorial representation as opposed to simply a letter, and the only shapes in the novel that can be accurately depicted by an inverted delta are the maelstrom and vortex, one must finally conclude that his triangular blueprint was meant to tie the aforementioned ancient civilizations (along with their languages, ideologies and narrative vehicles) to the physical, three-dimensional systems of the maelstrom/vortex. To do so allows the reader to reify the cyclic and spiraling metaphor backlooping throughout the text, especially when juxtaposed with the examples of “bright intact repetition.” The arboreal vortex is the final cipher.
But the inclusion of the third line also invites another angle of inquiry as it pertains to a spatial and material reading of *GDM*, one which operates from a space between the physical letter on the page and the metaphor that it suggests. Following the backloop from “Delta Autumn” to “Was,” one finds a repeated use of the word “treed.” It occurs three times in “Was,” most notably in reference to Buck and Buddy’s pet fox, which was normally kept in “the crate under the bed,” (5) but at the opening of their tale, “had treed behind the clock on the mantel” (5). The term describes what prey often does in the face of predation, but more specifically describes an aspect of hunting. A hunting dog will have treed its quarry once said quarry has been chased up a tree and held there by the baying hound. In essence, a treed animal is an animal trapped or ensnared (usually) in a *tree*. In “Was,” the second and third time the word is used is in reference to the twins hunting down the escaped slave, Tomey’s Turl (8, 18). But what truly separates the treed fox line from the others is the object the fox has chosen to tree behind: a clock. In the linear order of vision, the fox is “trapped” (or snared, or trepanned) behind *time*. This point alone would seem to align itself with the earlier discussed backloop sentence as well as with both the figurative (inverted) family tree and material gum tree turned vortex by the trapped squirrels, but moreover its impact may be traced forward in both narrative time and material space to “Delta Autumn,” where Faulkner employs the term’s inversion when he describes Ike’s dream about “himself and the wilderness . . . the two spans running out together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space where once more the *untreed* land warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton” (337, my emphasis). Here, Ike *imagines* a
wilderness (space) un-trapped by the ravishing of (man’s) time. But this is not as it truly is.

The trap of time is complete, enclosed by the third line that forms the delta underneath which the wilderness has retreated. More pointedly, the third line turns the $11^{th}$ Greek letter, lambda (inverted V) into the inverted Greek letter delta, which reconstitutes the emphasis the text places on the post-literate alphabetic system of writing. As to the material informing the metaphorical, the word “treed” is one meager line short of the word “freed.” Just as discussed earlier with regard to the singular line differential between “Spoot,” “spoof,” and “spot,” one small line, spatially, turns the “T” (treed) into an “F” (freed). Problematically, the metaphor does not line up with the actuality of the narrative situation. If the inclusion of a third line transforms the open (free) “V” of the dell into the delta hieroglyph (depicting a trap), then adding a third line to the letter “T” should not have the opposite effect—that of turning a trap (treed) into freedom (freed). Faulknerian dead-end? Perhaps, but that should not be surprising given Faulkner’s proclivity for such consternating paradoxes. The only other conceivable function of the above (non) connection is as a caveat: there is no way to turn treed (in the sense of a trap of time) into freed. As with Rider, the cycle is inescapable. Or, taken a step further, such a transformation can not be executed with the addition of a mere straight line, but it might be possible to break free of the cyclic trepan if attention is paid to a backlooping line: that of the spiraling maelstrom/vortex.

This becomes especially pertinent with regard to another reading of the word “treed,” or (phonetically) “tread” as it relates to the earlier discussed Old English antecedent of “trap,” which is “treppan,” meaning “to tread.” “Treed,” or “tread” may be
read as a phonetic contraction of the verb, “to read.” The spiraling line paradigm connects these points from a space both inside and outside the text. “Treed” appears in “Was,” which materially spirals forward into “untreed” in “Delta Autumn.” “Tread” is etymologically connected to “trap” through the Old English “treppan,” which spirals around to “Pantaloon in Black” as an iteration of an almost exact spelling of “trepan,” which spirals into the meaning of trepan: to trap. This meaning then aligns itself with Rider in that he “treads” in the sense of walking, as well as both the fact that his name means “one who traps” in the sense of riding (a horse), and that his name is a phonetic interpretation of the word “reader,” thereby spiraling around once more to the “to read” dynamic. Staged another way, one might say that one who rides (writes) is trapping, and one who is treed (reads/apt ’read) is trapped. Add to that spiral the phonetic similarity of “tree” to “trey,” meaning three (as in the three points and/or sides of a triangle), and the spiraling vortex metaphor takes on its material, trey-dimensional existence within the material book-plane.

In “Ideology and Topography,” J. Hillis Miller puts forth a profound rhetorical discussion about the ideological causes/effects of Absalom, Absalom! as a means of giving “the reader a momentary free space in which he or she might go beyond ideology” (215). The definition of ideology, as Miller himself acknowledges by his attention to the matter in the opening paragraphs of his piece, is something of a sticking point. Ultimately, his chosen position on the matter situates itself somewhere within a Marxist/Althusserian/de Manian nexus—more pointedly, he notes that “for all three ideology is an erroneous relation between consciousness and material reality” (194). That is to say, with regard to Absalom, Absalom!, “the novel’s characters are not born what
they are. They come to be what they are as the result of the impingement on them of various ideological forces,” (194) because “What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism” (195). This “confusion of linguistic with natural reality” may find its roots at the inception of narrative: in the stellar writing of Greek Myth. The confusion is two-fold. First, mythology itself is paradoxical. A myth is a fictional story that is disseminated as a truth. Webster’s defines myth as a “traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.” At the heart of narrative is a sub-conscious acceptance that the story is somehow true. The earlier discussed blurred delineation inherent in the stellar writing system of Greek mythology (constellations) further complicates the issue. The myths (presented as true, but in reality fictional) were “written” upon something eternally reified—the firmament. For thousands of years, the “natural reality” of the stars in the sky has been employed to describe a “linguistic” ideal. It is no wonder that people continue to confuse “reference with phenomenalism.” Our consciousness has always been erroneously related to a “material reality”: fiction and firmament, people can not separate the two.

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Zizek refers to the Marxist angle of Miller’s ideological triad as “a kind of basic, constitutive *naïveté*; the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it” (28). Zizek goes on to note that even if *naïveté* is removed from the question of ideological influence on the subject (what he would term a “cynical subject”), ideology still confuses
the subject: “The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological
mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask” (29). In short,
ideology is so powerful a construct that even when a subject is aware of his/her
subjugation to it, s/he willingly remains partial to the ideological influences, which makes
what Faulkner is doing (according to Miller) in Absalom, Absalom!, perhaps about as
effective as Boon hammering at the breach of his gun underneath the vortex of squirrels.

And what Miller suggests Faulkner is attempting in AA! is recapitulated in GDM.
In AA!, the characters’
erroneous assumptions about race, gender, and class have prevented them
from understanding the real material conditions of their lives and have
brought on their own suffering. Worst of all, these ideological errors are
shown in a series of eloquent formulations to be passed from generation to
generation, from person to person, by that most ineradicable of human
habits: storytelling (198-99).

Again, Ike’s ledgers function as a perfect representation of this idea.

Storytelling is an eradicable human habit that passes ideology down from one
generation to the next. When aligned with the Rosetta Stone paradigm, one might even
surmise that ideology passes between languages/cultures as well as through time. All are
implicated in the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan, even Ike, the cynical subject
who repudiated his inheritance in hopes of breaking the cycle of sin represented by his
family’s bloodline. There seems to be no way of turning “treed” into “freed.”

Which brings this essay back to the three-dimensional vortex. The backlooping
line is Escheresque, junctureless in that it has no discernable beginning or end. This is in
direct contrast to the single line that might be used to turn a “T” into an “F,” which begins and ends in a distinct material space. The difference is temporal. Faulkner’s vortex spins through time *ad infinitum*, while the singular line of the letter is completed in a finite space/time. This is the caveat earlier intimated. First came the pre-literate “spot” as reified in the singular star. As narration infiltrated the sky-space, finite, imaginary spatial lines were drawn between spots to depict a character from narration, but with the entirety of said narration contained within the space-hieroglyph/character figure. From there storytelling fell into the post-literate age where stories and their inherent, unintentional (but maybe not always so unintentional) ideologies thrived like hidden cancers (no stellar pun intended) on the etched stone or papyrus that became so easily disseminated. This may also be viewed as the material gestation of narrative. Materially inseminated in the firmament, narrative eventually grew written lines with their own mass. These lines were disseminated on papyrus and even more mass was added to the overall density of narration as a whole. This is the reader/writer relationship actualized, the transmogrifying moment when the finite and massless lines drawn in the sky were overcome by the infinite spiral created by the density of the written word and its ideological effects—the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan as depicted by the inverted delta as vortex.

Imagine for a moment the great extraterrestrial vortex of singularities—the black holes of space. Such an irreversible cosmic event is not always so. It takes a tipping point of gravity/density for a rift in space-time to occur, but once the singularity achieves critical mass, it can not be undone and anything within its reach is consumed, is passed through the black hole and, theoretically, “crosses” over to another dimension when it exits the black hole’s counterpart—the white hole. Once storytelling became writing, a
similar event occurred. The finite lines of the written character (letter) are consumed by an ideological vortex from which there is no escape. Ideology was sluiced through the vor-textual construct, “crossing” through time and space to be delivered to unsuspecting readers/writers. Just as Miller states about *AA!*, “On the one hand, the novel may give knowledge about ideology that might help liberate us from it. On the other hand, the novel may have an irresistible performative effect that goes against that knowledge” (207). As with *Absalom, Absalom!*, so with *Go Down, Moses*. Without the inverted delta, one would be hard pressed to align anything from the text with the theme of ideology, at least under the auspices of some kind of unity. But Faulkner tries. He gives the reader the means by which to suss out his reproach of the ideological effects of narrative. That is the function of the delta, to impress upon the reader that what happens two-dimensionally within the text has a reified effect on the reader: three-dimensional in that ideological effects occur on the three-dimensional plane of reality. Consider the caveat an inversion. The ancients had little to no idea that the “spots” they used to draw their two-dimensional narratives were real, existed three-dimensionally in space. The delta informs the modern that s/he has little to no idea that two-dimensional narrative has ideological effects on his/her three-dimensional reality. With both situations, a confusion of “reference with phenomenalism” occurs.

Faulkner has given the reader a simple *drawing* of an incredibly complex metaphor. More importantly, the drawing he provides is one of the most common and pertinent shapes known to mankind. The triangle has its physical connotation: that of the wedge, which is one of the six classical simple machines. Metaphorically, this once again places the inverted delta in the realm of the post-Archimedean Greek Philosophers who
calculated the mechanical advantage of simple machines such as the wedge through the geometry of its shape. But, taken this way, the delta also speaks to a human fundamental. Where would human beings be without the wedge? They could no more do without that simple shape than they could without their ideologies, would be one way to answer that question. The two are connected through their inevitabilities. But even if the text of *GDM* is using the figure of the inverted delta in all its physical and metaphorical meanings, if the text holds up that one, vulgar doodle to elicit a resonance pertaining to every multiple meaning that the shape can bring to the mind in order to illuminate the inescapable vortex of ideology in (especially) written narrative as a caveat against falling victim to said ideologies, there is always the matter of an “irresistible performative effect” with which to contend. Even if one is aware of an approaching event horizon, can one escape a black hole?

Miller asks a similar question when he inquires, “Does reading *Absalom, Absalom!* free us from ideology or only imbed us more inextricably with it” (196)? His answer is a careful one. He avers that: “Ideological presuppositions have a stubborn recalcitrance. They tend to form themselves again even when we think they have been abolished. Nevertheless, *Absalom, Absalom!* gives the reader a momentary free space in which he or she might go beyond ideology . . . a new space within which decision and action are possible” (215). But Miller’s is an optimistic stance compared to what Faulkner’s would appear to be. Quentin’s obsession with shedding his family’s ideology eventually culminates with his own suicide. Ike approaches his own death with the knowledge that, no matter his most sincere efforts of repudiation and abstinence from procreation, his family’s miscegenation has already continued into a future he will have
no part in—a future with yet another World War to be fought by the young, a future of ravaged wilderness, a future of machines. And then there is “Boon, the plebeian” (213), who for all his loyalty and efforts “missed [old Ben] five times” (216) and who ultimately sits underneath the inexorable vortex of the gum tree, hammering away at his impotent tool. Poor Boon can not even manage to triumph over one small squirrel. He has no ability to change the state of the vortex in even the smallest fashion. Whatever Faulkner’s actual position on the subject, it seems his characters can not escape the vortex of ideology any more than Rider could escape the life-cycle, and by extension, any more than readers/writers can escape the ideologies that cross between them.
So if Faulkner’s delta functions as a material drawing of an immaterial metaphor in such a way that it aids in the metaphor’s decryption, how does Pynchon’s post horn interface with his text? In one sense, it operates in a contrary fashion. The delta, for example, is a primordial shape. Its very simplicity allows its attachment to an almost infinite number of meanings, which is exactly how the text of *GDM* uses it. In essence, its ambiguities allow all the aforementioned connections to be made in order for the reader to draw the text’s metaphorical conclusions. The post horn, by contrast, is anything but basic. It is a (relatively) complex drawing that describes a very specific and basic metaphor: entropy. At its most fundamental level, entropy can be defined as a measurement of disorder within a closed system, be it thermodynamic or informational. The muted post horn is an elegant depiction of both systems. A horn is a communicative device, one that issues information either in the form of musical information or as a signaling device used to transmit information to, say, military units over distances. A mute placed in the bell of a horn would certainly facilitate a loss of the communicated information and an increase in informational disorder. The disorder is caused by the physical space of the mute through which the sound-carrying air must travel. A specific amount and “quality” of energy (breath and embouchure) is required to communicate the intended information, but the enclosure of the mute causes the intended information to become confused, or diluted, thereby indicating an entropy of information. More energy
would be required to overcome this disorder because the horn is also a physical system that requires the energy of breath. The physical energy needed to produce a sound increases in proportion to the extra space of a mute placed in the bell, thereby indicating an entropy in the physical sense. In other words, the orderly flow of breath needed to produce a clear, unconfused tone is disrupted by the mute. These principles of entropy are intentionally simplistic in their scope as it is the opinion of this essay that, at least at this point in the text’s critical history, any further, in-depth discussion of entropy as it pertains to *The Crying of Lot 49* would be superfluous.

What is more important than scientific explanation at this time is an idea proposed by John Nefastis as he explains entropy to Oedipia before she attempts to operate his Machine. He suggests that: “Entropy is a figure of speech, then . . . a metaphor” (85). Of course, Palmeri argues that because Nefastis “wore a shirt on various Polynesian themes and dating from the Truman administration,” (84) “Nefastis nostalgically projects himself back into the fifties, both in his dress and in his mental models” (982). Palmeri is stating that Nefastis incorrectly understands entropy, and while this is fundamentally correct, it that does not change the fact that Pynchon only gives the reader the “outdated” (983) definition of entropy, thereby allowing it to be used as metaphor. This erroneous use of entropy does not necessarily disrupt Palmeri’s conclusion, however, that “Deciding between the two meanings of entropy [physical/informational] may be less important than recognizing the complementarity to which they point” (983). This essay, then, shall choose to view entropy from within its given realm of metaphor as well as from within the reified realm of the material hieroglyphic on the page. Not from between the literal and the metaphorical, but from within both.
Spiraling back to Faulkner, the delta in *GDM* “breaks the fourth wall,” is materially self-reflexive in that it functions as a bridge between the writer and the reader (Rider). It operates *outside* of the narrative from the material space on the page. A case could be made that Ike is the one imagining the shape, but the text only indicates that “He watched [the wilderness] . . . retreating southward through this inverted-apex, this [ ] -shaped section of earth” (326). Faulkner only describes Ike watching the wilderness over a length of time. There is no sure indication that Ike himself described the figure and nowhere in the text does any character or narrative action acknowledge the hieroglyph.

Of course, the post horn is also self-reflexive to a point. The first time it is drawn on the page, Pynchon addresses the reader *almost* (if it is possible to say this) in the second person by describing it as “a symbol she’d never seen before, a loop, a triangle and trapezoid, thus: [muted post horn]” (38). The “thus” is self-reflexive. It draws the reader’s attention to the post horn via the direct agency of the author, but that is not the crux of the difference between the two. The difference is the word “she’d.” Pynchon lets the reader in on what the hieroglyph looks like, but it is also operating *within* the narrative and to the knowledge of the protagonist, Oedipa Maas.

This difference is crucial to understanding how Pynchon’s hieroglyph functions. On the surface, it describes what Palmeri asserts, that: “To produce a text that signifies neither literally nor metaphorically, Pynchon establishes competing versions of the concept of entropy” (980). The post horn describes the literal (physical horn system) as well as the metaphorical (system of communication/information) within the same material space (hieroglyph). It would *seem* that the hieroglyph describes the central metaphor, just like Faulkner’s ultimately does, and the reader can mark it as doing so and
move on, but the narrative action does not relinquish the horn so easily. The post horn becomes Oedipa’s great white whale. It almost consumes her in her quest to elicit its meaning, to unearth its secrets. As she herself thinks after finding “the image of the post horn all but saturating the Bay Area,” “She might as well be in the cold and sweatless meathooks of a psychosis” (107). Indeed, finding the hieroglyphic post horn “On the latrine wall” (38) in the ladies room of The Scope, “began, for Oedipa, the languid, sinister blooming of The Tristero” (39-40). Without it, Oedipa would have simply executed Pierce Inverarity’s will, and there would be no story from which to draw the overarching metaphor of entropy.

As earlier cited, Palmeri states that: “Pynchon’s narrative thinks about the concept of entropy rather than with it” (981), but this is not necessarily so. Consider for a moment that Palmeri also states:

entropy of information always carries a negative sign. On this understanding, heat and information are correlates, and so are the two kinds of entropy, both being expressions of uncertainty and lack of information. In a closed system, an increase in information will equal but not ‘offset’ a decrease in either kind of entropy, because information is the negative of entropy (983).

If this statement is applied to the post horn with consideration to the hieroglyph as being a form of information, then Palmeri’s first assertion that 49 thinks about entropy rather than with it loses some truth. The proliferation of the post horn image as Oedipa traverses the Bay Area (the addition of information to the closed system of the narrative) rightly
does nothing to offset the entropy of the system. In other words, “more” post horn only equates to more “uncertainty.” Or as Lyons and Franklin phrase it:

In the broader context of the acquisition of information we, like Maxwell’s demon, pay for the order we impose on experience. For the gain in order arranged by the process never quite balances the disorder in the environment of the subject acquiring information by the endeavor. There is always a net loss of order in the total experience of the knower (198).

Pynchon’s hieroglyph actually causes narrative entropy, not only for Oedipa, but for the reader as well. Hence, Pynchon’s text does think *with* the concept of entropy, and not just *about* it.

Palmeri covers quite a bit of ground in his work on 49, and some of it seems very familiar. In his ruminations on how “Pynchon often employs puns to elude the binary opposition of literal and metaphorical,” (985) he discusses the way “Allegory reconciles characters and actions with an unseen, abstract world. Ironies and puns also imply a world beyond what is said . . . use the double meanings of wordplay to imply an unsaid world of significance” (985). Palmeri is referring to something that sounds quite a bit like Faulkner’s evocations and resonances. Just as the delta evokes Greece and Egypt, the Summer Triangle and the vortex without actually “naming” them, “in assigning the most important names in the novel—Saint Nacrissus, Tristero, Oedipa—Pynchon eludes the constraints of allegorical coding through punlike allusions to competing paradigms” (985). Palmeri goes on to evidence, “On the subject of narcissism, for example, the text offers three models of interpretation: late classical, Christian, and Freudian” (985). These paradigms compete, yes, but they also allow the reader to mark the concept of narcissism
as significant. Moreover, the fact that they all maintain their effect on the culture of both the text and the reader is of utmost significance. The competing paradigms may be viewed as competing ideologies that are passed down through literature, religion, and the soft science of psychoanalytic theory.

Palmeri clarifies further:

Like the meanings of St. Narcissus and many ancient Egyptian words, the phenomena signified by Tristero prove to be multiple and antithetical. The word itself connotes both a plot containing sinister adventure (‘trysts’) and one that elicits melancholic regret (‘tristia’) . . . As a kind of narrative pun, ‘Tristero’ does not have a determinate meaning ‘either literally or as metaphor,’ but it does, like ‘St. Narcissus,’ point to certain meanings. Puns clear out linguistic space in which to express unauthorized, repressed meanings (988, my emphasis).

This is the Faulkner strategy in full effect. Pynchon’s text uses puns to “point to certain [unauthorized, repressed] meanings” just like Faulkner uses wordplay like Rider/Spoot to pun on the ideological cross-over between readers and writers throughout time, and “Theophilus” and “Amodeus” to point to the Greek/Latin linguistic/translative/narrative/ideological effects that those cultures/languages continue to have on Western civilization thousands of years later.

And if Pynchon is implicating Ovid through via “San Narcisco” (13) and “‘Echo Courts,’” (16) Sophocles through “Oedipa,” (1) and Nabokov through references to “all these Humbert Humbert cats,” (120) the question then becomes, who else is he
implicating and why? The first clue should not be hard to miss. Someone drew a muted post horn hieroglyph on page 38. Perhaps a dismantling of the image is in order.

As referenced earlier, Pynchon does most of the dismantling for the reader using verbiage that seems no mere coincidence: “a loop, triangle and trapezoid, thus:” (38). Pynchon might have used a verbal description of a single, muted post horn image: “A stick figure of a muted brass horn,” or “a simplistic drawing of a bugle with a mute in its bell.” Instead, he chooses to first describe the drawing using words that indicate its individual geometric shape components, unnecessarily it seems, because he immediately follows his alphabetic description with a hieroglyphic figure. So why the words? Why the hieroglyph? Why both?

The key is in the plural of hieroglyphic. Webster’s defines the noun function of the word as “the picture script of the ancient Egyptian priesthood—often used in pl. but sing. or plural in constr.” Oedipa uses the “s” constructed plural of the word, “hieroglyphics,” which indicates that Oedipa instantly understands that the singular image of the post horn is made up of a number of individual hieroglyphs. Authorial intent aside, the words Pynchon chooses to describe these individual hieroglyphs resonate on a Faulknerian frequency. A “loop,” for example is only one way to describe the first shape component of the post horn. The actual term for that section of the post horn is “bore.” “Loop” only describes the shape of the bore, and therefore, the shape of a loop itself is what becomes pertinent to the reader. Furthermore, “loop” only describes the general shape, while “backloop” is more to the specific shape as the bore travels forward, then loops back, then forward again. Taken alone, this use of the word “loop” does not necessarily evoke GDM, although anyone who has spent time unpacking the
“junctureless backloop of time’s trepan” sentence in the novel would be hard pressed not to linger over the word. However, taken concomitantly with the following word, “triangle,” the perceptive reader of both novels must pause for a more thorough evaluation. In the Faulkner, as discussed above, the backloop and the triangle are the two shapes most important to unveiling the hieroglyphic metaphor of the vortex as expressed by the printed image of a triangle in the middle of written text. Fast-forward twenty-five years and those two shapes appear again, described in alphabetic writing, directly above another printed image in the middle of written text. It is as if the spiral begun in GDM did not end there, but continued its parabolic arc into the future just as its central metaphor describes the passing down of ideologies: past into future.

One might ask, at this juncture, if the presence of the trapezoid in Pynchon’s shape litany collapses the allusion. On the surface it would seem that is does. There is no mention of a trapezoid in GDM, no reference to that shape either literally or metaphorically. That leaves only the word itself to unpack for clues.

The word “trapezoid” contains, most importantly to this discussion, the word “trap.” This word aligns neatly with the idea of a trepan as a trap, and moreover, a time-trap. It also pings between Faulkner’s trepan and the concept of the horn as a musical instrument that “keeps” time. The words pun on each other in a space between the two texts, neither literally nor metaphorically. If an instrument “keeps” time, in a sense it “traps” it, thereby establishing a “particular moment in the reading experience” in the punning sense. The word “trap” also connects to Rider in the earlier discussed function of “trapping” being a word for “riding,” “trap” being derived from the OE, treppan, and “treed” being a form of trapping. Such connections (resonances) allow the reader to mark
Rider, “Pantaloon in Black,” and by extension, the entirety of *GDM* within the space of Pynchon’s post horn. This becomes especially clear when the loop and the triangle are added to the tableau. The three shapes connect in a hieroglyphic triad that cuts straight to the heart of Faulkner’s triangular metaphor.

If, then, *49* (and more specifically, the post horn hieroglyphic contained therein) is effectively equating the concept of entropy to the ideological crossings between readers and writers, perhaps further exploration of the text can corroborate the existence of the phenomenon, or at least elucidate the nature of the connection. For example, the word “entropy” itself pertains. Taken from the German, *entropie*, which comes from the Greek, *en + trepein*, meaning, to turn or change. The Greek suffix is tantalizingly similar to the word “trepan,” which allows Pynchon’s central metaphor to resonate on the same frequency as Faulkner’s.

There are many other such “particular moments” in *49* that resonate in similar ways. On the very first page, for example, Oedipa wonders if Pierce Inverarity was “crushed by the only ikon in the house,” a “whitewashed bust of Jay Gould that Pierce kept over the bed” (1). While the reference to Jay Gould comically situates Pierce in the same vilified realm of the infamous robber barons of old, it is the spelling of “ikon” that is of greater interest. Why the Greek-like spelling if not to immediately implicate the ancient society in some sort of linguistic conspiracy? Of course, in the Greek, icon is spelled “*eikon*,” but Pynchon’s spelling works in the same way that Palmeri indicates his puns work—indirectly, in order to open up a more ambiguous space, a space of “excluded middles” (150) that works against simplistic binary association. “Ikon,” then, serves to evoke the “other” possibilities of such a spelling. It, like the delta hieroglyphic,
simply “points” to the ancient Greeks, and in tandem with the Faulkneresque, individual components of the post horn, the implications of Faulkner’s text as a whole. As to the literal, narrative action, Oedipa wonders if Pierce was killed by a “Greek-like word” coming “down” on his head as he slept (read ‘without consciousness of it interacting with his head’). The word finds reification in a three-dimensional object. This sums up Miller’s understanding of ideology quite well at the same time as it aligns with the title of Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*.

Further investigation of the Greek referents in the text of *49*, (there are more: Pynchon names his gay bar “The Greek Way” (89)) however, pale in comparison to the elaborate pun Pynchon constructs that implicates both the delta and the vortex. Fittingly, the scene in which the pun occurs shares a number of similarities to the scene in *GDM* where Rider drunkenly wanders the night. After fleeing the sexual advances of Nefastis, Oedipa begins a 24 hour quest “faced with a metaphor of God knew how many parts; more than two, anyway. With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Trystero, to hold them together” (87). Oedipa is on a quest for answers that make sense of her metaphor—the Trystero and its post horn. Rider, too, is on a quest. He hunts for answers from God as to why his wife is dead. Rider’s quest takes place overnight and after buying a jug of moonshine he “done paid for” (143) with “four silver dollars” (142). Likewise, Oedipa’s quest begins at night when she decides “only to drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen” (88). And just as Rider and she drift at random, Oedipa also begins her night’s meanderings in The Greek Way, where she becomes “rather drunk” when digging for information about a stranger’s muted post horn lapel pin (94).
There are other parallels. When faced with the night’s “unbreathing blackness,” (143) Rider drinks from his jug and speaks, in a sense, to both God and the night: “Hah . . . Dat’s right. Try me. Try me, big boy. Ah gots something hyar now dat kin whup you” (143). Oedipa, in her turn, thinks in phrases such as: “Nothing of the night’s could touch her,” (95) which strikes the same chord as Rider’s blasphemous taunt. She goes on to think about “any death-wish that can be consummated by some minimum gesture,” (95). Such a phrase sounds eerily reminiscent of Rider’s death-wish consummated in the “minimum” gesture of catching Birdsong cheating at dice and cutting his throat. Furthermore, Oedipa eventually “busrode and walked on into the lightening morning, giving herself up to a fatalism rare for her;” (100) which is exactly what Rider does when he “crosses the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan.” And just as Rider “misread the sign” (145) of seeing his wife’s ghost, Oedipa finds one of the “repetition of symbols” (95) in her quest when she stumbles “on a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were dreaming the gathering . . . They knew about the post horn” (96). The scene evokes a strange, spectral imagery that resonates with Rider’s apparitional experience as much as it opens up a space for the reading (or misreading) of signs.

But beyond those parallels lies the pun in question. When Oedipa encounters the old sailor with a tattoo of the post horn on his hand, “huddled, shaking with grief,” (101) She knew, because she had held him, that he suffered from DT’s. Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind’s plowshare . . . The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending on where you were: inside, safe or outside, lost.
Oedipa did not know where she was. Trembling, unfurrowed, she slipped sideways, screeching back across the grooves of years, to hear in the earnest, high voice of her second or third collegiate love Ray Glozing bitching among “uhs” and the syncopated tonguing of a cavity, about his freshman calculus; “dt,” God help this old tattooed man, meant also a time differential . . . there was that high magic to low puns, because DT’s must give access to dt’s of spectra beyond the known sun (104-105).

The time differential, “dt,” in calculus stands for “delta time,” the “d” of which is represented in mathematics by the alphabetic delta: the triangle. This alone would seem merely coincidental if it were not for Oedipa’s described metaphoric action/state in the scene: “Trembling, unfurrowed, she slipped sideways, screeching back across the grooves of years.” This is an unmistakable, phonographic metaphor that interfaces mathematically with Faulkner’s (and with the dt introduced, Pynchon’s) delta.

To begin with, Faulkner’s material delta, as discussed earlier, may be seen as a two-dimensional depiction of a three-dimensional vortex as viewed from the side. If one were to swing the vortex 90 degrees on its “x” axis so that it is viewed from the top (a partial inversion of the delta), the vortex’s three-dimensionality is “pressed” back down to the two-dimensional. It would appear as a flat, spiraling line—out to in, or in to out, depending on where one chooses to begin. But Pynchon tells us where to begin by describing a record. Oedipa is the stylus that screeches back across the years. One begins playing a record by placing the stylus at the outside, and following the grooves, the stylus moves inward, toward the center, forward in time. Of note, here, is the fact that a record is yet another medium of recorded (written) information, which lines up neatly with
Oedipa being described as a stylus since stylus is also a word that means “implement of writing.” Additionally, the metaphor operates much like Faulkner’s maelstrom/vortex. His shapes, while similar, share differences in their respective “ups” and “downs.” They are operational inversions of each other, depending on how one chooses to understand the vortex. “Stylus,” as a writing implement can only record information, or “write” information, while “stylus” as a phonograph needle “reads” the information on the record. The ambiguous reference allows one to read “stylus” as either or both. So, metaphorically, what Pynchon is describing is an inter-dimensional, time-associated information construct across which Oedipa (writer/reader) crosses just as Rider (reader/writer) crosses the junctureless backloop of time’s trepan—the inter-dimensional, narrative time-trap as physically and metaphorically described by the vortex. These two paradigms meet at the crossroads of the delta, but moreover, they meet on an axis of “inversion.”

Faulkner’s “inverted” delta is a 180 degree endeavor and swings only on the “x” axis, but Pynchon’s delta swings both ways: once, 90 degrees on its “x” axis in verbally described metaphor as just exposed, and once on its “y.” This occurs within the space of the post horn hieroglyphic[s] where the delta spins 90 degrees from its Faulknerian up/down inversion state to its sideways horn-bell state. This indicates two possible interpretations. First, that 90 + 90 = 180, and therefore equates, ultimately, with Faulkner’s 180 degree delta inversion. It is a comforting but quaint thought. The second is that there is more to Pynchon’s delta than Faulkner’s.

Consider that Pynchon describes a time differential as “a vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last for what it was, where it could no longer
disguise itself as something innocuous like an average rate” (105). Faulkner’s delta describes a uni-directional trajectory: past into future, while Pynchon has Oedipa traveling back in time to remember that “dt’s” are a change over time.

Pynchon uses another low pun to describe exactly what that change over time means. Oedipa Maas is a name that may be read with a two-fold, literary and translatative consideration. “Oedipa” pings at the idea of incest via Sophocles, and “Maas” pings, linguistically, at the Spanish: “mas,” meaning “more.” One could posit that the name elicits the idea of “more incest.” Fair enough, but Oedipa, with consideration to her last name, is not a singularity. She is married to Mucho Maas, whose name (entirely at the Spanish) may be read as “much more.” So taken in tandem, one might read the pun from a marital connection: “much more incest,” to convolute the order. That would certainly link up to Ike’s ledgers and the metaphor of the passing down of ideology as incestuous, literally. But if Pynchon’s delta indicates a change over time, or a delta that swings on a dual axis, then maybe what the “Maas” pun is trying to say is “much more than more incest.” There are, after all, two “Maas” members in the family; two “mores” in the pun. That the pun requires translation also pings back to Faulkner’s miscegenation as something translatory. The Rosetta Stone embodies this idea perfectly with its miscegenistic mixing of languages that lead to an incestuous crossing of ideologies.

It becomes helpful, here, to view the central metaphor in GDM—the vortex—as a system. That is to say that narrative—from constellations to hieroglyphs to the written word—and the process of passing along narrative ideology may be understood as an informational system, and therefore subject to the effects of entropy. This is delta time embodied across the intertwined metaphors. As more information (read more narrative) is
added to the system, the level of disorder, or confusion, rises. Oedipa experiences this disorder intimately as she tracks the Tristero through the W.A.S.T.E postal system. She may be “a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts,” (83) but her pursuits only serve to confuse any conclusions she hopes to draw. Pynchon exemplifies Oedipa’s confusion toward the end of the book, during her last “thrust at truth” when she seeks out Professor Emory Bortz to, presumably, smooth out the rough edges of her thesis. What is striking about this scene, aside from the narrative itself, is the proliferation of questions within the text. Keep in mind, this scene appears with only thirty pages or so left in the novel. As per the standard narrative structure, this is the point in the book where there should be more answers than questions, but in the span of thirteen of the last thirty pages during which the scene unfolds, Oedipa and Bortz ask 32 questions, either rhetorical or direct, pertaining to the riddle of the Tristero/Thurn and Taxis/The Courier’s Tragedy connections. There are no conclusive answers to any of these questions for Oedipa, just as “There was no moon, smog covered the stars, all black as a Tristero rider” (133) in the narrative action later in the scene. Oedipa, unlike the subadar, looks out from the dark and into the dark. She sees very little. Even in the final pages of the book, for all of Oedipa’s hunting, she is left only with the “excluded middles . . . bad shit” (150), but she still believes that all she has are the “either[s]” and “or[s]” (150-151) (there are five sets in one paragraph) “Behind the hieroglyphic streets” (150). At the Inverarity stamp auction, even the presence of Genghis Cohen, the impartial philatelist consultant, creates a question as to the validity of his contributions. He begs Oedipa not to call his presence a “conflict of interests,” (151), as he is only there because of “some lovely Mozambique triangles [he] couldn’t quite resist” (151). A “Mozambique triangle,” while in reality a
triangular shaped postal stamp issued by certain colonizing trading companies in Africa, also may be read at the level of diction as an “African triangle,” and with further (liberal) manipulation, an “Egyptian delta.”

But what Cohen explains to Oedipa next informs how Pynchon’s entropic post horn can be understood as a response to Faulkner’s cautionary vortex. He notes that they are “in luck. Loren Passerine, the finest auctioneer in the West, will be crying today,” and in response to Oedipa’s verb confusion, “We say an auctioneer ‘cries’ a sale” (151). The word “cry” enjoys a special significance in the Pynchon. Most notably, the word carries the action of the title, which instantly marks any exploration of the word from within the text as an important moment. Oedipa is confused by the word for one simple reason, and that is that the word has multiple meanings. More importantly, the word’s meaning has changed over time (dt). In a sense, entropy enters as an expression of deconstruction. The word “cry” is decentered via its subsequent usages after its initial iteration in the Latin, quiritare, meaning to cry out for help. The word has gone on, passed through the OF and ME, to mean to shout, to beg, to shed tears, to advertise, and finally, to preside over an auction. The more meanings the word obtains throughout time and across language (addition of information to a linguistic system), the more confused its intended meaning (disorder within the system).

This final scene in 49 pings back to the Faulkner in two ways. The first is through the name of the auctioneer, Loren Passerine. The name Loren means “laurel tree,” which evokes a number of resonances to GDM, the most notable having to do with the linguistic play of the word, “treed,” but also pertaining to the arboreal vortex itself. Also, a “Passerine” is the name for a bird in the Passeriformes order of birds. More than half the
world’s birds belong to this order, so the designation is vague as to the specific. But, interestingly, the term is also a generalization that encompasses songbirds, the term “Passerine” often being used to connote a “songbird.” One interpretation of the name, Loren Passerine, then, would be “Songbird Tree.” This is poignantly evocative of “Pantaloons in Black” as the name of the white man whose neck Rider cuts is named “Birdsong” (151), and it is the Birdsong family who lynch him “from the bell-rope in a negro schoolhouse about two miles from the sawmill” (149). Furthermore, both scenes hold a sense of impending death, or at least impending fate. Oedipa’s “Songbird” “hovered like a puppet-master . . . He stared at her, smiling, as if saying, I’m surprised you actually came” (152). In parallel, when Rider shows up to the dice game, his Birdsong seems surprised that he “actually came” when he states, “You’re drunk . . . Get out of here” (147). Finally, “The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49” (152). This mirrors Rider’s narrative as well. Rider “cuts Birdong’s throat clean to the neckbone,” (151) certainly a clearing of the throat in a violent sense, before the Sheriff’s posse finds “him laying in the back yard asleep” (152), presumably awaiting a “crying” in another sense of the word (Rider cries “tears big as glass marbles” (154)), and a “lot” in both the sense of a grave and of fate.

The second way that the final scene of 49 resonates with the Faulkner is metaphorical. Faulkner’s delta indicates an incestuous passing down of ideology, through the ages and from within narrative. Along comes Pynchon and his delta which, as this essay has hopefully elucidated, describes an entropic change to Faulkner’s. Pynchon’s turns Faulkner’s on its side by suggesting that, unlike the binary status of the snare in
which one is either trapped or not, there is the excluded middle of the third option: entropy. The snare no longer functions properly.

For example, when Bortz hands Oedipa a copy of “Blobb’s Peregrinations . . . It was full of words ending in e’s, s’s that looked like f’s, capitalized nouns, y’s where i’s should’ve been. ‘I can’t read this,’ Oedipa said” (129). The words, passed down from a different time, have changed. Because “more information” has been added to the informational system of writing—vowel shifts, conformity in spelling and modern word usage, for example—the level of disorder in the system has also grown. How can Miller’s “performative effect” of ideology work if the reader can make no sense of what the writer is saying, if the reader “can’t read this?” This is the mute, the [trap]ezoid, as entropy. Pynchon describes a postmodern world in 49, one feeling the effects of an informationally saturated vortex. A world of information overload via the “greenish dead-eye of the TV tube,” (1) the “field strength” and “lines of force” (12) of radio frequencies, the electronic cartography of the “transistor radio,” “printed circuit,” (14) and “digital machine[s]” (25). Whatever ideology the vortex would pass to the postmodern reader, there is too much interference; too much information to sort through in order to make sense of any of it. Entropy has set in. It was always going to set in, which makes Faulkner’s tri-dimensional “act of metaphor . . . a thrust at truth and a lie” (105).

Consider Faulkner’s vortex both literally and metaphorically. As a meteorological entity, a vortex is a thermodynamic system. The Second Law of Thermodynamics obviously applies to cyclonic systems in that they only exist for a finite amount of time. They form, wreak havoc, then dissipate. Pynchon’s text observes this reality as it pertains
to Faulkner’s metaphorical vortex, as well. Metaphorically, Faulkner’s vortex functions as an informational system that is just as susceptible to entropy as a physical system. Faulkner’s text and hieroglyphic outline an infinite “going down,” a Nefastisian belief in Maxwell’s Demon, while Pynchon’s hieroglyphic and text clarify that there is no perpetual motion machine. Therefore, another reading of the Mucho Maas pun would be towards the physical—“much mass,” as was discussed earlier with regard to the reified spot of the firmament and the physical lines of post-alphabetic writing. Writing systems have a physical mass and are therefore subject to both informational and physical entropy.

“To Mucho,” Faulkner’s delta, his vortex, “was horrible. Endless, convoluted incest” (5) set up in metaphor as “the endless rituals of trade-in, week after week” (5) at his former vocation as used car salesman. But “Oedipa couldn’t understand how he could still get so upset” (5) over it. Just as Mucho’s sales days are behind him, so is Faulkner’s metaphor behind the literate world. The world has dropped the acid and will “never be spooked again” (188) by the outright performative effect of ideology because, like Mucho, the world can now:

break down chords, and timbres, and words too into all the basic frequencies and harmonics, with all their different loudnesses, and listen to them, each pure tone, but all at once (116).

The world might not experience “nightmares anymore,” (118) but it is no more sane, no less confused. Schizophrenia is the exodus Pynchon allows. Like Mucho, who is “losing his identity . . . less himself and more generic . . . a walking assembly of man,” (115) the postmodern’s only escape from the confusion of information overload is a drug-induced
insanity. As Miller points out, so much of a person’s identity is reaped from his/her ideological impressions, hence, a lack of ideological direction may lead to an equal loss of identity. In a sense, this too is the entropic ratio of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Of course, ideology still lurks in the written word. At the beginning of 49, when Oedipa begins her journey to make sense of the “outward patterns” that held “a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an attempt to communicate . . . she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant . . . as if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken” (14, my emphasis). Ideology is still attempting to communicate, but too much mass has been added to the vortex, it is “rotating too slow.” After the span of the entire novel, it has communicated nothing but confusion. Even the TV movie “based loosely on [Metzger’s] career . . . in an air-conditioned vault at one of the Hollywood studios, [where] light can’t fatigue it, [so] it can be repeated endlessly” (22) is not guaranteed escape disorder. During its airing, in fact, the story temporally falls apart because “they must have got the reels screwed up” (23).

In the end, Pynchon’s post horn cynically assuages Faulkner’s delta caveat by suggesting that perhaps ideological crossings are the least of narrative’s problems. This idea is exemplified perfectly in the scene where the teenage rock and roll group, the Paranoids, tell Oedipa “the plot of The Courier’s Tragedy, by Richard Wharfinger, related near to unintelligible by eight memories unlooping progressively into regions as strange to map as their rising coils and clouds of pot smoke. It got so confusing that next
day Oedipa decided to go see the play itself” (49, my emphisis). Seeing the play only leads to more confusion on Oedipa’s part, but more importantly the passage indicates an inability on the Paranoids’ part to recall the plot of the play accurately, let alone for it to have any performative ideological effect. Even if one were to view Pynchon’s America as succumbing to some postmodern, drug-addled, mentally-ill ideological construct, one could not aver that it works against entropy. For Oedipa, for readers and writers, for literary critics, there is no “pulsing stelliferous meaning” (64) to be found in the system of narrative because entropy is always there to make a lie of the thrust. Searching for such meaning only leads to near psychosis (on Oedipa’s part), and a worse fate awaits the others in the novel. After all, Oedipa’s shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; [her] husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself . . . [her] one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved 15-year-old; [her] best guide back to the Trystero has taken a Brody. Where am I? (126).

Ideological subjugation, insanity or death: there is no way of turning “treed” into “freed.”
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