

**THE NON-FLATLAND 'PRETERITE' VERSUS THE STRAIGHT WORLD 'ELECT'
IN THOMAS PYNCHON'S INHERENT VICE**

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Abstract: Pynchon is a legendary figure in contemporary American literature whose writing skills attracted more attention of the people of all walks of life, from the beginning that happened with his first novel 'V' which was published in the year 1963. His contribution to American literature and to the world literature has gained much popularity among the academicians, scholars and all those who like to read fiction. Though he produced seven novels and one short story collection till date his works caused the production of a great amount of books and journal articles, news paper reviews and many of such kind. Some people started recognizing this as Pynchon industry or 'Pyndustry' during 70's in USA and the industry is successfully running for almost fifty years now.. How is this possible to a man who keeps away himself from the public appearance and not even accessible to private interviews? How to understand the author's reflections on his novels? May be the reason and answer to these which many of us curiously search for, is to scan his persona in his novels that is to understand the author from his works. The last novel of him is *Inherent Vice* once again proves that he is so keen in allowing his readers to deconstruct and reveal the hidden agenda. This novel too like his earlier novels discloses his artistic complexity and intellectual breadth but with a refreshing theme. This paper highlights the presence 'use' and 'abuse' conditions between the 'preterite' and 'elect' in the coastal state California.

Key Words: paranoia, flatland, preterit, straight elect, the poor multitudes, real estate moghuls.

If we consider that many American novels are true representatives of American soul, then this is one of such kind and never disappoints the reader in extracting glimpses of such. Though the author tries once again to adopt things that he is familiar with and watched in his surroundings over a long period, as elements of this new novel, prefers to portray the real conditions in a fictitious way. What is so enthralling is his capacity to present both 'flatland' and 'straight' with same ease and allowing one to overtake the other. He chose 'California as American edge-site' as the setting of the novel where catastrophe, metamorphosis, or redemption is constant. His selection of this state, which is well known for its excess, corruption, and dread, sometimes reflected the plot he used for his earlier novel 'The Crying of Lot 49'. This enables many to go in their quest for decoding of the system in practice. The ecstasy driven functions projected as a 'crazed contact zone' which recalls the view of one of the characters 'Buffalo Springfield' in his novel *Vineland* (1990) that 'Paranoia strikes deep'.

"the non-flatland Preterite (surfers, dopers, fun seekers, rockers, hippie riffraff, drifters, seekers, Indians, the poor multitudes, restless home makers in little bars) versus the "straight world" Elect (land developers, bankers, tax-dodging dentists, big shots, police within police, loan sharks, or worse) ". But the roads of access may simply lead back to the Machinations of empire and dissolve this post-Hiroshima U.S. binary into a community of lost souls, code failure, and the security-state apparatus of everyday fear and trembling..."(Rob Wilson, 218)

As the story progresses the plot reveals the hunger of the soul for self transformation and social justice. Pynchon's abilities to present the various sections of the society especially the surfers, dopers, fun seekers, rockers, hippie riffraff, drifters, seekers, Indians, the poor multitudes, and the restless home makers in little bars make us (readers) believe that his acquaintance with the aforementioned is of great help for the development of plot. Since California has the edge to provide an amicable atmosphere for the surfers and drifters, the presence of rockers and hippie riffraff reveals the cultural multiplicity of the state. This is only a 'view' of the story and the poor multitudes, restless homemakers in little bars, seekers and Indians gets a complete 'view' in this direction. Though the number of characters or sections presented here with utmost care for better comprehension of the picture drawn which may not be seen of much help to the readers to derive something, only because of the number is more. What made Pynchon to carry out in his theme regarding the comparison he made between Preterite and Elect or whether he never tried to do so is only a matter of choice for the readers to decide. It is a common phenomena that we come across in many of Pynchon's novels, *Inherent Vice* deals with a time and a place, where many things are normalized but with the possible prediction of falling on 'the cusp of extinction'. Like the socialist workers' unions of *Against the Day* and the frontiersmen of *Mason & Dixon*, the dopers and hippie riffraff are way ahead to find that the trend of *Sixties SoCal*' is soon to disappear or are soon to have their paradise swept

away by the forces which come under the category of 'Elect' that focuses primarily on capital and change. "This countercultural impulse has been a feature of Pynchon's writing, and so has a sense of potent nostalgia for a future that never took place, for the side-turnings that humanity missed in its rush to modernity" (Telegraph Review). In *Inherent Vice*, the countercultural impulse continues to turnaround amid the lengthy and complex twists and turns of the plot where humour is presented as madcap and tortuous. "There is no avoiding time," cries one of the characters of the novel which is under aromatic influence. the magnanimous nature of time, the sea of memory and forgetfulness are woven together in this novel only with the aim of revealing the years of promise, gone and unrecoverable. Who made this promise to whom is the characteristic trait of this novel where regular intervention of the 'land' allowed to claim its quota of better living. But the destiny prevails and jumps over by the evildoers known to some as land developers, bankers, tax-dodging dentists, big shots, police within police, loan sharks, or worse. For some others it is all too well, and taken instead for grant, with the possible claim hostage to the future. Pynchon's imaginings of the transformational years, the late 1960s and early '70s, that he probably spent in and around Manhattan Beach, California enabled him to portray the real conditions of the place during 60's and 70's. The prominent ones among the causes might be on the lines of 'Machinations of Empire' which resulted in the prevalence of 'community of lost souls, code failure, and the security-state apparatus of everyday fear and trembling'. "In *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon labors in the time-honored generic trenches of American "hardboiled fiction" to elaborate the transformative energies of what California still stands for as wording edge-space, as a temporal promise of social transformation and popular-cultural redemption not quite over. (Wilson, 218) Though his contemporaries are equally brilliant in highlighting the countercultural amalgamations Pynchon's efficiency is unmatched because of his knowledge of science especially. His command on the subject helped him to labor deeply into the 'hardboiled fiction' of America. The transformative energies are pro-active always in the state of California and the societal changes are only on a temporal adjustment far from permanency. Here is where the so called forces 'Elect' defy "the ancient forces of greed and fear" (130). This should not be confused with the metaphoric, mythologizable, though quite natural, Rousseauvian, set into 'stark and simple contrast with the pavers or cobblestones' that represent all that was nothing but false, dull, artificial, and oppressive about urbanity and civilization. Who could draw the

attention to this bare truth is none other than existing yet denying nature of the edge-site with its deep connections to Preterite. This is where we find few hippies turning into murderous lunatics, and the entire loose network of dissident subcultures or the not so strong association among flatland communities (stoners, surfers, musicians, draft dodgers, all manner of unmoored young humanity) was now under scrutiny. That popular beach, a dour and gloomy new counter-Zeitgeist was reiterating, is likely to harbor deadly and disastrous substances or things. Better bury them as they are known for their pestilent nature under some pavers. And besides, paving it is a business opportunity for those whose sole aim is to work for capital gains. The true representation of flatland Preterite in this novel conveys to the readers how the SoCal are exploited in the name of 'dream' and how this flatland culture of the past got affected due to the advancement of straight 'Elect'. Whatever is projected and always conveyed with scientific advancement as its backbone may successfully adhered by the author to bring a form for the one that is so long neglected in the name of 'transformation'. "Unraveling it, getting truly and finally to the bottom of these systemic mysteries, is simply not an option, though the human mind appears both evolutionarily hard-wired and culturally encouraged to try..... (His plurisignificant punning is surely a manifestation of this impulse: in his fascination with unraveling potential meanings from accidents of language, he trains his readers to expect the same and hunt for it, and this game yields ... rewards often enough that even the most tenuous connections can be worth the effort of imagining)...(College Hill Review). What Pynchon may in fact have considered is his novel of ideas of the people/communities whose 'potboiler disguise', frankly with the sole purpose of spreading the core idea among the people or readers. The vice by its meaning tells us that 'which is inherent may lead to tragedy and potential for disaster associated with certain forms of humanly built space and social organization' —than by the aesthetic criteria of humanistic realism. The quest for such is continued by the reader to know which can be the 'real', potential in the midst of these flatland communities and the straight 'Elect'. Thorough knowledge of these two possible categories of people in the society may provide an opportunity to understand or realize the 'Vice' in it. What is so amazing about this author is his establishment of the truth that "One shoehorn's one's experience of a Pynchon book into such a category at one's peril". As a presenter of these realistic plots, Thomas Pynchon can be anyone's choice as of the top fiction writers of the present era, after all, with very little left to prove to anyone. Any

approach that brings the potential cautionary effect or influence of carefully arranged 'ecological/developmental parable', a useful and a strong reaction of a counter myth against 'the cavalier treatment of irreplaceable places' can be more action oriented than allowing the spread or stimulus of worse vices.

"Whatever you do,"maybe more to himself. Keep clear of the Fang. If they even begin to think you might get between them and their money, best you go looking for something else to do. Far away, if possible." (p 159).

The scenario may be comprehensible at times, but not always, especially dealing with the circumstances where one can't be ignorant of the exploiting attitudes of the land developers, bankers, tax-dodging dentists, big shots, police within police, loan sharks, etc. There may be convincing reply from them when enquired but not a reliable or unarguable one of such kind. The machination of Empire for the cause of everyone, ends as solution to someone. The ungraspable totality and inexplicable code failure are to be/not to be estimated as some serious 'concerns' in this direction. As it is also evident that the binary approach of U.S to this 'community of lost souls', where the security-state 'apparatus' has got anything to do other than trembling and fear that it creates. Thomas Pynchon's awareness of all these 'conditions' of the place, contributed to selecting such plot which is late capitalist, where carefree youth and happy dopers are seen with an aim to take control of the situation by all means. In the view of the Larry 'Doc' Sportello one of the important characters in this novels, these people always played a role in the business. They go out to collect the cash debts and ruthless in their behavior and approach, which is evident in their activities like breaking the rib cages, getting people fired etc... They always keep 'an unforgiving eye' on anything that they encounter or even come across fearing that it might become a threat. 'Doc' considers that

"everything in this dream of prerevolution was in fact doomed to end and the faithless money driven world(would) reassert its control over all the lives it felt entitled to touch, fondle and molest, it would be agents like these , dutiful and silent, outdoing the shitwork, who'd make it happen(129)".

The 'commodifying forces' of money, sex narcotics, lust, greed, and death go on unstoppable, not worrying about the possibility of alternative affects. As they are commonly present at every gathering "concert, peace rally, love-in, be-in and freak-in, here, up in north, back East, wherever – those dark crews had been busy all along, reclaiming the music, the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday, all they could sweep up, for the ancient

forces of greed and fear?(p 130). This reiterates the American vernacular revolution which proclaims the secret and gradual entry of pop-carnavalesque energies to gain access of the prevailing conditions and how they are 'mimed, hollowed out', and finally foreclosed due to the birth of 'security apparatus of police forces lurking within what Ruth Wilson Gilmore puts it as the "Golden Gulag". The social conditions are encouraging to this kind of situation or not, is a choice for discussion here but the security apparatus has got something to do here, is what matters. The so called 'mimed and hallowed' conditions have paved the way for a prison like situation or prison camp like situation and they are all elucidated so that the readers understand from this novel and some of the clues do help them to a great extent. Amazingly Pynchon used number of characters to portray the presence of such to elevate the plot into a realistic one, and the author's familiarity in choosing the characters is matchless and it may be considered that the number of visits that the author had to this place could have given him the required acquaintance with such people whom it is referred as 'preterite'. This is quite evident in number of other novels written by the author. First one to be mentioned here is his gigantic and magnanimous novel 'Gravity's Rainbow'. When compared to the other novels of Thomas Pynchon this is quite easier and shorter to read, except the second novel 'The Crying of Lot 49'. This also gives the impression of having been easier to write, too. The gap that the author has taken between Inherent Vice and the earlier novel Against the Day is less than three years which is very less when compared to the period he has taken between his Gravity's Rainbow and Vineland. To the level of intensity and passion this novel comes no way near to its predecessors. Though number of reasons are reasons are there but to conclude it is a mere fact that the earlier novels 'characteristically hilarious and thought-provoking' and also generated more curiosity to unravel the myth behind the scenes. Whereas this novel may not be treated on the lines of its predecessors, as it lacks much of 'the menace and the passion' of the earlier ones.

"Then again, perhaps this flattening of affect is deliberate, analogous to seeing the world through a haze of cannabis smoke, or entirely mediated through TV. It's not that the conspiracies and the paranoia aren't there anymore; it's just that these days, as he looks back at California in 1970..... But there's something profoundly bleak about the inability to take anything seriously. Since the conspiracy is inescapable, there's nothing to do except laugh at it. Squint the right way, and what looked like wry indulgence morphs into nihilism". (Jones, 10)

It may be the widespread belief that every author tends to draw the attention of the world to the world that he presents ignoring at times the unreliable image that it may create in the minds of world lot. For all who tries to know the weirdest thing of all about this novel where it may be possible enough to comprehend the 'perverse bright spot in the smog of despair'. which has been present throughout in this novel.

Conclusion: Finally the novel tries to reveal us the intricate web of intrigue that was thrust on one of the main characters Doc, which is true to the spirit of Pynchon's other novels. Pynchon's novels are full of conspiracies and uncanny coincidences. But anyone who gets overly involved in the plot of "Inherent Vice" may end up with disappointment as the possibility is there in missing the point. This novel, more than anything, excels at evoking a place and time, and in drawing a colorful cast of characters which are termed as 'preterite' by Rob Wilson. This includes surfers and rock stars, cops and con men,

hippie riffraff, drifters, the restless homemakers and a menagerie that reflects the beach culture and in so called Pynchon's paranoiac elements in which the story is set. By the novel's end, one only vaguely cared for the loose ends to get tied up between the straight world and non-flatland so that a true amalgamation is possible to whatsoever the way they end. Pynchon's labor is very much appreciated in the way he approaches in this novel to make perfect balance in and as the characters proceed which can be compared to his words for 'Doc Sportello' "Location. Surveillance. Detection". The quest for selfhood which constantly drives the communities of the 'straight world' into the zones of inherent depravity beyond good and evil, beyond the levels of human tendencies where an arrangement can be seen as a hope. This is reiterated and given an expression in the novel in the following way...

"deeper into whatever complications of evil, indifference, abuse, despair they needed to become even more themselves" (120).

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