

## Pynchon, Joseph Heller, and V.

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In the Brandeis University Joseph Heller Collection are two items of particular interest for their connection with Pynchon. When *Catch-22* was published (1961), Candida Donadio was acting as literary agent for both Heller and Pynchon. It is not surprising therefore that she should have sent a copy of *Catch-22* to Pynchon for his comments. In a note dated November 2, 1961, and addressed from Seattle, where he was then working for the Boeing Company, Pynchon expressed his enthusiasm for the novel. The main part of the note reads: "I love it. I won't tell you how much, or why, because I always sound phony whenever I start running off at the mouth like a literary critic. But it is close to the finest novel I've ever read." The note is typed on the quadrille paper Pynchon prefers for correspondence and is signed tersely just "Pynchon." Brief though it is, this note has a real historical importance in that it documents the reaction of one major contemporary novelist to another. It must also encourage critical comparisons between the two writers, particularly over their suspicion of systems and officialdom as well as their sense of the absurd.

Donadio sent a copy of this note to Heller along with an undated letter explaining that it was from the "only other genius" she had represented. She implies that, at the time of writing, Pynchon's first novel had been completed but had not then been published because she was considering asking Heller for a "quote"--presumably for promotional purposes. Interestingly, she gives the title of Pynchon's novel as *World on a String*. With V-motifs so ubiquitous in the novel, it is difficult to imagine any other title, especially one which would have had quite tenuous reference to yo-yoing. In the event, it is possible that the working title was dropped to avoid any copyright problems arising from its coincidence with the song "I've Got the World on a String," popularized by Frank Sinatra in the 1950s.

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