

## On an Unpublished Introduction to *Gravity's Rainbow*

Edward Mendelson

The Fall 1995 catalogue of the publisher Alfred A. Knopf included the following item (at the foot of page 73) in its list of new titles in the Everyman's Library series:

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*. Introduction by Edward Mendelson.  
. . . Fiction • 944 pages, \$25.00. . . . 0-679-43724-X

The story behind this book, and its introduction, is as follows.

Around 1990, Everyman's Library acquired a license from Viking Penguin to publish a new edition of *Gravity's Rainbow*. All titles in the Everyman's Library series include a newly-written introduction. After consulting with Thomas Pynchon's agent, the American editor of Everyman's Library commissioned me to write the introduction to the new edition. I did so; the text was approved by Mr. Pynchon's agent, and I received full payment for it from Everyman's Library. The novel and introduction were set in type, and the announcement above appeared in the Knopf catalogue distributed in mid-1995.

The edition was never printed, however, because the license granted to Everyman's Library by Viking Penguin was limited to (if I remember correctly) five years. Viking Penguin reminded Everyman's Library that those five years had already passed; Everyman's Library asked for an extension of the license, but Viking Penguin declined. At this point, Everyman's Library had no legal right to issue its edition, and abandoned its plans to publish.

The introduction remains unpublished. I am not certain whether or not I have the legal right to publish it, but even if I legally could do so, I would not particularly want to, partly because I wish I had written something better, partly because my implicit understanding with Everyman's Library and Mr Pynchon's agent was that the introduction was written only for use in the Everyman's Library edition.

My view about introductions to books by living writers is the same as Virginia Woolf's. She wrote in "Memories of a Working Women's Guild," "Books should stand on their own feet. . . . If they need shoring up by a preface here, an introduction there, they have no more right to exist than a table that needs a wad of paper under one leg in order to

stand steady." I doubt that anyone thinks *Gravity's Rainbow* needs shoring up by anything. Certainly I don't think so.

—*Columbia University*