

# Pynchon's Intertextual Circuits

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*Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power*, by John Dugdale. New York: St. Martin's, 1990. 214 pp. \$39.95.

*Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power* is a rich and suggestive book. Dugdale finished writing it before the appearance of *Vineland* and chose not to work with *Gravity's Rainbow*, the sole product of Pynchon's second seven years (1966–1973) as a writer, in order to concentrate on some of the fictions from Pynchon's first seven years of publication (1959–1966): "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna," "Low-lands" and "Entropy," as well as *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. To anyone familiar with these texts and with the criticism devoted to them, Dugdale's book offers numerous striking and generative readings. This cornucopian richness makes the reviewer's task difficult; it can be sampled, but it cannot be summarized. I shall therefore focus on some of the more general, hence more easily summarized arguments of the book, but I emphasize that they are not more consequential than the sum of the new nuggets of information and insightful readings of individual passages that the book provides in such abundance.

The subtitle, "allusive parables of power," promises a book that will tease out the famously elusive "political" Pynchon. Dugdale's agenda, summarized in his introductory remarks, carefully expands some of the concepts he first developed in a review of *Slow Learner*, "'A burglar, I think. A second-story man'" (*Cambridge Quarterly* 15 [1986]: 156–64). Both there and in the book under review, he argues for the existence of two or more "stories" or levels in the domicile of Pynchon's fiction. He begins by characterizing Pynchon "as a remarkably artful writer" whose work has "two different areas . . . [or] aspects . . . that can be referred to . . . as the 'artistic' and the 'political.'" He says that "the first term comprehends more than the formal qualities of texts" and that "the sense of the second includes the representation . . . of contemporary social phenomena, and of historical forces and events" (xi). Yet, almost immediately, Dugdale blurs this distinction: he claims that the artistic and political texts "work in comparable ways, and . . . each of them also possesses a political subtext" (xiii). If the texts work in comparable ways, if *each*

has a political subtext, and if artistic means more than formal, why the insistence on a distinction, a duality that the rest of the book repeatedly sets up and repeatedly finds not altogether tenable?

The whole matter is never—perhaps never can be—satisfactorily resolved in the terms that originally frame the question by juxtaposing the artistic and the political, though the examples of this juxtaposition Dugdale offers are often interesting in themselves. Thus, in his discussion of Pierce Inverarity's estate and the Tristero forgeries about to be auctioned as "lot 49," Dugdale separates the subtexts somewhat artificially, but then does show that we may read the story of each as the synecdoche of a quasi-hegemonic order that is on the verge of fragmentation. He argues that Pynchon asks us to read the first story—of Pierce's estate and Oedipa's efforts to untangle it—as a political subtext, a synecdochic record of the construction and unraveling of the Western (European) as well as the western (Pony Express) and therefore American political order. This is unremarkable. But Dugdale also shows, ingeniously and with illuminating new references to the work of Jorge Luis Borges, that the artistic subtext of Pynchon's prose formally and allusively recapitulates the exhaustion and breakup of the order of twentieth-century literary traditions.

This section, then, seems to provide some evidence of the usefulness of insisting on a distinction between political and literary levels. Yet elsewhere Dugdale devotes a great deal of effort to the argument that the dynamics of order and disintegration in Pynchon's oeuvre of 1959–1966 are determined by ideas about the relations between conscious and unconscious processes that emerged in Freud's writings on the topics of dream, projection and paranoia. In this account, where Pynchon ends and Dugdale begins is not always clear, but its consequence is that the artistic and the political cease to be independent and contrasting orders of the text and become two contingent manifestations of a deeper pattern. The pattern is that of a circuit, a loop of incessant movement between the language that fashions Pynchon's fictive characters as Subjects and that second language, tightly interwoven with the first, that constructs Pynchon's view of History, "the process without a Subject," in Louis Althusser's famous formulation. The content and identity of these two languages change in Dugdale's book: sometimes they refer to the above-named artistic and political, or the personal and the public, the subjective and the historical; but most generally they refer to any manifest text constructed out of a latent one, with clues to the second embedded in the first. (Dugdale elides the possibility of a symptomatic reading that lacks such clues but offers lacunae and silences imposed upon a text

by repression; Althusser and his disciples Pierre Macherey and Michel Pecheux elaborated this possibility.)

Identifying the circuit-patterns that connect the multiple stories and allusions of Pynchon's prose is more central to Dugdale's enterprise than any contestable juxtaposition of a pair of stories or levels. He demonstrates, not surprisingly but effectively, that multiple fictional narratives as well as non-narrative and non-fictional discourses are all woven together in Pynchon's work from his earliest days, and that this work can be described as "polyphonic" (6), though this fashionably Bakhtinian identification is not always put to good use later. Dugdale also shows that Pynchon's work is characterized by a strategy of transferring elements from one story or discourse to another. He performs wonders in teasing out the repetitions and variations of this smuggling, transferring, trafficking strategy (these terms are originally Freud's). He identifies many previously unidentified allusions as indisputable links between discourses in the intertextual circuit. Acknowledging valuable work on Pynchon's allusions done by other scholars (notably David Cowart and David Seed), Dugdale goes beyond "logging echoes"; he argues that "the degree of [Pynchon's] artfulness . . . requires a different conception of the work. Instead of treating each text as essentially something single, albeit incorporating a number of interesting nuggets . . . this study views it as a double (or multiple) structure, possessing an extensive and elaborate subtext which is largely generated by the technique of allusion" (xii). Not one pudding, then, with a lot of embedded plums, but a layer-cake, with relations among the layers that are other than those of mere passive contiguity. Because Freud matters so much to this reading—and Dugdale does more and better with Freud than either Bersani or Wolfley has—I turn to his use of Freud. This aspect of Dugdale's work neither claims nor intends to be a rigorous new analysis that transforms our understanding of Freud. Rather, his reading of Freud enables a more complex reading of Pynchon.

In Dugdale's account, Freud's work on the manifest and latent content of dreams contains an implicit theory of allusion; since Dugdale calls sustained allusion elevated to a principle of composition "intertextuality," Freud can be said to have a theory of same. Pynchon's prose enacts that theory and is profitably viewed through its prism. "In the Freudian model . . . the dream is a transformation of a larger body of material," not dissimilar to "'waking sensation first stored and later operated on'" (Dugdale 7, quoting *V.* 255). The result of such transformative operation (cf. Esther's nose job?) is that "the original material remains as something latent, 'a secret richness and concealed density of dream'" (Dugdale 7, quoting *Lot* 49 117). The

manifest content of Pynchon's fiction, then, while expressed in a set of stories, is usually the guide to a secret text of collective dreams as well as literary, cultural and political history; uncovering the sinews and circuits that connect them is Dugdale's intention. His critical prose, weaving together his own, Pynchon's and Freud's words as well as their paraphrased thoughts, enacts the model of intertextuality it also seeks to define. Dugdale wants to show that allusions matter in Freud's thought as links between the manifest and latent structure of dreams, and that they matter in much the same way in Pynchon's texts. These show symptoms and "obvious signs . . . that they are the result of a process analogous to the dreamwork" (7). A less generous reading of the notoriously permissive adjective "analogous" might dismantle part of Dugdale's claim, but I find it easy to avoid that temptation, since I am convinced of the usefulness of the claim.

Dugdale further argues that puns, "nodal points, switch words," names formed by condensation and images formed by displacement matter equally to Freud and Pynchon. Again, the claim is not altogether surprising: Freud, as Lacan underscores, is concerned with language, his only access to the dream-text; and he recognizes the obvious fact that writers traffic in the same raw materials as he and his patients. (However, authors process words under conventions of genre and decorum crucially absent in the partly failed censorship of dreams by the gate-keepers of the conscious mind, and then in their relatively untrammelled rendition on the couch.) Still, Dugdale's extended account of the similarities between Freud's use of concepts like delirium, paranoia and the uncanny, and Pynchon's deployment of the same concepts is impressive. Of course, Dugdale's uncovering of latent structures in Pynchon's text during his pursuit of allusion is not just the result of quasi-psychoanalytic assumptions about the dynamics of the mind of the text; it is, above all, the product of an extraordinarily informed and inventive reader, but the "secret texts" he identifies are no less interesting for all that.

Dugdale builds up the claim that a close reading of Freud enables a better reading of Pynchon, and of the Modernism to which his "post-Modern" work is often linked. "It seems reasonable," he writes, "to assume that the treatment of paranoia throughout Pynchon's work relies on the discussion of the condition in three of Freud's publications in the years before the Great War, namely the case history of Schreber (1911), *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13) and *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914); and that the characterization of Stencil the conspiracy-theorist is influenced by the figure of Schreber" (115). Dugdale shows that Freud, who had earlier made use of classical authors like Sophocles and Shakespeare, also read an emerging culture

of Modernism contemporary to him; the decadent aftermath of that culture is still Pynchon's concern in "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna," in *V.*, even in *Lot 49*. Insisting that the "probable model" for Stencil is Schreber, Dugdale gives depth to the familiar claim that the model for Stencil's and Oedipa's narrative activity, as well as for their and the reader's interpretive construction of textual and worldly reality, is the paranoid's constant shuttle between the public and the private, the facts of the world and the disavowed needs of the subject. The facts are rearranged by the paranoid according to his needs, but those needs always already emerge in a reading of the conditions of the worlds that surround both fictive characters and implied readers.

Sometimes in Dugdale's account, Pynchon's "secret text" is the disavowed collective subject, the Other of America that both Profane and Oedipa stumble across. Pynchon envisions modern society as constructed of discourses and spheres; we live in the circulation among them, or, to switch to trafficking metaphors, at their many nodes and intersections. Dugdale shrewdly points out that the socialist Michael Harrington's *The Other America* appeared in 1962-1963, and he documents how often the collective preterite "Other"-s of America, identified by contemporary discourses of social and cultural criticism, are on Pynchon's mind. At "other" times the "secret text" is not drawn from the *res publica*; it can instead be the private self that must hide to thrive because it is threatened by "a world in which nothing is private" (2). There are prefigurations of *GR* and *Vineland* here, of the penis that is not one's own. In such a world, power is omnipresent (an odd absence here of Foucault, who is nowhere discussed). There are "no small immunities, no possibilities for hidden life or otherworldly presence" ("The Secret Integration," cited on Dugdale 2). In such a world, a sort of melancholy paranoid emerges as the necessary Pynchonian protagonist, and the traffic of metaphor and allusion between the conscious and unconscious minds of the sometimes individual and at other times collective subject is identified as the most specific feature of his text.

In Dugdale's view, these theoretical views and assumptions subtend Pynchon's critique and parody of modern artists and political leaders. The actual relation Dugdale sees between the narratives of art and politics is not altogether clarified by unexceptionable claims to the effect that artists and their works have a "troubling intermediate status, something more than simply predictive, something less than causal" (116). Yet the extended discussion of the intertextuality that links Fascism, Modernism and paranoia remains a useful contribution. Hugh Kenner, defensively, and Fredric Jameson (in *Fables of Aggression*, his study of the modernist Wyndham Lewis as fascist)

have written about related matters, but neither, of course, incorporates an enriching reading of Pynchon into his argument, nor do they—surprisingly, in Jameson’s case—pay detailed attention to the Freudian parallels.

Dugdale also adds to our sense of the sorts of broadly political concerns Pynchon must have had in his formative years of the 1950s: not just the apocalypse of Bomb and Rocket that mark *GR*, but also, for example, the case of Ezra Pound. He points out that Pound’s treason was topical in 1958, when the charges against him were dropped. Pynchon alludes to Pound only once, perhaps to avoid stigmatizing a powerless living writer, but Dugdale argues that Pound’s Italy, led by a failed reporter named Mussolini and imbued by an ideology that appropriated D’Annunzio’s writing, matters to Pynchon. In fact, the collapse of existing political and artistic orders (“things fall apart”), the transformation of political reality into art, and vice versa were major concerns of the artists of the period 1895–1945 (Conrad, Yeats, Joyce, perhaps Rilke—and Eliot, whose work is shaped by attempts to avoid the necessary conflict of the two). Dugdale discusses the transformative traffic between art and politics in Freudian terms, with a broad range of reference to Pynchon’s fictions. He deftly invokes figures ranging from Joseph Conrad to Herbert Marcuse—himself no mean reader of Freud—and discusses the “one-dimensional men” of 1960s discourse, linking them to Modernism’s secret sharers and doppelgängers. This long, Freud-directed discussion evades summary, but is so enabling that it deserves to be known to all critics of Pynchon’s work. In particular, it offers challenge and assistance to any cultural historian ready to acknowledge, first, that the post-1918 culture of Western Europe and the USA developed as one transatlantic network after the onset of Surrealism (a Freud-imbued movement if ever there was one), and second, that Pynchon is a pivotal transitional figure who looks both back to the origins of transatlantic modernism and beyond its end, to the transnational culture figured in *Vineland*.

Dugdale’s descriptions of the circuit, of the linguistic traffic that splits, doubles and reformulates both texts and fictive subjects, are complicated by his turn to the role that mental processes characteristic of paranoia play in Freud’s thought and Pynchon’s fiction. These are organized by the process of projection, to which Dugdale turns repeatedly. Driblette’s remarks on projecting have, of course, become a commonplace in the criticism. Dugdale insists that “‘projection’ and ‘paranoia’ are the beginning rather than the ending of a reading of Oedipa’s myth, and that the terms are not supplied in the novel . . . to be simply psychologized away” (143). In other words, contested readings cannot be resolved by claims that the facts of the text do not

support, say, Oedipa's interpretation of a clue, which must therefore be rejected as a projection, a fantasy, a delusion, a red herring. Dugdale's view is that "[Oedipa's] projections are not random fantasies, and they do not come from a vacuum. Projection in Freud is the return of the repressed; something is censored, transformed in the unconscious, and re-emerges as an imagined fact of the external world." "The self-styled projector Driblette" exemplifies that re-emergence; in Pynchon's own words, "'what was bugging him inside, usually, *somehow or other*, would have to come outside, on stage'" (Dugdale 143, quoting *Lot 49* 106; emphasis added). What buttresses Dugdale's interpretation is his belief that what underlies Pynchon's "somehow or other" is the circuit and language of allusion. And since allusion, like language, speaks of the absent object of reference, allusion almost becomes a place-holder for the term "language" in much of the book. At certain other moments, art appears as an agency that renders visible, by forgery as well as projection, the unseen and unconsciously held contents of the collective subject; in such sites, art becomes allusion and allusion art. It is a measure of the richness of the book that this sort of occasional reduction does not undercut the persuasiveness of Dugdale's readings.

Dugdale is careful throughout to insist, as above, that "projections are not fantasies." In Freud's work, projection differs from fantasy in that the latter originates in privacy, indeed in isolation. When a person in solitary confinement fantasizes, he or she constructs narratives that seek to compensate or emancipate, but, lacking contact with the world of continuing new experience, they increasingly emerge from memory and desire, becoming more tenuous as the separation of self from world increases. Freud's and Dugdale's formulations of paranoia insistently point to the traffic between the public and the private; even the "delirium" of *Lot 49's* "delirium tremens," Dugdale reminds us, is in Freud's discussion of the Schreber case a term for "the *paranoid's* delusional formations" (9). This insistence serves Dugdale well. For example, it enables an extremely suggestive reading of "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna," especially of the ways Siegel comes to perceive Loon as "a secretly familiar repressed self . . . a mirror which enhances rather than diminishes him." Siegel constructs Loon as his "inner Machiavel, vaunting, monumental, victorious (*Sieg*)" (26). Using Freud, Dugdale reads Loon's appearance as one that is uncannily conjured up, "as if projected" but *not* fantasized, "to fulfill Siegel's secret desire to liquidate the guests" (27). Dugdale explores the meaning of Pynchon's sentence about "'going native in Washington, D.C.," and argues that "to become assimilated to Washington is to behave like a true follower of Machiavelli, [allowing] vicious actions [to] be performed on one's

behalf" (34-35). Having prepared us with his subtitle to read Pynchon's "parable of power" at some length, Dugdale only gestures at the paranoid "governmental mind in siege in Pynchon" (35), but even this brief reading, enabled by a precisely Freudian notion of projection, enables us to see that "siege," like "sieg," is part of Siegel's name, and to connect these "vicious actions performed on one's behalf" to the anxious fantasies and dreams performed in Prentice's mind on behalf of others in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The rich promise of the reading Dugdale initiates here remains to be fulfilled by others.

Dugdale's study enables us to see anew the extent to which Pynchon's work is concerned with the ways the most private (because unconscious) reaches of subjectivity can yet be an effect of continuous and vulnerable interaction with the public realm, and how entirely the subject's view of the public realm is reformulated under the guidance of unknown, incompletely acknowledged or wholly disavowed private obsessions that disguise and "forge" what they cannot embrace openly. Art can be an agent of such reformulation for both the artist and the collectivity about which he writes. Here Dugdale invokes Modernism (recall Gide's concern with counterfeiting and Joyce's with forgery), and cites the "forged stamps sold as lot 49 [that] disclose a disavowed American history" (144). He then elaborates the argument that "the concept of the Tristero involves a more complex nightmare-perception of the USA: not just as a nation which secretes a 'shadow-state' of the disaffected and rejected, but as itself secretly a shadow-state, a nation of darkness" (144).

Pynchon here ranks with Freud, Marcuse, Harrington and other critics of culture who read their own societies (and, in the self-reflexive novelist's case, fictions) as shadow-states, fictitiously whole and ostensibly encompassing states which do not *incidentally* create the dark margins and shadows where the preterite dwell, but which come into being only in that act of simultaneous exclusion (once again, Althusser's exploration of reading in *Reading capital* would have been useful here).

The model for Dugdale's view of the repressive state is still Freud's own description of the creation of subjectivity. Subjectivity emerges when the patriarchal order represses what it considers inimical to family and society, which is to say that not only is the content of unacknowledged desire suppressed, but the fact that suppression has occurred is also forgotten. One of the shaping imperatives of consciousness is the continual censorship and repression of desire in the course of its many unhappy returns; in turn, civilization and the superego work to discipline the subject. Thus repression, enacted and forgotten, creates preterite desires in the mind, Others in the state, and



the secret text in Pynchon's fiction. But through its partial failures of vigilance, repression occasionally permits all three to emerge into the public text; reading allusion is our way of retracing that emergence. This endless traffic among the realms of repressed desire is, for Dugdale, a central issue in both Freud's and Pynchon's texts. Allusion is the indispensable pathway for this traffic, both its form and its cargo. Dugdale does not fear what Slavoj Zizek labels the "fetishistic fascination of the content hidden behind the form"; he offers literally dozens of specific, local readings of the content of allusions, precisely what I have not enumerated in this review. I have chosen instead to outline the general shape of an allusive practice that Dugdale believes stands at the heart of Pynchon's writing and should be at the heart of our strategies of reading him. Like Zizek, Dugdale believes that "the secret to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form but, on the contrary, the secret of this form itself" (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 11). Though his arguments develop intermittently and are frustratingly dispersed over the whole of the book, his depiction of allusive strategies linking public and secret texts has considerable explanatory power. No scholar or aficionado of Pynchon's work can afford to neglect it.

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