

Source Materials for Thomas Pynchon's Fiction:  
An Annotated Bibliography

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Pynchon's use of sources, his cryptic references to arcane materials, and his encyclopedic range of reference are all aspects of his work that have intrigued scholars and readers alike. Even though it is not necessary to know all the historical and scientific facts that he mentions in order to enjoy his narratives, some knowledge of the sources does tend to add to our understanding and appreciation of the texts.

Recent criticism has been of inestimable help in making Pynchon more accessible to the general reader. Most critics have also explored whatever sources they have been able to discover. A lot still remains to be done in this area. By comparing Pynchon's texts with the sources we can see more deeply into his intentions and modes of execution. The effect is akin to that of being inside his workshop, looking over his shoulder, as he builds his fictional maze. The sources enable the reader to see hidden connections and discover the implicit logic of his structures. A detour into the sources is a rewarding way of reentering his fictional world. One returns with a keener appreciation for what he is able to do with his materials, for how his Midas touch turns dross to gold.

Adams, Henry. The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961.

In V., the quest of Sidney Stencil, his desire to discover what or who V. is, his obsession with the past, and his assumption of various identities are similar to the efforts of Henry Adams, who also wants to find the connection between energy and history, between the virgin and the dynamo. Like Adams, Stencil refers to himself in the third person and projects himself into imagined historical situations in order to recover and understand the past. (See [Banta] V., p. 51.) Pynchon explores the dynamics of history in the manner of Henry Adams using metaphors from physics and electronics to comprehend the forces behind social and political change.

----- . The Tendency of History. New York: Macmillan, 1928.

In this work Adams enlarges on the notion of entropy and the processes of history. Pynchon turns to it seeking a metaphor for his own ideas about cycles of decadence and regeneration in various societies. In his story, "Entropy" and in The Crying of Lot 49, Pynchon presents two kinds of entropic tendencies: 1, the heat death of a universe in which stasis has been reached and there is no flow of energy; 2, the emergence of chaos within a system of communication in which messages are lost while in transit between the source and the recipient.

Allworth, Edward. Uzbek Literary Politics. The Hague: Mouton, 1964.

Allworth's book is a collection of essays on the problems of alphabet reform in Kazakhstan. Allworth discusses the various committees that were organized and mentions the conference at Baku which Tchitcherine is said to have attended. Pynchon could have gone to this work for some of the facts he needed to develop the sequence about the Kazakh response to alphabet reform in Gravity's Rainbow.

Asquith, Margot. The Autobiography of Margot Asquith. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.

On p. 78 of [Viking] Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon compares a character, Maud Chilkes, to Cecil Beaton's photograph of Margot Asquith, the wife of a British Prime Minister. The photograph is expressionistic in terms of its conception. The lines resemble Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase. It reveals only the back of Mrs. Asquith's head, but is a full-figure shot.

Babington-Smith, Constance. Air Spy: The Story of Photo Intelligence in World War II. New York: Harper, 1957.

Babington-Smith's is another name Pynchon conjures with. She was the reconnaissance expert who studied the aerial shots of Peenemünde and spotted the V-2 rockets being prepared for test firings on the launch pads (GR, p. 726).

Baedeker, Karl. "Introduction." Italy: from the Alps to Naples. New York: Scribners, 1909, p. xxi.

Baedeker's guide to Italy contains a detailed map of the Uffizi, the kind of map that Signor Mantissa and the Gaucho depend upon in V. Pynchon goes to the guide for details about the gallery. In V, he mentions that there were 123 steps leading down from the gallery to the Piazza della Signoria; this fact is helpfully provided by Baedeker also. For data like this Pynchon also turns to Whitaker's Almanac and the World Almanac.

Bitzer, John A. and Ted Woerner. A-4 Fibel. Redstone Arsenal, Alabama: Army Ballistic Missile Agency, 1957.

This is a translation of the rocket launching handbook that was prepared to be given to German troops who were actually engaged in firing the V-2. It is written in clear, simple language, with a minimum of technical jargon and is illustrated with cartoons and diagrams. The drawings are humorous and prurient. The aim is to instruct the ordinary soldier in the basics of rocket launching procedures. Pynchon goes to it for the image of the five-position launching switch mandala in GR. The A-4 Fibel also mentions MIPOLAM, a protective material used by the troops and brought into GR (p. 631).

Blackett, P. M. S. Fear, War and the Bomb. New York: McGraw Hill, 1948.

Pynchon quotes Blackett on p. 12 of GR. Blackett, a Nobel Laureate in nuclear physics, in this book investigates the military and political consequences of atomic energy.

Borges, Jorge Luis. Labyrinths. Edit. Donald Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 1962.

The influence of Borges on Pynchon is most apparent in the labyrinthine form his fiction takes and in the exhaustive, encyclopedic scope of the narrative. Like Borges, Pynchon is an inveterate bibliophile who takes great delight in weaving diverse, obscure elements into his fictional constructs in order to present a rich, complex, and surreal world. In GR, Pynchon at times parodies and at times mimics the style of Borges. The

scenes set in Argentina are particularly interesting as examples of the Borgesian mode (GR, p. 383, e.g.).

Borkin, Joseph and Charles A. Welsh. Germany's Master Plan. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943.

It is quite possible that Pynchon may have consulted this book which contains a lot of information about various industrial cartels with special emphasis on the structure and strategy of IG Farben. Perhaps the most significant element is that Borkin and Welsh introduce the metaphor of IG Farben as an octopus which is trying to grasp all of Europe in its tentacles. Pynchon uses the image of the octopus as destructive entity all the way through GR.

Brown, Norman O. Life Against Death. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959.

Brown's study of the psychoanalytic meaning of history is as pervasive an influence on Pynchon as is the work of Freud and Jung. Brown's application of Freudian concepts of repression and sublimation to the process of culture formation leads naturally to Pynchon's views that secular history is an impossibility. Having killed the old gods, man, especially modern man, creates other more terrible ones with his technology. In Pynchon's work the sexual impulse, most often in its deviant aspect, becomes as instrumental in the historical process as any political or economic factor.

----- Love's Body. New York: Vintage, 1966.

Like Brown, Pynchon explores the relationship between fantasy, dream, illusions and the real world of facts and technics. In his struggle against gravity, his attempts to free himself from the confines of realism by entering a surrealist cosmos, Pynchon celebrates a kind of resurrection of the body. In his use of symbolism (correspondences), his view of the illusory nature of the phenomenal world, and his distrust of psychic "inner voices," Pynchon follows Brown.

Buber, Martin. I and Thou. Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Scribners, 1958.

Buber's concepts of the I-Thou relationship and the It-world seem to have had a direct influence

on Pynchon's work. The reality of the I, in both Pynchon and Buber, inheres in sharing, in concern for others. The ultimate fragmentation of Slothrop's self in GR is akin to the kind of transcendence that Buber's I must experience if it is to find wholeness in the I-Thou relationship, but Slothrop fails to maintain any contact with the It-world and so loses his "self," his temporal existence. In V., Benny Profane's fear of involvement in any I-Thou type of relationship dooms his existence to belong purely to the things of the It-world.

Collier, Basil. The Battle of the V-Weapons. New York: Viking, 1965.

Collier's book is a valuable source for Pynchon, since it is filled with facts about the V-2, and also about life in London during the rocket attacks. As Steven Weisenberger points out ("The End of History?"), Pynchon has obviously turned to Collier for the atmosphere of war-afflicted London that he presents in the first segment of GR.

Dornberger, Walter. V-2. New York: Viking, 1954.

Dornberger's book about the activities in Peenemünde is very valuable because it provides Pynchon with a first-hand report on the construction and development of the rocket test site. Pynchon goes to Dornberger for a lot of details. For instance, on p. 404 of GR he mentions that the engineers commuted to the Greifswalder Oie on a ferry boat and relaxed in Herr Halliger's inn on the Oie. Dornberger describes this ferry boat and this inn in great detail in his book.

Frenssen, Gustave. Peter Moor's Journey to Southwest Africa: A Narrative of the German Campaign. Trans. Margaret Way Ward. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.

This is a soldier's eye-witness report of General Lothar von Trotha's campaign against the Hereros in 1904. The language is vivid and full of power. Pynchon goes to Frenssen for his account of the Herero retreat. Some segments of Mondaugen's story in V. seem to paraphrase Frenssen's book.

Graham, Stephen. Through Russian Central Asia. London: Cassell, 1916.

Pynchon has apparently gone to Graham to get a feeling for Central Asian landscape, flora and fauna. Graham's account is a travelogue of a journalist who travelled the region on foot. On p. 195 Graham compares a Kirghiz town to a wild western town and Pynchon uses this idea on p. 338 of GR.

Grottrup, Irmgard. Rocket Wife. Trans. Susi Hughes. London: Andre Deutsch, 1959.

A rare work which gives a detailed account of the experiences of a woman married to a rocket engineer who is captured by the Russians at the end of WW II and forced to work on the Soviet rocket program. The relationship between man and wife is reminiscent of the tensions that exist between Pöckler and Leni.

Hardinge, Rex. South African Cinderella: A Trek Through Ex-German Southwest Africa. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1937.

Hardinge's work furnishes Pynchon with much of the material contained in "Mondaugen's Story." Steven Weisenberger ("The End of History?") suggests that certain images and details, such as those describing the brutal treatment of the Hereros by the Germans, all come out of Hardinge's narrative. He directs particular attention to the image of the Herero woman whose breasts have been eaten by jackals. Along with Peter Moor's Journey by G. Frenssen, which gives an eye-witness account of von Trotha's campaign, Hardinge's book has surely been a valuable source for Pynchon.

Hawkes, John. The Cannibal. Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1949.

Hawkes's book is a surrealist vision of Europe in 1945. He describes a world torn by war and political rivalries. The various zones of occupation, the post-war economic and social break-down of an entire society, and the futile efforts of an unwanted American who tries to administer this strange world, provide Hawkes with the controlling metaphors of this book. Europe soon after the war is also the main setting of GR, and Pynchon shares with Hawkes the awareness that the zones are, in a

sense, The Zone, a surrealist locality projected by the imagination which becomes the proper ambience of deracinated modern man.

Huzel, Dieter K. Peenemünde to Canaveral. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962.

Huzel was one of the engineers who worked at the rocket plant in Peenemünde. In this autobiographic work he provides us with a vivid account of the situation there after the British bombing raid. As Pökler does in GR, Huzel escapes death and injury because he happens to be away from Peenemünde the night the place is bombed. Huzel also gives us an anecdote which describes how he was once caught sitting directly below a V-2 that had misfired and was now descending rapidly in his direction. Pökler has a similar experience in GR.

Jung, C. G. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Ed. Sir Herbert Read, et al. Bollingen Series XX, New York: Pantheon, 1956.

Pynchon refers directly to Jung in GR (p. 410, e.g.) and the influence of Jung on Pynchon is pervasive and abundantly evident in most of his work. In his conception of the unconscious, the value and meaning of myth and symbols, Pynchon follows Jung. The theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious finds a particularly sympathetic response in Pynchon along with other related matters such as mysticism, psychic phenomena and the nature of dreams. Like Jung, Pynchon is more open to cross-cultural mythologies and iconography than Freud was because he feels that primitive man has a kind of integral relationship with society and his environment that modern man lacks.

----- and W. Pauli. The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche. Bollingen Series LI. New York: Pantheon, 1955.

This work contains Jung's exposition of synchronicity, the acausal connecting principle behind apparent change and coincidence. In GR, Pynchon also challenges the established views concerning cause and effect, views that are largely based on a Newtonian-Cartesian conception of the physical world. Jung suggests that psychic phenomena, pre-cognition and telekinesis, matters that remain

outside the bounds of scientific theory, may be explained by the unconscious psyche and the archetypes which form the substratum of the collective unconscious. Slothrop's uncanny ability to sense the oncoming rockets and Pointzman's obsession with cause and effect can be better understood with Jung's theories in mind.

Kooy, Dr. J. M. J. and Dr. Ir. J. W. H. Uytenbogaart. Ballistics of the Future. Haarlem, Netherlands: N. V. de Technische Vitegeverij J. Stam, 1946.

This book is actually an engineering manual on the V-2 but also contains some interesting data about the activities of the rocket batteries in Holland. In GR Pynchon mentions that a rocket exploded near the estate on which Blicero and Katje are living (p. 96). Kooy and Uytenbogaart tell us about this incident on p. 284. This book also contains scale drawings of various sections of the rocket along with all the mathematics of flight and design.

Kracauer, Siegfried. From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947.

Kracauer's book is interesting but is based on a tenuous thesis. The relationships between the expressionist films of the 20's and 30's and the Hitlerian phase offer the possibilities of exciting social metaphors to Pynchon, and he does not hesitate to exploit them fully. The films are treated as the visual manifestations of the soul and mind of the Weimar Republic by Kracauer, who goes on to suggest that Nazism is somehow implicit in the themes they depict. Pynchon uses the ideas of Kracauer to explore the implications of the works of Fritz Lang and other German directors, especially as they reveal the psychological nexus between art and life.

Little, Malcolm. The Autobiography of Malcolm X. New York: Grove, 1964.

As has been pointed out by David Thorburn in his article "A Dissent on Pynchon," Pynchon turns to The Autobiography of Malcolm X in order to paint a picture of Slothrop's attitudes toward the American



Negro. Young Malcolm leaps from the pages of his life story into Slothrop's life as if there weren't any hiatus in between. Pynchon's imaginative universe is continuous with the real historical world and this only becomes evident after the reader sees how Pynchon uses the historical version of reality to fabricate the world of his fictions.

McGovern, James. Crossbow and Overcast. New York: William Morrow, 1964.

Pynchon goes to McGovern for a vivid account of the American attempts to salvage rocket materiel soon after the cessation of hostilities in Europe. McGovern uses the acronyms that Pynchon mentions on p. 273 of GR. The book includes some interesting photographs of the underground rocket factory at Nordhausen and the bibliography at the end is invaluable as a source of government documents that are rare. Books such as the A-4 Fibel, the primer that the rocket batteries used as instructional material to train troops and which must have contained names of the switch positions, are mentioned by McGovern.

Novikoff-Priboy, A. Tsushima, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944.

A vivid account by one of the crew members of the ORYOL, a battleship in Admiral Rozhdestvenski's flotilla, on its way to battle with the Japanese fleet in the straits of Tshushima. The descriptions of the coaling sequences at Luderitzbucht are close to the similar scenes in GR and V. The experiences of Tchitcherine's father are close to the kinds of activities the sailors of the Russian fleet engaged in when they touched African shores.

Pavlov, Ivan Petrovitch. Conditioned Reflexes and Psychiatry, II. Trans. and Ed. W. Horsley Gantt. New York: International Publishers, 1941.

This is apparently the book that Pointsman reveres as his Bible and it is also the work that Pynchon quotes from when he brings in Pavlov's correspondence with Pierre Janet on the nature of insanity and its connection with the conditioned reflex (Lecture 54). Gantt's translation is referred to

directly by Pynchon on p. 88 of GR. Pavlov's letter to Pierre Janet from which Pynchon quotes deals with the sentiment d'emprise and feelings of paranoia. Pointsman, the avowed Pavlovian, is committed to cause and effect relationships and cannot bring himself to accept the more mystical view of mental illness that Janet propounds. The 54th lecture of this book also deals with the "ultra-paradoxical effect," which Pointsman offers as an explanation of Slothrop's erections.

Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. A History of Russia. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969.

Riasanovsky develops the idea that Russian expansionism and imperialistic ventures into the land of the Kazakhs were similar in intent and effect to the westward movement of the American pioneer. This idea seems to appeal to Pynchon and he uses this image when he describes Tchitcherine and Džaqqyp Qulan as Lone Ranger and Tonto.

Sasuly, Richard. IG Farben. New York: Boni and Gaer, 1947.

Sasuly's book is a detailed account of IG Farben operations during WW II and in the years preceding the war. Pynchon goes to Sasuly to learn about the internal organization of various secret branches of the company that administered industrial espionage. The kind of information that Pynchon gives us on p. 630 of GR about the links between the OKW and the departments of the Abwehr and their links with Vermittlungsstelle W is exactly the kind of data that Sasuly provides on p. 110 of his book. Concepts such as the role of the Verbindungsmänner can only be understood with the help of Sasuly.

Tickell, Jerard. Odetta: The Story of a British Agent. London: Chapman and Hall, 1949.

Tickell's book gives an account of a spy named Bleicher. It includes a picture of the man and his dossier. The book is also valuable for the picture it paints of the activities of allied intelligence operations in the south of France.

Von Karman, Theodore. The Wind and Beyond. Boston: Little Brown, 1967.

Actually a biography, this work also becomes a source book for information on the early phases of aeronautics. Von Karman personally knew many of the engineers that Pynchon mentions in GR. Personalities like Adolf Busemann, Prandtl and Ackeret whom Pynchon refers to in GR are all mentioned by Von Karman. On p. 276 Von Karman also mentions one Frank Tchitcherine, an American intelligence agent who was assigned to him in order to help him screen refugee German scientists (most of them from Peenemünde and the factory at Nordhausen) at the end of hostilities in 1945. This Tchitcherine is related to the Tchitcherine in the Kerensky government. How Pynchon connects this agent with his own Tchitcherine, the "mad scavenger," is interesting to observe.

Waite, A. E. The Holy Kabbalah. New York: University Books, 1960.

Waite's book is an excellent guide to the Kabbalah, and since Pynchon mentions him in GR we can assume that he is familiar with this work. Waite provides an exhaustive description of the ten Sephiroth and includes exegetical chapters that cover the historical, mystical, and magical aspects of the Kabbalah. His chapter on the mystery of the Shekhinah sheds an interesting-light on the manner in which Pynchon refers to Greta Erdmann as the Shekhinah in Ensign Morituri's story (GR, p. 478).

----- The Pictorial Key to the Tarot. London: William Rider and Son, 1922. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1975.

Waite's guide to the Tarot is the one that Pynchon is turning to when he throws Weissmann's and Slothrop's Tarots at the end of Gravity's Rainbow (p. 738, 747). In the Pictorial Key, Waite clarifies "the Celtic Method of Divination" which Pynchon uses; Waite was also a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn, to which Pynchon refers (p.747).

Watson, J. B. and Rosalie Rayner. "Conditional Emotional Reflex." Journal of Experimental Psychology. III (1920), 1-14.

In this article Watson and Rayner give a detailed account of the experiments they performed on a child to condition certain negative and positive responses. This is the experiment that Pynchon seems to have in mind when he says that Tyrone Slothrop was also conditioned by Jamf to respond to certain sexual stimuli. Pynchon's attitude toward Watson's behaviorist theories can best be understood by the fact that one of the villains in GR, Pointsmen, is also a behaviorist.

Winner, Thomas G. The Oral Art and Literature of the Kazakhs of Central Asia. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1958.

Winner's book gives us a description of the ajtys and provides a sample of this folk poetry. Pynchon goes to Winner's book for some names such as Džabajev and Qulan and also for the kind of cultural data that enables him to flesh out the Central Asian sequence.

----- . "Problems of Alphabetic Reform Among the Turkic Peoples of Soviet Central Asia." Slavonic and East European Review, XXXI, 76 (Dec. 1952), pp. 133-147.

Pynchon turns to this essay to acquire the kinds of facts he needs to give the reader a historically accurate picture of the impact of Russian imperialism on the language of the Kazakhs. Many of the details concerning the alphabetic reform that Tchitcherine is involved with in GR have been culled from this article.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922.

The relationship of Pynchon's ideas and the concepts of Wittgenstein is intimate. From the Tractatus Pynchon takes many ideas to support his own view of the world. The manner in which pictures, both moving and still ones, are used in GR as models of reality is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's attempts to define and capture the real world. Pynchon also

seems to be in agreement with Wittgenstein on the issue of causality. Both challenge the causal nexus and deem it to be a superstition encouraged by those who seek to control others. In V., both Weissmann and Kurt Mondaugen show an awareness of Wittgenstein's opening statement in the Tractatus: "Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist." Since both men are in German Southwest Africa in 1922, it is remarkable, if not anachronistic, that they are knowledgeable about a recently published philosophical work.

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