

A MONUMENT TO PYNCHON SCHOLARSHIP\*

John M. Krafft

Thomas Pynchon: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials. By Clifford Mead. Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1989. 176 pp. Illus. \$39.95.

Thomas Pynchon is often described as the greatest living novelist writing in English, largely on the strength of Gravity's Rainbow (1973), an encyclopedic novel of vast historical, cultural and scientific erudition, and inordinate formal complexity, experimental sophistication and linguistic vitality. At the end of the 1980s came a milestone and an anniversary in Pynchon's career. Vineland (1990), his first novel since Gravity's Rainbow, reached bookstores just before New Year's in 1989, some thirty years after the publication of his first mature fiction.

That anniversary was also marked by the publication of Clifford Mead's Thomas Pynchon: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials--a valuable resource for scholars, a treasure for collectors, and a treat for other admirers of Pynchon. This is the first comprehensive Pynchon bibliography published since the mid-1970s, when there was so much less to comprehend. Less criticism, that is. Literally hundreds of articles and chapters, and almost all of the thirty or so books and essay collections devoted to Pynchon have appeared since the publication of the useful Scotto (1977) and the rather unsatisfactory Walsh and Northouse (1977) bibliographies. Pynchon himself has published relatively little in the meantime, but Mead has listed and even included some interesting older material--juvenilia and miscellany--not widely known or readily available before. In fact, apparently everything of Pynchon's which is known or presumed to be in the public domain is here.

Mead's enumerative bibliography of Pynchon's own work is divided into five sections. Section A lists the various English-language editions of the three novels V., The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow, and of the collection of early stories, Slow Learner. The section includes many photographs of

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covers, among which are an advance reading copy of V. and a trial cover design for Gravity's Rainbow. Section B lists Pynchon's short fiction--stories and excerpts--and miscellaneous non-fiction--reportage, a technical article, an introduction, a book review, a few published letters, and so on. The listing in this section of six stories published by the fifteen-year-old Pynchon in his high school newspaper, Purple and Gold, in 1952-53 will amuse and please many readers--as will Mead's thoughtful inclusion of the stories themselves in the appendix to Thomas Pynchon. Until now, even photocopies of the juvenilia have been scarce. Not everyone who had heard of them may have believed they actually existed. But now, Mead has provided both readable photographic reproductions of four of the stories and transcriptions of all six. While these juvenilia are, well, juvenile, enthusiasts and scholars alike will welcome them, even if they don't reshape our sense of Pynchon's oeuvre.

Section C lists and carefully describes the English pamphlet reprints of five stories and one article. These editions are generally thought to have been "unauthorized." Indeed, anger over being pirated is rumored to have been Pynchon's reason for publishing the collection of his early stories, Slow Learner, in 1984. But Jim Pennington of Aloes Books has recently been quoted as saying that the editions were in fact authorized by Pynchon's agent. Of course, that is just what one would expect him to say, even if it is true. Section D lists translations of novels, excerpts and stories into more than a dozen languages, from Swedish and Italian to Japanese and Hebrew.

Section E lists, reproduces and/or transcribes the endorsements Pynchon has written for the books of thirteen other authors, including Richard Farina, Rudolph Wurlitzer, Marge Piercy, Peter Matthiessen and Tom Robbins. This material is interesting as Pynchon's writing and important as an index to his literary taste and values. David Seed's recent analysis of the light these endorsements shed on Pynchon's fiction exemplifies the kind of work Mead's compilation may encourage more of.

For students and other Pynchon scholars at least, Part 2, the bio-bibliography, is likely to prove the richest vein in Thomas Pynchon. Here are listed more than a hundred dissertations devoted partly or wholly to Pynchon, and a polyglot array of books, chapters, excerpts, significant mentions, essays, conference papers, articles, reviews, gossip columns--everything from academic treatises to journalistic snippets--published between 1962 and 1988 and numbering perhaps a thousand. Anyone undertaking research into Pynchon or Pynchon criticism faces quite a task, one which Mead has greatly facilitated but which he has wisely refrained from making seem simpler than it is. Apart from the dissertations, which are listed chronologically, the bio-bibliographical material is presented strictly alphabetically, without Scotto's artificial

and sometimes arbitrary divisions of reviews from criticism and of items about one novel from those about another, and without Walsh and Northouse's pointless division by year of publication. (Admittedly, beginning or casual researchers may prefer chronological or novel-by-novel arrangement, but comprehensive alphabetical listing is ultimately more suitable for the serious investigator.)

Besides the juvenilia mentioned above, the appendix to Thomas Pynchon reproduces a number of pages and photos from Pynchon's 1953 high school yearbook, the Oysterette. Text reproduced here identifies Pynchon as the author of the otherwise unattributed Purple and Gold stories. The photos include group pictures of the Purple and Gold and Oysterette staffs, the math club and the National Honor Society, as well as Pynchon's senior picture. According to the Senior Class Will, "Tommy Pynchon leaves his big vocabulary to Jimmy Donovan."

The bibliography of a living writer, particularly a writer of Pynchon's stature, dates rapidly, as the appearance of Vineland has already shown. So we will eventually need and welcome a second edition of Mead's Thomas Pynchon. With that prospect in mind, I will venture a few suggestions. According to his preface, Mead "attempts to be inclusive rather than selective," but "some trifles of negligible value have been omitted." That is fine, doubtless even fortunate, given some of the true trifles I have read. Nevertheless, I would have appreciated Mead's articulating his principles of selection. What makes a trifle--size, lack of critical intent, lack of acumen . . . ? It would also have been useful to know what data bases and indexes covering what periods Mead drew on. If researchers knew, for instance, that Mead had already mined the Arts and Humanities Citation Index through 1988 and the MHRA Annual Bibliography through 1986, they would know what sources they didn't need to recheck. Finally, perhaps sacrificing correctness to utility, I would have listed dissertations by their DAI citations.

Such quibbles notwithstanding, Thomas Pynchon: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials is a monument to thirty years of Pynchon's work and to nearly as many years of Pynchon scholarship. And it comes with a bonus, though something of a teaser at that. The dust jacket is illustrated with portions of a manuscript poem signed "Tom Pynchon." The bibliography itself, however, contains no mention of any such poem.

--Miami University--Hamilton