

**ENGL636, S II '04, M-F 1330-1445, ARM 119 :: STUDIES IN AN AUTHOR / THOMAS PYNCHON ::
WVU DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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[Click for Thomas Pynchon on the Simpsons! \(thanks to Spermatikos Logo\)](#)

... we all know of him: reclusive, mysterious, genius author of massive, very important works, cultural icon of paranoia and conspiracy, recent guest voice on The Simpsons ... we could call it something like the Pynchon effect, defining the 21st Century postmodern writer, invisibly dispersed across his text but equally into the culture he writes on and through ... and so, this course will be a full serving of Pynchon ...

COURSE GOALS:

1. We read Pynchon. Pynchon's novels are rewarding and challenging (and very funny). First and foremost, a close reading of the novels. Expect to read a lot: the short stories, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon*, with reference to *V.* and *Vineland*. The class will be conducted as a discussion/seminar.
2. Pynchon reads Them. What do you need to know to read Pynchon? We will map context and background for the notoriously complex textuality of Pynchon's novels, exploring the literariness of this encyclopedic synthesis of materials ranging from rocket science to obscure mysticism. The aim is an archeology not simply of the relevant sources but of the literary and cultural logic of documentary material in Pynchon's work.
3. Pynchon reads Us. Reading Pynchon informs our understanding of contemporary literary studies. His novels are exemplary references for a range of theory and criticism, from meta-concerns with narrative, materiality, reference, and history; to specific theoretical formations such as postmodernism, transnational/postcolonial studies, and media theory. How does Pynchon model and interrogate literary studies? His novels define an inter- or trans-disciplinary thinking that maintains the specificity of the literary. We will explore how Pynchon situates literature in a global discourse economy.
4. And don't forget the Pynchon effect!

REQUIRED TEXTS AVAILABLE AT THE WVU BOOKSTORE

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*

Thomas Pynchon, *Slow Learner*

PARTIAL LIST OF RECOMMENDED TEXTS

(all at WVU Library; *=also at WVU Bookstore)

Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, especially Chapters XXI, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXV.

Aleida Assmann, "Texts, Traces, Trash: The Changing Media of Cultural Memory," *Representations* #56, [link \(JSTOR\)](#)

Hanjo Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text*

Leo Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature," *Representation* #25, [link \(JSTOR\)](#)

Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History*

Charles Clerc, *Mason & Dixon & Pynchon*

Peter Cooper, *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World*

David Cowart, "The Luddite Vision," *American Literature* Vol. 71 #2, [link \(JSTOR\)](#)

Walter Dornberger, *V2*

Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*

Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*

*Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*

Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*

*Chalmers Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*

C. G. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Vol 9 of the Collected Works

C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Vol 12 of the Collected Works

J. Kerry Grant, *Companion to the Crying of Lot 49*

Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: an approach to Gravity's Rainbow*

Friedrich Kittler, "Media and Drugs in Pynchon's Second World War," in *Reading Matters: Narratives in the New Media Ecology*, ed. Tabbi and Wutz

Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*

Stefan Mattesich, *Lines of Flight: discursive time and countercultural desire in the work of Thomas Pynchon*

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*

Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, ed. Levine & Leverenz

Frank Palmieri, "Neither Literally nor as Metaphor: Pynchon's the Crying of Lot 49 and the Structure of Scientific Revolutions," *ELH* Vol 54 #4, [link \(JSTOR\)](#)

I. P. Pavlov, *Conditioned Reflexes: An Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex*

William H. Plater, *Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon*

*Thomas Pynchon, *V*.

*Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland*

Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Edward Mendelson

Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus*

Rchard Sasuly, *IG Farben*

Lance Schachterle, "Information Entropy in Pynchon's Fiction," *Configurations* Vol 4 #2, [link \(Muse\)](#)

Gershom Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*

Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, especially part III

*Stephen Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*, (not in the library)

*Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, especially chapters I, II,

V, XI

Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History*

George Zipf, *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort: An Introduction to Human Ecology*

REQUIREMENTS

- Essay on a topic arising from the course, 10 pages minimum. Plan a paper suitable for conference presentation. One page proposal due in class August 2. Final version due via email August 10. 30%
- Class presentation, 15 minutes minimum. Sign up via email for one book-length text from the recommended list. Firstly, write a critical review of the text, including summary and evaluation, 2-3 pages. Secondly, write a lesson plan for the text, with reference to Pynchon's work. Imagine a class of your choice; how the texts are taught is up to you. Present the critical review and teaching plan to the class. 30%
- 4 reflection/responses, 700 words minimum, due by class time via email. Choose a specific passage in the text and respond to it. Respond to the language, to cultural or literary context, or otherwise. 10% each.
- Regular attendance, preparation, and participation are assumed.
- Join Pynchon-L, *the* list for pynchonoids. [Link](#).

SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

SCHEDULE

Date	Reading	*Due*	[Presentation]
July 1	Introduction		
July 2	Slow Learner (Introduction, "Low-Lands," "Entropy")	*Sign-up for Presentations*	
July 5	Holiday	*Response 1*	
July 6	Slow Learner ("Under the Rose," "The Secret		

	Integration"), "Is it OK to be a Luddite?" link		
July 7	The Crying of Lot 49		
July 8	The Crying of Lot 49		
July 9	The Crying of Lot 49		
July 12	The Crying of Lot 49, all	*Response 2*	Mandi Fredrick, <i>The Human Use of Human Beings</i>
July 13	The Crying of Lot 49		Elayna Vanscoy, <i>Companion to The Crying of Lot 49</i>
July 14	Gravity's Rainbow		
July 15	Gravity's Rainbow		
July 16	Gravity's Rainbow		Reid Harward, "Media and Drugs in Pynchon's Second World War" and "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature"
July 19	Gravity's Rainbow, through 278	*Response 3*	
July 20	Gravity's Rainbow		
July 21	Gravity's Rainbow		
July 22	Gravity's Rainbow		Konni Jacobs, <i>The White Goddess</i>
July 23	Gravity's Rainbow		Rebecca Skidmore, <i>From Caligari to Hitler</i>
July 26	Gravity's Rainbow, through 616	*Response 4*	Matt Haas, <i>Signs and Symptoms</i>
July 27	Gravity's Rainbow		Bridgit Ferris, <i>Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism</i>
July 28	Gravity's Rainbow		Jay Marinelli, <i>Life Against Death</i>
July 29	Gravity's Rainbow		Jim Greene, <i>Sonnets to Orpheus & Duino Elegies</i>
July 30	Mason & Dixon		
August 2	Mason & Dixon, through 206	*Paper Proposal*	Nick Hales, <i>Empire</i>
August 3	Mason & Dixon		Lori Zerne, <i>Mason & Dixon & Pynchon</i>

August Mason & Dixon
4

August Mason & Dixon
5

August Mason & Dixon
6

August
11

Andrea Cooke, *Sorrows of
Empire*

Paper Due