

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76974-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon

Edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman and Brian McHale

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
THOMAS PYNCHON

The most celebrated American novelist of the past half-century, an indispensable figure of postmodernism worldwide, Thomas Pynchon notoriously challenges his readers. This *Companion* provides tools for meeting that challenge. Comprehensive, accessible, lively, up-to-date and reliable, it approaches Pynchon's fiction from various angles, calling on the expertise of an international roster of scholars at the cutting edge of Pynchon studies. Part I covers Pynchon's fiction novel by novel from the sixties to the present, including such indisputable classics as *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. Part II zooms out to give a bird's-eye view of Pynchon's novelistic practice across his entire career. Part III surveys major topics of Pynchon's fiction: history, politics, alterity ("otherness"), and science and technology. Designed for students, scholars and fans alike, the *Companion* begins with a biography of the elusive author and ends with a coda on how to read Pynchon and a bibliography for further reading.

INGER H. DALSGAARD is Associate Professor of American Studies, Department of English, University of Aarhus, Denmark.

LUC HERMAN is Professor of American Literature and Narrative Theory at the University of Antwerp.

BRIAN MCHALE is Distinguished Arts and Humanities Professor of English at the Ohio State University.

A complete list of books in the series is at the end of this book

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HANJO BERRESSEM teaches American Literature at the University of Cologne, Germany. His publications include *Pynchon’s Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text* (1993) and *Lines of Desire: Reading Gombrowicz’s Fiction with Lacan* (1998). He has edited, together with Leyla Haferkamp, *Site-Specific: Pynchon|Germany, Pynchon Notes, 54–55* (2008) and *Deleuzian Events: Writing|History* (2009). Currently, he is completing a book on the work of Gilles Deleuze: “*Crystal Philosophy*”: *Radical Constructivism and the Deleuzian Event*.

DAVID COWART, Louise Fry Scudder Professor at the University of South Carolina, is the author of *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (1980) and numerous articles on Pynchon and contemporary American fiction. His most recent books are *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, which won the SAML A Literary Studies Award in 2003, and *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Writing in Contemporary America* (2006). A consulting editor for the journal *Critique*, Professor Cowart has been an NEH fellow and has held Fulbright chairs in Finland and Denmark.

INGER H. DALSGAARD is Associate Professor in American Studies at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, and holds a doctoral degree from King’s College, University of London, and MIT. Her work on Thomas Pynchon, science and technology has been published in a number of collections and journals, including *Pynchon Notes*.

BERNARD DUYFHUIZEN is Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences and Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. His research interests include Thomas Pynchon, the novel and narrative theory. He is the author of *Narratives of Transmission* (1992), and he is completing a study of the reader in *Gravity’s*

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Rainbow. Duyfhuizen is also a member of the musical group Eggplant Heroes, whose first CD, *After This Time*, was released in 2010.

AMY J. ELIAS teaches contemporary literature and culture, narrative theory and digital humanities at the University of Tennessee. She is the author of *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (2001), which won the ISSN's Perkins Prize, has published numerous articles and book chapters concerning contemporary narrative, media arts and historiography, and is completing a book on dialogics. She is creator and past president of ASAP: The Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present and organized its 2009 launch conference.

LUC HERMAN teaches at the University of Antwerp. He is the author of *Concepts of Realism* (1996), the co-author of *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005), the editor of *Approach and Avoid: Essays on Gravity's Rainbow* (1998) and the co-editor of *(Dis)continuities: Essays on Paul de Man* (1988). His research interests in narrative theory and the work of Thomas Pynchon have led to co-authored essays in *Contemporary Literature*, *Critique*, *Mosaic*, *Narrative*, *Pynchon Notes*, *Style* and *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*.

KATHRYN HUME is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University. She has written numerous articles on Thomas Pynchon's novels, and her books include *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (1984); *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to Gravity's Rainbow* (1987); *Calvino's Fictions: Cogito and Cosmos* (1992); *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction since 1960* (2000); and *Surviving your Academic Job Hunt: Advice for Humanities PhDs* (2005; 2nd edn., 2011).

JOHN M. KRAFFT teaches English at the Hamilton campus of Miami University. He co-founded *Pynchon Notes* in 1979 and served as an editor of the journal until 2009. He has co-authored several recent essays on Pynchon with Luc Herman.

BRIAN MCHALE is Distinguished Arts and Humanities Professor of English at the Ohio State University. He is the author of *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992) and *The Obligation toward the Difficult Whole: Postmodernist Long Poems* (2004), and co-editor, with Randall Stevenson, of *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Literatures in English* (2006) and, with David Herman and James Phelan, of *Teaching Narrative Theory* (2010).

DEBORAH L. MADSEN is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Geneva. Her research focuses on cultural articulations of American Exceptionalism. She has published on Thomas Pynchon, his colonial ancestor William Pynchon, and literary representations of the Pynchon family. Her most

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THOMAS HILL SCHAUB is Professor of Literature at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and author of *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (1981), *American Fiction in The Cold War* (1991) and *Approaches To Teaching Thomas Pynchon's The Crying Of Lot 49 and Other Works* (2008). He has published essays on James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Ellison, Cormac McCarthy, Marilynne Robinson and Don DeLillo, among others. He has been editor of the journal *Contemporary Literature* since 1989.

DAVID SEED holds a chair in American Literature at Liverpool University and published *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* in 1988. Since then he has published studies of other American novelists and brought out *American Science Fiction and the Cold War* (1999). His main research areas have been Cold War culture, the relation of fiction to film, and different aspects of science fiction. He is currently working on a study of Ray Bradbury.

STEVEN WEISENBURGER is the Mossiker Chair in Humanities at Southern Methodist University, where he teaches American studies courses. Author of *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* (2nd edn., 2006), *Modern Medea* (1998) and *Fables of Subversion* (1995), he has published extensively on American literature and topics in American history. He is completing a book on the cultural history of American white supremacy and, with Luc Herman, working on a co-authored study entitled *Gravity's Rainbow, Domination, & Freedom*.

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CHRONOLOGY OF PYNCHON'S LIFE AND WORK

- 1937 Thomas Pynchon is born on May 8 in Glen Cove, on Long Island, New York.
- 1945 The Second World War in Europe ends on Pynchon's eighth birthday, VE Day.
- 1952 Pynchon's earliest known stories begin appearing, anonymously, in his high school newspaper, *Purple and Gold*.
- 1953 Pynchon graduates from Oyster Bay High School and enters Cornell University as an Engineering Physics major.
- 1955 Pynchon joins the US Navy.
- 1956 During the Suez Crisis, Pynchon serves aboard the USS *Hank* in the Mediterranean.
- 1957 Pynchon returns to Cornell as an English major.
- 1958 Pynchon collaborates with Kirkpatrick Sale on a musical, "Minstrel Island" (unfinished).
- 1959 Pynchon's first two mature short stories, "The Small Rain" and "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna," are published. He receives his BA and moves to Greenwich Village. He applies, unsuccessfully, for a Ford Foundation Fellowship to work with an opera company.
- 1960 Pynchon moves to Seattle to work as a staff writer for Boeing Airplane Company's in-house newsletter *Bomarc Service News*. Two more short stories, "Low-lands" and "Entropy," and the technical article "Togetherness" appear.
- 1961 "Under the Rose" appears. It will receive an O. Henry Award.
- 1962 Pynchon leaves his job at Boeing, his last known salaried employment, and moves to Mexico.
- 1963 Pynchon's first novel, *V.* (J. B. Lippincott), is published. It will receive the Faulkner Foundation Award for best first novel of the year and also be a National Book Award finalist.
- 1964 Pynchon tells friends he has recently been denied admission to an undergraduate program in mathematics at the University of California at Berkeley. His last short story, "The Secret Integration," appears.

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- 1965 Pynchon turns down an opportunity to teach at Bennington College. In "A Gift of Books," in *Holiday* magazine, he praises Oakley Hall's western novel *Warlock*.
- 1966 Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (J. B. Lippincott), is published. It will win the Rosenthal Foundation Award. The essay "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts" appears in the *New York Times*. By now Pynchon is apparently living mostly in California.
- 1968 Pynchon's name appears, along with more than 400 others, in an advertisement protesting the US war in Vietnam.
- 1973 *Gravity's Rainbow* (Viking) is published. It will share the National Book Award with Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Crown of Feathers*, be a runner-up for the Nebula Award, and be recommended for but denied a Pulitzer Prize.
- 1975 The American Academy of Arts and Letters awards Pynchon the Howells Medal for *Gravity's Rainbow*. He refuses it.
- 1983 Pynchon writes an introduction for the reissue of his late friend Richard Fariña's *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me*.
- 1984 Pynchon collects five of his early short stories, with a reflective introduction, in *Slow Learner* (Little, Brown), and publishes "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?" in the *New York Times*.
- 1988 Pynchon receives a five-year MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. "The Heart's Eternal Vow," his review of Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, appears in the *New York Times*.
- 1990 Pynchon's fourth novel, *Vineland* (Little, Brown), is published. Pynchon is now married and living in New York City.
- 1992 Pynchon writes an introduction for the collection *The Teachings of Don B.*, by his late friend Donald Barthelme.
- 1993 Pynchon's essay on sloth, "Nearer, My Couch, to Thee," appears in the *New York Times* as part of a series on the deadly sins.
- 1994 Pynchon writes liner notes for the retrospective CD *Spiked!: The Music of Spike Jones*.
- 1995 Pynchon writes jacket notes for the band Lotion's CD *Nobody's Cool*.
- 1996 "Lunch with Lotion," an interview conducted by Pynchon, appears in *Esquire*.
- 1997 Pynchon's fifth novel, *Mason & Dixon* (Henry Holt), is published. Pynchon also writes an introduction for the reissue of Jim Dodge's novel *Stone Junction*.
- 1999 Pynchon writes "Hallowe'en? Over Already?" for the *Cathedral School Newsletter*.
- 2002 *Playboy Japan* publishes sarcastic remarks attributed to Pynchon about reactions to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Pynchon's agent quickly disavows them.
- 2003 Pynchon writes a foreword for the George Orwell Centenary edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

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- 2004 Pynchon lends his voice to the character “Thomas Pynchon” in two episodes of *The Simpsons*.
- 2006 Pynchon's sixth novel, *Against the Day* (Penguin Press), is published. Pynchon also writes a program note, “The Evolution of *The Daily Show*,” for a tenth-anniversary celebration.
- 2009 Pynchon's seventh novel, *Inherent Vice* (Penguin Press), is published. Pynchon narrates a promotional video for the book. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences names him a Fellow.

Compiled by JOHN M. KRAFFT