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Unexpected Refuge

Thomas Pynchon comes home.

Alan Jacobs | posted 1/02/2014

In the last paragraph of Thomas Pynchon's 2009 novel *Inherent Vice*, Doc Sportello, the diminutive stoner private eye who serves as the book's protagonist, drives down the Santa Monica freeway in a dense fog. He creeps along in a line of cars and wishes for something better than his current life, when the fog lifts. *If* it lifts.

Maybe then it would stay this way for days, maybe he'd have to just keep driving, down past Long Beach, down through Orange County, and San Diego, and across a border where nobody could tell anymore in the fog who was Mexican, who was Anglo, who was anybody. Then again, he might run out of gas before that happened, and have to leave the caravan, and pull over on the shoulder, and wait. For whatever would happen. For a forgotten joint to materialize in his pocket. For the CHP to come by and choose not to hassle him. For a restless blonde in a Stingray to stop and offer him a ride. For the fog to burn away, and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead.

Lovely and melancholy sentences ... but: "For something else to be there instead"—instead of *what*, exactly? And I think the only answer is: instead of California. Or of the California we know, in what we think of as our home universe, our good old space-time coordinates.

That might seem a strange thing to say about a book that seems to be a slightly distended pastiche of a certain sub-genre of detective fiction, but I think it's true. It's clear that Doc Sportello fits into his time and place a bit uncomfortably. One might assume that this is simply a function of the acid trips he has been on, but that's not all there is to it. For instance, Doc loves and listens to and speaks often about surf music, famous songs like "Wipe Out" by the Surfaris (1963) and "Tequila" by the Champs (1958), and obscurities like "Super Market" by Fapardokly (1967), and even made-up tunes like "Soul Gidget" by Meatball Flag ("one of the few known attempts at black surf music"), even though the book is clearly set in 1970. More recent songs are mentioned, but Doc seems generally oblivious to them, even though he is a young man.

I say the book is clearly set in 1970 because Pynchon anchors the narrative in a handful of public events. First, and in thematic terms probably the most important, the Manson Family murders, which happened in August 1969, are on the lips of many, especially as the case drew near to trial in the middle of the following year. More lightheartedly, a perpetually stoned rock-and-roll band is passionately following the vampire-based soap opera *Dark Shadows*, and Pynchon seems to have tracked the actual developments of that show pretty closely.

Still more temporally precise are the references to two nba playoff series from 1970, one involving Milwaukee and Philadelphia, another the legendary Finals encounter of that year between the Lakers and the Knicks. But this anchor, however precise, is not quite as firmly buried in the sand as it might seem. For instance, we're told at one point that Doc had liked Kareem Abdul-Jabbar since he had been Lou Alcindor—but in 1970 he was still Lou Alcindor: the name change came a year later. And would an early-round Eastern Conference playoff game have been shown on television in California in 1970? Certainly not.

There are other such oddities scattered through the book: for instance, one character refers comically to Cheech and Chong's song "Basketball Jones," which didn't appear until 1973. If almost any other novelist were at work here, I would simply assume sloppiness. But with Pynchon you never know. Maybe he *was* sloppy; or maybe the book is in very subtle ways offering us a world where space and time undergo slippage, and not just for those like Doc Sportello who are forever toking on fat joints. Pynchon can be challenging for his reader in this way; and still more challenging for book reviewers. But the assumption that he knows what he's doing is, for reader and reviewer alike, a highly fruitful one.

2.

Inherent Vice begins when a woman shows up at the Southern California office of a former lover (Doc) who is a private eye; she is concerned about a missing person and wants Doc to investigate. He takes the case, as a favor more than as a job, and finds himself drawn deeper and deeper into various possible and real conspiracies, sees the living killed by agents unknown and the apparently dead find new life. Meanwhile the puzzle with which the book begins—a run-of-the-mill missing persons case—in some ways resolves itself and in others just evaporates in the face of stranger and more ominous mysteries.

Pynchon's new novel *Bleeding Edge* begins—or almost begins; I'll explain the caveat later—when a man shows up at the Manhattan office of a friend (Maxine Tarnow) who is a fraud investigator: he wants her to look into the books of a company he's connected with to see how and why they're being cooked. She takes the case, as a favor more than a job, and finds herself drawn deeper and deeper into various possible and real conspiracies, sees the living killed by agents unknown and the certainly dead find apparent new life. Meanwhile persons go missing under extremely frightening circumstances, but then turn up alive and well—most of them, anyway—and the puzzle with which the book begins evaporates in the face of stranger and more ominous mysteries.

Much of the investigating that Doc does he does by intuition: "Doc's nose had begun to run, a sure sign that he was onto something here." Sustained drug use seems to intensify, or at least liberate, this intuition: "A private eye didn't drop acid for years in this town without picking up some kind of extrasensory chops." Maxine too, though without drugs, relies on a similar kind of esp, a series of "sensors" that alert her to significant information waiting to be collected: "Among Maxine's more useful sensors is her bladder. When she's out of range of information she needs, she can go whole days without any particular interest in pissing, but when phone numbers, koans, or stock tips from which she's likely to profit are close by, the gotta-go alarm has reliably steered her to enough significant restroom walls that she's learned to pay attention." (Curiously, Oedipa Maas, in Pynchon's early book *The Crying of Lot 49*, first encounters the mysterious organization called the Tristero through a message and an image scribbled on the wall of a public toilet.) Doc and Maxine alike possess something like Socrates' *daimon*: when they heed that inner prompting, things go well for them—or, still more important, very very bad things are averted.

Bleeding Edge also fixes its temporal coordinates by referring to sporting events, in this case an NFL matchup on September 9, 2001. One book invokes its own title once, the other twice. Each book is far more accessible than most of Pynchon's more expansive tomes, content to work largely if not wholly within the familiar procedures of realistic fiction. (Though, it must be said, with the ongoing comical-shtick accompaniment that every Pynchon novel inflicts on its readers: stoner jokes in the earlier book, remarkably clichéd Jewish ones in the new one, which also features, most cringe-inducingly of all, a Sassy Black Woman.) And at one point in *Bleeding Edge* two people start singing and dancing to "Soul Gidget."

Pynchon could scarcely indicate more clearly that he wishes these books to be seen as companion pieces, bookends to each other as their settings bookend the continent, mirror images. But the shrewd reader will be at least as attentive to the ways the books diverge, and indeed, the differences between the two are key to understanding them both, and especially to grasping the ways in which *Bleeding Edge* is a kind of revision of, or corrective to, the most widely-noted tendencies of Pynchon's fiction.

3.

Doc Sportello doesn't do acid any more, at least not intentionally, preferring the gentler high of weed. But the inevitable flashbacks pay their visits, and on at least one occasion Doc's joint has more than just weed in it. Flashbacks are typically seen as problematic, but from one point of view, like the first-order trips they follow, they're an opportunity: they open the doors of perception to other

worlds, places as real as or maybe more real than everyday Californian space-time. One world that Doc visits seems to be Lemuria, that long-departed island of legend, the Atlantis of the Pacific: a place of perfect harmony, guided and guarded by ancient wisdom; the kind of world that the hippies of the Sixties, at their best anyway, loved and longed to restore. In Lemuria Doc learns that a woman he cares for is safe; their spirits resonate, they find peace in the midst of chaos.

One of the last, and most important, invocations of Lemuria comes in the late passage where the book's title also emerges. Doc's lawyer Sauncho mentions the term "inherent vice":

"Is that like original sin?" Doc wondered.

"It's what you can't avoid," Sauncho said, "stuff marine policies don't like to cover. Usually applies to cargo—like eggs break—but sometimes it's also the vessel carrying it. Like why bilges have to be pumped out?"

"Like the San Andreas Fault," it occurred to Doc. "Rats living up in the palm trees."

"Well," Sauncho blinked, "maybe if you wrote a marine policy on L.A., considering it, for some closely defined reason, to be a boat ..."

"Hey, how about a ark? That's a boat, right?"

"Ark insurance?"

"That big disaster Sortilège is always talking about, way back when Lemuria sank into the Pacific. Some of the people who escaped then are spoze to've fled here for safety. Which would make California like, a ark."

California, then, is Lemuria's aftermath, but also the possible seed of its renewal. The once and future Lemuria, and yet vulnerable just as Lemuria and Atlantis were, since an earthquake sent them beneath the sea. So the stoner denizens of Doc's wastrel world carry in their dna the memories of a perfected society, memories that arise from their unconscious minds in drug-enhanced visions. Our best hopes and dreams, then, are exercises in recovery of what has been lost, recuperation of an ideal past.

In *Bleeding Edge* there is no Lemuria, no ideal past. Instead there is a video game.

It's called DeepArcher—pronounced, more or less, "Departure"—and it's built to be part of the Deep Web. This is an actual term, coined by a computer scientist named Mike Bergman, for a real thing, or a real multitude of things: the vast number of websites that are for various reasons unreachable by the "crawlers" that Google and other search engines send out to harvest the online. The makers of DeepArcher want to make their virtual world uncrawlable, unfindable by casually prying eyes, but available to those who *know* (or truly want to know). When those developers decide to open their whole code-base to the world (and also for other reasons too complex to go into here) it becomes more vulnerable to unwelcome outsiders—but at the same time, hackers jump in and extend the world vastly. It becomes for many people a kind of (one might say) Second Life. Among them, briefly anyway, is the novel's protagonist, Maxine.

Once when Maxine, seeking refuge from various sources of stress and anxiety, is traveling in these digital worlds, she meets a woman in a coffee shop—or, it would be more accurate to say, she converses digitally with an apparent person whose avatar is female. This person proves to be a kind of philosopher of DeepArcher. "These days you look at the surface Web," she says,

"all that yakking, all the goods for sale, the spammers and spielers and idle fingers, all in the same desperate scramble they like to call an economy. Meantime, down here, sooner or later someplace deep, there has to be a horizon between coded and codeless. An abyss."

"That's what you're looking for?"

"Some of us are." Avatars do not do wistful, but Maxine catches something. "Others are trying to avoid it. Depends

what you're into."

Another time Maxine meets a dead man she knows—or perhaps he is not dead after all, which she has already suspected on other, spooky grounds; or perhaps someone else is using his name; there's no way to tell—a man whose death she feels vaguely responsible for. They converse:

"How about at least letting me bring you back up. Whoever you are."

"What. Up to the surface?"

"Closer anyway."

"Why?"

"I don't know." She doesn't. "If it's really you, Lester, I hate to think of you being lost down here."

"Lost down here is the whole point. Take a good look at the surface Web sometime, tell me it isn't a sorry picture. Big favor you'd be doing me, Maxine."

Why would you want to leave Lemuria? Or the closest thing to it people can make.

But: Is such a refuge the sort of thing people *can* make? Lemuria, the lost Lemuria, was not made, at least not in the same way. A technological Lemuria certainly cannot be *designed*, but that does not mean that it cannot, at least possibly, *emerge*. At one point late in the story, at a strange and disturbing and sort-of wonderful Halloween party that goes long into the night and then into the next day, two young Russian gangster-hackers meet one of the creators of DeepArcher and express their devoted awe at its constant expansive evolution. They ask one of the creators, "Tell us, Justin. Did you design it that way?" And he answers, "No, it was only supposed to be the one thing, like, timeless? A refuge. History-free is what Lucas and I were hoping for."

But a new *emergent* history is what they, or rather the virtual world's new hive-mind of designers and users, are getting. So, a little later, Misha and Grisha, still in a mood of wonderment, take Maxine aside:

"DeepArcher—you know it too. You've been there."

"Um," nothing to lose, "see, it's only, like, code?"

"No! Maxine, no!" with what could be either naïve faith or raving insanity, "it's real place!"

"It is asylum, no matter, you can be poorest, no home, lowest of jailbirds, *obizhenka*, condemned to die—"

"Dead—"

"DeepArcher will always take you in, keep you safe."

"Lester," Grisha whispers, eyes angling upstairs toward the pool, "Lester's soul. You understand?"

And then Pynchon lets us know that it's not Halloween any more: "A head gesture out into the All Saints night, toward far downtown where the Trade Center used to stand" The All Saints night—the holy day of the saints, the inheritors of eternal life.

Somewhat earlier in the book Maxine talks with Igor, an older Russian, a kind of mentor or minder or boss to Misha and Grisha. Then too Lester's death comes up, followed by this enigmatic exchange, with Igor speaking first:

"Cops will not act. It becomes matter of ..."

"Justice."

"Restoration."

"He's dead. What's to restore?"

"You'd be surprised."

4.

This is hopeful, even, in its way, eschatological, and not for the first time in Pynchon. (Consider, for instance, the lovely awakening of the Thanatoids in *Vineland* [1990].) But for there to be the hope of restoration there must first be loss. And in this book the losses go far beyond the individual murder, as that All Saints passage reminds us: "where the Trade Center used to stand." The events of *Bleeding Edge* begin in the spring of 2001 and end a year later, and the 9/11 catastrophe throbs at the center of the book's manifold anxieties and fears. That catastrophe can only be approached via the by-now-fully-developed Pynchonian view of history—not the idealized history of lost Lemuria, but this history that has made this time and place.

The aforementioned Halloween party is perhaps the book's finest and most important set-piece, but another memorable and important one occurs when Maxine and two friends take a late-night speedboat ride that culminates in their fleeing official pursuit by rushing past the lower tip of Manhattan Island, past the Statue of Liberty, down Arthur Kill along the west side of Staten Island, to conceal themselves amidst the vast mountains of refuse at the Fresh Kills Landfill, "toxicity central, the dark focus of Big Apple waste disposal, everything the city has rejected so it can keep on pretending to be itself."

And then Maxine sees the tiny Island of Meadows: "here unexpectedly at the heart of it is this 100 acres of untouched marshland, directly underneath the North Atlantic flyway, sequestered by law from development and dumping, marsh birds sleeping in safety."

This little island reminds her of something, and it takes her a minute to see what. As if you could reach into the looming and prophetic landfill, that perfect negative of the city in its seething foul incoherence, and find a set of invisible links to click on and be crossfaded at last to unexpected refuge, a piece of the ancient estuary exempt from what happened, what has gone on happening, to the rest of it. Like the Island of Meadows, DeepArcher also has developers after it. Whatever migratory visitors are still down there trusting in its inviolability will some morning all too soon be rudely surprised by the whispering descent of corporate Web crawlers itching to index and corrupt another patch of sanctuary for their own far-from-selfless ends.

Consider this an allegory of life under late capitalism: a world in which "developers," "for their own far-from-selfless ends," seek more and more territory to colonize, exploit, and dispose of. Whatever exists, whether found or made, they strive to apprehend; and having apprehended it, they test it for potential value, according to their system of value; and having established that value, they seize it; and having seized it, they use it; and having used it, they discard it. And the cycle then resumes. "History-free is what Lucas and I were hoping for," Justin says, but there is *always* history. And history always leaves its detritus.

The agents of the Developers may be found almost anywhere, if you have eyes to see them—even in the midst of the scruffy dopers' paradise Doc Sportello inhabits in *Inherent Vice*: "This seemed to be happening more and more lately, out in Greater Los Angeles, among gatherings of carefree youth and happy dopers, where Doc had begun to notice older men, there and not there, rigid, unsmiling, that he knew he'd seen before, not the faces necessarily but a defiant posture, an unwillingness to blur out, like everybody else at the psychedelic events of those days, beyond official envelopes of skin." The "operatives" are visible; their bosses are not. Or is there one Boss, some kind of singular entity, perhaps not a person except in some fictional or metaphorical sense—"V," for which Pynchon's first novel is named; the Tristero of *The Crying of Lot 49*?

Pynchon seems from early in his career to have intuited what Michel Foucault writes about in books like *Discipline and Punish*: a "power-knowledge regime" which cannot be *located* in a person or institution, but whose control of our world is imperceptibly dispersed—an evil inversion of the ancient mystical definition of God as a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. A secret cabal of Freemasons or Communists or Republicans would be comforting by comparison, as a character in *Bleeding Edge*, an aging Sixties-style radical, notes: "Some conspiracies, they're warm and comforting, we know the names of the

bad guys, we want to see them get their comeuppance. Others you're not sure you want any of it to be true because it's so evil, so deep and comprehensive." Or, as Doc reflects further on the existence of those "rigid, unsmiling" men at the periphery of every festivity,

If everything in this dream of prerevolution was in fact doomed to end and the faithless money-driven world to reassert its control over all the lives it felt entitled to touch, fondle, and molest, it would be agents like these, dutiful and silent, out doing the shitwork, who'd make it happen. Was it possible, that at every gathering—concert, peace rally, love-in, be-in, and freak-in, here, up north, back East, wherever—those dark crews had been busy all along, reclaiming the music, the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday, all they could sweep up, for the ancient forces of greed and fear?

From within this paranoid (or observantly realist) logic, there is an obvious answer to the question, "Was 9/11 an inside job?" Of course it was. The invisible power-knowledge regime brought about the destruction of the Twin Towers when that suited its interests—just as it had earlier erected them for equally inscrutable reasons—and those who think that President Bush and his henchmen engineered 9/11 are not looking *far enough* inside: in this vision the Bushies were at most servants or emissaries of larger, ever-nameless forces.

An inchoate awareness of these panoptic powers of constraint and control is what moves people to every form of disguise or evasion: thus the resonant image of a *Halloween* party, when everyone is costumed. But such strategies may be doomed to failure. Maxine's best friend, Heidi, is a kind of anthropological semiotician who uses that Halloween as an opportunity to wander through the city to do some field work—from which she returns dismayed. Everywhere she looks she sees "everything collapsed into the single present tense, all in parallel. Mimesis and enactment."

"It's depressing. I thought Comic-Con was peculiar, but this was Truth. Everything out there just a mouseclick away. Imitation is no longer possible. Hallowe'en is over. I never thought people could get too wised up. What'll happen to us all?"

To which Maxine replies, "And because you tend to be a blamer" And Heidi: "Oh I blame the fuckin internet. No question."

Which brings us back to DeepArcher. It is in recognition of the range and scope of the Developers that its makers sought "refuge," as Justin rightly calls it, in the Deep Web, and that so many of the gameworld's inheritors sought that "abyss," that "horizon between coded and codeless." But the powers-that-be understand that people seek such refuge.

Maxine can't be sure who she's *really* meeting in DeepArcher; she doesn't even know who sends her the mysterious packages that help her in his investigations, or seem to. She doesn't know how to read, how even to *experience*, a sexual encounter she has with a man (an older, rigid, unsmiling man) who certainly seems to be one of the bad guys—but the fact that he is later murdered tips her over into treating it as a genuinely human encounter after all. Which could be right, though who knows? But in DeepArcher *no* encounter is legible.

In response to every attempt to evade the panoptic gaze, the Developers might say, if they speak, if they speak in a single voice, "Energies and intentions infinitely dispersed, distributed? *We invented* that game. Go as deep as you want: we'll be there waiting." In the course of the story we see occasional successful acts of anarchic resistance to these forces; small ones, to be sure, which do no more than briefly disrupt the rhythms of the late-capitalist power-knowledge machinery. Perhaps small disruptions can add up. Perhaps not.

5.

In the closing pages of *Bleeding Edge*, perspectives alter; what had been the chief events of the narrative slide out of focus, and ideas and experiences that had lurked in the background suddenly demand our full attention. And all this happens in a way that few of us associate with Pynchon. It is customary to say of him that his characters are not "real," that his intellectual pyrotechnics and metafictional games are arid, emotionally empty. This is a misreading, I think, though perhaps an understandable one: those

pyrotechnics, that ceaseless jokiness, the ridiculous names (of which there are fewer in *Bleeding Edge* than in any other Pynchon book), do tend to create a smokescreen. But from Oedipa Maas's late intuition of a world either saturated with or utterly evacuated of meaning, to the desperate wartime lovemaking of Roger and Jessica in *Gravity's Rainbow*, to the love of Zoyd Wheeler for his daughter Prairie in *Vineland*, to the warmth and depth of the friendship between Mason and Dixon in the novel that bears their names, there is more genuine depth of feeling in Pynchon's fiction than is often acknowledged. But in *Bleeding Edge* he confronts more openly and directly than he ever has the power of ordinary human love.

The particular form of ordinary human love with which this book is primarily concerned is that of parents for their children. After a few hundred pages in which Maxine drives herself deeper and deeper into local and world-historical mysteries—mysteries that confront her with the kinds of powers that can decide to bring down two great Towers, and perhaps bring the whole world within their coldly networked embrace—the sudden and unavoidable realization that her children could be in danger reverses her polarities, throws every prior obsession into the far background, reconnects her instantly and overwhelmingly with her love for her sons. And it is not just Maxine to which this happens: a friend comes to realize how many of her own long-held principles she would abandon to be reunited with her estranged daughter; Maxine has a long and moving conversation with her father in which she realizes for the first time the anxious passion with which *he* has loved *her*.

Maxine doesn't know who's behind the destruction of the Twin Towers, or what forces shape our newly encoded and pixelated second lives. She doesn't know whether in DeepArcher she speaks with the dead. It's not as though those things aren't important any more, only that, somehow, they cannot compete with the drive to restore broken relations, to heal the immediate: to take care of the boys, to renew her love of her errant husband. Only toward the end of the book do we understand why it began where it did: not with the client showing up at Maxine's office, but with what happened just before that, her daily walk with her boys to their school.

This compulsion to drop the worldly and massive in favor of our families is what it is—as one character in the book says, turning that stone-dead cliché into a koan, or trying to—and for better or worse. Maybe we ought to be thinking about the principalities and powers, maybe we ought to be thinking about what's real and what isn't real and about the simulacra that displace what had once been real, but in the end, we spend a great deal more time thinking about our families, because we love them—if we have them. One of the strongest points of contrast between Maxine and Doc Sportello is this: Doc is alone, with only his old car to keep him company as he waits out the interminable fog.

This love, and especially the love of women for their sons and daughters, has not regularly been a part of Pynchon's fiction, but that just means that it emerges here all the more luminously. Such love is stronger than the forces that bring down great buildings, stronger than the forces that weave a vast web to capture hearts and minds, one bit at a time. It is stronger even than the desire to commune with the dead. We all too easily lose sight of this love in the construction of our self-images, and it is easy also to lose it in the fictional and metaphysical games that Pynchon cannot help but play and plays so well, but it is in slyly awed recognition of the greatness of this love that he chooses to end this weird book and, who knows, perhaps his long and magnificent career.

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Let the Non-Reader Beware

None of the major characters in *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*, and few of the minor ones, read books. References to television, music, consumer brands, and (in *Edge*) web-sites abound, and those references are sharply observed and often extremely funny. There's a brilliant riff in *Inherent Vice* on how Charlie the Tuna, in the old StarKist commercials, is complicit in his own exploitation; and an ongoing joke in *Bleeding Edge* involves Maxine's husband's addiction to a biopic channel, with such memorable films as "The Fatty Arbuckle Story" featuring Leonardo di Caprio, and a dramatization of Mikhail Baryshnikov's life starring Anthony Hopkins. ("Would you look at this. Ol' Hannibal dancin up a storm here.") But books, whether fictional or nonfictional, highbrow or lowbrow, are almost impossible to find, because they have played no role in shaping the hearts and minds of these characters.

Even Heidi, Maxine's academic friend who uses words like "mimesis" and "alexithymic," is never seen reading and makes no references to books. (It's probably significant also that she studies popular culture: she visits ComicCon—more formally, Comic-Con International, held annually in San Diego since 1970—and observes trends in Halloween costumes.) I can think of only one book mentioned in *Bleeding Edge*, and not by name: a computer programmer is said to have on his desk a copy of "the camel book"—that is, Larry Wall's *Programming Perl* (probably the 2nd or 3rd edition). In 2001, when the book's events take place, Perl was still the most widely used scripting language, especially by those who coded the internet, though Python and a brand-new language called Ruby were on the rise. It says something about Pynchon's attention to detail that he gets this right. It says something about his book's themes that the only book referred to is a programming manual.

Pynchon writes long, complex, demanding, learned books about people who don't read long, complex, demanding, learned books, and while this could be said of many other writers as well, in Pynchon it has, I think, a particular significance. Most of Pynchon's characters in these recent books—and, I think it is fair to say, in all of his books in one way or another—are caught up in immensely complex semiotic fields. All around them events are happening that seem not just to *be* but to *mean*, but the characters lack the key to unlock those mysteries, and as they try to make their way are constantly buffeted by the sounds and images from movies, tv shows, tv commercials, popular songs, brands of clothing, architectural styles, particular makes of automobile ... all combining to weave an almost impossibly intricate web of signification. Rare indeed is the Pynchonian character who is not entangled to some degree in this web.

By doing what he does in book after book, Pynchon clearly indicates not just that he finds this entanglement problematic in multiple ways—psychologically, socially, politically—but also that the primary means by which the entanglement may be described and diagnosed is that of *books*—large books comprised of dense and complicated sentences. In Pynchon's fiction we see an immensely bookish mind representing an unbooked world, and its great unspoken message is: *Let the non-reader beware.*

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