Thomas Pynchon: A Brief Chronology

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Thomas Pynchon

*A Brief Chronology*

1937  Born Thomas Ruggles Pynchon Jr., May 8, in Glen Cove (Long Island), New York.

c.1941  Family moves to nearby Oyster Bay, NY. Father, Thomas R. Pynchon Sr., is an industrial surveyor, town supervisor, and local Republican Party official. Household will include mother, Catherine Frances (Bennett), younger sister Judith (b. 1942), and brother John. Attends local public schools and is frequent contributor and columnist for high school newspaper.


1955  Leaves Cornell to enlist in U.S. Navy, and is stationed for a time in Norfolk, Virginia. Is thought to have served in the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.

1957  Returns to Cornell, majors in English. Attends classes of Vladimir Nabokov and M. H. Abrams and serves on staff of college literary magazine.


1960  Moves to Seattle to work for Boeing Aircraft as a technical writer and engineering aide in nuclear missile programs—first with the Bomarc Service Information Unit and later with the Minuteman Field Support Unit. Stories “Low-lands” published in March in *New World Writing* and “Entropy” published in spring issue of *Kenyon Review*. Candida Donadio becomes his literary agent. Signs

1961

1962

1963

1964
February 1, V. receives William Faulkner Foundation Award for best first novel of 1963, and in March is named as a finalist for the National Book Award (which is given to John Updike’s The Cenciour); paperback edition issued in March. Application for graduate study in mathematics at University of California, Berkeley, is turned down. “The Secret Integration” published in the Saturday Evening Post, December 19.

1965
“The World (This One), the Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity” (later part of The Crying of Lot 49) published in Esquire in December. “A Gift of Books,” review of the novel Warlock by Oakley Hall, published in December issue of Holiday.

1966

1967
In January signs contract with Viking Press (where editor Cork Smith had moved) for untitled novel to be delivered in December. The Crying of Lot 49 wins Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award ($2,000) from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in May.
1969  Lives in Manhattan Beach, CA.

1972  Manuscript of *Gravity's Rainbow* delivered to Viking in January; working title is “Mindless Pleasures.”

1973  *Gravity's Rainbow* published by Viking Press on February 28 in simultaneous cloth and paper editions; it sells 45,000 copies the first year.

1974  *Gravity's Rainbow* named co-winner of National Book Award for Fiction (with Isaac Bashevis Singer's *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories*). It is also unanimously selected by judges for Pulitzer Prize in fiction, but advisory board declines to give the award, calling the work “unreadable,” “turgid,” “overwritten,” and “obscene.” Viking president Tom Guinzberg arranges for comedian “Professor” Irwin Corey (“the World’s Foremost Expert”) to give Pynchon’s acceptance speech at National Book Award ceremony, April 18.

1975  *Gravity's Rainbow* awarded Howells Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters (given to one work of fiction every five years). Pynchon declines to receive the award.


1982  Terminates his relationship with literary agent Candida Donadio.


1986 Former agent Candida Donadio sells more than 120 letters Pynchon had written to her agency for $45,000 to collector Carter Burden.


1991 Son Jackson Pynchon born.


1994 Writes liner notes to *Spiked! The Music of Spike Jones*, CD compilation released by Catalyst in April.

1995 Father Thomas Sr. dies, July 21.

1996 Writes liner notes to CD *Nobody's Cool* by New York band Lotion, released February 27 by spinART label. “Wanda Tinarsky” letters, which originally appeared between 1983 and 1988 in the *Anderson Valley (CA) Advertiser*, are published by Vers Libre Press with the suggestion they were written by Pynchon. He denies authorship, and experts eventually conclude the letters were the work of a since-deceased poet and postal worker Tom Hawkins. Carter Burden dies, and his family donates his collections, including the Pynchon letters purchased from Candida Donadio, to the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Mother Catherine dies in November.
1997  *Mason & Dixon* published by Henry Holt in April. CNN airs videotape of Pynchon on Manhattan street, but, at his request, does not identify him.

1998  Writes introduction to *Stone Junction* by Jim Dodge. *New York Times* publishes excerpts from his letters to Donadio held by Morgan Library, March 4. At Pynchon’s request, the Burden family and Morgan Library agree to seal these letters until after his death.

1999  “*Hallowe’en? Over Already?*” (a 500-word article on son’s school Halloween picnic) appears in *The Cathedral School Newsletter*.

2001  Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin, acquires the corrected typescript of *V.* and eight letters written by Pynchon in the early 1960s.

2002  Ransom Center acquires manuscript of “*Minstral Island*” (1958).


2004  Makes second voice “appearance” on *The Simpsons* in episode that airs November 14.


2009  *Inherent Vice* published August 4 by The Penguin Press.

Compiled by Paul Royster

*University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries*

*June 21, 2005*

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Note:

The information in this brief chronology was compiled from published sources, including The New York Times, the Washington Post, various booksellers’ catalogs, and other online sources. Dates have been independently verified whenever possible. Gerald Howard’s recent article, “Pynchon From A to V,” in Bookforum, Summer 2005, has been extremely informative and helpful.

This chronology is intended as a teaching aid or “learning object” for teachers and students of literature. It is modelled on the chronology style developed by The Library of America under the guidance of the late Hanna M. (“Gila”) Bercovitch.

Useful or interesting online sites associated with Thomas Pynchon include:

- San Narciso College Thomas Pynchon Home Page
  http://www.pynchon.pomona.edu/
- ThomasPynchon.com
  http://www.hyperarts.com/pynchon/
- Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, Jr., Spermatikos Logos
  http://www.themodernword.com/pynchon/
- Pynchon Listserve
  http://www.waste.org/pynchon-l/
- Pynchon Notes
  http://www2.ham.muohio.edu/~kraftjm/pynchon.html
- vheissu: Thomas Pynchon — A Collection
  http://www.vheissu.org/varia/eng_intro.htm

Mr. Pynchon’s literary agent is Melanie Jackson of The Melanie Jackson Agency, 250 West 57th Street, Suite 1119, New York, NY 10019. His attorney is Jeremy Nussbaum of Cowan, Liebowitz & Latman, P.C., 1133 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036-6799.