

NAMES IN THOMAS PYNCHON'S V.

Kelsie B. Harder

State University of New York,
College at Potsdam

A novelist bears name watching when her writes: "That night Profane . . . went a-roving: . . . looking for amusement. He found it in the form of one Brenda Wigglesworth, an American WASP who attended Beaver College. . . ." ¹ Beaver College exists in Glenside, Pa.; probably a real Brenda Wigglesworth can be found; but Profane is fictional. The melding of the three names creates a not-so-subtle sexual commentary that needs no overt explication or covert analysis. Thomas Pynchon uses names both ways, overtly and covertly, to economize artistically on simile, metaphor, symbol, and allegory. Each of his novels, V., The Crying of Lot 49, and Gravity's Rainbow, including the titles, is structured around names, both place and personal, and further seem to weave into a pattern of attitudes that reflect their style and content.

In this first explanatory onomastic survey of Pynchon's novels, I will limit the area of investigation to V., with occasional mention

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of characters who figure in all the novels published so far. Although Gravity's Rainbow is the richest ground for growing, and, eventually plucking names, V. sets the method and direction in which names are implicated in the "human condition" that seems to tantalize Pynchon.

In each novel, Pynchon is searching, using names and images to chase after the meaning of life itself, which, of course, includes death. In V. the search is somewhat optimistic, a quest in a sense for the Holy Grail in more modern terms, with the elusive V. as the goal. In The Crying of Lot 49, the search is for anti-meaning, the underground that opposes the Establishment, with postage stamps being used as a means of communication. Gravity's Rainbow is a search for death, the finding of the 00000 rocket, the finality of sophistication. Each novel ends in a scattering of particles, of character, of time and space.

While carefully naming his characters, Pynchon often types them to the point that they become charactonyms, although it is dangerous to assume that Pynchon intended such. A goodly daub of cuteness, as well as a thick smear of flippancy, envelops these names, many of which gather to themselves accretions of meaning that lead to obscurity, epexegetic in nature, perhaps excessive. He also mixes traditional names for animate beings with names of chemical elements or other non-human (animate) objects.² This sort of naming points up his thesis, or one of them, that animate and inanimate matter is made of the same

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elements, with scattering and regrouping in an endless cycle. Some of the names appearing in V. can serve as illustrations.

Who is V.? In the context, she is the female principle of the universe and is all woman, the feminine absorbent that complements the masculine force and controls it through vulnerability, which can be both feminine and masculine. The asymmetrical V also represents the meeting of Eros and Thanatos, a conjugation occurring time and again in all three novels as pairs of sexual partners in whatever combination Vee together.

Specifically, V occurs in many concrete situations, in real characters, and as the initial of things, persons, and places. She is Beatrice, the barmaid at the Sailor's Grave bar, whose name echoes the Beatrice who leads Virgil into Paradiso in Dante's Divine Comedy. The contrast is obvious in a world that now is controlled by machines and where, to be exact as to place in the novel, the sailors await the Suck Hour, when Mrs. Buffo, owner of the bar, holds what we ordinarily call Happy Hour. Some 250 sailors root for the seven rubber breasts that dispense beer. It is a thirsty world, and the "sow" image should not be lost in the hilarity, which in itself is painful. One of these sailors is Pig Bodine, who moves in and out of both V. and Gravity's Rainbow. V. is also Rachel Owlglass, a rich girl who lost her virginity to the gearshift rod of her MG, which she calls "a stud." V. is certainly Irving, the freckle-faced secretary/receptionist/nurse/mistress of Shale

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Schoenmaker, M. D., plastic surgeon, who tattooed the thousands of freckles.

The main search is carried on by Herbert Stencil, hardly one of our medieval knights, whose name represents the attempt to make order out of a disordered, chaotic world, a Schopenhauer concept. Stencil's father, Sidney, left a journal in which he wrote under "Florence, April, 1899," this note: "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us suspected. Not who, but what: what is she? God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report."³ Herbert was born in 1901, "the year Victoria died," and was in time to be "the century's child," a century whose symbol was to be V, for the rocket age. His mother vanished in such a way that Herbert never referred to her. His father dies "under unknown circumstances in 1919" in the city of Valetta "while investigating the June Disturbances in Malta."

The remark on the "century child" may be a foreshadowing of an era controlled by V., including V for victory, the familiar two fingers spread apart to symbolize winning the war by the Allies; V-girls, those young women, the groupies of World War II, whose targets were soldiers and sailors, not rock singers; the V-note--a bar named V-Note in V.--or V-mail, the short-lived, fortunately, note paper used for writing quick messages home from the front, wherever; Venus; V. D.; venery; element vanadium; V-8 engine; volume; volt; von; velocity; TV;

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V-1, the robot bomb developed by Germans in World War II, named *vergeltungswaffe eins*, "retaliation weapon, number one"; and V-2, the liquid-filled rocket used against England and forerunner of the rockets used to explore nearby space.

The inextricable entwining of the machine and flesh forms the V, but it also intimates a meeting, mating, melding of the animate and the inanimate, thereby focusing on a mystery, which Stencil must seek and possibly clarify. Still, he fears that he will find "her," for once the mystery is deciphered, stenciled, then what else is there to do? His motto: "approach and avoid."⁴ Too much knowledge is dangerous and a loss of hope—the Adam and Eve myth revisited. The human, however, with the heightened consciousness of place and paranoia, must search, being forever restless.

Among the animate beings who possess the famous or infamous V. are The Virgin Mary; Victoria Wren (daughter, wife, or mistress of Sir Alastair Wren of the British Parliament); V. A. ("Brushhook") Spugo, plotter for alligator killings in the sewers of New York, who once killed 47 rats with a brushhook under the streets of Brownsville on August 13, 1922; Varkumian, a pimp, a play on the German word for "dissolute," or "squalid"; Veronica, either from the plant or from St. Veronica, is a female rat that is a kind of voluptuous Magdalen, beloved by Father Fairing, the priest who preaches to rats in the sewers of New York, and whose own name was chosen from an aeronautical term meaning, "A structure on the exterior of an aircraft, for

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reducing drag"; an alligator chased by Benny Profane in the sewers of New York; Demivolt, an interrogator and torturer; Voigt, a spy; Vero Meroving, probably with "Merovingian" connotations, dressed in jodphurs and an army shirt, with a zodiac necklace; Hedwig Vogelsang, 16-years-old, white, blond, hip-length hair, breasts perhaps too large, who chose Venus among the planets in a planetarium as her partner; the Venusbergs; Valdimir Porčepic, musician; Viola, one-ironance and hypnost; Veronica Manganese, a coupling of animate and inanimate names, with Manganese taken from chemistry, "a hard, brittle, grayish-white metallic element," with a variant of magnesia; and V. the woman lover of Melanie l'Heuremaudit, 15-years-old, who was impaled accidentally in the crotch while acting in The Rape of the Chinese Virgins. V. disappears after this horrifying event.

Among places alluding to V. are Vheissu, (which may be Venezuela), Vesuvius, and Valetta, the latter derived from a man's name, though of feminine gender in linguistic form.

This survey hardly touches on the possibilities of V. both as a character and a concept. The search for the elusive and the allusive V. is perhaps like trying to catch the wind in a net, for V. is everyone and everything if the author so chooses. Unity and consistency cannot be demanded of the imaginative and metaphoric mind. V. is the mystery that can be called the essence, whatever meaning we may attach to that concept, both concrete and abstract, no doubt the vive itself

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and so meant to be. Still, there is joy in the search; although in the nature of things and being, V. will disappear eventually.

Among those affected by V. is some magical way is Benny Profane ("Benny Sfacim is your name"),⁵ half Catholic and half Jewish (on mother's side), who accompanies Paola Maijstral, "small master," and Stencil to Malta in search of V. Paola's father, or fathers, is Fausto Maijstral and all the different moods and forms and names that Fausto takes. He definitely is the "master intelligence," marred by too much knowledge of evil and the Twentieth Century. Paola herself manifests characteristics of V. As a 16-year-old girl, she is brought to the States by Pappy Hod, an old lecherous sailor who married her but could not keep her.

Pappy, who also plays a small part in Gravity's Rainbow, has the common nickname of all older men who live and work among younger persons. His surname is somewhat of a puzzle, unless it refers to his being "a carrier of Paola from Malta to the United States," an action that really serves no purpose except possibly to provide an excuse to move Stencil from New York to the place of his father's death, Valetta. The name may also be a kind of apocopation of hodograph, from mathematics and mechanics, "the figure described by the extremity of a vector that has a fixed origin and a position vector equal to the velocity of a moving particle." Given Pynchon's attraction to such names, it is a distinct possibility, for we have Hod as a fixed allegorical figure, but yet one that at least attempts to equal the veloc-

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ity of a moving particle, this time Paola.

The name of the ship on which the sailors serve is called the Scaffold, which has connotations macabre enough to extend meaning to perhaps nothing more than that the sailors are puppets, as we all are, to fate, merely dangling humans. Pig Bodine, perennial AWOL from the Scaffold, drug dealer, piggy, bovine, animalistic, obscene, moves through both Gravity's Rainbow and V. as a major figure and catalyst. Ploy is a 5'0" sailor who likes to pick fights with larger men, since he knows they will not take him seriously. When Naval dentists decided to pull all his teeth, he had to be quieted with a Penothal injection. Upon awakening, without teeth, he "saw the apocalypse" and spent his last days aboard the Scaffold trying to kick officers in the teeth. With his new teeth, he bit Beatrice, the barmaid, in her right buttock, causing her to scatter watery beer and glasses in a parabolic manner all over the Sailor's Grave. Dewey Gland, surely an echo of Dewey Dell from Faulkner's Dewey Dell in As I Lay Dying, is a friend of Ploy and a guitarist, but with no further implications as a name.

C. Osric Lych, commander of the Scaffold, has homosexual characteristics. Osric has a meaning of "divine rule," perhaps alluding here to the command, but it also has foppish connotations from the character in Hamlet. We could even take the whole name as something like See Osric Letch." Lych could be derived from "lech," or "leech," or even "leek," depending on how it is pronounced and what one wants

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it to mean. Hiroshima is an electronics technician on the ship. Howie Surd, the drunken yeoman, has a name that derives from an obsolescent mathematics term for an irrational number. Knoop, communications officer, was the responsible ship's executive when Pig Bodine upset Task Force 60 in the Mediterranean by broadcasting through the teletype system one of his most harrowing pornographic stories. His name comes from science, The Knoop Scale, "a scale of hardness based on the indentation made in the material to be tested by a diamond point." It was named after F. Knoop, an American chemist. The cook on this ship was somewhat tritely named Potamos, "Potomaine." Although the name is strictly Greek for "river," the reference is too clear for anything except its paronomasic intent. Besides, the cook's soup is undrinkable and his food inedible.

Johnny Contango, the damage-control officer, is a properized name meaning "(on the London stock exchange) a fee paid by a buyer of securities to the seller for the privilege of deferring his payment." Baby Face Falange, machinist mate striker, has a name taken from that of the Spanish Facist party that has been in power since the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Lazar, ultimately from Lazurus, is a sailor who wrote foul sayings on the Confed-

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erate monument downtown. The name has allusions to "a leper." Teledu, the sailor who lived in a refrigerator for two weeks on eggs and frozen hamburger, is a properization of the name of a "small dark brown mammal" found in the mountains of Java, Sumatra, and Borneo. It ejects "a fetid secretion when alarmed or in danger." Groomsman is ironically named, since he seems constantly to be infested by crabs which thrive on "super-formula crab-killer." Groomsman introduced Pig Bodine to Hanky and Panky, two airline hostesses.

Later, Pynchon repeated this kind of reduplicative in Flip and Flop, two Washington government girls who give Bodine and Profane a hanky-panky weekend, replete and complete with the Shore Patrol and the brig, a bad scene since Pig had been AWOL to the point of desertion. Among the acquaintances developed during that enthusiastic weekend were Iago Saperstein (an insurance executive); Maynard Basilisk ("mighty lizard"), the alias for an escapee from Devil's Island and en route to Vassar to teach beekeeping; Tyrosemiophiles ("collectors of labels on French cheese boxes," "close enough perhaps"); Petard ("an unemployed musicologist. . . who dedicated his life to finding the lost Vivaldi Kazoo Concert, and whose name may

have the etymological meaning, "to break wind," hence, "music-ologist"); and Squasimodeo ("formerly a civil servant under Mussolini," but with a name that must have been created for sound effect only).

Other crew members of the Scaffold included Fat Clyde, christened Harvey, called "Fat" because he was 6'1" tall and weighed 142 pounds; Tiger Youngblood, the spud coxswain, but with no other characteristics for such a ferocious name; and Pinguez, steward's mate striker, whose name is apparently a variant of pinguid, "fat, oily, greasy." Antoine Zippo, "captain of the second division head," is a trumpet player, whose pseudo-Italian name seems intended to connote liveliness. Antoine has a meaning of "inestimable," but Pynchon makes nothing of this. Nasty Chobb is a different matter. He is the ship's baker who does such a nasty job that he puts salt instead of sugar into the morning pies to discourage thieves. Leroy Tongue is a midget storekeeper. Sam Mannaro is also another pseudo-Italian creation. Mannaro has no manners, for he is sly and sneaks alum into Antoine's drink. David and Maurice, the Commandoes heading for Egypt during the British and French landing in October, 1956, are dismissed as names with just that: "David and Maurice were their names." Dahoud, a name seemingly chosen at random, rounds out this strange, almost universal, crew waiting on the scaffold for the inevitable.

Other names need to be examined for their contribution to the

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No Name Plot, as Pynchon calls it; but because of space and time limitations, not much more than a mere listing can be done. Clayton ("Bloody") Chiclitz, with the obvious pun on the candy gum name, appears in all three novels as the munitions manufacturer, formerly a toy magnate, now defense contractor, owner of Yoyodyne, Inc. (yoyo + Dyne, an engineer). The yoyo, an image that is often used, is also a kind of V, out and back. References are made about yoyoing up and down the East Coast, or yoyoing back and forth across town, or anywhere involving a return. Later, Gravity's Rainbow itself is a V image, a parabola.

Kurt Mondaugen, "moon eye," plays major parts in both V. and Gravity's Rainbow as an engineer and key mechanic in the Peenemunde project. The rocketry reference is clear. Morris Teflon, another animate plus inanimate name, trademark for polytetrafluorethylene, is a slippery character who takes pictures with his Leica of his fellow sailors and their girlfriends while they are orgying in an apartment in Newport News. Fatso Pagano, 240-pound controlman, is a patsy for the Shore Patrol who beat him into unconsciousness. The Pagano connotation escapes me, despite its "pagan" derivation. Porpentine, a petty diplomat, echoing porcupine and turpentine, is assassinated by Eric Bongo-Shaftsbury of the British Foreign Office, in a kind of CIA operation with a British upper lip. Fergus Mixolydian, the universal man who claims to be the laziest person in

New York, symbolizes Everyman, being Irish Armenian Jew, with a Scots forename and "mingling mode" for the surname, one of Pynchon's better creations. He can also mix drinks, allowing for another dimension of interpretation. As a landlord, he can usurp the place of the Christian God.

Signor Rafel Mantissa, petty criminal, has a name properized from mantissa, "the decimal part of a common logarithm." One of the many names Pynchon draws from the disciplines of Science and mathematics, it becomes almost a prototype for names that appear in Gravity's Rainbow. Rafel must not go unnoticed, either. Mr. Zeitsuss, "sweet spirit," bosses the alligator hunters. Vogt, "overseer," "boss," operates the instruments' factory that is a center for spy activities. His helper is Gascoigne, a black whose name seems to have no special significance, except as a whimsy of the author. Ugo Medichevole, the magician for whom V. worked at one time, apparently means "magician." Ugo is Italian for "mind." Medichevole seems to allude to both "the winning by one card player of all the tricks of a deal," plus the dictionary spelling of the pronunciation of the Italian family name of Medici, who were gamblers, or magicians, if you will. The name then could mean "taking a chance with the mind," or a magician by trade. Ironically, Ugo gets used by V., who turns him into a zombi with the mental age of five.

The defrocked priest, Fenice, who breeds huge scorpions in cages

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that old Romans used to punish their boy and girl concubines, has a name that is definitely a devoicing of the y in Venice, but with no other particular meaning. Cinoglossa (Chinese-glossary) is another cute creation, but it can allude to the poet, homosexual, and epileptic who wanders somewhere in the Inferno that Pynchon creates. Robin Pettipont, another priest, seems to have no reason for being "a small stitch in embroidery," although Robin is again used for Robin Goodfellow, seduced by Victoria Wren, and perhaps alluding to Robin Hood (Hod, maybe). Father Avalanche, the good priest of Malta, has another name from the sciences, this time physics and chemistry, the Townsend avalanche, "a process in which the ions of one generation have collisions that produce a greater number of ions in the succeeding generation."

This rapid survey of Pynchon's use of names in V. is not exhaustive, nor was meant to be, but it seems that we are here faced with an author who has gained much critical acclaim for three novels that fall within the tradition of James Joyce and William Faulkner, who were adept at choosing names for characters in order to make even more subtle their already subtle characterizations. Of course, Joyce and Faulkner were not the only novelists to do this. On a lesser scale, we have noticed that James, Trollope, Dickens, Vonnegut, and Burgess, among others, have done the same, but not with the deftness of a Joyce or Faulkner.

Pynchon surpasses all these in his weaving of names into the

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fabric of his fictions so that his thesis of disintegration of mass, human and non-human, into atoms and refusion into new forms, though alike and repetitive. To make this plausible, he chooses names from the sciences, usually from names of elements or synthetics. Others are chosen for their connotations and are often created out of linguistic possibilities that make near-sense or possible nonsense, as in Mifsud, Dnubietna, Marratt, or Margravine de Chiave Lowenstein ("wife of a margrave," and "key" or "clef" plus "stronghold of lions," with the full meaning of "the woman who holds the key to the lion's cage"). Sometimes an ordinary common name is given to a main character, as Esther Harwitz, the Jewish girl who is the recipient of a new nose by Dr. Schöenmaker and then falls in love with him and becomes pregnant. The chemical ester is applicable here: "a compound produced by the reaction between an acid and an alcohol with the elimination of a molecule of water."

Code names are important to Pynchon for pointing up his thesis. For instance Mondaugen, receives a message while he is in South Africa which read:

DIGEWOELDTIMSTEALALENSWTASNDEURFUALRLIKST.

Weissmann ("wiseman") who brought it to him had already removed every third word and obtained GODMEANTNUURK, which rearranged spelled Kurt Mondaugen. The remainder read, DIEWELTISTALLESWASDERFALLIST, "The world is all that the case is," another theme that moves through

Pynchon's Works.

Pynchon states his case in pessimistic terms, much as can be found in Dante's Inferno, certainly one of the influences on this work: "To populate, or not to populate. Ghosts, monsters, criminals, deviates represent melodrama and weakness. The only horror about them is the dreamer's own horror of isolation. But the desert, or a row of false shop fronts; a slag pile, a forge where the fires are banked, these and the street and the dreamer, only an inconsequential shadow of himself in the landscape, partaking of the soullessness of these other masses and shadows; this is 20th Century nightmare," perhaps V⁶. The names Pynchon chose reflect this only too well.

Kelsie B. Harder

The State University College of New York at Potsdam

¹V. (New York: Bantam, 1964), p. 426.

²The universal symbol is the Partridge in a Pear Tree, according to the painter Slab, and represents a revolt against Catatonic Expressionism. The tree will replace the Cross in western civilization. The beauty of the pear tree in the old Christmas song—a linguistic joke—"is that it works like a machine and yet is animate: The partridge eats pears off the tree, and his droppings in turn nourish the tree which grows higher and higher every day lifting the partridge up and at the same time assuring him of a continuous supply of good. It is perpetual motion, except for one thing." At the top of the picture of the partridge in the pear tree is a gargoyle with sharp fangs which someday will snip off the head of the partridge. It may be a low flying plane, or high tension wire, or any other death. The head will be snapped off. V., p. 263.

³V., p. 43.

⁴V., p. 44.

⁵V., pp. 126-7.

⁶V., p. 303.