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Introduction

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First, many thanks to Georges-Claude Guilbert, who did all the real work, and to Guillaume Cingal, who started it all when he launched the idea. I would also like to thank Luc Herman, John Krafft and Tim Ware, whose early eagerness to attend marked the cusp when my approach abruptly changed from “Wouldn't it be nice” to “Well, now I really have to do it, don't I?” Brigitte Félix kindly accepted to chair a session and I would like to thank her and also the whole LOLitA group in Orléans, of which she and most of the other French speakers are active members, and which has kept the Pynchon flame, and others, alive for so many years now.

Let me also thank again all the participants in the conference, who gladly accepted the dangerous rules of the game, and gave their papers shortly after their first reading of the novel. This is, I feel, what lends a feeling of urgency to their essays, what makes them so valuable as they look ahead to the work that remains to be done—indicating tracks to follow, new fields to be harrowed—and as they look back on the experience of reading, and what an experience it has proved to be in this case! One was constantly reminded of Richard Poirier's remark, so relevant still after all these years (with the further twist that Pynchon now plays with our expectations

as lovers of his work): “we are in a true dilemma if we love Pynchon or any writer who resembles him. We don’t want to stop the game, we don’t want to get out of the rhythm, but what are we to do if we simply don’t know enough to play the game, to move with the rhythm?” (Poirier 21). If the work at Pynchonwiki so readily accepts the issue, and addresses it “full on,” academic work traditionally eschews it, placing itself as it does safely on the side of knowledge and not of ignorance. In sharp contrast, all the papers assembled here seem to cry out “Ignorant reader, my fellow, my brother, myself!” Each attempts in its own way to chart the cartography of ignorance, and seems to remember Pynchon's words in his introduction to *Slow Learner*: “Ignorance is not just a blank space on a person’s mental map. It has contours and coherence, and for all I know rules of operation as well” (Pynchon 17-18).

Perhaps it is fitting, then, to begin our short presentation of the papers and the echoes between them by delineating a blank space around which most of the papers placed outposts and into which all the discussions attempted forays, that of the “Western Revenge” episodes. They answer the expectations of a dime novel reader so fully as to unsettle us all, used as we are to be unsettled by excess of contradictory meanings more than by lack thereof. Will the desert landscape they draw prove to be full of life-giving if slightly puny vegetation, as Tim Ware suggested during the discussions? Will it undergo the sort of re-evaluation which *Vineland* underwent, as John Krafft reminded us, or will the breach of contract prove this time difficult to accept? In his thought-provoking presentation, which is part of a longer work in progress and thus unfortunately could not be included here, Luc Herman forcefully stated that refusing the question in the name of Pynchon's genius would be antinomic with its very essence, which lies in shaking all presupposed convictions. Yes, we all share the presupposition of Pynchon's genius, strongly grounded on his “pretty good track record,” to borrow Charles Hollander's words. No, we can't use it as an argument without gravely distorting its very nature.

There is no doubting that more spadework needs to be done on these passages, and chiefly for a start intertextual work—finding references in literature, especially dime novels (remember the illuminating work done on spy novels by Kyle Smith), and films (I would humbly suggest Sam Peckinpah and Sergio Leone as possible directions). The time now is for proposing directions, offering vantage points and discovering new territories. So may these few pages stir up in you the sort of echoes that they found in me, filtered through my own preoccupations and position as chiefly a reader and re-re-reader of *Mason & Dixon*. In my short presentation of the papers, I won't resist mentioning some of these echoes, for what they're worth, simply as personal examples of elements that resonated for me. And, unashamedly, to use my privilege as first reader to be the first to post reactions. It seems perfectly appropriate that the papers be published on-line, as we certainly hope the echoes they find in you will soon take their place in the ever-expanding network of interpretations, interrogations and dialogue out there.

A fitting example is Anne Battesti using in her paper the thorough work on idiots and idiocy in *Against the Day* which Tim Ware elaborated after hearing her presentation in Tours. No doubt she is not the last to use it and her work on the philosophical dimensions of idiocy and on Dostoevsky will lead others to steal from the best and go on exploring the huge new territory she has opened our eyes to, and that opens so many new perspectives. Her approach also offers a different angle on ghosts in *Against the Day*, after Daniel Punday's important paper, and more generally on something that many others here try to provide insights on, the relations between the spiritualization of matter and the materialization of spirit.

Bénédicte Chorier leads us to consider the way in which the multiple meanings of the word “incorporation” can help us approach these relations. This is just one of the many insights in her paper, and I will only offer a pick here: the typology (the word seems fitting given the Old Testament / New Testament layout

of the book) of geographical echoes between America and the rest of the world, and more generally the way in which two words on the periphery of the book, “minor adjustments,” can open to a meditation on all the great interrogations in the novel, as the ampersand on the title page of *Mason & Dixon* led Samuel Cohen to great insights.

And that's before we open the book, and have to deal with the words actually in there, which Claro counted, all 440,400 of them... As the French translator of *Against the Day*, he certainly is *primus inter pares* among readers both in his knowledge of the book and in the humble acknowledgement of the extent of his ignorance. We are proud to present here a translation of some of the fascinating remarks on the detail of Pynchon's syntax to be found on his blog. His examples are striking in that they move away from the long, convoluted and mesmerizing Pynchonian purple patches to concentrate on what may be more generally at work in Pynchon's prose, the “minor adjustments,” the small distortions of syntax in what would seem to be the simplest sentence, one which at first reading had us pause a second or less, perhaps not even consciously, because we were able to infer the meaning and bridge the small gap or inconsistency, without really feeling we were trading “over the abyss.”

The periphery of the text, not as in the case of “minor adjustments” its back cover but its title and epigraph, clearly mark light as one of the most important subcontinents in *Against the Day*. Jon Hackett not only thoroughly charts the lines of forces at play, but he provides us with an original and convincing vantage point to look on this subcontinent, and also to look back and reconsider the question of the relations between Pynchon's work and Manichaeism, a question that is arduous, at times disquieting and probably ultimately undecidable, which makes it all the more important to debate. He also gives great insights on the numerous figures that ghostly operate between matter and idea, that, again, idealize matter and materialize ideas. They also include photographs, maps, in *Against the Day* as in *Mason & Dixon*,

and, we should add, printed paper.

Charles Hollander in fact answers a question that Claro asked at about the same time on his blog (Friday, September 14, 2007), commenting on Victor Appleton's Tom Swift, already present in "The Secret Integration," as a possible model for the Chums of Chance: "This resurgence of a literary character the Pynch had already played around with authorizes a new, exhaustive reading of *Against the Day* along the following line: what if, among thousands of other things, Pynchon had played at revisiting all his favourite topoi?" And tropes, adds Charles Hollander. At the end of *Mason & Dixon*, Mason and his son are referred to as Mason and Mason. Charles Hollander considers here Pynchon and Pynchon, Pynchon and his former self in the larger perspective of lineage. And the permutations of letters, the use of the dictionary, so finely shown in his paper do ring a bell and help us reconsider many elements scattered over Pynchon's entire work.

As the distortions great and small of his prose, the games with dictionary definitions often try to unhinge the "metaphors we live by." Paolo Simonetti presents with extreme clarity a model for the way in which the figurative can be mapped out onto the literal, if only to make us feel that everything in language is metaphorical, as Derrida reminded us. In the course of his study, Paolo Simonetti also gives two examples of the way in which the relation between materialization and spiritualization can be expressed in terms of space. They are the problematic spaces of the *S.S. Stupendica* and of the panorama. Again, what avenues for further research, and we can feel what can be gained by seeing the nineteenth century as "the nineteenth century of panoramas," to borrow the French title of Bernard Comment's important study, as the century of the passage "from representation to illusion" (Comment 9).

Here we rely on a double axiom: Richard Poirier, again, and Edward Mendelson have stressed the centrifugal movement in the process of reading

Pynchon, the way in which his books send us back to the world, and can make us understand it better. But there is a corollary to this axiom: the world can make us understand the novel better. And what a better proof of that than Peter Vernon's paper. Yes, indeed, his paper uncovers a whole network of references that are difficult to grasp for mere continentals, be they European or American. Through the mediation of cricket, it also offers a double meditation, on the world at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first, and on what is at stake in the book.

"He who is afraid of losing his place cannot see," to borrow Jean-Luc Godard's words. And clearly Pynchon wants us to accept this and lose our place in order to see. The writers of these papers have taken the risk. In turn, may reading them unsettle your position, as it certainly did mine, and may the directions offered lead to further displacement, as they find echoes with other work in the months to come. Panoramas will be among the subjects treated in Buffalo in April 2008, and other questions will be addressed at the International Pynchon Week in Munich in June 2008. This in turn will raise new issues, and lead to further work. All lines have not been singled up, to be sure, but the ship has left the ground, possibilities have opened up.

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