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Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching

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I

"A screaming comes across the sky"—but not this time. Readers who opened to the first page of Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*, expecting something like the apocalyptic sublime of *Gravity's Rainbow*, were no doubt disappointed, if not appalled, to find this instead:[1]

> "Now single up all lines!"
>
> "Cheerly now . . . handsomely . . . very well! Prepare to cast her off!"
>
> "Windy City, here we come!"
>
> "Hurrah! Up we go!"
>
> It was amid such exclamations that the hydrogen skyship *Inconvenience*, its gondola draped with patriotic bunting, carrying a five-lad crew belonging to that celebrated aeronautics club known as the Chums of Chance, ascended briskly into the morning, and soon caught the southerly wind.
>
> When the ship reached cruising altitude, those features left behind on the ground having now dwindled to all but microscopic size, Randolph St. Cosmo, the ship commander, announced, "Now secure the Special Sky Detail," and the boys, each dressed neatly in the summer uniform of red-and-white-striped blazer and trousers of sky blue, spiritedly complied.
>
> They were bound for the city of Chicago, and the World's Columbian Exposition recently opened there. Since their orders had come through, the

> "scuttlebutt" among the excited and curious crew had been of little besides the fabled "White City," its great Ferris wheel, alabaster temples of commerce and industry, sparkling lagoons, and the thousand more such wonders, of both a scientific and an artistic nature, which awaited them there.
>
> "Oh boy!" cried Darby Suckling, as he leaned over the lifelines to watch the national heartland deeply swung in a whirling blur of green far below, his tow-colored locks streaming in the wind past the gondola like a banner to leeward. (Darby, as my faithful readers will remember, was the "baby" of the crew, and served as both factotum and mascotte, singing as well the difficult treble parts whenever these adolescents found it impossible to contain song of some kind.) "I can't hardly wait!" he exclaimed. (3–4)

This is parody. An abundance of markers point to that conclusion—the corny idioms, the conspicuous clichés ("ascended briskly," "alabaster temples," "sparkling lagoons," "tow-colored locks," etc.), the patriotic bunting and uniforms, the intrusive and patronizing narrator, the overfastidious scare quotes. It is as if *Ulysses* opened, not with Mulligan and Stephen on the tower, but with the sentimental women's-magazine discourse of the "Nausicaa" chapter.

Parody of what, exactly? The Chums, as their narrator makes clear, are heroes of a series of boys'-adventure novels, with titles such as *The Chums of Chance at Krakatoa, The Chums of Chance Search for Atlantis* (6)*, The Chums of Chance in Old Mexico* (7), *The Chums of Chance and the Curse of the Great Kahuna* (15), *. . . in the Bowels of the Earth* (117), *. . . and the Ice Pirates* (123), *. . . and the Caged Women of Yokohama* (411), *. . . and the Wrath of the Yellow Fang* (1019), and even *The Chums of Chance Nearly Crash into the Kremlin* (123). In the course of *Against the Day* itself, the Chums undertake airship missions to such far-flung locales as Venice, Flanders, Siberia, and both Poles; they seek the lost city of Shambhala in Central Asia and travel from one Pole to the other subterraneously, by way of the Hollow Earth. The Chums series is Pynchon's invention, but it is modeled on actual mass-market juvenile adventures series of the early twentieth century.[2] The most familiar of these is the series devoted to the inventions and adventures of Tom Swift—"our colleague, Brother Tom Swift," as one of the Chums calls him much later in Pynchon's novel (704). The Chums inhabit the same generic universe as Tom Swift and his precursors and imitators.[3]

While the Chums' adventures, and the genre-world in which they unfold, recur throughout *Against the Day*, they do not continuously dominate the novel (no doubt to many readers' relief). Instead, by the middle of part 2 of this gargantuan five-part work, its genre undergoes a modulation. Anticipations of this new genre can already be glimpsed at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, toward which the Chums are flying when we first encounter them. Their mentor, Professor Vanderjuice, prompted by a lecture on the closing of the frontier by his colleague "Freddie Turner"—that

is, Frederick Jackson Turner, who really did present his "frontier thesis" at the 1893 Exposition—reflects on the end of the Old West. Gazing down from above on the Chicago stockyards, he muses, "here's where the Trail comes to its end, along with the American Cowboy who used to live on it and by it. No matter how virtuous he's kept his name, how many evildoers he's managed to get by undamaged, how he's done by his horses, what girls he has chastely kissed, serenaded by guitar, or gone out and raised hallelujah with, it's all back there in the traildust now and none of it matters [. . .]." (53) If in one sense the professor's analysis is correct, and the Old West does indeed end with the closure of the frontier and the triumph of industrial production, as represented by the stockyards, in another sense he is contradicted by the presence at the same Columbian Exposition of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.[4] For the Wild West Show testifies to the continuing vitality of the *fictional* West, the West of the "yellowback" or "dime novels" that made Buffalo Bill Cody a household name in the first place.[5]

The professor's pocket eulogy of the Old West conveniently enumerates some of the genre conventions of the dime-novel western. By the end of part 2 we will have encountered more of them, as the novel pursues story lines that carry it to the mountain West and the world of the Traverse family: Webb Traverse, outlaw dynamiter of Colorado, murdered by hired gunmen; his sons Reef, Frank, and Kit, who seek revenge for their father's death; and his daughter Lake, who runs off with one of Webb's killers. Reef recovers his father's body and takes it home for a proper funeral (209–17); Frank, finding himself in "a dime novel of Old Mexico, featuring gringo evildoers in exile [and] sudden deaths" (374), ends up killing one of his father's murderers in a shootout (395). Badmen and outlaw towns, showdowns and gunfights, chases on horseback, stoic heroes, thrilling rescues, violent revenge: the novel's motif repertoire here is that of the dime-novel western.

By part 3 of *Against the Day*, however, the Traverse brothers have dispersed, Frank to Mexico, where a number of the Wild West motifs persist, but Reef and Kit to Europe, where the novel's dominant genre modulates again. New motifs begin to appear: first Kit, then later Reef, become involved with radical groups, terrorist cells, and secret missions; rival undercover operatives struggle for the possession of a secret "weapon able to annihilate the world" (559); one operative turns double agent and betrays another, who returns to exact vengeance on the turncoat; and all of this is played out against the background of great-power conflicts over control of the Balkans and Inner Asia (the "Great Game" of Kipling's *Kim*; see Pynchon's reference to it on 227). In other words, the world of *Against the Day* converges with that of the "shocker" or spy novel, a subgenre of so-called imperial romance. Typical of this genre, from Stevenson's

Treasure Island through Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to Erskine Childers's *Riddle of the Sands* (1903), John Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916), and beyond, is the moment when characters contemplate a map of desired or disputed territory. A kind of primal scene of imperial romance, this moment is conspicuously enacted several times in parts 3 and 4 of *Against the Day* (e.g., 689–90, 806, 935–38).[6] There is even a rescue onboard the Orient Express, a topos of the spy-novel genre from at least Graham Greene's *Stamboul Express* (1932) to Ian Fleming's *From Russia with Love* (1957).

These are the genres that dominate *Against the Day*: juvenile adventure of the "Tom Swift" type, the dime-novel western, and the "shocker" or spy novel. Among them these three compose the bulk of this novel's generic repertoire, but they do not exhaust it—far from it. The attentive reader will recognize, dispersed throughout the novel, material derived from a whole range of other popular genres: Edwardian detective fiction, on the model of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes;[7] scientific romance, on the model of H. G. Wells;[8] other subgenres of imperial romance, including African adventure and polar adventure; collegiate novels, both the American dime-novel type associated with the generic college-boy hero, Frank Merriwell (see 100), and the comic Oxbridge type; and, more fleetingly, various theatrical genres, including melodrama and operetta. *Against the Day* is, among other things, a massive anthology of popular genres—a virtual library of entertainment fiction.

II

From the outset, *Against the Day* schools us in the identification and discrimination of its popular-genre materials. By the midpoint of this immensely long novel, we may feel confident of having mastered its technique of genre-poaching. But Pynchon has a surprise in store for us. As late as the last chapter of part 4—the novel's penultimate chapter, just before the brief coda of part 5—Pynchon suddenly introduces a new genre, never glimpsed before in the novel's preceding 1,040-odd pages:

> It was late afternoon by the time Lew [Basnight] motored over to the address Emilio had given him. He parked a few doors down from a chalet-style bungalow with a pepper tree in the yard, went up and knocked politely at the front door. And was shocked, or as much as he could be anymore, by the malevolent glamour of the face that so abruptly appeared. Shady side of forty, presentable, but also what he had long come, regretfully, to recognize as haunted. Maybe he ought to've turned and ankled it, but instead he took his hat off all the way and inquired, "This the house that's for rent?"
>
> "Not so far. Should it be, do you think?"
>
> Lew pretended to look at his daybook. "You'd be . . ."

> "Mrs. Deuce Kindred." The door screen cast over her face a strange rectilinear mist, which somehow extended to her voice and which for no reason he could figure, thinking about it later, he took as a sexual signal, proceeding to get an erection out on the front porch here and everything—"Did I come to the wrong place?" He watched her eyes flicker down and up.
>
> "Easy to find out."
>
> "The husband home?"
>
> "Come on in." She took a step back and turned, with the beginning of a smile she almost contemptuously would not allow him to see any further stages of, and led him through the olive light of the little front room toward the kitchen. Oh this was going to be sordid as all hell, he knew the feeling by now. At first he thought it must be him, and some tough-guy sex appeal, but after a while he understood that out on this coast it was nothing personal, it only happened a lot. (1051)

The slightly seedy Southern California milieu, the generic character roles (tough guy, femme fatale),[9] the wisecracking repartee, the slangy colloquialisms ("Shady side of forty," "ankled it"), and above all the cynical, world-weary tone—all these features unmistakably signal hard-boiled detective fiction. The interesting question is not "Why introduce *this* genre?", but "Why do so *just now,* so late in the novel?" The surprise of encountering this genre for the first time here, a mere forty pages from the end, instructively illuminates something crucial about Pynchon's genre-poaching technique that might otherwise have escaped our attention.

Lew Basnight, the tough-guy detective in this passage, has already passed through two other detective genres to reach this one. He begins his career as an operative for a detective agency battling strike breakers and anarchists, on the model of the Pinkerton detectives who figured as heroes in turn-of-the-century dime novels; after a detour into the London of Edwardian detectives of the Sherlock Holmes type, he finally finds himself on the West Coast, enacting the role of hard-boiled detective.[10] Minus the Edwardian detour, Basnight's itinerary retraces that of Dashiell Hammett's detectives, from agency operative (the Continental Op) to private investigator (Sam Spade, Nick Charles), or, for that matter, Hammett's own career, from Pinkerton detective to one of the founders of the hard-boiled genre.[11] Hard-boiled detective fiction emerges around 1920 in the pages of the *Black Mask* pulp magazine, where Hammett's own first stories began appearing in 1922 and 1923.[12] This is precisely the era that Pynchon's storyworld has reached by this point in part 4: post–Great War, the early twenties.

This insight has in its wake a broader appreciation of the logic of Pynchon's genre-poaching throughout *Against the Day*: Pynchon appropriates the conventions and materials of genres that flourished at the historical moments during which the events of his story occur. His genre-poaching

is synchronized with the unfolding chronology of his storyworld. Only in the closing chapters does the chronology of *Against the Day* reach the post–Great War period, so only here does hard-boiled detective fiction become available for appropriation. Most of the novel transpires during the two-decade run-up to the Great War, from 1893, the year of the Columbian Exposition, to 1914, so its dominant genres are the popular genres of that era. For instance, the "Tom Swift" series of juvenile novels, on which the Chums of Chance narrative is modeled, was launched in 1910, near the middle of *Against the Day*'s chronological span.[13] The best known of the boy engineers in popular juvenile literature, Tom Swift is hardly the first of them, the boy-inventor genre having been a staple of American dime novels since the 1870s, yielding a number of commercially successful series predating "Tom Swift."[14]

Westerns, too, had been a staple of "yellow-back" dime novels since at least the 1860s, undergoing a number of mutations over the decades.[15] By the 1890s, when the chronology of *Against the Day*'s storyworld begins, typical dime-novel westerns often featured sympathetic outlaw heroes who engaged in forms of "social banditry," seeking redress and retribution for wrongs done to them by powerful landowners and corrupt politicians.[16] Even the historical Frank and Jesse James—in real life, unreconstructed secessionist insurgents—were recast as dime-novel heroes in this mold.[17] This, of course, is exactly the situation of the Traverse boys in Pynchon's Wild West narrative. The Traverses, like the James Boys of the dime novels, are good-guy outlaws bent on justifiable revenge; the middle brother, Frank, even shares a first name with one of the James brothers.

Finally, the period from 1893 through the Great War—the period of *Against the Day*—also coincides with the heyday of what contemporaries called "shockers"—British spy novels.[18] The amateur spies of Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) or John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) or *Greenmantle* (1916) foil foreign conspiracies at home or offshore and even travel undercover to the enemy heartland (as Richard Hannay and his companions do in *Greenmantle*)—missions that anticipate those undertaken by Pynchon's secret agents in *Against the Day.*

Parallel cases could be made for nearly all of the popular genres that Pynchon appropriates throughout *Against the Day.* Stories of Edwardian era detection, scientific romances, "imperial romances" set in Africa or the Arctic, college novels, operettas: these are all popular genres that flourished during the decades covered by the events of *Against the Day.* If *Against the Day* is a virtual library of entertainment fiction, it is more specifically a library of *early-twentieth-century* entertainment fiction.

This is not the first time Pynchon has applied the technique of synchronizing the popular genres being pastiched or appropriated with the era of the novel's storyworld. Indeed, it could be argued that *all* of his

novels since at least 1973 manifest this same logic. The tendency is less discernible in the earlier, pre-1973 novels, where, though popular genres are certainly evoked, recycled, and remediated—for example, spy novels in *V.* (1963), Hollywood war movies in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)—they seem not to be systematically coordinated with the eras of the respective storyworlds.[19] Beginning with *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), however, such coordination becomes the norm. *Gravity's Rainbow*, a novel about the 1940s, is cast in the form of a movie *from* the forties—or rather, it mingles several different genres of forties movies, including the war movie, the musical comedy, the romance, the horror movie, even the animated cartoon. Genre-poaching in *Gravity's Rainbow* does not stop there, for the novel also appropriates a number of other popular genres of its period, in various media, including superhero comics and various radio-show genres.[20] If *Against the Day* is a library of early-twentieth-century entertainment fiction, then *Gravity's Rainbow* is a media library of the 1940s.

Following *Gravity's Rainbow* after an interval of seventeen years, *Vineland* (1990) has been seen by some as complicit with ephemeral television culture and the televisual medium. Certainly, it is saturated with television: TV jingles and catch phrases, the names of TV shows and celebrities, and above all, TV genres, including cop shows, game shows, soap operas, sitcoms, movies of the week, and even commercials.[21] From another perspective, however, the televisuality of *Vineland* appears less a matter of supine complicity with mass culture than of a kind of *historicity*, or even a method of *historiography*: another instance of Pynchon's appropriation of popular genres keyed to the historical moment of his novel, here the year 1984. *Inherent Vice* (2009), a companion to *Vineland* and Pynchon's most recent novel to date, is set in 1970 and models itself on hard-boiled detective fiction and film of the late sixties and early seventies, such as Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer novels and the director Robert Altman's 1973 updating of Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Finally, *Mason & Dixon* (1997), the novel that immediately precedes *Against the Day*, systematically pastiches eighteenth-century comic or picaresque narrative. Written wall-to-wall in a mock-eighteenth-century style, it simulates the style and conventions of popular novels contemporary with the events it narrates, as well as poaching other popular narrative forms of its era, including the "gothick" novel and the seventeenth-century New England captivity narrative.

III

If a logic of *synchronization* consistently determines Pynchon's selection of genres for poaching throughout *Against the Day*—indeed, right across

the whole corpus of his fiction since at least 1973—this by no means entails consistency or uniformity in his *handling* of these genres. Rather, the mode of appropriation varies from genre to genre. That Pynchon subjects the boy-inventor genre to somewhat campy parody, for instance, does not mean that he will necessarily handle the dime-novel western genre or the spy-novel "shocker" the same way; manifestly, he does not.

In fact, the Chums of Chance receive special treatment. While there are moments of parody in the handling of all these genres, in the case of the Chums the parody is broader and more consistent, and the serious or "straight" moments rare (and accordingly more conspicuous). Moreover, the Chums are subjected to a kind of "quarantine," as though parody were contagious and Pynchon did not want to risk contaminating the other genres. Their narrative alone features an intrusive narrator (the one who alludes to "my faithful readers" on the novel's first page (3)), who appears not to narrate any of the other story lines. The Chums almost never interact directly with protagonists of the other genres—for instance, the Traverses—but generally do so only indirectly, at one or more removes, through minor intermediary characters.[22] From the perspective of the other characters, they are *fictitious*, heroes of a series of novels—Reef Traverse actually reads one of them, *The Chums of Chance at the Ends of the Earth* (214–15)[23]—and that makes them, from our own perspective as readers, *doubly* fictitious, fictions within a fiction.

The Chums receive special treatment because they have been reserved for a special destiny. In a novel so invested in tracing the buildup to the Great War, and so relentless in foreshadowing it, it is only from the perspective of the Chums that we witness the war in present time. Whereas other characters (including Kit and Reef Traverse) *flash back* to their Great War experiences after the fact, in retrospective, only the Chums are permitted to reflect the war experience *as it happens*—albeit from high above (and perhaps in an alternative universe): "[Randolph St. Cosmo] gestured out the window, where long-range artillery shells, till quite recently objects of mystery, glittering with the colors of late afternoon, could be seen just reaching the tops of their trajectories and pausing in the air for an instance before the deadly plunge back to Earth.[24] Among distant sounds of repeated explosion could also be heard the strident massed buzzing of military aircraft. Below, across the embattled countryside, the first searchlights of evening were coming on" (1025). The paradox is powerful: Pynchon reserves for the most lightweight of all the genres he poaches—literally as well as figuratively lightweight, airborne, lighter-than-air—the mission of bearing witness to the weightiest, the gravest, of historical catastrophes.[25]

Pynchon could easily have subjected the western genre to the same sort of parodic transformation that he applied to the boy-inventor genre, as

many others already had—Ishmael Reed in *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969),[26] Gilbert Sorrentino in *Gold Fools* (2001), even Mel Brooks in *Blazing Saddles* (1974). Instead, he adopts a strategy of demystification and debunking, subjecting the western to a *revisionist* transformation in the spirit of E. L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960), Michael Ondaatje's *Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970),[27] or revisionist western films like Altman's *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992), or HBO's *Deadwood* series (2004–06). The aspiration of these revisionist novels and films, as of *Against the Day*, is to close the gap between the genre conventions of the western and what one imagines the *historical* experience of the American West must have been like, by restoring (among other things) the hardships, the class conflict, the profanity, the sexuality, and the unglamorous violence that the genre conventionally edits out.

Animated by this revisionist spirit is Frank Traverse's experience of "Old Mexico" as "a dime novel [. . .] featuring gringo evildoers in exile [and] sudden deaths" (374). The catalog of motifs does not actually end there but continues: "gringo evildoers in exile, sudden deaths, *a government that had already fallen but did not yet know it, a revolution that would never begin though thousands were already dying and suffering in its name*" (my italics) (374). While this catalog begins with the familiar repertoire of the dime-novel western, it soon swerves into real-world politics and the painful paradoxes of history, which the dime novel sought systematically to evade and suppress.[28] To put it another way, Frank's dime-novel experience swerves into a different, revisionist subgenre, that of "Mexico Westerns" such as Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) or Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* (1993, 1994, 1998).[29] Similarly revealing of Pynchon's revisionist strategy is his treatment of the three "classic" gunfights in which Frank Traverse is involved. In the first (395), Frank stumbles upon his adversary unexpectedly in a cantina and manages to shoot him before the other man even recognizes him; in the second (646–48), a tense standoff that seems on the brink of erupting into a gunfight is defused by the farcical intrusion of an outsider; in the third (1005–06), Frank's revenge on the man who ordered his father's murder is preempted when a bodyguard guns the culprit down before Frank gets a chance to do so. Messy and unsatisfactory, each episode ends in an anticlimax of one kind or another. These are hardly the sorts of stories that the dime novels conventionally tell about Wild West violence.

Pynchon's approach to the spy novel is similarly revisionist, but here he seeks, not so much to close the gap between the genre's conventions and historical reality, as to bring to light the repressed content of the genre itself—to read its subtext. Pynchon highlights the element of early-twentieth-century "shockers" that strikes twenty-first-century readers of the genre most forcibly, namely, the intense homosocial bonding among

these novels' male protagonists, verging on homoeroticism. More even than their patriotism, what motivates these men—for example, the two English amateur sailors of Childers's *Riddle of the Sands* or the international companions of *Greenmantle* (an Englishman, a Scot, an American, a Boer)—is the intensity of their devotion to each other, rooted in all-male public-school culture and reinforced by the homosocial model of the Boy Scouts.[30] Women disturb the intimacy among male friends, except when they pose an outright threat, as the German femme fatale Hilda von Einem does in *Greenmantle*.[31] More typically, however, they simply fall outside the circle of these men's experience: "Women had never much come my way," frankly confesses Buchan's Richard Hannay, "and I knew about as much of their ways as I knew about the Chinese language. All my life I had lived with men only."[32] If homosociality is the norm, however, homoeroticism itself is repressed and dissimulated. The possibility of homosexuality, when acknowledged at all, tends to be coded and displaced onto enemy aliens, such as the German secret-service chief Stumm in *Greenmantle*, whose room, with its effeminate *décor*—literally, his closet!—gives him away: "It was the room of a man who had a passion for frippery, who had a perverted taste for soft delicate things. . . . I began to see the queer other side to my host, that evil side which gossip had spoken of as not unknown in the German army."[33]

Pynchon takes the "shocker" out of the closet in his version of the spy novel. He seizes on the genre's intense homosociality and amplifies it into outright homosexuality in the person of his principal spy, the British secret agent Cyprian Latewood, a flaming queen who uses his sexuality as a tool of the espionage trade. Already notorious at Cambridge as a "sod," or sodomite (489), Latewood is recruited into the British secret service in Vienna, has a homosexual affair with his immediate superior and handler (who is later exposed as a traitor), and goes on to form a threesome with Reef Traverse and Yashmeen Halfcourt between and during missions to the Balkans. He is the frankly queer version of Childers's closeted, overgrown boy scouts and Buchan's dapper and misogynistic "clubland heroes."[34] Through the figure of Cyprian Latewood, Pynchon *queers* the British spy novel.[35]

IV

Against the Day is a library of entertainment fiction, but entertainment fiction passed through the looking glass, rendered differently, *altered*: parodied, revised and demystified, queered. To what end?

Perhaps to the end of perfecting a new method of writing historical fiction. Over the course of several substantial novels, since at least *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973, and nowhere more extensively or more successfully

than in *Against the Day*, Pynchon has been refining his practice of what we might call *mediated historiography*—the writing of an era's history through the medium of its popular genres. There is precedent in postmodernist fiction for a novel that "poaches" multiple genres—William Burroughs's *Cities of the Red Night* (1981), for example. There is also precedent for historical novels that mimic the style of novels written in the era of their storyworlds—John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) and *A Maggot* (1985), for instance. But there is little or no precedent for Pynchon's method of sampling from the whole range of a particular era's popular genres and piecing them together in a single text to produce, if not genuinely exhaustive coverage, then at least a compelling *illusion* of exhaustiveness. It is as though Pynchon were aiming to *map* the era's entire system of popular genres within the covers of a single novel (albeit a huge one).

To map an era's genre system is to map its popular *self-representations*. Every popular genre, for all its obvious limitations, distortions, and suppressions, captures the way a historical epoch represented itself *to* itself. Juvenile-inventor fiction, for all its puerilities, shows us something about Americans' imaginary relationship to technology around the turn of the century, and perhaps something, too, about their relationship to categories of time and space.[36] The dime-novel western, however unfaithful to the historical experience of the West, nevertheless shows us how Americans of that era imagined their relationship to that historical experience. In the same way, the British "shocker" shows us how contemporary readers imagined their relationship to empire, the hard-boiled detective novel shows how *its* readers imagined their relationship to urban modernity, and so on. Each genre holds a distorting mirror up to historical reality. Multiply the genre mirrors, set them at different angles to each other, and one might stand some chance of approximating the historical "truth" of the era that produced them. This appears to be Pynchon's wager: that, multiplied and juxtaposed, an era's genres might compensate for each others' distortions and, taken all together, might jointly yield a complete and faithful—if also complex and elusive—representation of the historical whole. The map of the era's genre system can also serve as a *cognitive mapping* of the era itself (in Jameson's sense)—or so Pynchon hopes.[37]

It is a measure of Pynchon's sophistication as a cognitive cartographer that he also takes into account his *own* historical position—which is to say, *our* historical position as latter-day readers of these early-twentieth-century popular genres, looking back from the distance of a century at the world on the eve of the Great War. Pynchon introduces his, and our, historical perspective into the picture through his parodic and revisionist handling of the popular genres in *Against the Day*. His parody of juvenile-inventor fiction reflects *our* distance from the Chums' "boys'-book innocence" (418) about

technology and history—an innocence that also qualifies them to serve as estranged witnesses of the horrors of the Great War. His restoration of the unspoken realities of the West to the dime-novel western reflects *our* skepticism, *our* iconoclasm, *our* impatience with the western's generic pieties. His queering of the British "shocker" reflects our own inability to see that genre's intense homosociality as anything but deeply closeted homosexuality. And so on, for the rest of the genres that compose the fabric of *Against the Day.* Pynchon historicizes *doubly*, on the one hand, by refracting the era's historical realities through the genres of its own self-representation; on the other, by indicating where *we* stand with respect to this distant era and its characteristic genres. The cognitive map includes us, the readers of *Against the Day: "You are here."*

NOTES

A version of this article appeared as "Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching," *Genre* 42, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2009): 5–20.

1. This is not to say that the apocalyptic sublime is absent from *Against the Day*, only that it is deferred. See, e.g., the opening of the sixth chapter of part 4: "A heavenwide blast of light" (79).
2. Juvenile adventurers in the Stratemeyer Syndicate's Great Marvels series actually anticipate the Chums' expeditions to the North Pole and the Hollow Earth, in novels from 1906 and 1908, respectively; see John T. Dizer Jr., *Swift and Company*, 100–07; see also E. F. Bleiler, "Newark Steam Man to Tom Swift," 109–12.
3. See Dizer, *Swift and Company* and *Tom Swift and Bobbsey Twins*, passim; see also Francis J. Molson, "Tom Swift Books."
4. In chapter 6 of part 1 of *Against the Day,* Pynchon has the Archduke Franz Ferdinand attend Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show (45). On the almost-too-good-to-be-true conjunction of the Turner thesis and Buffalo Bill at the Columbian Exposition, see Bill Brown, "Reading the West," esp. 30.
5. The journalist Ned Buntline "discovered" Buffalo Bill in 1869 and launched him as a hero of dime novels that appeared between 1879 and 1904; see Daryl Jones, *Dime Novel Western*, 56–75. On the Wild West Show at the Columbian Exposition, see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 63–87.
6. On turn-of-the-century imperial romance generally, and its map motif in particular, see Susan Jones, "Into the Twentieth Century," esp. 420.
7. Lew Basnight, hitherto a detective of a different type, ironically enumerates some of the genre's motifs: "anxious husbands and missing necklaces and exotic poisons" (693). On Edwardian detective fiction, see Joseph A. Kestner, *The Edwardian Detective*.
8. Two of the Chums of Chance take a trip on a substandard time machine, evidence of the way that "Mr. H. G. Wells's speculative jeu d'esprit on the subject has been adulterated to profitable effect by the 'dime novels'" (398).

9. The femme fatale in this passage, who identifies herself as Mrs. Deuce Kindred, is none other than Lake Traverse, strayed from her origins in a different genre.

10. To describe Basnight as having "passed" from one genre to another is putting it mildly. His transformation from Pinkerton operative to Holmes-style Edwardian detective is literally explosive: blown up by anarchists somewhere in Colorado, he is rescued by a pair of effete English travelers and taken to London, to be recruited there to do detective work on behalf of a mystical order. The head of this order explains that the world he inhabited before the blast was different from the one he now inhabits, and that the explosion was one of the "crossover points or gates of transfer" between "lateral world-sets, other parts of the Creation": "You found passage between the Worlds" (221)—or at any rate, between genres.

11. See Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 139–43; 224–28.

12. Sinda Gregory, *Private Investigations*, passim.

13. The Chums' mention of "Brother Tom Swift" actually occurs during an episode datable to the year of the Tunguska Event, 1908, two years *before* Tom Swift's first appearance in print—a trivial anachronism, and probably an unintentional one.

14. See Bleiler, "Newark Steam Man to Tom Swift," passim.

15. See Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western,* passim; also Brown, "Reading the West," passim.

16. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 128.

17. Ibid., 125–55; Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western,* 75–99.

18. See Susan Jones, "Into the Twentieth Century," passim.

19. Pynchon's first spy-novel pastiche occurs in the short story "Under the Rose" (1961), which he later incorporated as chapter 3 of *V.*, though in radically revised form, refracted through eight distinct points of view. By reworking the story as an exercise in perspectivism, he somewhat obscures and dilutes its genre identity, reflecting, perhaps, a lack of commitment, at this point in his career, to the technique of genre-poaching that he would develop later.

20. There are also traces of the western genre in *Gravity's Rainbow*, though on nothing like the scale of *Against the Day*—in the hallucinatory episode of Crouchfield the westwardman, a sort of distillation of all the frontiersman figures of popular fiction and film, and in the episodes set in Soviet Central Asia, which are whimsically reconfigured in terms of Wild West clichés and stereotypes. Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 67–70, 338–43.

21. See Brian McHale, "Zapping, the Art of Switching Channels: On *Vineland*" in *Constructing Postmodernism*, 115–41.

22. The most significant exception here is Lew Basnight, who actually ventures aboard the Chums' dirigible, the *Inconvenience,* in chapter 5 of part 1.

23. Reef, evidently attuned to their existence by his reading, actually intuits the Chums' presence—a rare moment of "leakage" between the Chums' sphere and the Traverses': "At odd moments, now, [Reef] found himself looking at the sky, as if trying to locate somewhere in it the great airship [. . .] sometimes in the sky, when the light was funny enough, he thought he saw something familiar. Never lasting more than a couple of watch ticks, but persistent" (215).

24. What the Chums are witnessing here, of course, are the upper reaches of these projectiles' ballistic parabola: gravity's rainbow.

25. There is precedent in the juvenile-adventure literature for the Chums' involvement in the Great War. Clair Hayes produced, between 1915 and 1919, two series of "Boy Allies" adventures: ten volumes of "The Boy Allies with the Navy" and thirteen of "The Boy Allies with the Army." See Dizer, *Tom Swift and Company*, 63–67. The Boy Scout hero, Tom Slade, also went to war, in five novels published by the Stratemeyer Syndicate in 1918 and 1919. Dizer, *Tom Swift and The Bobbsey Twins*, 400–04. Pynchon had already parodied the boys-at-war topos in *Cashiered*, the war movie screened (out of order) in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Pynchon's handling of the Chums' wartime experience could be seen as a dialogical riposte to this particular juvenile-adventure fantasy: "'Those poor innocents,' says the most thoughtful of the Chums. 'Back at the beginning of this . . . they must have been boys, so much like us. . . . They knew they were standing before a great chasm none could see to the bottom of. But they launched themselves into it anyway. Cheering and laughing. It was their own grand "Adventure." They were juvenile heroes of a World-Narrative—unreflective and free, they went on hurling themselves into those depths by tens of thousands until one day they awoke, those who were still alive, and instead of finding themselves posed nobly against some dramatic moral geography, they were down cringing in a mud trench swarming with rats and smelling of shit and death'" (1023–24).

26. The name of the eponymous outlaw town in Reed's title, Yellow Back Radio, refers explicitly to the *yellow-back* dime novels that were the main medium of the Wild West genre before the rise of the movie western.

27. Among the other materials in this mixed-medium, dossier text—photographs, poetry, documents, testimony—Ondaatje inserts excerpts from a turn-of-the-century dime novel, *Billy the Kid and the Princess.* On postmodern appropriations of the western more generally, see Theo D'Haen, "The Western."

28. Brown, "Reading the West," 5.

29. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 591–613.

30. Robert Baden-Powell's widely read *Scouting for Boys* appeared in 1908, in the middle of the "shocker" era, too late to have influenced Childers (1903), but undoubtedly a model for Buchan (1916) (see Kestner, *The Edwardian Detective,* 4, 73, 356).

31. Jones, "Into the Twentieth Century," 209.

32. John Buchan, *Greenmantle*, 191.

33. Ibid., 84.

34. See Richard Usborne, *Clubland Heroes*. The characteristics of Ian Fleming's James Bond, a loner and womanizer, can be seen as compensation (or overcompensation) for the homosociality and repressed homosexuality of his precursors, the earlier generation of clubland heroes.

35. Compare Pynchon's rehandling of the "shocker" genre with John Ashbery's in a cut-up collage-poem called "Europe," from *The Tennis-Court Oath* (1962). Ashbery's source is a Great War era juvenile spy novel by William LeQueux, *Beryl of the Biplane* (1917), which the poet literally fragments and rearranges. Where Pynchon exposes the homoerotic subtext of the spy novel, Ashbery's juxtapositions expose its complementary homo*phobic* subtext: see John Shoptaw, *On the Outside*, 57–63.

36. Stephen Kern, *Culture of Time and Space,* passim.

37. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 51–54.