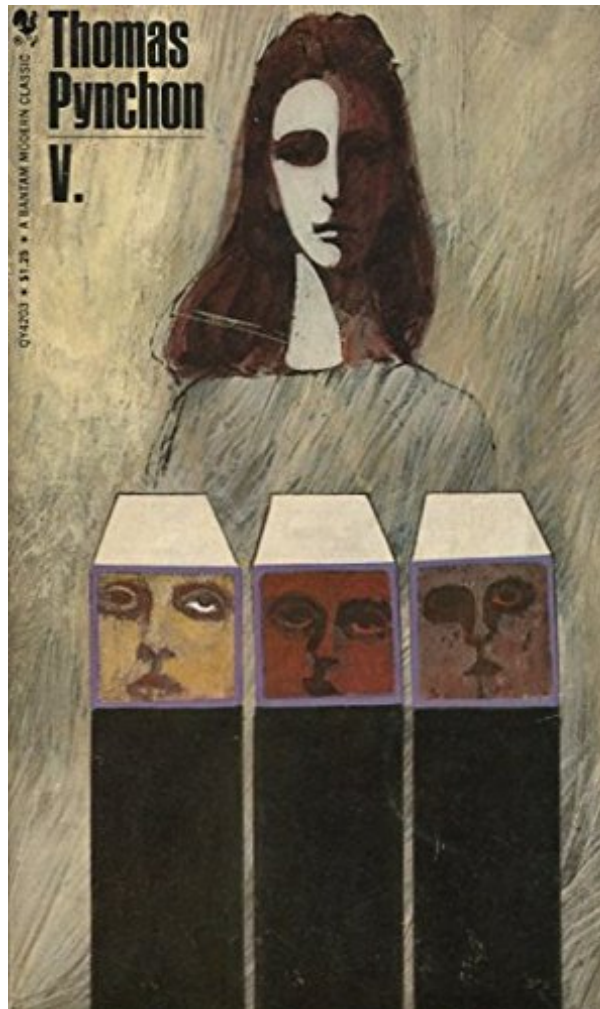
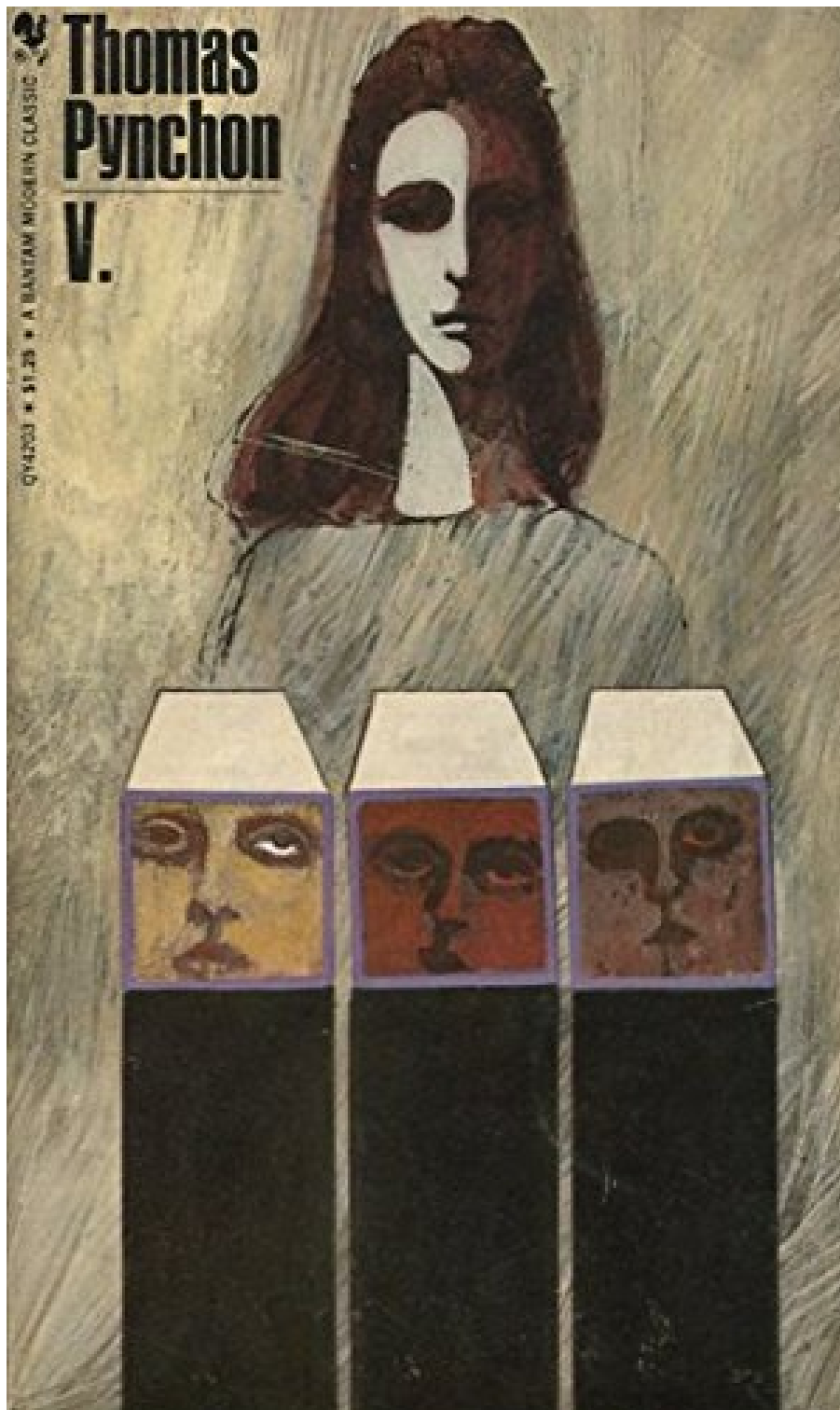


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- Sales Rank: #2435619 in Books
- Published on: 1968
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback

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An Enigma Wrapped Up In A Letter

By Scott Esposito

Although not quite unique, Thomas Pynchon's approach to narration is extremely unusual. Often he seems to drone on in endless detail. At times his books read like a description of a vaudeville slapstick routine. Commonly, narrative structure, presumably at the heart of most novels, seems abandoned, or even purposely ignored. The upshot of this is that Thomas Pynchon's novels are strange, and decidedly not for everyone.

Of course the flip side is that for those who find Pynchon to their liking he is a rare treat, an intriguing enigma that you simply cannot stop talking about. Such is the case with *V.*, a novel that over the years has shown a propensity to spark almost endless debate. Ostensibly it is the story of two men, Stencil and Benny Profane. Benny spends the greater part of the novel tramping around New York City with his friends, the Whole Sick Crew, generally not doing much of anything except procrastinating and running through various jobs and friends. Stencil spends most of the novel a quest of sorts, using a unique technique to track down details about an elusive and mysterious woman known only as *V.*

It has been noted that it is a technique of Pynchon's to surround the reader in layer after layer of detail and leave her to ferret out some sense; *V.* is certainly in keeping with that tradition. Wrapped up in this book is enough social critique, pop culture, historical theory, hilarious humor, and prediction of the future to make the reader's head spin like the roulette wheel at a casino. Rather than a shortcoming, this overwhelming downpour of data is one of the best parts of *V.*, as there is just enough cohesion among the disparate elements that certain associations, even theories, can be developed. But are the associations really there or just in the reader's head? That is one of the questions Pynchon aches to ask.

Also central to *V.* is the idea of mechanization and routinization. Several characters in *V.* (including *V.* herself) become more and more mechanized as time passes. Further, several elements of *V.* suggest the mechanization of society. Linked to this idea of mechanization is that of routinization, and Pynchon seems to say that the mechanization of modern life has helped create a society that is locked in routine. This theme of routinization is found in both large and small instances. On the small side is Benny Profane (among others) who is continually unable to break out of the boundaries he has set on his life. ...

I feel my review of *V.* would not be complete without a few words about Pynchon's amazing breadth of knowledge. Diverse places such as New York City, Malta, Paris, and Africa are made the setting for several of the book's scenes and these locations are discussed with such authority, knowledge, and familiarity that the reader is convinced that Pynchon must have spent five years living in each. Additionally Pynchon integrates a great deal of information into the plot of *V.* A sampling of such information would include: explicit procedures for a nosejob, World War I fighter pilots, naval vessels, jazz musicians, Machiavelli, modern art, classical art, automobile safety tests, and the Holy Bible. Even at the tender age of 24 Pynchon had filled his head with enough information to inscribe nearly each of the 500 pages of *V.* with a certain subtext or reference.

Rather than review *V.* by presenting a plot summary I have tried to express a few of the ideas Pynchon works with. I have done this because *V.* thrives on non-linearity and a plot summary would be pointless and would do little to give a potential reader a true feel for what *V.* might be like. Instead I have chosen a few elements that I feel are at the heart of *V.*, and have discussed them. For those who enjoy immersing themselves in a book and look forward to thorough discussions when they are done there are few books I can recommend above *V.* But for those who prefer more traditional, even formulaic, books I should warn that *V.*, while in my opinion excellent, may not be to their liking. Despite these admonitions I would recommend this book to as many people as possible, as I do believe that everyone should experience *V.* This fine book may be a difficult taste to acquire, but one well worth the effort.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Terrible Typos

By Ian Conley

I give this book four stars because it challenges the reader and is psychedelic as hell. I deduct two stars for persistent and annoying typographical errors that occur very often.

Examples:

Page 340, Second Paragraph: "I write this during a night raid, down in the abandoned sewer. It is raining outside. The only fight is from phosphorus flares above the city, a few candles in here, bombs, Elena is beside me, holding the child who sleeps drooling against her shoulder."

Page 341 Third Paragraph: "First mention oaf Elena Xemxi comes from Fausto I, shortly after Maratt's marriage."

The first example is obvious that "The only fight" should be "The only light". The second is also glaringly stupid, "oaf" should be "of".

I hope the oaf who proofread this novel is fired forsooth!

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Wire We Hear

By Robert Rudawsky

As a poor schlemiel seeking meaning in the mysteries of the human experience, I read *V* after having felt that my senses had been affected by the experience of reading Gravity's Rainbow. In an era where people strive to be as "holistic" as possible in their interpretation of life's events, *V* at the very least offers a symbolic representation of a gradual narrowing of focus that accompanies any investigation. One could argue that this process lies at the core of our very "understanding" of anything. Recall that this novel was written by a young author, possibly trying to impress as young men do, that which is important to us. That to which we devote great time and effort in pursuit of. The fertile delta? A shady grove, my darling? I would be delighted to read a comparable work from the sensibility of a female's point of view. May I be so bold as to suggest a title? It would be "I", possibly subtitled "Wire We Hear", with abundant allusions to stringed musical instruments and other phallic symbolism.

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