

GRAVITY'S RAINBOW

- Location: The Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia
2008-2010 Delancey Place
Philadelphia, PA 19103
- Time: Five Sundays, 2-4 p.m. (for dates, see "Readings" section, below)
- Instructor: Paul Saint-Amour, Annenberg Professor in the Humanities, University of Pennsylvania
psain@english.upenn.edu / (909) 938-0947
- Contact: Edward Pettit, Sunstein Senior Manager of Public Programs
epettit@rosenbach.org / (215) 732-1600, ext. 135

TEXTS

REQUIRED: Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). Viking, Bantam, or Penguin editions recommended, as the Weisenburger *Companion* (below) is keyed to these three. I find the Viking to be the most readable thanks to its larger font and page size.

I recommend the audiobook version of *GR* read by George Guidall. His 2014 recording is available on Audible.com; you may be able to find an online copy of his 1985 recording.

OPTIONAL: Steven C. Weisenburger, *A 'Gravity's Rainbow' Companion*, 2nd ed. (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 2006), ISBN 978-0820328072. Borrow online:
<https://archive.org/details/WeisenburgerAGravitysRainbowCompanion>

RESOURCE: "Some Things That 'Happen' (More or Less) in *Gravity's Rainbow*," online section-by-section synopsis by Michael Davitt Bell: <https://www.ottosell.de/pynchon/rainbow.htm>

DESCRIPTION

Gravity's Rainbow, Thomas Pynchon's masterpiece, turns 50 this year. The book divided readers from the get-go: the Pulitzer Prize jury recommended it unanimously but the Pulitzer board vetoed the recommendation, awarding no fiction prize for 1973 and calling the novel "turgid," "unreadable," and "obscene." Now's the time to read or revisit Pynchon's ludic tome, with its pratfalls and pig costumes, its tales of love and rockets, its scatological sado-masochistic set pieces, and its passages of transcendent lyricism. Over the course of 5 fortnightly meetings, we'll make our way through the whole enchilada.

What's it like? Imagine that Herman Melville had been born in 1937, read Joyce's *Ulysses* in a lecture course taught by Vladimir Nabokov at Cornell University, and worked in the aerospace industry while beginning to hand-write novels on graph paper. The *Moby-Dick* of this latter-day Melville would have been *Gravity's Rainbow*. Set during the final months of the Second World War, it's an encyclopedic meditation on whiteness, war, sex, Psy Ops, plastics, corporate capital, the settler state, integrals, disintegration, and the V-2 rocket. It's a paranoid disquisition on paranoia, it's polymorphously perverse, and it's gorgeous—a strenuous pre-history of the nuclear age and the way we live now.

READINGS

10/08 Book 1: Beyond the Zero

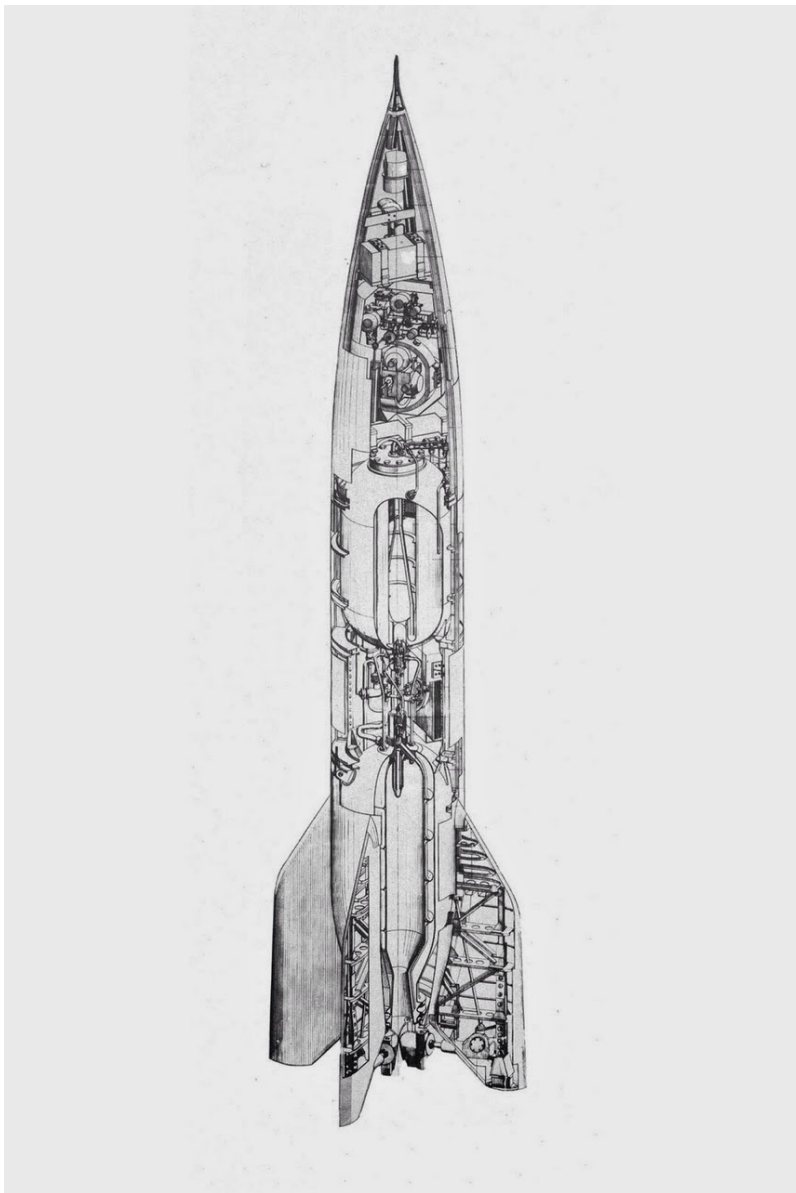
10/22 Book 2: Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering

11/05 Book 3: In the Zone, first half (Viking p. 447; Bantam p. 521; Penguin p. 454)

11/19 Book 3: In the Zone, second half

12/03 Book 4: The Counterforce

+ possible supplementary reading: Edward Mendelson, "Gravity's Encyclopedia" (1976)



The V-2 rocket in cross-section.