



Anthology: The Blurbs of  
Thomas Pynchon  
Compiled by Patrick Lane

**from *Post Road 14***

Selected by Wesley Stace, author of *by George and Misfortune*.

*Blurbs are almost always besides the point. But I agree with the Neal Pollack. Post Road "feels like it is put out by actual people". I agree with Barry Gifford that it is "a jewel in a bucket of stones". In fact, I'd gladly have nominated the whole of Post Road 14. What other magazine would print Mary Gaitskill's appreciation of Barrie's Peter Pan, next to a reprint of Wilkie Collins' 1863 A Petition to Novel-Writers, a questionnaire answered by George Saunders, a recommendation of the work of William Boyd, and a reproduction of Anais Nin's marriage certificate? And I haven't even scratched the surface - of one issue. Post Road manages to be a fan mail to good writing, and full of good writing itself. It is nostalgia for then and passion for now all rolled into one attractive package. It's unafraid to give airtime to private passions. It lets me opine enthusiastically about the abnormal romances of J. Meade Falkner: it was by no means certain that anyone would ever ask. It's the right size. It collects all Pynchon's blurbs - his most consistent public statements in the nearly 50 year arc of his writing career - so I don't have to. Post Road loves the world of letters. And I love Post Road. – WS.*

Thomas Pynchon is the author of *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Slow Learner*, a collection of short stories, *Vineland*, *Mason & Dixon* and, most recently, *Against the Day*. He received the National Book Award for *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1974.

*Been Down So Long it Looks Like Up to Me* by Richard Farina

Random House, 1966

It's been a while since I've read anything quite so groovy, quite such a joy from beginning to end. This book comes on like the Hallelujah Chorus done by 200 kazoo players with perfect pitch, I mean strong, swinging, skillful and reverent -- but also with the fine brassy buzz of irreverence in there too. Fariña has going for him an unerring and virtuoso instinct about exactly what, in this bewildering Republic, is serious and what cannot possibly be -- and on top of that, the honesty to come out and say it straight. In spinning his yarn he spins the reader as well, dizzily into a microcosm that manages to be hilarious, chilling, sexy, profound, maniacal, beautiful and outrageous all at the same time.

*My Escape from the CIA (And Other Improbable Events)* by Hughes Rudd

Dutton, 1966

You have a feeling, reading these stories, that Hughes Rudd, like some kind of a satanic Santa Claus, is leading you in under under the shadow of the great, grotesque American Christmas Tree and over to an assortment of gift packages, each one of which is quietly ticking. The explosions may come while you're reading, or after you've finished a particular story. But it's the thought behind them that really counts: to bring you, ready or not, into the presence of truth. Without copping out behind idle metaphors or irrelevant plot devices, Mr. Rudd has succeeded in telling, with all his reporter's love of accuracy, and mastery of detail, and irony, and grace, and sometimes terrifying precision, exactly what the hell having to be an American, now, during the years of total war, epidemic anxiety and mass communications whose promise has been corrupted, is really about; where it's really at. He comes as close to the core of the business as anybody has, because he is not only a writer with an enormous genius for spinning a yarn, but also one whose fine ear is tuned both to the reverberations of global history and to the secret whisperings of the human spirit. It is our good luck as readers to share, and certainly to ponder ourselves, the things he has been listening to.

*Looking for Baby Paradise* by John Speicher

Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967

Watch this Speicher cat, he's a writer of fine and startling talent. His novel is not only funny and frightening, absorbing, compassionate and skillfully-paced, but underneath you can also feel good solid rage, a deep sense of care, and most hopefully a refusal to believe

that the world he's telling about really has to be like it is. For reasons Americans have only lately begun looking into, and in the best sense of the word, *Looking for Baby Paradise* is revolutionary.

*DeFord* by David Shetzline

Random House, 1968

This is an extraordinary book, quickened by honest rage, written with sustained grace; comic; impassioned, and always deeply moving. For at its heart is an awareness that the America which should have been is not the America we ourselves live in; that the dissonances set up between the two grow wider and more tragic. What makes Shetzline's voice a truly original and important one is the way he uses these interference-patterns to build his novel, combining an amazing talent for seeing and listening with a yarn-spinner's native gift for picking you up, keeping you in the spell of the action, the chase, not letting go of you till you've said, yes, I see; yes, this is how it is.

*Nog* by Rudolph Wurlitzer

Pocket Books, 1970

Wow, this is some book, I mean it's more than a beautiful and heavy trip, it's also very important in an evolutionary way, showing us directions we could be moving in -- hopefully another sign that the Novel of Bullshit is dead and some kind of re-enlightenment is beginning to arrive, to take hold. Rudolph Wurlitzer is really, really

good, and I hope he manages to come down again soon, long enough anyhow to guide us on another one like *Nog*.

*Dance the Eagle to Sleep* by Marge Piercy

Fawcett Books, 1971

Here is somebody with the guts to go into the deepest core of herself, her time, her history, and risk more than anybody else has so far, just out of love for the truth and a need to tell it. It's about time.

*SDS: Ten Years Toward a Revolution* by Kirkpatrick Sale

Random House, 1973

SDS is the first great history of the American prerevolution. . . . It will stand not only on its extraordinary merits because it is a source of clarity, energy and sanity for anyone trying to survive the Nixonian reaction, but also as one book that was there when we needed it the most.

*Amazon One* by Mary F. Beal

Little, Brown & Co., 1975

I love this book. It is authentic and deeply felt, it moves with grace, speed, and surprise, it makes you feel good and also gets you angry, it takes you into the lives of people you can

care about and believe in -- especially Kam, who is the most engaging guerrilla to show up in American writing since Hemingway's Robert Jordan. This is novel-writing the way it should be, all-out, maniacal, professional.

*Far Tortuga* by Peter Matthiessen

Bantam Books, 1976

I've enjoyed everything I've ever read by Matthiessen, and this novel is Matthiessen at his best -- a masterfully spun yarn, a little otherworldly, a dreamlike momentum . . . It's full of music and strong haunting visuals, and like everything of his, it's also a deep declaration of love for the planet. I wish him and it all kinds of fortune.

*Sounding the Territory* by Laurel Goldman

Random House, 1982

An astonishing piece of work! I wasn't at all prepared, reading a book full of such laughter and vertigo, to be moved, and touched, as deeply as I was. Laurel Goldman brings to her writing a high-level quality of attention, a demonic sense of humor, a serious respect for life's darkness -- it is writing which is able, in the most surely felt way, to enter a reader's heart.

*Days Between Stations* by Steve Erickson

Simon & Schuster, 1985

Daring, haunting, sensual. . . . Steve Erickson has that rare and luminous gift for reporting back from the nocturnal side of reality, along with an engagingly romantic attitude and the fierce imaginative energy of a born storyteller. It is good news when any of these qualities appear in a writer -- to find them all together in a first novelist is reason to break out the champagne and *hors-d'oeuvres*.

*Lion at the Door* by David Attoe

Little, Brown & Co., 1989

In a quietly passionate voice that speaks to our hearts, David Attoe has brilliantly, honorably imagined himself into lives whose truths we recognize, lives otherwise only lost, and with his eloquent care, rescued them from the silence.

*Destiny Express* by Howard A. Rodman

Atheneum, 1990

Daringly imagined and darkly romantic -- a moral thriller.

*Stone Junction: An Alchemical Potboiler* by Jim Dodge

Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990

Here is American storytelling as tall as it is broadly imagined and deeply felt, exuberant with outlaw humor and honest magic. Reading *Stone Junction* is like being at a nonstop party in celebration of everything that matters.

*Mao II* by Don DeLillo

Viking, 1991

Here is American storytelling as tall as it is broadly imagined and deeply felt, exuberant with outlaw humor and honest magic. Reading *Stone Junction* is like being at a nonstop party in celebration of everything that matters.

*Mad Dog* by Jack Kelly

Atheneum, 1992

Lyrical and fast-driving, this tale of Dillinger's last days restores to us with brilliant fidelity a long-unredeemed part of our true outlaw heritage.

*We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World's Getting Worse* by James Hillman and Michael Ventura

HarperCollins, 1992

This provocative, dangerous, and high-spirited conversation sounds like one that many of us have been holding with ourselves, more and less silently, as times have grown ever

darker. Finally somebody has begun to talk out loud about what must change, and what must be left behind, if we are to navigate the perilous turn of this millennium and survive. For bravely lighting up these first beacons in the night, Ventura and Hillman deserve our thanks as well as our closest attention.

*Arc d'X* by Steve Erickson

Poseidon Press, 1993

Mind-warping in its vision, absolute in its integrity, *Arc d'X* is classic Erickson -- as daring, crazy, and passionate as any American writing since the Declaration of Independence.

*CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella* by George Saunders

Random House, 1996

An astoundingly tuned voice -- graceful, dark, authentic, and funny.

*Sewer, Gas & Electric: The Public Works Trilogy* by Matt Ruff

Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994

A post-Millennial spectacular -- dizzingly readable!

*Dreamland: Travels Inside the Secret World of Roswell and Area 51* by Phil Patton

Villard, 1998

A mind-opening tale of trespass and revelation, of road adventures, of technothriller hardware, of saucer folks, and aerospace outlaws -- as well as a daring account of our history through the Cold War and beyond by what we have seen, and often wish we had not seen, in the hazardous dreamscape of the American Sky.

*The Restraint of Beasts* by Magnus Mills

Arcade, 1998

A demented, deadpan comic wonder, this rude salute to the dark side of contract employment has the exuberant power of a magic word it might possibly be dangerous (like the title of a certain other Scottish tale) to speak out loud.

*Slackjaw* by Jim Knipfel

Tarcher/Putnam, 1999

*Slackjaw* is an extraordinary emotional ride through the lives and times of reader and writer alike. It is maniacally aglow with a born storyteller's gifts of observation, an amiably deranged sense of humor, and a heart too bounced around by his history, and ours, not to have earned Mr. Knipfel, at last, an unsentimental clarity that is generous and deep. What begins as a cautionary tale turns out to be, after all, an exemplary American

life. The Park Service ought to be charging admission. Long may he continue to astonish us.

*The Testament of Yves Gundron* by Emily Barton

Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2000

Blessedly post-ironic, engaging and heartfelt -- a story that moves with ease and certainty, deeply respecting the given world even as it shines with the integrity of a dream.

*The Verificationist* by Donald Antrim

Knopf, 2000

Donald Antrim is in top form with this high-spirited hallucination, whose characters, undeniably ourselves, carry on engagingly and shamelessly, in an off-the-wall, not to mention off-the-ceiling, environment that is also the world we know, and sometimes wish we didn't.

*The Black Veil: A Memoir with Digressions* by Rick Moody

Little, Brown & Company, 2002

Rick Moody, writing with boldness, humor, generosity of spirit, and a welcome sense of wrath, takes the art of the memoir an important step into its future.

*The Buzzing* by Jim Knipfel

Vintage, 2003

The Balzac of the bin is at it again. With this paranoid Valentine to New York -- and to a certain saurian colossus noted for his own ambivalent feelings about large cities -- Mr. Knipfel now brings to fiction the welcome gifts which distinguished his previous books -- the authenticity, the narrative exuberance, the integrity of his cheerfully undeluded American voice.