



BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

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Thomas Pynchon

Typed Letter Signed to Richard Fariña

1965

\$37,500

16 Oct 1965

Why Dick,

Holy shit man. How would "holy shit" look on the book jacket? What I mean is you have written, really and truly, a great out-of-sight fucking book. For Jim Silberman I will (D.V.) get up something phrased more acceptable to the family trade and all. But to you, wild colonial maniac, about all I can say is holy shit.

Did my reaction in Carmel seem less enthusiastic? I was being analytical then. Because you had asked me to. And there is that bit of the nasty/analytical to us all, right? Not to mention, having been peripherally There Then, the temptation to read it as a roman à clef, which of course it never was. But these days I have renounced all that analytical shit and read for pleasure and instruction. And this thing man picked me up, sucked me in, cycled, spun and centrifuged my ass to where it was a major effort of will to go get up and take a leak even, and by the time it was over with I knew where I had been.

If you want comparisons, which you don't, I think most of Rilke.

If you want what specifically did I dig, that's hard because there were no weak spots anyplace, and everything came on beautiful. The monkey scene, and the scene following with Beth Blacknesse in the swamp terrified the shit out of me. The trip to Cuba and Heff getting it got to me. The riot was a joy. Juan Carlos Rosenbloom a comic triumph.

If you want complaints, sorry, I don't have any against you, only what appear to be RH editors screaming ick, ick. I wish the blowjob scene in the Grünhouse had not been so attenuated. I miss very much the Cunt Game. And why do they want Richard Pussy out, and what's wrong with take this zircon to Foppa?

I haven't heard your album but have heard good shit about it. Good show.

At the moment I am in LA, or possibly only think I am, and who knows for how long. But if you should feel like shooting the shit, on any subject except cops, which I cannot discuss without chorea, hives and falling sickness hitting me all at once, Candida will (D.V.) forward mail. If not, I understand man.

Again, congratulations. I doubt any puff from me will be a fraction as effi-caceous as the book itself, its sheer power. It is really going to flip Their ass, and God knows They need it.

Say hi to Mimi. Happy Vietnam Day.

later,

Pynchon

Typed Letter Signed on graph paper, measuring 8½" x 11". Archivaly framed and matted with an accompanying slipcase (not pictured). Two horizontal creases from being mailed and some scattered wrinkling, near fine. A significant and important Thomas Pynchon letter sent to his good friend and author Richard Fariña, after reading the manuscript of Fariña's first and only novel *Been Down So Long it Looks Like Up to Me* in October 1965: "Holy shit man. How would 'holy shit' look on the book jacket? What I mean is you have written, really and truly, a great out-of-sight fucking book. For Jim Silberman I will get up something phrased more acceptable to the family trade and all. But to you, wild colonial maniac, about all I can say is holy shit."

Pynchon first became aware of Fariña while working as an editor at a literary magazine at Cornell University and marveling over Fariña's notably superior submission and his radically original voice. The two soon became friends and kindred spirits; both were students of Vladimir Nabokov and with a similar drive to explore language with a modern style and playfulness few others could muster. Pynchon arrived on the literary scene first with the publication of his acclaimed debut novel *V* in 1963. Fariña followed several years later after pursuing a musical career with his new wife, musician Mimi Baez. Seeing Pynchon's success, Fariña sought his advice while the manuscript for *Been Down So Long*, a story based at a fictional version of Cornell University, was still in process.

This letter directly references that earlier version which Pynchon read while in California: "Did my reaction in Carmel seem less enthusiastic? I was being analytical then. Because you had asked me to. And there is that bit of the nasty/analytical to us all, right? Not to mention, having been peripherally *There Then*, the temptation to read it as a roman à clef, which of course it never was. But these days I have renounced all that analytical shit and read for the pleasure and instruction. And this thing man picked me up, sucked me in, cycled, spun and centrifuged my ass to where it was a major effort of will to go get up and take a leak even, and by the time it was over with I knew where I have been."

After a comparison to Rilke, Pynchon continues by explaining there's nothing in the novel that he doesn't like: "The monkey scene, and the scene following with Beth Blacknesse in the swamp terrified the shit out of me. The trip to Cuba and Heff getting it got to me. The riot was a joy. Juan Carlos Rosenbloom is a comic triumph." The only complaints he can offer are laid at the feet of Random House editors: "I wish the blowjob scene in the Gründhouse had not been so attenuated. I miss very much the Cunt Game. And why do they want Richard Pussy out, and what's wrong with take this zircon to Foppa?"

The letter closes with a few scattered comments about Fariña new album ("heard good shit about it"), meeting up ("if you feel like shooting the shit, on any subject except cops, which I cannot discuss without chorea, hives and falling sickness hitting me at once"), and a final compliment about the book: "Again, congratulations. I doubt any puff from me will be a fraction as efficacious as the book itself, its sheer power. It is really going to flip Their ass, and God know They need it." In an apparent homage, to Fariña at the conclusion, Pynchon has signed his name with tildas over the two "n"s in his name: "Pyñchoñ".

Sadly just two days after the release of *Been Down So Long* on April 30, 1966, Fariña was killed when he was thrown from a motorcycle he was riding on following a party. Pynchon, whose second book *The Crying of Lot 49* was released almost simultaneous to Fariña's, heard the news over the radio. Being unable to confirm the story, as he explained in the introduction for a Penguin reprint of *Been Down So Long*, he spent the night on the phone reminiscing with a mutual friend from Cornell: "Both still hoping, hope fading, we talked for a long time, into the middle of the night, about Fariña and the old days, in our voices the same mixture of exasperation and love most of us had always felt whenever his name came up." Pynchon dedicated his next book, the radical and revelatory masterpiece *Gravity's Rainbow*, to Fariña.

A wonderful letter from Pynchon, by far the most revealing we've seen, providing insight to the famously reclusive author and his relationship with Fariña, an important and influential writer struck down on the eve of literary stardom.

[BTC#424563]

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