

## Response to Carol Schaechterle Loranger

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If the *Companion's* annotation of *GR* 13:30–31 so “effectively closes off the passage by marking it as monologic character description,” then our fellow “inky drudge” wouldn’t have annotated the annotation, right? Wrong: because this essay hunts bigger game—literary critical “terrorism” and the always awful “totalizing reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*.”

First things first. What we have here is a marvelous investigation of an obvious anachronism in a fairly minor offhand reference Pynchon’s narrator, focalizing through Pirate Prentice, makes. Loranger’s paragraphs supply a likelier referent and speculate on reasons for this error, as well as somersault through a remarkable if iffy set of textual hyperlinks to arrive at a reading that is nevertheless compelling. She wonders: Is *GR* complicit, in its poetics, with the politics of American domination that the novel’s authoritative voices otherwise condemn? Great question! Thus this paper shows how mighty oaks are from tiny acorns grown and that Close Reading still has jobs to do.

Howsoever, researching and writing the *Companion*, one also had a job to complete, lest the vita list it as an eternal work-in-progress—the result, certainly, had one hunted every item so doggedly as this paper so splendidly does. But one recognized those practical limits on inquiry, announced them in the introduction, and more or less invited other solid scholars to dig in. They have. In the decade since the *Companion* made its debut, well over a hundred readers, many of them non-academicians (attorneys, computer technicians, engineers, retirees), have kindly corrected my errors, supplied things identified as “Source unknown,” and suggested alternative sources for some items. The mailperson still delivers these things, right out of the blue, or they crop up in scholarly essays like Loranger’s. Eventually, perhaps as a Y2K offering, look for a revised 2nd edition that incorporates all this stuff and thanks all you good people.

Now back to this thing about Terrorist Totalizers. One hardly cares about being set up as straw man in somebody’s effort to muscle a reading of a novel onto the table. Who hasn’t done it (in the spirit of critical dialogue)? Sitting here, though, I’m trying hard to figure out how, which is to say, in what possible worlds of discourse, the

*Companion's* work compares to the conspirings of some Taliban-like terrorist cell wanting to dominate all thought?

In the same effort to Get A Grip Here, Foax, why not ask: What is the "single totalizing reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*" that the *Companion's* supposedly terroristically dominating annotations "tend toward"? Carol Loranger does not say. Neither, exactly, did my good friend Duffy Duyfhuizen. What Duffy has pointed out, and rightly, is that textual evidence for the real-world chronology behind *GR's* fictional-event sequences is not always consistent, and that my presentation of that evidence in the *Companion* overlooked some textual ambiguities. This raises problems for, but has not to my knowledge displaced, claims I make about the novel's structure: that it is cyclical, but not closed, and that key points in the text's four-part schema involve the Christian liturgical calendar. These are claims about narrative architecture—about things there in the text (unless we've all been having a collective hallucination). But does the *Companion* really ever thematize them to the extent they become a full-fledged "reading"? Put differently, what is the main-street interpretation the *Companion's* annotations supposedly police?

I kept waiting for Loranger to deliver those goods. But her paragraphs don't, and so despite all their fine work on Pynchon's beastly Fuzzy-Wuzzies, they fallaciously confuse remarks on structure with arguments for a thesis.

One day—but increasingly I doubt it—a grand thesis on Pynchon's fictions may take root deeply enough in my brain for me to want to grow a whole book atop it. (The *Companion* was never meant to be that tome. I said so in the introduction.) Meantime, we should ask ourselves what is going on in Pynchon studies that might nurture stronger and more pertinent critical work. For, despite having two new novels to play with, our whole enterprise finds itself in an awful doldrums. In fact, we ought to question whether it is only a matter of using "various contemporary theoretical lenses." Whether, indeed, that kind of trust in high-theory optics got us here. And whether, at last, that's the way out of talking mainly to ourselves . . . of so losing a grip on language as to metaphorize textual criticism into geopolitical terrorism.