

Notes

To the Editors:

It's an honor to be contradicted by so careful a Joycean as Brook Thomas ["What's the Point? On Comparing Joyce and Pynchon," Pynchon Notes, 11 (1983)]. If I may reply briefly to his final point: I'm sorry if my sentence about the failure of characters from Lot 49 to reappear in Gravity's Rainbow gave Mr. Thomas any trouble. Everyone knows that Bloody Chiclitz appears in all three books--and the sentence of mine that immediately follows the one quoted by Mr. Thomas says very plainly that "Elements of V. are carefully fitted into both the later books; but nothing that first appears in Pynchon's second book reappears in his third." This is certainly a significant point. Pynchon could easily have found a place for Dr. Hilarius (he of Buchenwald) in Gravity's Rainbow, had he wanted to; he had no difficulty finding places for Mondaugen, Pig Bodine, et al. But he chose not to include Hilarius, nor any of the other characters introduced in Lot 49 who might have gone into the later book with almost equal appropriateness. And this choice makes a clear differentiation between V. and Lot 49. (By the way, what all this has to do with the stated subject of Mr. Thomas's paper, a comparison of Joyce and Pynchon, strikes me as a bit unclear.)

One further point about Ulysses and Gravity's Rainbow and their different relations to the world outside the books themselves. Both these books include prophecies of events occurring after the date of the fictional events they describe, and in each case the author seems to have prophesied events he considered especially important. Pynchon prophesies the formation of the postwar social order and the start of the nuclear war that may yet occur. Joyce prophesies the writing of Ulysses. Crawford, for example, tells Stephen to write "something with a bite in it," and to "Put us all into it"; Molly thinks about writing a book of "the works of Master Poldy." One event that Joyce does not bother to

prophesy is the Great War of 1914-1918--rather a curious omission for a "kind of encyclopedia" dated 1914-1921.

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In his excellent essay, "War as Background in Gravity's Rainbow, Khachig Tóllölyan suggests that the firing of the 00000 takes place "in April (Eliot's cruelest month) or just before V-E day, May 8, 1945" (Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow, ed. Charles Clerc, Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1983, 40). I believe that this date can be pinned down more precisely. April can be eliminated first; Enzian tells Katje that the Schwarzkommando "have someone [meaning Thanatz] who was with Blicero in May. Just before the end" (GR, 663). The firing must have been "the end," since Thanatz has had no word of Blicero "since the noon on the Heath when 00000 was fired" (667). Thanatz later recalls "the last firing, the unremembered night-hours to Hamburg" (672), and his escape from Hamburg in a plane. According to the 1945 World Almanac (one of Pynchon's standard sources), Hamburg was occupied by the British on May 3. It is reasonable to assume that Thanatz' flight occurs the previous day, May 2, leaving the well-concealed but particularly appropriate date of May 1, or May Day, for the firing. This means that the 00000 is, among other things, a Maypole, that time-honored phallic symbol of renewed fertility. It is also a Beltane fire, a Raketten-Stadt version of those ceremonial bonfires traditionally kindled on the first of May, whose long history, says The Golden Bough, contains clear evidence of human sacrifice. The Druids' victims sometimes were encased in giant figures made of wicker-work; then they were burned alive in Beltane fires. Gottfried within the rocket takes their place, as first offering in this new fire-festival.

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