

Notes and Queries

Panel Discussion: "Teaching Pynchon to Undergraduates"

At the CEA (College English Association) meetings in Cherry Hill, NJ, April 2-4, 1981. Chairing the session will be Beverly Clark of Wheaton College. The panelists are as follows:

Craig Werner, University of Mississippi.

"'Entropy' as an Introduction to the Major Works of Thomas Pynchon"

Raymond J. Wilson III, Bellevue College.

"Ten Study Guides on V."

Carol Marshall Peirce, University of Baltimore.

"Pynchon's V. and Durrell's Alexandria Quartet: A Seminar in the Modern Tradition"

Martin Green, Fairleigh Dickinson University.

"Pynchon's Heart of Darkness: The Crying of Lot 49"

Roger Clark, Sociology Department, Nichols College.

"Imperialism in Gravity's Rainbow"

Elaine B. Safer, University of Delaware.

"Teaching Gravity's Rainbow in 'The Contemporary American Epic Novel'"

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Terry Caesar comments "on Notes and other Bibliographical Items: these sorts of items are inevitably interesting and I hope you keep your criteria of what merits interest generous, not to say arcane, as I think befits Our Author. But should the net be cast so wide as to include, for example, the review of NASA's "The Space Movie," on pages 42-45 of the Fall, 1980 Film Quarterly? Though the reviewer never mentions Pynchon, statements such as 'it is not surprising that, above all, the film celebrates the enormous, upright rocket and its straining for climactic release from gravity' provoke more thoughts about him than most things I've read which have little merit simply because they merely mention Pynchon. Another extremely stimulating article, which again never mentions Pynchon specifically but is more profoundly and meditatively 'about' him than (to me) most articles which are, is Kingsley Widmer's 'In Praise of Waste' (Partisan Review 46, 1979, 542-52). Your readers would not, I think, want to miss these two pieces, or

at least I would not want to have, no matter how much else goes on--unknowingly--under the name 'Pynchon.'"

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Brian McHale offers the following items:

"I was delighted to see that someone else (Javaid Qazi, in PN 2) had been struck by the convergence (or whatever it is) between GR and Hawkes's Cannibal. However, the connection does not appear to end there. There is a striking resemblance between Pynchon's version of London under the blitz and Hawkes's in the opening chapter of The Lime Twig (New Directions, 1961). More problematically, there may also be a distant echo of Hawkes's The Beetle Leg (1951) in Slothrop's hallucination of Crutchfield the westward-man (or am I hallucinating this myself?). Mightn't the connection extend even further than this? It bears looking into.

Pynchon specialists might not be expected to look into Harold Bloom's A Map of Misreading (Oxford University Press, 1975), but if they did they would find (pp. 31, 38-39) some extremely provocative remarks on Pynchon as 'Sado-Anarchistic parodist': 'I greatly prefer Pynchon to Mailer . . . because a voluntary parody is more impressive than an involuntary one.'"

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T. S. Tillotson passes along two further offerings "for the open-ended bibliography (dare I call them quasi-Qazis?). These were brought to my attention in an unpublished paper (14 pages, single-spaced, with a two-page bibliography) written several years ago by Bob DeBroux, which dealt with the Herero connections in GR:

Steenkamp, William Petrus. Is the South-West African Herero Committing Race Suicide? Cape Town: Unie-Volkspers, 1943.

Apparently washing blue was actually used as one 'abortifacient of choice' by the Hereros. Steenkamp's unique solution to this problem (offered on p. 35) involved the 'grafting of Government method onto [the Herero's] puberty school ideas.'

Parrinder, Geoffrey. African Mythology. London: Hamlyn, 1967.

The aptness of Pynchon's description of the White Lady (p. 658) and of references elsewhere in the text of GR can scarcely be appreciated without a glance at the picture on p. 27, showing what Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa calls 'such a well-known figure that it can almost be regarded as the emblem of rock art in Southern Africa.'

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