

Notes

To the Editors:

One of the interesting points that William McCarron et al. make is that, when allusions are made to items of popular culture, it is, sometimes, hard to pin the connection down to a particular film, song, comic book and so on. Rather, the text contains layers of references which reenact the *feel* of particular genres. An example that springs to mind is the Webley Silvernail dancing rodents episode. A dialogue reminiscent of the film *Angels with Dirty Faces*, in which Jimmy Cagney plays a gangster who is a hero to young men who fail to see his conviction for murder and his execution as anything more than proof of his toughness and status as an anti-establishment figure (as if it had been made by the Disney cartoon studio), segues into a Busby Berkeley routine mixed with images from the infamous *Triumph of the Will* propaganda film. This may be naturalized as a reflection of Silvernail's point of view, his love of movies, especially the technical aspects of film, his support of the outsider, the preterite, and, finally, his feeling of powerlessness within the bureaucracy of the White Visitation. (Possibly that cigarette stub he took from the ashtray contained more than just tobacco?) The overpowering irony is that Silvernail's "guest star" appearance is in the role of Hitler, who promised the Germans an escape from the shackles of the Versailles Treaty. The German people exchanged one kind of subservience for another, to follow the Nazi dream of world domination. (Another level of allusion, for example, is the song, a "beguine" [a *slow*—not a fast-tempo as Steven Weisenburger would have it—sensual, South American song genre], which concerns the story of ill-fated love couched in the terminology of Pavlovian experimentation.)

To paraphrase Kathryn Hume, Pynchon, in the short "clip," "orchestrates" *Gravity's Rainbow* with multiple references that tie in to the novel's themes: in particular, the mistake made by the preterite in wanting change at all cost, aggrandizing those who fight the "system," even if this leads to tragedy, as in the case of the electrocuted rodents, the "doomed" Tyrone Slothrop, Germany under National Socialism, the world caught beneath the Cold War threat, or the violent rebellions in '60s America. . . .

It is easy to see [as William Vesterman does], in the "simplicity" of the lyrics, a superficiality reflecting simple-mindedness. However, "songs" have been written at all levels, and represent a genre,

restricted both emotionally and intellectually, but, within its limits, as profound as the finest poetry. One has only to look at the musical dramas of Gilbert and Sullivan, Bertolt Brecht and Busby Berkeley. Closer to my view than Vesterman may be Hanjo Berressem's approach: the meeting of geography and psychology at a particular theatrical "interface." . . .

In some ways *Gravity's Rainbow* is a series of scenarios that direct and restrict characters. If the beginning of the book is the staging of the end of mankind—fleeing a powerless, doomed metropolis, civilization, back to a primitive underground of refugees and stateless poverty—the end may represent another terminal state, society as a prison, where we entertain ourselves to death while the real threat beckons undetected.

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World-Wide Web Sites of Special Interest

The Pomona Pynchon Page: <http://www.pomona.edu/pynchon/>

An Italian Pynchon Page: <http://www.dada.it/pynchon.html>

Andrew Dinn's home page:

<http://www.cee.hw.ac.uk/~andrew/pynchon-l.html>

Tim Ware's hyper-concordance to *Gravity's Rainbow*:

<http://www.crl.com/~timware/gravity.html>

If you don't already know what the World-Wide Web is, the resources available at any one of the interconnected sites above will make you glad you decided it was time to find out.

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The Pynchon E-Mail List

pynchon-l is an open e-mail discussion list (list owner, Jody Gilbert of Simon Fraser University). You can subscribe by sending the following message to majordomo@sfu.ca (leaving the Subject line blank):

subscribe pynchon-l
end

To post a message to the list, send it to pynchon-l@sfu.ca. Remember to distinguish between replies to individuals and replies to the whole group. To reply for the entire list membership to read, you have to send to pynchon-l@sfu.ca, since the majordomo software does not allow for group reply.

Archives of list postings are available at the Pomona Web site and at Andrew Dinn's home page.