

Leopold Street & Dr. Bloom in *A Bright Room Called Day Revisited*

A good playwright—and Kushner is among the best—considers carefully what names to give to characters and places in the world of the play because these names can offer insight into deeper layers of meaning. For example, “Agnes” means “lamb,” as in a holy, sacrificial creature, a description which suggests certain qualities in the main character in *A Bright Room Called Day Revisited*. “Traum,” the name of the most dogmatic of the play’s Communist characters, means “dream” as well as signalling “trauma.” In Hungarian *Husz* means “twenty,” but the surname probably originated from *hús*, the word for meat. In the play, Husz carries a butcher knife and can be quite bloody-minded, but he also extols the virtues of the masses, suggested by the number twenty. Gotchling is a variant of the surname Gottschling which means “God’s echo.”¹ And according to the website *Hebrew Namer*,

The name Baz means “falcon” in Hebrew. In Jewish culture, the falcon is a symbol of grace, freedom, and independence. If you give your child the name Baz, you will be expressing a desire for them to live a life that is filled with these qualities. This is a name that celebrates the beauty and wildness of nature.²

Growing up Jewish, Tony Kushner may have been honouring a friend named Baz, but even if he didn’t, he chose an apt name for his gay character who refuses to deny his identity even when it could get him killed.

So why does Agnes specify Leopold as the street where she found the Communist Party office (page 11) as she wandered Berlin, especially as there is no such street? There is a

¹ <https://www.houseofnames.com/ca/gottschling-family-crest>

² <https://hebrewnamer.com/names/baz/#:~:text=Baz%20is%20a%20Hebrew%20name,beauty%20and%20wildness%20of%20nature.>

Leopoldplatz, a public park in the Wedding district of the city, where Baz and Gotchling attended the Nazi rally in Scene 4, but there is no such street. It's possible that Kushner simply made a mistake, but he knew that the park was in Wedding, an economically depressed area that became a hotspot for Communist activity and political unrest. In real life Berlin, the office Agnes went to would have been on one of the adjacent streets such as Müllerstrasse, Turmstrasse, or Osloer Strasse. Why choose the name Leopold?

And why does Kushner name Paulinka's therapist Dr. Bloom? Putting the two names together, what immediately comes to mind is Leopold Bloom, the Jewish protagonist of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. And since the names Leopold and Bloom are both mentioned early in Act One, it seems likely that Kushner was signalling a connection between Joyce's masterpiece and the spine of the play. *Ulysses* is the story of an ordinary man trying to be accepted by his peers as he navigates the streets of Dublin on a single day. The book's title, of course, provides the mythic structure and scope of that journey. Both Bloom and the mythic Ulysses are trying to get home after work, and the spine of *A Bright Room Called Day* is the story of five artists trying to find or hold onto some semblance of home and sense of purpose. In each story, home ends up being less than it was before, and the work hasn't accomplished what each worker had hoped.

At the end of the Greek myth, Ulysses/Odysseus sets off on another journey, as do four of the five friends in *A Bright Room Called Day Revisited*. And though Leopold Bloom helps the young Stephen Daedalus get safely home, Dr. Bloom "abandons" Paulinka to find safety for himself. Joyce's Bloom as well as Kushner's characters have all been betrayed by people or ideologies they have trusted. Now they must look for new sources of hope in new homes.