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**PYNCHON'S CUNNING LINGUAL NOVEL:
COMMUNICATION IN LOT 49**

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For a work published only twenty years ago, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* has received considerable attention. There are already fourteen books of criticism devoted to Pynchon's work, chapters of many other works, a Pynchon journal, and articles proliferating at an entropic rate.¹ Certainly the complexities of Pynchon's texts, their density and intriguingly varied allusiveness invite such attention. *Lot 49* has already generated more pages of criticism than its own 138 pages. Critics have discussed its typical Pynchonesque involvement with plots, paranoia, and entropy; its description of our modern world, mechanized, loveless, and chaotic. They have discussed its language, but inadequately, for in focussing usually on explication alone, they have ignored how language is involved as a major element in the novel, almost as a character, certainly as a plot device.² Pynchon writes of isolated people, individual enclaves of despair, and he shows how both language and his protagonist Oedipa act to connect these separate entities.

As executor of the will of her former lover, on Pierce Inverarity, a Southern California conglomerate mogul and late-night telephoner somewhat like Howard Hughes, Oedipa Maas discovers the Tristero, an alternate postal system that originated in opposition to the Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly during the Holy Roman Empire and continued in this country in opposition to the U. S. Mail (whether delivered by Pony Express, Wells Fargo, or modern government carriers). The founder of the Tristero, one Hernando Joaquin de Tristero y Calavera, styled himself The Disinherited,³ and his mail system, in both the historical past and present of the novel, is used primarily by the disinherited of society, the poor, alienated, and disenfranchised:

She remembered now old Pullman cars, left where the money'd run out or the customers vanished, amid green farm flatnesses where clothes hung, smoke lazed out of jointed pipes.... Surely they'd forgotten by now what it was the Tristero were to have inherited; as perhaps Oedipa one day might have. What was left to inherit? That America coded in Inverarity's testament, whose was that? She thought of other squatters who stretched canvas for lean-tos behind smiling billboards along all the highways, or slept in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymouths, or even,

daring, spent the night up some pole in a lineman's tent like caterpillars, swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication, untroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night long, in the thousands of unheard messages. She remembered...voices before and after the dead man's that had phoned at random during the darkest, slowest hours, searching ceaseless among the dial's ten million possibilities for that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word. (pp. 135-136)

Note how, in the preceding, the description of those in need is threaded through with means both of transportation (trains, highways, cars, pipelines) and communication (billboards, wills, telephones, the Word).

The key to deciphering Inverarity's will, Oedipa believes, lies in understanding the Tristero (also known as Trystero, and symbolised by a muted post horn or the initials W.A.S.T.E.).⁴ Her concrete proof of the organization's existence is limited: forged stamps, lines from rare texts bought from San Narciso's Zapf books, explanations by a San Narciso professor — and Pierce Inverarity owned them or nearly owned their place of employment. Thus, she concludes:

Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, onto a secret richness and concealed density of dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. *Or* you are hallucinating it. *Or* a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps and ancient books, constant surveillance of your movements, planting of post horn images all over San Francisco, bribing of librarians, hiring of professional actors and Pierce Inverarity only knows what-all besides, all financed out of the estate in a way *either* too secret *or* too involved for your non-legal mind to know about even though you are co-executor, so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. *Or* you are fantasying some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull. (p. 128, I have italicized the words

“either” and “or.”)

Pynchon presents a system of communication, while his vocabulary, either/or, insists on mutually exclusive possibilities, a disjunctive syllogism (either a or b; not b; therefore a). This limited choice suggests separate and closed systems, never touching, a suggestion widely adumbrated by Pynchon: the already mentioned telephone lines that cannot touch lest they short; the haves and the have-nots, those who inherit and the disinherited; or parallel but never crossing steel rails which Oedipa walks along (p. 133 ff). Pynchon emphasizes the seeming gap between these categories both by extending his examples and by his choice of connectors:

She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was not like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would *either* be a transcendent meaning, *or* only the earth. In the songs Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard sang was *either* some fraction of the truth's numinous beauty (as Mucho now believed) *or* only a power spectrum. Tremain the Swastika Salesman's reprieve from holocaust was *either* an injustice, *or* the absence of a wind; the bones of the GI's at the bottom of Lake Inverarity were there *either* for a reason that mattered to the world, *or* for skin divers and cigarette smokers. Ones and zeroes. So did the couples arrange themselves. At Vesperhaven House *either* an accommodation reached, in some kind of dignity, with the Angel of Death, *or* only death and the daily, tedious preparations for it. Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, *or* none. (pp. 136-137, my italics)

“Undistributed middle,” the binary number system of digital computers, zeroes and ones only, followed by a series of either/or's — these all emphasize separation. But as Pynchon also insists on our noticing, “how had it ever happened here, with the chances so good for diversity?” Logic insists that either/or is often fallacious and the situation in question is one of both/and; certainly human experience is diverse, our choices are frequently not limited, and our language, especially as Pynchon uses it, insists on multiple uses.

After the most moving scene in the novel, the one in which Oedipa comforts an ex-sailor near death, the narrator makes these statements:

"...The dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and tunnels of truth..." (p. 95)

"The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie." (p. 95)

"There was...high magic to low puns." (p. 96)

"**Metaphor**" literally means a carrying beyond, beyond the closed system. A pun imposes another meaning in place of an expected one; it superimposes one layer of meaning, one system, upon another. Both act as links, joining, as Oedipa in her search links the rich world of Inverarity to the disinherited world of dying winos. Thus, her first view of San Narciso links sight to real estate development, agriculture, hearing, and electronics:

She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. (p. 13)

The road she drives on provokes another metaphor:

What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L. A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain. (p. 14)

Moreover, the names in the novel are jokes or puns, names like Stanley Kotecks, Mike Fallopian, Emory Bortz, and Manny di Presso. Oedipa, of course, suggests that other questor after truth and, unknowingly, himself, Oedipus. But there is still more to the names. Pynchon has used T. S. Eliot liberally in his work, from early writings such as "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" and "Lowlands," at least through *Lot 49*.⁵ The tower Oedipa sees herself locked in suggests Ugolino's tower in *The Waste Land*, and "Thurn" of Thurn and Taxis sounds like the German *Turm*, tower; certainly Pynchon's devastating descriptions of San Narciso's landscape and tristero symbol W.A.S.T.E. also remind us of *The Waste Land*. Oedipa's husband shortens her name and calls her "Oed" (pp. 3, 6, 105, 107, 108); "Oed," the German word meaning "waste," occurs in line 42 of *The Waste Land*.

In another example of perceived wordplay, Joseph Slade sees Inverarity as a pun on Sherlock Holmes's Professor Moriarity; Richard Poirier sees the name as incorporating a rare stamp, an inverse rarity.⁶ But this attention to his name obscures more useful puns connected with his legacy. What no one has stressed is the several senses of "will." Oedipa investigates Inverarity's will, his testament, which states the disposition of property he accumulated, in part at least, through strength of will; Oedipa determines not to take drugs and wills herself "to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind" (p. 134). Interestingly, we never learn who Inverarity's beneficiary is. Nor, unlike Fitzgerald on Gatsby, do we ever learn about Inverarity's house — not where it is, what it looks like, nor what it contains (beyond a bust of Jay Gould over the bed). Certainly the private property, the house and its contents, are part of the material legacy. Neither Oedipa nor her co-executor, Metzger,⁷ ever mentions it. Oedipa and we would seem to be the inheritors; and through that bequest, that transferral of matter, including the contents of the novel to us, there is a hint that systems can touch and no longer be set apart one from another.

Thus, throughout the novel, Pynchon has been at pains to describe what appear to be closed and separate systems and then to puncture their hermetic state. "You know what a miracle is," a Mexican anarchist comments, "another world's intrusion into this one" (p. 88). (Similarly, his anarchist organization's initials, CIA for *Conjuración de los Insurgentes Anarquistas*, pun on and intrude into the highly regulated world of another CIA.) The central example of different worlds connecting is figured in Maxwell's Demon, a creation of Scottish physicist James Clark Maxwell in his study of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that heat will not flow spontaneously from colder to warmer bodies. Rather, warm bodies tend to give up their energy, and this is entropy — the dissipation of all heat energy and the cessation of all work based on heat exchange.⁸ In her meeting with John Nefastis, Oedipa encounters Nefastis' invention of a piston engine based on Maxwell's hypothesis of positing a sorting demon that could limit entropy:

He began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy...But it was too technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. The equation for one, back in the '30's, had looked very like the equation for the

other. It was a coincidence. The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon. As the Demon sat and sorted his molecules into hot and cold, the system was said to lose entropy....

"Communication is the key," cried Nefastis. "The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind..."

"Entropy is a figure of speech, then," sighed Nefastis, "a metaphor. It connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow. The Machine uses both. The Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally gracefully, but also objectively true." (p. 77)

The metaphor of the Demon, that is, links the worlds of thermodynamics and communications, much as Oedipa, whom critics like Poirier and Leland have also seen as a sorting demon, strives to link together disparate parts of Inverarity's world.

She also recognizes "another world's intrusion into this one" when she becomes aware that her dying sailor's DT's ties in another universe:

She knew, because she had held him, that he suffered DT's. Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself.

..."dt," God help this old tattooed man, meant also a time differential, a vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last for what it was.... She knew that the sailor had seen worlds no other man had seen if only because there was that high magic to low puns, because DT's must give access to dt's of spectra beyond the known sun, music made purely of Antarctic loneliness and fright. (pp. 95-96)

"The saint whose water can light lamps," mentioned above, is another pervasive link between novel's many levels, its seemingly disparate worlds. Although not named, he is St. Narcissus. In Richard Wharfinger's *The Courier's Tragedy* (and it should be noted that, in her role linking information and worlds, Oedipa acts as go-between or courier), "Angelo,...evil Duke of Squamuglia, has perhaps ten years before the play's opening murdered the good Duke of adjoining Faggio, by poisoning the feet on an image of Saint Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, in the court chapel, which feet the Duke was in the habit of kissing every Sunday at Mass" (p. 45). Mucho Maas, on the day

Oedipa left home, whistled a song by Sick Dick and the Volkswagens, "I Want to Kiss Your Feet" (p. 12), and Inverarity's base of operations is, of course, named for the dangerous bishop, San Narciso. Eusebius records Saint Narcissus' *miracle* of converting water into oil for the lamps of the church at Easter time, also the Bishop's participation in two Church councils to set the date of Easter.⁹ Appropriate to a figure in a Pynchon novel, Narcissus becomes the victim of a cabal: three witnesses accuse him of a heinous crime. And although the charges are not believed, Narcissus resigns his see and retires to the desert, only emerging years later to reclaim his episcopacy and die of superannuation at 126 years of age.¹⁰

Beyond Pynchon's love of the arcane, three further points should be made here. I agree with W. T. Lhamon, Jr., Mendelson, and Slade that religion figures prominently in the novel,¹¹ and with the first two critics that the 49 of the title alludes to Pentecost, celebrated forty-nine days after Easter, which Bishop Narcissus helped fix in the Church's calendar. (More on Pentecost subsequently.) "Narcissus" also refers us to the Greek mythical character and to a cognate, "narcotic." The euhemeristic account of the naming of the flower after the figure conceals the fact that the narcissus bulb contains alkaloids capable, like peyote, of inducing both hallucinations and stomach pains. The "waves of nausea, ...headaches, nightmares, menstrual pains" (p. 129) Oedipa experiences could be caused by narcissus poisoning (narcissism?) as described in texts on herb and plant medicines.¹² Certainly Mucho is a victim of both hallucinatory alkaloids and narcissism: "my husband," thinks Oedipa, "on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself..." (p. 114). Her psychiatrist distributes "LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs" as part of his experiment. Rather than help the withdrawn come out of themselves, instead of helping the maladjusted reach out to the community, Hilarius insists on building his own bridge: "The bridge inward" (p. 7).

Finally, after noting that Oedipa stays at nymph-decorated Echo Courts and a few other perfunctory allusions to the myth, let me conclude these references to Narcissus along lines of inquiry which Pynchon invites through both the presence of Freudian Dr. Hilarius and the behavior of his characters: narcissism. I have already mentioned Mucho's regression. As a used-car salesman, he could face neither the sale of cars, each of which was "a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projec-

tion of somebody else's life" (p. 5), nor the sign of the National Automobile Dealer's Association, "N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky" (p. 107), which is still another bilingual link. In avoiding adulthood, besides taking LSD, Mucho responds to Oedipa's absence by picking up teenagers at KCUF record hops, something he has done in the past. Oedipa had wondered whether his concern for statutory rape affected his performance:

Having once been seventeen and ready to laugh at almost anything, she found herself then overcome by, call it a tenderness she'd never go quite to the back of lest she get bogged. It kept her from asking him any more questions. Like all their inability to communicate, this too had a virtuous motive. (p. 29)

So, Oedipa mothers Mucho, discreetly. She comforts Baby Igor, Metzger's identity as child actor. Metzger's self-fascination is so extreme that he possesses a pilot film for a TV series about himself: "The film is in an air-conditioned vault at one of the Hollywood studios, light can't fatigue it, it can be repeated endlessly" (p. 20). Like Mucho, he leaves Oedipa for a teen-aged girl — in his case, one of fifteen — and marries her in Nevada. Oedipa's psychoanalyst, Hilarious, believing that Israeli agents are pursuing him for his less-than-healing practices at Buchenwald, goes mad. And Randolph Driblette, the director of *The Courier's Tragedy*, having projected a world onto the stage, commits suicide in the Pacific.

"If I were to dissolve in here [the shower]," speculated the voice out of the drifting steam, "be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too. You, that part of you so concerned, God knows how, with that little world, would also vanish.

"...You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touched [sic] the truth. Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it." (p. 56)

Says Freud in his essay "On Narcissism," the patients in question "suffer from megalomania and they have withdrawn their interest from the external world (people and things)."¹³

Metzger's life is sealed in a vault; after weeks with her, he leaves Oedipa without a word. Mucho travels the bridge inward; he doesn't

miss Oedipa, replacing her with LSD, interchangeable nymphets, and the phrase "Rich, chocolaty goodness." Driblette, before he "withdrew his interest in the world" through suicide, insisted that "the reality is in *this* head. Mine. I'm the projector at the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also" (p. 56). Their megalomania and retreats from reality are obvious.

Their monumental self-concern, their inability to give of themselves, underscores the novel's concern with lovelessness. Oedipa had not loved Inverarity, but had hoped he might take her away from her self-confinement. Their relationship had an "absence of intensity": "all that had gone on between them had never really escaped the confinement of that tower"; "the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic" (pp. 10-11). She feels little remorse in committing adultery with Metzger and loss, rather than passionate betrayal, when both men are gone from her. She is lonely, but only little less so than at the start of the novel. In a gay bar in San Francisco, she meets someone wearing the muted post horn of Tristero as a lapel pin that marks the members of Inamorati Anonymous, an organization founded by a fired Yoyodyne executive who nearly commits suicide (by fire):

"My big mistake," [he says,] "was love. From this day I swear to stay off of love: hetero, homo, bi, dog or cat, car, every kind there is." And he did. (p. 85)

Her informant leaves her:

...feeling as alone as she ever had, now the only woman, she saw, in a room full of drunken male homosexuals. Story of my life, she thought, Mucho won't talk to me, Hilarius won't listen, Clerk Maxwell didn't even look at me, and this group, God knows. Despair came over her as it will when nobody around has any sexual relevance to you. (p. 86)

No love, no sexual relevance, no close relationships — metaphorically, the lack of contact that would be figured in a Venn diagram of a syllogism with an undistributed middle.

Freud in "On Narcissism," an essay which does discuss homosexuality as a symptom of narcissism, says, "we must begin to love in order that we may not fall ill, and must fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we cannot love."¹⁴ Tony Tanner, in his early discussion of

Lot 49, speaks of the absence of love, narcissism, and the tower of self, that "the only way to escape from one's 'tower' is through an act of love," and that Oedipa "finds no love or willingness to be loved."¹⁵ Oedipa, however, is willing to be loved. She goes with Inverarity to Mexico in hope of having her isolation pierced; when that fails, she marries Mucho. She initially protects herself from Metzger's advances, wrapping herself in layers of clothing like so much conventionality, then sexually attacking him. Her behavior toward Mucho emphasizes tenderness. And she reaches out to the broken, dying wino in the novel's most moving scene:

"Can I help?" She was shaking, tired....
She was overcome all at once by a need to touch him, as if she could not believe in him, or would not remember him, without it. Exhausted, hardly knowing what she was doing, she came the last three steps and sat, took the man in her arms, actually held him, gazing out of her smudged eyes down the stairs, back into the morning. She felt wetness against her breast and saw that he was crying again. He hardly breathed but tears came as if being pumped. "I can't help," she whispered, rocking him, "I can't help."
(pp. 92-93)

Oedipa can't operate Nefastis' machine because she is not sensitive in the sense that she is not psychokinetic, but throughout the novel she proves herself sensitive to sights, smells, events, and — most importantly — to people: "The true sensitive is the one that can share in...man's hallucinations, that's all" (p. 79). Pynchon's skill is that he can make us share Oedipa's feelings, whether her perceptions are verifiable reality or hallucination.

The novel, then, is about communication.¹⁶ Its first paragraph mentions an odd assortment of communications systems and attempts to establish community, including a Tupperware party, Inverarity's will, television, religion, a university library (incorporating printing, books, education), music, and sculpture (the plastic arts), which leads back to religion by Pynchon's naming the sculpture an ikon (p. 2). The individuals in the novel are just that, individuals, lacking cohesive community. Members of Inamorati Anonymous are nameless; they hold no meetings, and if one is in danger of falling in love and calls for help, different members subsequently respond, never the same one twice. Members of the Peter Pinguid Society are compelled to keep in touch using Yoyodyne's interoffice mail — another postal system (the society's initials stand for post-postscript),

in rebellious antagonism to the government's, parallel but separate from the Tristero system — but their messages are devoid of content, vacuous. They have established an alternate system, but do not communicate. They lack fervor, which brings us back to the hidden metaphor of Pentecost.¹⁷

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance....And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" (Acts 2:4 and 12). Speaking to another in his own language, whether it be a national language or technical jargon, is one way to reach between otherwise closed and separate systems. "Communication is the key" (p. 77), "the miracle of communication" (p. 135), and language is its medium. As Norbert Wiener says in his study of entropy and language, "we ourselves constitute...an island of decreasing entropy." Because we ingest food, excrete, and procreate, we are not closed systems, and neither is language, which loses words and constantly adds new ones. Says Wiener, "the coupling which unites the different parts of the system into a single larger system will in general be both energetic and informational."¹⁸ The mechanical term "coupling" has a sexual meaning, too; it was Oedipa who coupled with Metzger. It is Oedipa whom we see in the novel as most energetic, gathering and sorting information, indeed like a demon, and Inverarity as a *diabolus ex machina*.

Joseph Slade writes of her coming out of her solipsistic tower through her passion to know,¹⁹ another word with both cerebral and sexual referents. When Oedipa dances with the young deaf-mute at her Berkeley hotel, she expects collisions on the dance floor, but none occur, no "kiss of cosmic pool balls" (p. 92):

Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions became a serious hindrance? There would have to be collisions. The only alternative was some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined. Something they all heard with an extra sense atrophied in herself. She followed her partner's lead, limp in the young mute's clasp, waiting for the collisions to begin. But none came. She was danced for half an hour before, by mysterious consensus, everybody took a break, without having felt any touch but the touch of her partner. (p. 96)

Throughout the novel, we see closed and isolated systems — mechanical, mathematical, governmental, social, and private. And we see miracles connecting them. One such miracle is language. Dead men tell no tales, but their bones can become ink that conveys a message, a miraculous conversion in the fifth act of *The Courier's Tragedy*; the words of dead authors still reach us and move us. Puns connect systems of meaning, and metaphor shifts us from one level to another. The binary digits of computers, each representing a separate, closed system, together do convey meaning. The very stamps that disclose the Tristero to Oedipa are objects used to link people, to help them communicate. Humans, not closed systems themselves, can bridge the gap between themselves and others through language and through love. Oedipa is tender with Mucho and the dying sailor; she makes love to Inverarity and Metzger. She reaches out to Maxwell's Demon and San Francisco's night world — The Greek Way, Inamorati Anonymous, dying winos, and children in Golden Gate Park. She dances with someone with whom she cannot speak, yet they communicate: "She followed her partner's lead." She knows that the old sailor suffers from DT's, Pynchon insists, simply by holding him (p. 95). What Oedipa exhibits, then, is the willingness to love and be loved, and love, as Socrates defines it in "The Symposium":

is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between them. ...He is a ...[demon], and like all that is spiritual he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal. ...This is the power which interprets and conveys [like a courier] to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and rewards of the gods; and this power spans the chasm which divides them, and in this all is bound together.²⁰

Thomas Pynchon, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, describes our America, our Waste Land, each of us locked in our own tower. He cunningly weaves his tapestry of the world, and he shows us the way out. We do not know what revelation, if any, Oedipa will receive at the stamp auction, but the method has been shown to us: speaking — in tongues, puns, and metaphors — searching, caring, and reaching out to others. The emphasis on method in this open-ended novel suggests another communications expert, the late Marshall McLuhan, who insisted that the "medium is the message."²¹ Pynchon, like Eliot in *The Waste Land*, portrays the situation perceived by emphasizing the negative, the need for change in our America, the need to link seemingly sepa-

rate systems. Both his novel and his protagonist embody the message: language and love can go beyond the logic of closed systems; they can overcome undistributed middles and connect the apparently unconnected.

NOTES

¹ The fourteen books are, in chronological order: Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York, 1974); George Levine and David Leverenz, *Mindful Pleasures* (Boston, 1976); Mark Richard Siegel, *Creative Paranoia in Gravity's Rainbow* (Port Washington, 1978); William M. Plater, *The Grim Phoenix* (Bloomington, 1978); Edward Mendelson, ed., *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, 1978); David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon: Art of Allusion* (Carbondale, 1980); John O. Stark, *Pynchon's Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information* (Athens, Oh., 1980); Douglas A. Mackey, *The Rainbow Quest of Thomas Pynchon* (San Bernardino, 1980); Richard Pearce, *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon* (Boston, 1981); Heinz Ickstadt, *Ordnung und Entropie. Zum Romanwerk von Thomas Pynchon* (Hamburg, 1981); Thomas Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana, 1981); Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (London, 1982); Peter L. Cooper, *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 1983); Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus, 1983);

Among recent books of criticism that devote chapters to Pynchon are: Tony Tanner, "Caries and Cabals," *City of Words* (New York, 1971), partially reprinted in *Mindful Pleasures*; Josephine Hendin, "Thomas Pynchon and Western Man," *Vulnerable People* (New York, 1978); Raymond M. Olderman, "The Illusion and the Possibility of Conspiracy," *Beyond the Waste Land* (New Haven, 1972); Frank D. McConnell, "Thomas Pynchon and the Abreaction of the Lord of Night," *Four American Novelists* (Chicago, 1977); Edward Mendelson, "The Sacred, the Profane, and *The Crying of Lot 49*," in *Individual and Community*, ed. Kenneth H. Baldwin and David R. Kirby (Durham, 1976); Craig Hansen Werner, *Paradoxical Resolutions: American Fiction since James Joyce* (Urbana, 1982). The books entirely devoted to Pynchon include fuller past bibliographies, and John Krafft's and Khachig Tölöyan's *Pynchon Notes* maintains a current one.

² Among the few who do study the novel's language, usually as a trap to catch the reader in a world where nothing is certain, are Annette Kolodny and Daniel James Peters, "Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*: The Novel as Subversive Experience," *MFS*, 19 (1973), 79-87; Frank Kermode, "The Uses of Codes," *Approaches to Poetics*, ed. Seymour Chatman, *Selected Papers from the English Institute*, Vol. 33 (New York, 1973), 68-74; and John P. Leland, "Pynchon's Linguistic Demon: *The Crying of Lot 49*," *Critique*, 16 (1974), 45-53, and Schaub's *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity*, pp. 37-38, 104-107. See also Schaub's article "Where Have We Been, Where Are We Headed?: A Retrospective Review of Pynchon Criticism," *Pynchon Notes* 7 (1981), 5-21.

³ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York, 1966), p. 119. All subsequent references to the novel in my text will be paginated parenthetically and will refer to this edition.

⁴ Pynchon may well believe that he invented the symbol of the muted horn, but item number three in the official catalog of the Treasures of Tutankhamen displayed in American was a stoppered horn.

⁵ Cf. Slade, pp. 21-32, 135; Olderman, pp. 123-149; Plater, p. 8. The Tupperware party Oedipa attends at the novel's opening seems to be Pynchon's counterpart for parties with "tea and cake and ices" where "women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo."

⁶ Slade, p. 126; Poirier, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon," *Mindful Pleasures*, p. 22. Schaub sees it as a reference to James Maxwell's Scottish origins (*Pynchon*, p. 29).

⁷ On the aesthetic principle that it's better to clutter footnotes than text, let me here mention puns, starting with those in which Pynchon involves Metzger. Metzger mentions that his Jewish mother wanted "to kasher" him—kosher preparation of meat, requiring that all the blood be drained from it. "Metzger" is the German word for butcher, and the movie of him that Oedipa watches is *Cashiered* (pp. 16-17). Pynchon obviously enjoys these bilingual puns — more linking of closed systems: John Nefastis, Johnny Fastest, would seem to owe his last name to the French *nefaste*, unlucky, and possibly to "nefarious"; and "Maas," besides suggesting mass and its concomitant inertia, is Dutch for "mesh," the webbing of the net in which Oedipa finds herself, as well as Spanish for "more." Since Pynchon insists that there is high magic even to low puns and descends to name Mucho's radio station KCUF (please invert), the critic must also descend. The toy imprisoned in Yoyodyne's name is unusual; unlike those who play with frisbees, baseballs, footballs, a yo-yoer can play with himself, double meaning intended. Yo-yo exhibitions are extremely narcissistic, appropriate for San Narciso.

⁸ Entropy in Pynchon's works has been minutely examined, notably by Anne Mangel, "Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, Information: *The Crying of Lot 49*," *Mindful Pleasures*, pp. 26-27; by Plater, pp. 1-63, 220-224; and by Daniel Simberloff, "Entropy, Information, and Life: Biophysics in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 21 (1978), 617-25.

⁹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 5: xii & xxiii; and 6: ix-xi.

¹⁰ Pynchon's characters are paranoiacs; he creates novels in which there may actually be plots, or merely self-projections paranoiacally perceived. And Pynchon's readers are similarly infected, as Frank Kermode indicates (see footnote 2). They strive to find patterns, order where there may or may not be any. Given Pynchon's use of Eliot and St. Narcissus, I tried to find parallels between *Lot 49* and Eliot's poem "The Death of St. Narcissus." The parallels are plentiful. However, Pynchon's novel was published in 1966, and the first general publication of Eliot's poem seems to have been in *Poems Written in Early Youth* (New York, 1967), pp. 28-30; there was, however, a private edition of this collection, twelve copies printed in Stockholm in 1950. Could Pynchon have seen one? Similarly, there seemed to be a connection between Zapf Books and Robert Crumb's *Zap Comix*, especially given Pynchon's wasteland setting and this description of Crumb's work: "Robert Crumb's pictures of the ugliness of the environ-

ment and man in it are still the most honest [portrayals], a vulgar image of reality without the usual transfiguring of the media" (Reinhold Reitberger and Wolfgang Fuchs, *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium* [London, 1972], pp. 221). But again, the same chronological problem: the first *Zap Comix* were issued in 1967. (Cf. Poirier, *Mindful Pleasures*, p. 25). Robert Crumb (in conversation) stated that his work was not a source for *Lot 49*, that "zapped" was a common term during the 60's drug culture.

¹¹ Lhamon, "Pentecost, Promiscuity, and Pynchon's V: From the Scaffold to the Impulsive," *Mindful Pleasures*, p. 70; Mendelson's essay, pp. 206-212; Slade, pp. 128-130. "Lot," besides referring to the lot of Tristero stamps about to be auctioned and Mucho's used-car lot, could refer to Abraham's nephew (Gen. 11: 27-31; 13:1-13, 19), who dwelt in the Waste Land of Sodom, lost his spouse, and washed the feet of God's visiting angels. "Lot" means veiled, hidden, in Hebrew, another multi-lingual pun. In addition, Kinneret, Oedipa's hometown, can be found on the Sea of Galilee (Robert Murray Davis, "Parody, Paranoia, and the Dead End of Language in *The Crying of Lot 49*," *Genre*, 5 [1972], 373).

¹² Pliny, for example, in *Natural History*, book 21, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 255, says the following:

[The narcissus] is injurious to the stomach, so that it acts as an emetic and purge; it is bad for the sinews and causes a dull headache, its name being derived from the word narce, torpor, and not from the youth in the myth.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, trans. Cecil M. Baines, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Collected Papers*, (London, 1925), 5:31.

¹⁴ Freud, "On Narcissism," p. 42.

¹⁵ Tanner, *City of Words*, pp. 174-176; cf. Peter Abernethy, "Entropy in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*," *Critique*, 14 (1972), 18.

¹⁶ Among the critics who say so are Mendelson, Slade, Lhamon, and Plater.

¹⁷ Literally fifty days, it is a movable feast celebrated by the Christian Church seven Sundays after Easter. Also known as Whitsunday for the white robes worn by the newly baptized, it makes for sharp and ominous contrast to the black mohair suits of those who await the crying of Lot 49 (p. 137). St Narcissus was instrumental in tying Easter's celebration to Sunday rather than to the Friday following Passover, thus commemorating not so much the Crucifixion as the Resurrection. This Pentecost is presided over by Loren Passerine, suggesting the Holy Spirit as dove; unfortunately, however, doves are not passerines, which is the order of perching birds.

¹⁸ Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), pp. 25, 23. Slade and Plater also quote Wiener insisting that humans are anti-entropic, but use a different edition; I could not find the passages Slade mentions (pp. 132, 148, 252) in my text. Wiener also discusses Calvinism (the Scurvhmites in this novel, the Preterite and Elect of *Gravity's Rainbow*), comic strips, deaf-mutes, and digital calculators.

¹⁹ Slade, pp. 170, 246.

²⁰ Plato, trans. B. Jowett, "The Symposium," *The Republic and Other Works*, (Garden City, N. Y.), p. 347. I am indebted for this insight to Professor Marcelline Krafchick of California State University at Hayward.

²¹ "Medium Is the Message" is Chapter 1 of McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (New York, 1964). The book's subsequent chapters include one entitled "Narcissus as Narcosis," as well as ones dealing with comics, automobiles, and communications systems — print, radio, television, and telephones. And on p. 80 of this book, McLuhan writes: "The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity." That Pynchon knew McLuhan is confirmed by a letter he wrote to Thomas F. Hirsch, dated 8 January 1968, cited by Joseph Slade in "Escaping Rationalization: Options for the Self in *Gravity's Rainbow*," *Critique*, 18 (1977), 38, n. 2.