

# The Visibility of Cultural Chaos and Communication in the novel “The Crying of Lot 49” by Thomas Pynchon

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**Abstract:** In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon describes a woman’s strange quest to discover the mysterious, conspiratorial “Tristero” system in a futuristic world of closed society. The novel serves as a condemnation of modern civilization. Throughout the novel, the three motifs: God, TV and drunkenness play vital roles as means of communication. Widespread feelings of cultural disarray are evident as the narrative explores various facets of culture and society. The influence of the drug culture significantly contributes to a prevailing sense of isolation, portraying the world surrounding the protagonist as one immersed in perpetual drug-induced states, illusions and manic conspiracies.

Numerous challenges related to chaos in the novel are intricately connected to the concept of communication. The letters within the narrative serve as explicit and straightforward forms of conventional communication yet lack substantive meaning. Additionally, the novel features a mail delivery group that mandates its members to send a letter weekly, even if the content is devoid of meaningful content.

While the novel hints at a religious moment experienced by Oedipa, suggesting the potential for some form of meaningful communication, this process ultimately breaks down. Religion, language, and science are traditionally viewed as channels for communication that contribute to a sense of unity, but in the novel, these avenues fail to operate effectively. The overarching theme of communication issues in the novel is exemplified by imposed interpretations of the seemingly meaningless.

**Key words:** God, TV, Communication, Religion, Science, Cultural chaos, absurdity

In this paper, we are going to see that the first action in this novel is receiving a letter. The protagonist, Oedipa, starts to reveal the idea of a conservative society, which has a relation with the deliverance of mail. As an example, the letter delivers essential news. Oedipa’s husband passes away, leaving her with the extraordinary duty of resolving problems in

life. Because of that, most of the letters in the novel don’t have matters such as that.

There is a description of Oedipa’s various psychological feelings while going through the letters. Pynchon’s description of Oedipa’s relation in society is that of acquiring by reading news. She gets the thoughts of involvement in God, television and fairy tales. Each is comprised of the memories she shared with Pierce. The three recurring elements, God, TV, and drunkenness, are seen throughout the novel. Whenever they appear, they are in the moment of relation with communication. Whenever they appear, they are in the moment of relation with communication. When Oedipa appears first in the novel, she is seen as a divine being communicating with her. Television is described as a source of confusion because it is one sided communication in the novel. Drugs make one own mental status to be more comprehensive by letting out unfeasible information. These three elements and reminiscence from the past are laid in society. Sometimes, the message that they impart cannot be understood. The problems that Oedipa faces in the novel reflect all readers of the novel. The things that convey messages to Oedipa in the novel cannot be understood. Sometimes, the novel itself will bewilder the readers.

Every problem of a reader of this novel is replaced in the place of Oedipa. So, she is detailed in the novel as a ‘role model of all’ who faces the problems in different forms in the society. Oedipa’s imagination about her husband’s former job in a Used-Car Lot reminds us about the title. The reader thinks the title could connect with a Car Lot. The elements in the novel, such as voice, music, digging, and a whirlwind, give certain signs of wild activity. These elements stand for ethical communication. The phrase ‘Nothing was happening’ gives some difficulties which came after some disorganized moments. All these take place because Oedipa over visualized them within her. Because of Oedipa’s

constant imagination about strange ideas, the tranquillity outside her stagnates. In the novel, ethical values have a relation with partiality. Ethical values give some practicalities. Ethical values give some meaningful meaning to the life of a person in society. Ethical values are replaced by God's presence. Therefore, these values give clarity to situations during a chaotic life. 'Religious instant' in the novel conveys the other ethical rituals which import a complete message to the life. Rituals that exist in society give moral values to individuals according to their deeds.

The game of Strip Bothicelli gives several examples of a story about revealing. In this game, the protagonist, Oedipa, is described as a person who wears many clothes at a time. This is symbolized as a person of different attitudes. May be Pynchon wants to show her as a reflection of society. In the story, the game may be a wide-ranging metaphor for an investigative plot that is going to happen very soon. The protagonist, Oedipa, gives a solution to the obscurity of the Tristero very soon; she comes to know an unexpected turn in the story but does not reveal the secrets. The story has different turns which cannot be understood. As the protagonist in the story of the novel wears different dresses at a time, each dress reflects the different attitude of the protagonist and person in the society. Through all these characters and scenes, Pynchon draws out the different faces of a person.

Pynchon exhibits absorption about the people who have no value in society. An example is Mike Fallopian from the political party. He belongs to the party that imitates the John Birch Society, and their radical beliefs regarding communication are the political party's ideas, which are taken very seriously. Those people are victimized in the society by the insults. As an example of this group, Dr. Hilarius is named as a physiotherapist who possesses academic psychology. Pynchon describes him as deceptive to stand for a very stylistic, practical life in 1960. It introduces the concept of entropy and the possibility of meaning, which occur in most of Pynchon's work. Entropy, in a scientific sense, is the tendency of things to disorder themselves over time into chaos. Nefastis has found a way around the energy problem, and in doing so, he has created a scientific machine capable of changing the world. However, the application of his Nefastis Machine depends on the most profound sort of pseudoscience; some oddly defend 'sensitivity'.

The Nefastis Machine models the themes of order and disorder throughout the novel.

Like the machine, interpretation is an effort to impose order on disorder, but also, like the machine, interpretation is itself found upon disorder. The entire ordering structure is called into question; Oedipa turns out not to be 'sensitive', and she can never solve Tristero's story.

*The Crying of Lot 49* is put in pretty much the same position as Oedipa mourns: desperately trying to untable the mystery. While simultaneously wondering if the whole thing is just a big practical joke. Like other postmodern authors writing around this time, Pynchon turns the traditional art of storytelling on its breaking head and plays meta-fictional games that allow him to question the role of language in our lives as well as the nature of fiction. What Pynchon does in *The Crying of Lot 49* is hijack all the most insane and genius techniques used in modern fiction and then gleefully crash them into the world of 1960 counterculture. Pynchon parodies all of the significant movements of the time, from extreme conservatism to radical liberalism to the zone-out self-indulgence of California hippie and drug culture.

At the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa has yet to receive the answer to her primary question, whether the Tristero is a reality or not. She must continue her quest by attending the auction of the stamps. It is interesting to note that the stamps, the symbols of communication and revelation, are up to the highest bidder. This would either suggest that meaning can be bought with money, which would correspond to the Puritan idea that material success brings salvation, or that Meaning is available to those willing to give the most of themselves to discover it. Oedipa believes the ultimate revelation will be bestowed upon her, and she can only wait, silent, frightened, "to be illuminated." Oedipa's quest parallels that of Oedipus Rex, "who is tormented by the question of man's place in a universe he does not understand. The problems he faces are religious, metaphysical, political, and epistemological. Oedipus makes choices, but he does not achieve control over his destiny. He must continue seeking at the play's end. Like Oedipus, Oedipa exists in a world that she cannot understand. She searches throughout the novel for something which will provide meaning in her life. Though Oedipa never meets the soothsayer who answers her

dilemma, like Oedipus, she never achieves control over her destiny and continues her quest. Pynchon thus offers Oedipa several possibilities. The novel's most positive alternative that Oedipa faces corresponds to man's position in the universe. Man first attempts through communication with others to verify the world's existence in a horizontal search through historical time. Man suspects that there must be something beyond this world which gives this world meaning. He follows his religious impulse, attempting to verify the existence of a deity through communication with others of the clues and apparent revelations he is given. He carries out what Walker Percy calls a vertical search for transcendent meaning. Though the knowledge of a deity may be unavailable to man except at the point of death, the search for meaning provides meaning in this world. Through the search for meaning, man is placed in a position to become aware of the existence of alternative methods to find meaning. Moreover, it is only through the awareness of alternate modes of living that man can choose the alternative that will provide him with the most significant meaning. The search, the quest, is important because it provides the opportunity for encounters with the community that provide partial and periodic communication with others.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* intricately weaves a narrative that navigates the complexities of communication, societal critique, and the perennial search for meaning. The novel's exploration of Oedipa's journey, initiated by the reception of a letter, unfolds against the backdrop of a conservative society entangled with the mail delivery system. Pynchon skillfully utilizes recurring elements such as God, television, and drugs to depict moments of communication within the narrative, simultaneously reflecting the challenges both Oedipa and the readers face in unravelling the mysterious Tristero. The diverse faces of characters, the metaphorical layers of the game of Strip Bothicelli, and the introduction of entropy and the Nefastis Machine contribute to the novel's rich tapestry, challenging conventional storytelling norms and questioning the nature of order and disorder.

As Oedipa's quest for understanding unfolds, the novel leaves readers contemplating the broader

human endeavour for meaning and control over destiny. The auction of stamps symbolizes the potential acquisition of meaning through personal investment or material success. Pynchon's metafictional approach and societal critiques, set against the backdrop of countercultural movements, render *The Crying of Lot 49* a thought-provoking exploration of existential inquiries in a world characterized by ambiguity. The novel's enduring impact lies in its ability to engage readers in a reflective examination of the intricacies of communication, the pursuit of truth, and the enigmatic nature of the human experience.

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