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Preface

This project was originally based on a question regarding what I understood at the time to be the defining characteristics of postmodern fiction: self-consciousness, fragmentation, and metafiction. My point of departure was the idea that somehow the institutionalization of psychoanalytic theory influenced the content of novels. My assumption was that the content would be changed in such a way as to evoke a feeling of paranoia in the text itself. This paranoia, I thought, could explain the emergence of radically self-reflexive qualities.

Thomas Pynchon's work was the best example of what I understood as postmodern fiction. Simply to accommodate the relatively short length of a Master's thesis, I settled on *The Crying of Lot 49* as it is the shortest of his major works. I had written two papers on the novel previously: one was a dreadful book report for my high school sophomore honors English course, and one was a seminar paper for my first-semester as a graduate student. I thought that there must be a way to understand the contradictions, parody, and paranoia in the novel as being influenced by an awareness of psychoanalysis. I hoped to trace this awareness in both the content and the form of the novel itself.

My originally nebulous idea presented difficulties moving forward, and the first couple weeks of research were unsuccessful with this specific framing in mind. There
was no fitting theoretical approach; my ideas were not supported by any account of postmodernism. I had to retool my understanding of postmodernism before trying to propose a different take on the theory. For this re-education I went to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. It seemed serendipitous that the first paper I had ever written as a graduate student could easily be reworked as an exploration of how Pynchon's version of postmodernism differs significantly from Lyotard's. In my original seminar paper, I argued that Oedipa's quest to figure out the Trystero conspiracy was merely avoidance behavior, a way to postpone mourning the death of Pierce Inverarity. With help from Lyotard, I understood that this question of mourning could be more interestingly posed.

As my research sprawled outward from my original aim, I found my interpretation more and more influenced by the analytical style of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek was helpful in my departure from my previous understanding of how to read literature. I began to think beyond simply applying a certain theoretical lens to the work. Perhaps I was stricken with envy, or rather seduced by the brilliantly counter-intuitive turns Žižek makes in his argument. *The Plague of Fantasies* worked best to help advance my thesis.

I have often been afraid that academic writing might have ruined the simple pleasure of leisure reading and maybe the enjoyment of my favorite works. In the past I have grown so weary of a particular author that, for instance, revising an old seminar paper to submit as a writing sample for graduate school applications was nauseating. Pynchon has long been a labor of love for me. As a high school sophomore I was given
the freedom to choose a work by any author who had won either the Pulitzer or the National Book Award. I haphazardly chose Pynchon, and I read *The Crying of Lot 49* because, at the time, anything longer than 200 pages scared me. Since then I have read but not fully appreciated the complexity of two of his other novels as well as his collection of short stories *Slow Learner*. During the process of writing my Master's thesis I have often gotten frustrated with my own shortcomings: writer's block, impatience, and the kind of exhaustion I reach at the end of a work day when my eyes start to flip words around and I can barely absorb the meaning of even the simplest whiteboard message from my roommate. Despite this, I have not developed any weariness for the novel. In fact, I am in awe of the complexity and cleverness of Pynchon's prose to the extent that I hope to finish his two newest novels this summer.

With every deeper excursion into my analysis I found myself preempted not by secondary criticism but by the novel itself. It was this playfulness which I originally wanted to explain as a self-awareness of psychoanalytic criticism. Now, I understand the difficulty otherwise, as a more thorough commentary on certain schools of literary theory.

I am thankful for the opportunity to work with Pynchon and psychoanalysis, two chief research interests of mine at this point in my studies. I am thankful also to Dr. Florence Dore for originally pushing me to pursue the thesis option. I appreciate the guidance from my Director, Professor Tammy Clewell, for engaging with my jumbled ideas with patience, having an incredible store of knowledge of contemporary critical theory, and for adopting this project when Professor Dore was unable to work with me.
Introduction

“From Postmodernism to Psychoanalysis: Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*” offers an alternative to reading the novel through a strictly theoretical lens. Instead, I argue for the novel itself to be considered as a commentary on two dominant schools of literary-cultural theory. Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern theory is challenged by Pynchon's depiction of a continuous but creative mourning. This critique significantly proposes an understanding of how artistic works are produced in the first place. Furthermore, psychoanalytic theory is taken up as a subject in the novel. I argue that Pynchon reworks the domain of psychoanalysis as narrative form.

In Chapter 1: A Challenge to Postmodernism, I address how *The Crying of Lot 49* challenges Lyotard's theory of postmodernism in its account of mourning. The focus in this section is on literal death—chiefly that of Pierce Inverarity but also including Randolph Driblette's suicide—and the remnants thereof. First I concede that the novel is in line with Lyotard's theory of postmodern art in that it parodies and thematically acknowledges the death of metanarratives, including that of the aesthetic. Then I move to show how death underpins the entirety of the novel and how this presents a direct challenge to Lyotard's theory. This section asserts that an ever-present sense of loss and the accompanying continuous mourning are productive elements in the text.

Chapter 2: Technologies of Loss is a more thorough account of the theme of loss
in the novel as represented by technologies of communication. Here the focus is not on literal depictions of death but rather the theme of technology-as-death. These technologies are part of the W.A.S.T.E. system. I argue that while each piece of machinery promises control over the uncontrollable, the technology itself is deathlike. Using Slavoj Žižek's concept of the phantasmic hypertext, I argue that these technologies expose a preexisting loss. *The Crying of Lot 49*'s postmodern technological moment has not caused the loss but rather has the capacity to expose that which was already there.

Chapter 3: The Psychoanalytic Narrative is an account of how the novel maps the shifting domain of psychoanalytic theory and appropriates the authority thereof for the purpose of its own narrative. I analyze the novel's use of psychoanalytic theory in its content wherein the novel plays self-consciously with concepts like the Oedipus Complex and the Mirror Stage. This last section concludes that the novel itself—in its maddeningly circuitous and fragmented narrative of narratives—enacts the form of the Lacanian drive. I argue that the drive is the form narrative takes when the novel has appropriated the domain of psychoanalysis.
Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* offers a distinction between modern and postmodern works. Lyotard explains that both modernist and postmodernist works acknowledge the death of metanarratives like religion, nationalism, and philosophy. At one time, these metanarratives functioned to offer a palatable explanation for history as well as the present condition. The function of metanarrative is to be like the “theory of everything” which is chased after in the contemporary West by quantum physicists and celebrity scientists like Stephen Hawking. The death of metanarratives means that there is no longer a reliable totalizing force which functions to make sense of the world. In order to delineate the difference between modern and postmodern works, Lyotard argues that modernist works fail to recognize that the aesthetic form is dead like other metanarratives. In a modernist work, the aesthetic acts as a totalizing force; it sorts out and explains the world in a palatable narrative. In this way, modern art is that wherein the “unpresentable” is the subject, but the work's own aestheticizing drive exhibits a “nostalgia for presence” (79). This reliance on the aesthetic form to make sense of the world is “nostalgia” at work. Lyotard does not see the postmodern as coming after the modern but rather as being a more radical trend.
concurrent with modernism. A postmodern work criticizes the aesthetic form in its subject matter and even, in a self-reflexive move, subverts aesthetic expectations of its own form. Within these bounds, Thomas Pynchon’s novel *The Crying of Lot 49* qualifies as a postmodern novel. Furthermore the novel thematizes the death of metanarratives, the aesthetic included.

The content of Pynchon’s novel challenges Lyotard’s assertion that this submission, this refusal of “the solace of good forms,” means that postmodernism is done with mourning the death of metanarratives (81). Instead, the novel posits a space for continued mourning. Pynchon presents a novel tied up in mourning. As such, this reading aims to discuss how *The Crying of Lot 49* proposes an alternative to Lyotard’s theory of postmodernism. While *The Crying of Lot 49* does indeed recognize the death of all metanarratives, the aesthetic included, the question of mourning sets Pynchon’s postmodernism against Lyotard’s. There is no completed mourning in this novel. Its protagonist, who carries out an inconclusive quest for conspiratorial meaning, is not free from history, as Lyotard would have it. Rather, the entire novel takes place in the shadow of death. The death of Pierce Inverarity opens the novel. Pynchon’s protagonist, Oedipa Maas, formerly dated the dead man and now finds herself perplexed at his decision to name her executor, or “executrix,” of his estate (1). Pierce’s death is so important as to be the catalyst for narrative action, and yet Oedipa barely acknowledges it. Lyotard argues that postmodernism is done with morning, but Pynchon presents us with a literal death which is never successfully mourned. In order to “be witnesses to the
unpresentable,” as Lyotard asserts, there must be a space for loss (82). After all, it is this very loss which generates narratives. Unlike the postmodern refusal of loss which Lyotard theorizes, Pynchon’s novel shows this loss underpinning and driving the narrative. *The Crying of Lot 49* posits a space for continued mourning. Here is Pynchon’s direct challenge to Lyotard’s theory of postmodernism—Oedipa’s quest indicates that not only is her mourning incomplete but that completed mourning is an impossibility. She is not even certain whether Pierce is truly dead; she does not fully mourn the loss. The entirety of *The Crying of Lot 49* takes place not only in the shadow of this death which begins the novel but also in a world which continually reminds both Oedipa and the reader of loss. This death is the impetus of our protagonist’s never-ending quest.

The unreliability of the text of *The Courier’s Tragedy* is an example of the novel’s critique of the metanarrative of aesthetic form. In many ways, we can see this text as similar to Pierce’s death—Oedipa cannot pin it down; she is unsure of its meaning. Furthermore, it may itself have originated as a hoax. Oedipa, Randolph Driblette, Professor Emory Bortz, and Bortz’s graduate students are fascinated by this play despite its having no correct, undisputed master copy. Its various reinterpretations are described repeatedly as “corrupt.” There are multiple editions and variations of the centuries-old play. Oedipa, described by the narrator as “a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts,” tracks down a copy of *Jacobean Revenge Plays*, Diocletian Blobb’s *Peregrinations*, as well as the “Quarto” reprint of the play hoping that her exhaustive academic research will help her (83). Each of these editions contradict each other.
Despite its aberrations, characters are still invested in this text. Its authenticity is questioned, though, by these characters who continually revise and reinterpret its meaning. Bortz himself creates a corrupt narrative to appease Oedipa—his “history” of the Trystero and the Thurn and Taxis systems is convoluted and clearly improvised. However, his story points directly to an awareness of the death of metanarratives which Lyotard posits as the impetus of the modernist project. Bortz explains, “[W]ith the end of the Holy Roman Empire, the fountainhead of Thurn and Taxis, legitimacy is lost forever among the other splendid delusions. Possibilities for paranoia become abundant” (136). Bortz here implies that the loss of the authority of metanarratives happened centuries previous. Regardless, *The Crying of Lot 49* details a protagonist who, in mid-twentieth century America, grapples with the modern death of metanarratives and the resulting “possibilities for paranoia.”

Oedipa can no longer rely on metanarratives which previously existed to explain and make sense of the world. She sees herself as the victim of an unidentifiable malignant force in the universe. We are told, “[T]o understand how [this formless magic] works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disc jockey” (12). Her irrational belief in this mystical entity is an example of the novel's larger theme of undecidability. The excerpt lists possible decisions for her to make. Of the four options, the superstitious route can be recognized as an attempt to ground meaning. It is important to note that not once is religion seriously invoked in the novel.
However, Oedipa’s belief in the Trystero may strike the reader as superstitious in nature. A “useful hobby” is an attempt to create meaning, and in a way Oedipa does “take up [...] embroidery” much like the girls in the Remedios Varo painting she sees at an art exhibit. The last two options are passive. To accept undecidability may make her “go mad;” marrying a DJ, which she has already done, is a way of ignoring the frenzied world outside her suburban home. Significantly, she abandons her husband and the suburbs at the outset of the novel. Oedipa’s reaction is somewhere between superstition and insanity. She tries desperately to make sense of the world and the Trystero conspiracy, and she finds herself distraught at the inability to do so.

For a novel so concerned with and even structured around death, there is a noticeable lack of overt grief from the protagonist. Oedipa does not cry in the novel. Though the novel begins with Pierce’s death, our protagonist does not attend any funeral services for him; she does not seem particularly moved by his passing. Late in the novel, she does attend another funeral:

[S]he, with Bortz, Grace, and the graduate students, attended Randolph Driblette’s burial, listened to a younger brother’s helpless, stricken eulogy, watched the mother, spectral in the afternoon smog, cry, and came back at night to sit on the grave and drink Napa Valley muscatel, which Driblette in his time had put away barrels of. (132-3)

Though very distraught at Driblette’s suicide, she does not cry over him. Instead, she merely “watche[s] the mother […] cry.” Indeed, the very title suggests a lack of closure.
The last line of the novel only hints at the event described by the title: “Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49” (152). The crying of the auctioneer is absent, as is any emotional outpouring from Oedipa. Her tears come to us only in the past tense.

The narrator explains, in a brief flashback, that Oedipa cried at an art exhibit she visited with Pierce. The painting which elicits such a reaction is a vivid metaphor of the death of metanarratives which Lyotard posits as being the catalyst for modernism. The central piece of the exhibit is a work by Remedios Varo titled *Bordando el Manto Terrestre*. The painting is described:

> [A] number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking helplessly to fill that void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships, and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world. (11)

Pynchon’s use of the word “void” to describe the scene of the painting is significant. The emptiness spurs the “frail girls” to create a work of art, the “tapestry.” Painted in 1961, Varo’s work is a perfect artistic representation, concurrent with the historical context of the novel, of the generative possibility of loss. Like the girls in the painting, Oedipa has been “seeking helplessly” to weave a narrative which would make sense of the loss of Pierce’s death. Moreover, this painting and the explanation Pynchon provides of it may be considered an allegory of the novel as a whole. Contained in this image is an idea of
why art is created: the artist, like the girls in the tower, are motivated by loss. Their efforts to create fiction are spurred on by an unrepresentable entity. In Varo’s painting, the loss is productive. Lyotard's conception of postmodernism is that loss is not present anymore, and that therefore the mourning of this loss is unnecessary. However, the novel posits a space for loss and the mourning thereof. Varo's painting as an allegory for the novel illustrates the opposition to Lyotard's theory of postmodernism. Not only is there loss, but it is necessary for there to be loss in order for narrative to exist. In “Subject as Commodity Sign: Existential Interiority on Trial in Thomas Pynchon’s Crying of Lot 49,” Lois Tyson argues that the encounter with the Varo painting reveals to Oedipa that “all reality is at once personal and cultural” (109). This Marxist reading of the novel insists that Oedipa’s quest is an existential one in which she searches for an authentic life. Such authenticity, Tyson claims, has been obscured by the commodity fetishism controlling other characters in the novel. Tyson falls short of fully acknowledging the loss which propels Oedipa's journey. In fact, the authenticity that concerns Tyson is not so much threatened, as she claims, by the immediately material concerns of consumerism, but rather by the absence of an authoritative metanarrative. That which Tyson acknowledges as “personal and cultural” is, like the tapestry, a fiction generated by this loss.

The novel is saturated with the subject matter of death. In “Death and The Crying of Lot 49,” Diana York Blaine importantly points to the how characters in The Crying of Lot 49 attempt to conceal their mortality. She spends most of the article analyzing American history’s mythos in relation to death, working chronologically through
Puritanism, Protestantism, Lincoln’s assassination, Emersonian philosophy, and other influences which have shaped American identity. Blaine argues that the novel “depicts ways of coping with the fear of death, through religious, political, and psychic fanaticism; through capitalist and material acquisition; through constructing a narrative, through becoming a literary critic [...]” (52). Indeed, we could consider that Oedipa’s quest in its entirety, taking into account the forms death takes in the novel, focuses not on “coping,” not on dealing with Pierce’s death, but instead on a bizarre, if at all possible, postal conspiracy only loosely tied to the deceased. We should understand what Blaine refers to as “ways of coping with the fear of death” instead in a more positive, productive light. The reality of Pierce’s death introduces a world of possibilities to Oedipa in the concept of the Trystero—a mystery which our protagonist spends the entire novel trying to resolve.

The mysterious nature of Inverarity’s passing problematizes the project of mourning. Initially it might seem that Oedipa’s preoccupation with the Trystero may be accounted for by the Freudian account of the mourning process that follows the death of a loved one. Freud noted as typical of mourning the “loss of interest in the outside world—so long as it does not recall [the deceased]” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 244). In contrast with Freud’s conception of mourning, we see Oedipa actually developing interest in the outside world. She leaves her suburban housing development, travels, and meets new people all in an attempt to solve the mystery which is intimately tied, in her mind, to Pierce. She fixates on the Trystero as a substitute for him; we know that “[e]very access
route to the Trystero could be traced also back to the Inverarity estate” (Pynchon 140). Navigating superfluous clues and underground societies, she thinks of him as being alive in the conspiracy itself. The narrator often informs readers of such confusions. Towards the end of the novel, she considers, “[H]e might even have tried to survive death, as a paranoia; as a pure conspiracy against someone he loved. […] Had something slipped through and Inverarity by that much beaten death?” (148). The possibility that he has “beaten death” is not fully convincing. Oedipa poses this question here among others about whether the Trystero is real or fictional. Indeed, this uncertainty mirrors that regarding the finality of Pierce’s death. Oedipa considers soon after the above excerpt, “[T]here was still that other chance. That it was all true. That Inverarity had only died, nothing else” (148). Pierce’s death resurfaces—still only as a possibility. Whether or not Pierce’s death is final sheds doubt on the very conspiracy after which she has spent the entire novel chasing.

Death resurfaces throughout Oedipa’s journey. In “The Rhetoric of Death in The Crying of Lot 49,” Marie-Claude Profit astutely points to the ubiquitous nature of death in the novel. She begins her article with a reference to what Bortz says to Oedipa while showing slides of a certain production of The Courier’s Tragedy. He instructs her, “Notice how often the figure of Death hovers in the background” (Pynchon 127). Profit explains, “What the quote underscores as characteristic is, first of all, an insistence: the multiplicity of references to a figurative theme (how often); secondly, it reveals the special way the theme appears: it appears in the background, discrete and yet persistent”
This last assertion is central to the importance of death as a theme. Although it may only “[appear] in the background,” death's presence is “persistent.” Profit aptly identifies a wealth of scenes that illustrate the appearance of death. But even still, the question remains why so many scenes appear, why the theme of death functions as it does. To answer these questions we must refer to a particular conversation, which Profit also points to, that is central to this reading of the novel. Mike Fallopian asks:

“Has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody’s putting you on? That this is all a hoax, maybe something Inverarity set up before he died?”

It had occurred to her. But like the thought that someday she would have to die, Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility directly, or in any but the most accidental of lights. (Pynchon 138)

Indeed, Oedipa spends the majority of the novel refusing to face the death of Pierce, and the world of the novel itself exerts quite a bit of effort in a similar refusal. But death cannot be ignored as such, and the many scenes Profit identifies illustrate its continual resurfacing.

The Pacific Ocean is an evocative symbol of death’s continual resurfacing. We are told that Oedipa and Metzger, Pierce’s lawyer, are haunted during their travels:

Somewhere […] lurked the unimaginable Pacific, the one to which all surfers, beach pads, sewage disposal schemes, tourist incursions, sunned homosexuality, chartered fishing are irrelevant, the hole left by the moon’s tearing free and monument to her exile; you could not hear or even smell
this but it was there, something tidal began to reach feelers in past eyes and ear drums, perhaps to arouse fractions of brain current your most gossamer microelectrode is yet too gross for finding. Oedipa had believed [...] in some principle of the sea as redemption for Southern California [...], some unvoiced idea that no matter what you did to its edges the true Pacific stayed inviolate and integrated or assumed the ugliness at any edge into some more general truth. Perhaps it was only this notion, its arid hope, she sensed as this forenoon they made their seaward thrust, which would stop short of any sea. (40-41)

The Pacific is described as a scene of loss, a “hole left” after loss. Its emptiness is menacing—it “lurk[s].” Oedipa’s quest for the Trystero takes place geographically alongside this symbol of loss. The ocean’s menacing nature is attributed to the inability to fully understand it. No faculties are able to register its existence; it is sensed, but only intuitively since it moves “past eyes and ear drums.” This body of water is “unimaginable” and thus threatening to our protagonist who so desperately strains to fully account for all uncertainties she comes across in her quest. It persists in the narrative despite the fact that Oedipa “stop[s] short of any sea” in the novel. She does not come in direct contact with the ocean, with death, and her mourning is never complete. The Pacific is described positively as “redemption” when contrasted with human “ugliness.” Without the Pacific, the human activities detailed in this long list would not have been created. The ocean symbolizes not just a menace but a productive space. It may be a
space of loss—“the hole left by the moon's tearing free”—but it is also a scene of creation marked with a “monument.”

Death returns as a literal occurrence later in the novel with Driblette's suicide. Oedipa learns from Professor Bortz and his fellow academics that Driblette has drowned himself in the Ocean since she last tried getting in touch with him. He reportedly has walked straight into the sea with a full suit on. Although Pierce's death is the impetus of Oedipa's journey, it happens outside of the world of the novel. Details about Pierce's death were never disclosed; Oedipa found out too late to attend any services. Significantly, *The Crying of Lot 49* contains Driblette's suicide as well as his funeral. His suicide must be considered in the context of the conversation he had with Oedipa following his performance of *The Courier's Tragedy*. In fact, this framing is insisted by Oedipa. After being interrogated about the exact meaning of the Trystero, Driblette says, “‘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 touch the truth’” (62-63). We must consider, like Oedipa, what this “truth” is to which Driblette refers. Driblette is the only character in the novel who is ever in direct physical contact with the Pacific, and this contact happens in death. He has thrown himself into the ocean, effectively “touch[ing] the truth,” the symbol of loss which carries the productive capacity for all the narratives of the novel.

Blaine argues that Oedipa “indeed discovers the inevitability of death, but
significantly, it is someone else’s” (52). Even an argument as carefully qualified as Blaine’s is not supported by the novel. Rather, we see Oedipa only attempt to acknowledge death. She is nudged toward this by incomprehensible clues. After Oedipa is hung up on by the man she had randomly met at a gay bar:

She stood between the public booth and the rented car, in the night, her isolation complete, and tried to face the sea. But she’d lost her bearings. She turned, pivoting on one stacked heel, could find no mountains either. As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land. San Narciso at that moment lost (the loss pure, instant, spherical, the sound of a stainless orchestral chime held among the stars and struck lightly), gave up its residue of uniqueness for her; became a name again, was assumed back into the American continuity of crust and mantle. Pierce was really dead. (Pynchon 147)

The final sentence here could be read as indicating that Oedipa has accepted death as Blaine would have it. However, Oedipa’s actions in the remainder of the novel suggest that she still does not believe that “Pierce [i]s really dead,” nor does she believe that Driblette is dead. She continues to chase the Trystero clues, going so far as to dedicate herself to tracking down the buyer of an obscure and possibly meaningless stamp collection. Furthermore, in the above excerpt, Oedipa “tried to face the sea” (emphasis mine). She cannot acknowledge loss, symbolized by the Pacific. Oedipa is only spurred further into the conspiratorial world by loss. Her mourning is not complete and, along
with this, her narrative is unending.

Oedipa’s denial of death is typical of American society as represented in the novel. In *The Hour of Our Death*, Philippe Ariès analyzes a thousand years of Western history in order to trace attitude changes regarding death. His last chapter “Death Denied” explains the modern tendency toward concealing death through medicalization and hospitalization. Ariès explains, “The beginning of the twentieth century saw the completion of the psychological mechanism that removed death from society, eliminated its character of public ceremony, and made it a private act” (575). After death, the emphasis is on returning to life as normal. American society rolls on. We see Oedipa trying to accept the same sort of peculiarity: “This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl” (123).

The sociohistorical context alluded to in the novel reinforces Ariès claim that the Western world denies the presence of death. Cold War anxiety is explicitly mentioned, but it is not at the foreground of narrative action. Mike Fallopian tells Oedipa the story of Peter Pinguid, inspiration for a conservative political group. According to Fallopian, Pinguid supposedly tried to start another front in the Civil War by sailing around South America in order to attack San Francisco. As a result of covert international alliances, a Russian fleet stood in the way of Pinguid. The ships fired at each other, too far away to hit their targets. The ammo caused no damage and merely sunk into the sea. Fallopian explains, “‘[T]he ripples from those two splashes spread, and grew, and today engulf us all’” (36). Fallopian suggests here that the Soviet-American conflict is all-pervasive.
The Cold War holds an undeniable influence over society in this novel. Allusion to a possible nuclear shooting war appears in the text also. When Oedipa distresses over the misspelling of the word “postmaster”—written on the envelope as “potsmaster,” Metzger tells her, “‘So they make misprints, […] let them. As long as they’re careful about pushing the wrong button, you know?’” (33). This is a passing reference to the novel’s sociohistorical context. Metzger jokingly delivers this line, as if this is not a concern worth much emotional effort. Yet the gravity of the situation is not to be taken lightly: the possibility of annihilation, the ever-present threat of nuclear war, the anxiety of this historical moment. American society in the novel functions like Oedipa. The narrator tells us, “[Oedipa] had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to make sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America” (147). Here the parallel is clearly drawn. The Cold War and Pierce's death are productive.

Oedipa’s quest brings her across segments of American society which Pynchon figures as postmodern in their refusal of death. These underground societies are an excess, noted by the acronym W.A.S.T.E., which constitutes America. The posthorn that unites W.A.S.T.E. represents “alienation”:

[I]t was calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loop holes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate,
silent, unsuspected world. (100-101)

This resistance is not a “vacuum;” rather, it is constitutive of American culture the same as the “void” is in Varo’s painting. The withdrawal Pynchon notes is an engagement and subversion at the same time. W.A.S.T.E. generates narratives just as loss does. It advances Oedipa’s journey as well as the novel itself. Without a metanarrative, the proliferation of these narratives continues unheeded. There is therefore no closure, no completed mourning. However this is productive. Pynchon's novel asserts that there can be no postmodern world without loss.
Chapter 2

Technologies of Loss

Death figures prominently in the novel as more than just the literal death of Pierce Inverarity and Randolph Driblette. *The Crying of Lot 49* also deals with loss through its representation of technologies of communication. Figuring technology-as-death, Pynchon’s novel reinforces the position that mourning is incomplete. Loss is not only present in literal death of characters but in the function of various technological machines.

The advent of these technologies of communication does not lead to the creation nor the intensification of this loss. Instead, it exposes the preexisting loss, the originary loss. My argument is informed by an understanding of what Slavoj Žižek calls “the phantasmic hypertext.” We can see the various technological innovations of the mid-twentieth century as functioning similar to the way in which Žižek says cyberspace does in his essay “Cyberspace, or, the Unbearable Closure of Being.” He explains, “[C]yberspace merely radicalizes the gap constitutive of the symbolic order: (symbolic) reality always-already was ‘virtual’; that is to say: *every access to (social) reality has to be supported by an implicitly phantasmic hypertext*” (184). There has always been a “gap” without which the symbolic order would not exist or would not be necessary. That
“gap” is the lack of a central authority. Without this authority, the symbolic is not only free to proliferate—it can only be self-referential; it has nothing but itself to refer to. Žižek's point about the “virtual” nature of the symbolic order is simply the assertion of this inescapably self-referential quality. As such, the symbolic order is maintained by “an implicitly phantasmic hypertext” whose purpose is to obscure the reality of the virtual. This phantasmic hypertext underlies and supports the symbolic in that it aids in ignoring the loss of authority represented by the “gap.” In “radicaliz[ing] the gap” of the symbolic order, we can witness the role of the “phantasmic hypertext” in structuring social reality, especially with regard to loss as exposed by technologies of communication.

The narrator alludes to the concept of a phantasmic hypertext. For instance, after the intermission of The Courier's Tragedy, a shift takes place in the performance. The narrator tells us: “Certain things, it is made clear, will not be spoken aloud; certain events will not be shown onstage; though it is difficult to imagine, given the excesses of the preceding acts, what these things could possibly be” (55). These “things” function similarly to how Žižek imagines the phantasmic hypertext. “Certain things” and “certain events” support the narrative of The Courier's Tragedy. Oedipa is intrigued by the conspiratorial air of the play after this shift and by the telling look of the actors “‘all […] so obviously in on something’” (61). Like this play, The Crying of Lot 49 implies “certain things” which, although not explicitly evident, influence the fabric of the narrative. Our protagonist Oedipa Maas intuits but does not fully realize “certain things.”
At many points in the novel she seems on the edge of a discovery, only to be thwarted, supposedly, by the mechanics of her brain. At a used bookstore we are told that “[s]omething came to her viscera, danced briefly, and went” (61). Later she laments, “All these fatigued brain cells between herself and the truth” (74). This “truth” is not necessarily the meaning of the Trystero but rather an undercurrent of her social reality.

The phantasmic hypertext is hinted at in the beginning of the novel. The narrator says that Oedipa’s quest will lead to an epiphany. The narrator tells us, “As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away” (10). When Oedipa sets out to fulfill her “executrix” responsibilities, she has no indication as to where she will end up (1). What starts as the task of executing the will of a former lover turns into a hunt for the meaning of one word, “Trystero,” which in turn leads her to the precipice of a postal conspiracy. Although indeed Oedipa’s quest takes her further and further from Pierce himself, we can read the “revelations” hinted at here as referring to the larger idea of a phantasmic hypertext which underlies and supports her social reality, concealing the ever-present loss. Žižek explains that, although such a hypertext is ever-present, one does not readily notice that the fantasy plays an integral role in one’s life.

*The Crying of Lot 49* lays bare the role of the phantasmic hypertext in negotiating characters’ experience of loss.

Representations of loss come to us via W.A.S.T.E. Oedipa first becomes aware of this acronym when she uses the women's restroom at The Scope. Mike Fallopian assures
Oedipa and Metzger, “It's not as rebellious as it looks. We use Yoyodyne's inter-office delivery. On the sly” (38). Oedipa soon learns, though, that this alternative postal service reaches farther than just Yoyodyne property. In fact, all of the fringe characters she meets are connected through this system. This alternative postal service exists as a way for a segment of the population to have more control over their communications—since this segment is against the “government monopoly” of the United States Postal Service (38). However, the W.A.S.T.E. system itself is uncontrollable. As Oedipa becomes aware, many of the letters sent via W.A.S.T.E. are pointless. She realizes this when she receives an unexpected letter from her husband Mucho. The narrator tells us that “[t]he letter itself had nothing much to say” (32). Moreover, Oedipa has “an intuition that the letter [will] be newsless inside” (33). Mike Fallopian explains that this is a symptom of the system itself. He says, “‘To keep it up to some reasonable volume, each member has to send at least one letter a week through the Yoyodyne system. If you don’t, you get fined” (39). This institution which utilizes the older technology of letter-writing promises control to the W.A.S.T.E. community, yet its content subverts these expectations.

By appealing to the human desire for control over the unknown, technology in the novel seduces characters. The urge to control is not fulfilled. Rather, technologies only expose how uncontrollable the reality of loss is. In “The Eternal Centre/The Final Zero: The Fiction of Thomas Pynchon,” Julian Cowley argues:

Pynchon’s recurrent entropy metaphor [...] comes ultimately to signify
this: that desire for eternal life, denial of the finality of death and the reality of forces of disintegration, has led inevitably, and with increasing virulence, to institution of structures that nurture death. (13-14)

This “denial” is what happens when one believes that loss can be controlled. My reading is in agreement with Cowley, but I extend her logic farther than just the instance of entropy in the novel. In looking to technologies of communication for some form of “eternal life” and in thinking that these technologies offer a reliable means of controlling loss, characters are in fact aligning themselves with something which is intimately tied to death itself. Their quest for immortality through technology has consequently “instituted […] structures that nurture death.” Indeed, these structures are figured as being literally a part of humanity. Though technology may appeal to characters who wish to exert control over death, the representation of these technologies in the novel engage and subvert this expectation. Instead of offering a means to control death these technologies expose its presence.

The characterization of these technologies shows that they expose that which the phantasmic hypertext previously worked to conceal, that which “remain[s]” and yet “stay[s] away.” Death permeates the world of the novel, and it is through the hyperbole of mid-century technology that these concerns are brought to light. Carolyn Brown draws on Jacques Derrida in her article “Waste, Death, and Destiny: Heterotopic Scenarios in The Crying of Lot 49” to argue that Oedipa is haunted by the beyond which is located outside of the possibility of binary oppositions. In reference to technology in
the novel, she explains:

> Death is posited not so much as a final frontier but as an ever-recurrent presence, always to be glimpsed on the screen, the edge of a postage stamp, the street, the play. It is not simply that the “subject matter” death is transmitted through a neutral medium, but that the very modes of these technologies, beyond “living speech” are deathly, or move phantom-like beyond the zone of the “Real World.” (156)

Indeed, Pynchon’s novel repeatedly figures technologies of communication as “deathly.” Brown does not fully expound on this facet of her argument. Instead, she argues that Oedipa is meant to represent a writer who must move beyond binary oppositions. It is important to consider, as Brown suggests, that these technologies are more than a “neutral medium.” Instead of offering control over death, they contain death as “subject matter.” Even their “modes” serve to subvert characters’ hope to control loss.

One way in which technologies of communication are figured metaphorically in the novel is through the characterization of humans as machine-like. In “Pynchon and the Civil Wars of Technology,” critic Lance Schachterle argues that Pynchon presents technology in a favorable light as “not intrinsically foreign or anti-human” (254). This melding of human and machine which Schachterle identifies may be referred to as the “man-as-machine” metaphor. We can see it at play in the text, for instance, when humans are frequently described as radio transmitters. When Oedipa enters the dressing room after the production of *The Courier’s Tragedy*, the narrator tells us, “She walked in on
soft, elegant chaos, an impression of emanations, mutually interfering, from the stub-
antennas of everybody’s exposed nerve-endings” (60). Here a very specific part of
human anatomy is spoken of as mechanical. It is important to note also that “stub-
antennas” are a mechanism central to communication. Late in the novel when Oedipa is
reunited with her husband Mucho, he uses a similar metaphor involving humans and
antennas. We learn that Mucho has been taking LSD as part of an experiment run by
Oedipa’s psychoanalyst, Dr. Hilarius. These psychedelics cause Mucho’s bizarre
observations. He tells Oedipa, “’You’re an antenna, sending your pattern out across a
million lives a night, and they’re your lives too’” (118).

The man-as-machine metaphor is prominent also in the theme of projection. After
a performance of The Courier’s Tragedy, Randolph Driblette explains his creative
direction, “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, and sometimes other orifices also”
(62). Significantly, Driblette does not describe himself as the projectionist, the human
who would be operating the machine. Instead he sees himself as a machine—the
projector itself, a full realization of the man-as-machine metaphor. Oedipa adopts this
point of view regarding projection. She strives to be like Driblette, “to try to be what [he]
was, the dark machine in the center of the planetarium” (emphasis mine) (64). The
repeated motif of projection—Oedipa’s question “Shall I project a world?”—can be
understood in this light (64). Her aim is to be the machine, not the operator.

Schachterle closes his article with an assertion based on an analysis of both The
He argues, “For Pynchon, the threat of technology is not us versus them, humans versus technology. Technology is not only part of what we make, it is part of what we are” (emphasis mine) (254). It is crucial to fully understand the implications of technology representing “part of what we are.” In the novel, this “part” is always figured as death-like. So, though the human characters seem to ignore the figure of death, a vital “part” of them is “deathly” (Brown 156).

The man-as-machine metaphor has further implications for our consideration of technology and death in the novel. Critic Kathleen Woodward points out in her article “Cybernetic Modeling in Recent American Writing: A Critique” that rote machines like the projector are not the only ones invoked by Pynchon’s prose. She comments on the “recent transformations in the connotations of the metaphor of man-as-machine” which she argues are “the result of an invention of a new technology, of a postmechanical, postindustrial technology—the invention of cybernetic machines.” As such, Woodward renames the metaphor “man-as-cybernetic-system” (59). In The Crying of Lot 49, death figures prominently in characters’ relation to this new cybernetic technology. Consider the W.A.S.T.E. carrier's mattress: Oedipa comes to it as the man is dying, in the throes of delirium tremens. The mattress is an interesting image given Woodward’s note. Of course, the mattress is not human; it is described as a “stuffed memory.” Here we see a reversal, instead of man-as-cybernetic-system, the cybernetic system is imbued with humanity. For Oedipa the death of the sailor is not as devastating a thought as the mattress on fire in the man's hypothetical “Viking funeral” and the resulting “massive
The novel further associates death and cybernetics in the recounting of the story of the ex-Yoyodyne executive who founded the Inamorati Anonymous. A homosexual whom Oedipa meets at The Greek Way explains that the executive was “automated out of a job” and subsequently cuckolded. As it turns out in the novel, the efficiency expert who originally fired him is his wife’s adulterous lover. The shamed executive threatens suicide and the efficiency expert remarks, “‘Nearly three weeks it takes him [...] to decide. You know how long it would’ve taken the IBM 7094? Twelve microseconds. No wonder you were replaced’” (93). Although the IBM is not necessarily regarded here as an instrument of death, its impingement pushes the man towards suicide.

The relationship between man and machine or man and cybernetic machine is figured in *The Crying of Lot 49* as ominous. In “Cyberspace, or, the Unbearable Closure of Being,” Žižek comments on this contemporary cultural concern of cybernetics. He posits:

"Today’s form of the obsessional question ‘Am I alive or dead?’ is ‘Am I a machine (does my brain really function as a computer) or a living human being (with a spark of spirit or something else that is not reducible to the computer circuit)?'; it is not difficult to discern in this alternative the split between [...] the ‘big Other’, the *dead* symbolic order, and the Thing, the *living* substance of enjoyment. (175)"

Significantly, Žižek here points to a fundamental characteristic of computers or
“cybernetic systems”—they are “dead.” Pynchon’s novel echoes this “obsessional” concern. The “split” between the mechanic and the “living human” is lost in the novel. If we revise Woodward’s metaphor, “man-as-cybernetic-system,” with Žižek’s interpretation in mind, then man becomes death, man dies.

Another way in which technologies of communication expose the ever-present impingement of loss is through the novel’s characterization of media, particularly the television. Both the subject matter and the medium itself invoke the concept of death. When Oedipa visits a nursing home she encounters a confused old man who complains of the T.V., “‘It comes into your dreams, you know. Filthy machine’” (73). Here the television, specifically a Porky Pig cartoon, is haunting. A television at the beginning of the novel haunts Oedipa. The narrator notes the “greenish dead eye of the TV tube” (1). Although the television is characterized as anthropomorphic in that it has an eye, it is “dead.” Here again is an interesting inversion of the man-as-machine metaphor which reinforces the presence of death in the novel. The concern of mortality looms in other media as well. This is evident in the hotel scene with Pierce’s lawyer, Metzger. We learn that he was once a child star named Baby Igor. A movie of his titled *Cashiered* replays on the hotel television while he is trying to seduce Oedipa. Metzger tells her, “‘The film is in an air-conditioned vault at one of the Hollywood studios, light can’t fatigue it, it can be repeated endlessly’” (22). Though it is “endlessly” preserved, this promise of immortality is not fulfilled as expected. The presumed control offered by the medium of film is subverted. The subject matter therein is menacing and reminds us of this theme,
this continually resurfacing, inescapable reality of loss. Although stored away in a vault, the reels have gotten mixed up, and the storyline does not follow as Metzger remembers it should. Despite the mix-up, we still get the ending:

[T]he TV tube revealed the father, dog and Baby Igor trapped inside the darkening “Justine,” as the water level inexorably rose. The dog was first to drown, in a great crowd of bubbles. Something short-circuited then and the grounded Baby Igor was electrocuted, thrashing back and forth and screaming horribly. Through one of those Hollywood distortions in probability, the father was spared electrocution so he could make a farewell speech, apologizing to Baby Igor and the dog for getting them into this and regretting that they wouldn’t be meeting in heaven […]. At the end his suffering eyes filled up the screen, the sound of incoming water grew deafening, up swelled that strange ’30’s movie music with the massive sax section, in faded the legend THE END. (30)

So, although the movie reels themselves appear to be immortal, protected from decay where “light can’t fatigue” them, the medium is intimately tied up with death. All characters die in this bizarrely macabre T.V.-movie. Moreover, their particularly agonizing deaths, including a toddler “electrocuted, thrashing back and forth,” are shown in detail and not just hinted at as being the end of the film. *Cashiered* shows us that these technologies of communication, while promising a measure of control, are characterized in the narrative as being death-like.
Another machine which subverts expectations of control comes to Oedipa’s attention via W.A.S.T.E. member John Nefastis. Pynchon's perennial theme of entropy appears in *The Crying of Lot 49* by way of his “Nefastis Machine.” It is supposedly a sort of perpetual motion device like Maxwell's Demon; the work it does is sorting molecules into hot and cold. The concept of a perpetual motion machine is physically impossible to execute because it supposedly functions without loss. John Nefastis explains to Oedipa, “Entropy is a figure of speech, […] 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 graceful, but also objectively true” (85). The Nefastis Machine is a technology of communication. Not only does it deal with the “world of information,” but it can only be activated by special people, “sensitives,” who have the ability to communicate with the machine itself. Dean A. Ward, in “Information and the Imminent Death of Oedipa Maas,” argues that entropy, as a theme in the novel, points to the eventual disintegration of Oedipa’s personality. Ward suggests that Oedipa’s information entropy will drop to zero if the mystery of the Trystero is solved. He explains that “she […] faces the destruction of the information system she has woven and, consequently, the annihilation of her identity and her death” (27). Ward draws too hastily a parallel between Pynchon’s older work, particularly his short story “Entropy,” and *The Crying of Lot 49*. In this novel, entropy as a scientific precept is not as central as Ward tries to argue. Instead both the Nefastis Machine and the idea of entropy can be read as reflecting a much broader point about technology’s promise of control. *The
Crying of Lot 49 shows us that trying to live in a world without loss is impossible just like the perpetual motion machine itself. The Nefastis Machine does not function the way its creator or Oedipa expect it to. It subverts expectations of control and exposes the inescapable nature of loss.

The telephone is another technology of communication whose characterization constitutes the novel's depiction of loss. While the telephone seems to promise more control over communication, it in fact exposes the inevitability of miscommunication. In The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, and Electric Speech, philosopher Avital Ronell argues that the telephone can be regarded as “a synecdoche for technology” (7, 20). It is in this spirit which the following analysis of communication in The Crying of Lot 49 should be taken. We must recognize that, of course, Pynchon’s novel is not only commenting on telephones but their associated technologies. In this short novel Oedipa receives two phone calls and makes three. Her last memory of Pierce Inverarity is a peculiar call she received, long-distance, from him at three in the morning. His death is obscured by the incident:

That phone line could have pointed in any direction, been any length. Its quiet ambiguity shifted over, in the months after the call, to what had been revived: memories of his face, body, things he’d given her, things she had now and then pretended not to hear him say. It took him over, and to the verge of being forgotten. (3)

If we consider again the man-as-machine structure, here it appears that the man is nearly
lost, almost completely given over to the other side of the equation. Not only do these images “take” Pierce “over,” the metaphor of the phone line itself becomes more important than the actual person on the other line. The mystery of the telephone captures Oedipa’s imagination as the call leads into an unknowable realm. Ronell insists that the telephone “indicates more than a mere technological object” (13). It is clear from the phone calls in this novel that the telephone indicates an originary loss.

This last phone call Oedipa receives from Pierce highlights a feature of telephone communication—the presence of the unknown. Žižek explains in “The Seven Veils of Fantasy”:

I am always afraid to miss the phone ringing, to be too late picking up the receiver; when a phone rings, I always expect it to be the call, and I am always disappointed when I hear the voice of the actual caller, whoever he or she is. There is no positive feature or content to identify this Call [...]—it stands for pure, empty Otherness. (39)

The technology of the telephone does not invent but merely shows us this want more clearly. With the technological advancements of the twentieth century, now “the” call is altogether disembodied. In the preface to The Plague of Fantasies, Žižek explains that “what precedes fantasy is not reality but a hole in reality, its point of impossibility filled in with fantasy” (xiv). It is the presence of a phone and the resulting absence of the Other which leads one to create the fantasy of “pure, empty Otherness.” Pynchon’s prose parallels this sentiment. We know that Oedipa considers:
[T]he voices before and after [Pierce]’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 unnameable act, the recognition, the Word. (149)

Žižek is not the only theorist with a similar conception of the “Call” to which the above narrator points. Ronell explains, “[T]elephonic logic means here, as everywhere, that contact with the Other has been disrupted; but it also means that the break is never absolute. Being on the telephone will come to mean, therefore, that contact is never constant nor is the break clean” (20). It must be clarified, though, that what Ronell asserts “will come” has always persisted in attempts to communicate with the Other. Because one must always rely on speech, the Other has been an enigma long before the advent of the telephone. Any belief in understanding is informed by a phantasmic hypertext which obscures the fundamental loss.

While the telephone may appear to be an improvement on earlier attempts to communicate, the characterization of this technology in The Crying of Lot 49 shows us that the uncontrollable does not conform to these expectations. When Oedipa is on the active end of the telephone, she uses it in an attempt to piece together clues. Her calls end abruptly and leave her bewildered. Trying to track down exactly why Driblette used the word “Trystero” in his version of The Courier’s Tragedy, Oedipa calls his home but
"[t]he phone buzzes on and on, into hollowness” (71). She is unaware at this point that Driblette has drowned himself. Not only does the word “hollowness” here refer to the void of death itself, but to the very medium of this technology. Still unaware of his death, Oedipa calls to Driblette’s household again later in the novel. The phone is answered unexpectedly by his mother who immediately shuts down the conversation by announcing: “I’m sorry, we’ve nothing to say” (121). Here the voice on the other end does not so much as attempt to communicate. Instead there is “nothing to say.” After Driblette’s funeral, another phone conversation ends abruptly when Oedipa calls The Greek Way to track down the Inamorati Anonymous member she had met a few nights before. Oedipa tries to coax him into confessing his participation in a grand conspiracy against her, but he answers only in confused, drunken responses. The narrator tells us, “Before she could ask what he meant, he’d hung up” (146). Her attempts to communicate are always lost; the Other remains unknown. However, the telephone is not to blame for these difficulties—buzzing, abrupt hang-ups, and connection fees aside. Rather, these problems have always existed in some form to complicate social reality.

A passage at the end of the novel hints at the ever-present difficulty of communication. The narrator speaks of homeless people who:

[S]pent 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. (149)

These people are “untroubled” by the aforementioned difficulties inherent in communication. They are not concerned with “unheard messages” and live without placing importance on technologies of communication. Pynchon’s tone here is biting when he refers to the “secular miracle of communication.” As we see from the other examples, there is no miracle. Far from improving communication, technologies like the telephone expose the preexisting loss. Žižek clarifies that his critique of cyberspace is not meant to “[resurrect] the myth of the good old pre-computerized times when words really counted” (“Cyberspace...” 177). Similarly, the critique implicit in Pynchon’s characterization of telephones does not appeal to a myth of the seamlessness of communication before the advent of cross-country telephone lines. Instead it exposes the ever-present loss.

The failure of previous historical attempts to communicate is cataloged in the false history of The Crying of Lot 49. Oedipa comes to Dr. Bortz with questions about the legitimacy, and even the very reality, of the postal conspiracy she has been chasing. Bortz recounts centuries of European history which seem dubious as he frequently qualifies his story with uncertainties. He mentions a man whose “name is something gutsy like Konrad” (135). Supposedly “Konrad” tried to merge the Trystero with rival postal agency Thurn and Taxis. He proclaimed, “The salvation of Europe [...] depends on communication, right? [...] Whoever could control the lines of communication, among all these princes, would control them” (135). But this attempt at unification is
unsuccessful. Konrad’s “salvation” was not realized. Even so, the “lines of communication” spoken of by “Konrad” are not controlled even on the American mainland of the early 1960s. W.A.S.T.E. shows that even modern communication is not only uncontrollable but problematic. Furthermore we can note here that the very uncertainty of Bortz’s historical narrative implies a failure of communication.

Pynchon notes that language itself functions as these technologies of communication do. Aside from the Trystero, a linguistic entity, the narrator speaks of language itself as a form of substitution. For instance, after Driblette’s suicide:

Oedipa sat on the earth, ass getting cold, wondering whether, as Driblette had suggested that night from the shower, some version of herself hadn’t vanished with him. Perhaps her mind would go on flexing psychic muscles that no longer existed; would be betrayed and mocked by a phantom limb. Someday she might replace whatever of her had gone away by some prosthetic device, a dress of a certain color, a phrase in a letter, another lover. (133)

Language is again characterized as “prosthetic” after a long list of people whom society would deem mentally ill. We are told that they “all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from” (105).

Pynchon’s notion of language-as-prosthesis is similar to Lacanian castration. In “The Seven Veils of Fantasy,” Žižek explains that “symbolic castration” involves the “sense of loss of something which the subject never possessed in the first place” (19). This effect is
again “merely radicaliz[ed]” by technology. Although one may be tempted to blame technologies like the telephone for miscommunication, such an accusation reveals this false sense of loss. We must be careful not to fall into what Žižek notes as “the loop of (symbolic) castration, in which one endeavors to reinstate the lost ‘natural’” (“Cyberspace...” 173).

The concerns voiced in Pynchon’s novel regarding loss are not specific to the postmodern moment. Richard Alan Schwartz notes in his article “Thomas Pynchon and the Evolution of Fiction” that “[Pynchon] uses scientific precepts as a vehicle for discussing human problems” (170). Indeed, we see in The Crying of Lot 49 that the problems technology presents are fundamental human concerns. Our common-sense assumptions about mortality and communication are magnified through the representation of technologies of communication to reveal the uncontrollable nature of loss. Pynchon’s novel argues that loss persists and informs social reality despite any attempt to ignore its presence. The advanced technologies sought by characters as a means of controlling the world of loss are not only insufficient but themselves a “[structure] that nurture[s] death” (Cowley 14). The search for immortality leads only to spectral, haunting machinery; and endeavoring to concretize and secure communication leads instead to the same miscommunication.
Chapter 3

The Psychoanalytic Narrative

In *Freud and the Institution of Psychoanalytic Knowledge*, Sarah Winter argues that Sigmund Freud tactically borrowed and adapted Greek tragedy in order to lend authority to his writing. She argues, “By associating psychoanalysis with Sophoclean tragedy, Freud allied psychoanalytic ideas with a powerful critical discourse on canonical authorship, classical tradition, and formal perfection” (39). Leaning on the canonical authority of Greek tragedy was instrumental in the cultural adoption of Freudian psychoanalysis. In a move analogous to Winter’s claim that psychoanalysis leans on the classical tradition for its own credibility, we can see a similar process in *The Crying of Lot 49* wherein the author associates the novel with psychoanalytic concepts in order to appropriate its domain. In early 1960s America, psychoanalysis was already a target of parody. Pynchon’s novel indicates that psychoanalysis was not taken seriously and was often the subject of jokes. This is evident in the name given to the novel’s psychoanalyst—Dr. Hilarius. It is important to note that in order to parodize in the first place, psychoanalysis must be well-known. As such, the novel uses Freudian psychoanalysis as a foundation on which to build its story. As opposed to using psychoanalytic theory as a frame for understanding the novel, I propose that Pynchon draws on the domain of psychoanalysis in both the novel’s content as well as its form to
appropriate the domain of psychoanalysis for its own narrative authority and mode of storytelling.

_The Crying of Lot 49_ assumes its readers come to the text having a store of knowledge about psychoanalytic theory and practice. Sarah Winter uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of “cultural capital,” explicated in his essay “Forms of Capital,” to explain the significance of the classics in Freud's Austrian gymnasium. Winter defines “cultural capital” as “the knowledge, bearing, pronunciation, tastes, and structure of identity necessary to achieve the ‘material and symbolic profits’ of economic success and social distinction in a particular society” (26). Considering the sociohistorical context of _The Crying of Lot 49_, “knowledge” of psychoanalytic theory was a marker of “social distinction,” if only for the purpose of parody. However, Winter herself argues, “While popularized versions of psychoanalytic ideas are more widespread than classical learning, psychoanalysis itself still lacks the transcendent cultural values of classical literature and its almost unquestioned capacity to confer legitimacy” (280). With Pynchon's novel, we see psychoanalytic theory as in fact possessing some “cultural value” at least in its pervasiveness. Though it may be a source of ridicule, psychoanalysis is ingrained cultural knowledge. The novel appropriates themes of psychoanalytic theory while at the same time subverting its authoritative ability to “confer legitimacy.” I argue, though, that in this very act of parodying Freudian theory lies an attempt to appropriate the narrative domain of psychoanalysis.
Perhaps the most evident psychoanalytic trope in the novel is “projection,” which is used as a literary theme. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, an “alphabetic manual” of psychoanalytic concepts compiled by Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, offers a definition, history, and analysis of the term (xi). The entry for “projection” tells us that Freud used the term earliest in his 1896 essay “Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence.” Laplanche and Pontalis define “projection”:

In the properly psycho-analytic sense: operation whereby qualities, feelings, wishes, or even 'objects', which the subject refuses to recognise or rejects in himself, are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing. Projection is understood as a defence of very primitive origin which may be seen at work especially in paranoia, but also in 'normal' modes of thought such as superstition. (349)

*The Crying of Lot 49* is rife with both “paranoia” and “superstition.” Pynchon plays with the multiple meanings of “projection.” Oedipa's husband Mucho Maas uses the term according to the “properly psycho-analytic sense” noted by Laplanche and Pontalis. He sees used cars as “futureless, automotive projection[s] of somebody else's life” (5). This psychoanalytic concept of “projection” often is invoked when speaking about mechanical projectors. It is used in a way that is not just faithful to Freud's writing; Pynchon also literalizes the concept of projection in the object of the mechanical projector. Randolph Driblette, speaking of his artistic vision after *The Courier's Tragedy*, refers to himself as “the projector at the planetarium” (62). Soon after this event, Oedipa considers the
notion of projection as such; she writes in her memobook: “Shall I project a world?” (64). Although not always explicitly tied to Freud's exact definition, “projection” as a theme in *The Crying of Lot 49* highlights the way in which the novel associates itself with psychoanalysis.

The very name of the novel's protagonist, “Oedipa,” further indicates the novel's play with psychoanalytic tropes. With its use of a well-known Freudian concept like the Oedipus Complex, the novel not only sustains but reconstitutes the realm of psychoanalysis. At first glance, Oedipa's name can be read as indicating something significant about gender and the Oedipus Complex. But instead of offering a commentary on either of these issues, Pynchon asserts a reconstituted domain for psychoanalysis. The most obvious difference between Pynchon’s protagonist and Sophocles' tragic hero is gender given the name's ending. Tracey Sherard argues in “The Birth of the Female Subject in *The Crying of Lot 49*” that the novel asserts a new construction of femininity. Sherard claims that “[t]he object of Oedipa's search is analogous to Cixous's for an essentially feminine written discourse” (60). However, the novel does not support this feminist reading. While Sherard points out that the first page of the novel is littered with references to Oedipa's gender—the words “executrix” and “hostess,” we must consider that the remainder of the novel is not concerned with her gender (61). The feminized ending of her name is nothing more than a red herring. *The Crying of Lot 49* is likewise not concerned with the family dynamics central to the Oedipus Complex. There is no mention of Oedipa's mother or father. Furthermore,
Oedipa and her husband Mucho have no children. Pynchon has removed the name from its original context. He has made a Freudian interpretation of Oedipa's character difficult to justify. Oedipa, unlike Oedipus, does not come to fulfill any prophesied destiny. She has no fate. In fact, her uncertain future is that which so torments her during the quest. Unlike Oedipus, Oedipa is not aware of any prophesy regarding her future. Her quest is not defined as clearly as trying to avoid fulfilling a predetermined fate. Instead, her journey is unencumbered by the concept of destiny. She is unsure of what she is looking for and further clueless as to where she will end up. Significantly, the novel does not offer a conclusion regarding Oedipa's fate. She is no closer to a resolution than she was at the outset of fulfilling her “executrix” duties (1). While Sophocles's story of Oedipa evokes a sense of foreboding in that there is imminent danger lurking with regard to the prophesy, *The Crying of Lot 49* may evoke a feeling of unease but precisely because there is not sure prophesy. Oedipa is without a clearly defined destiny. The manipulation of such an easily recognizable name with psychoanalytic implications like Oedipus into Oedipa highlights the novel's play with psychoanalytic theory. Its presence is taken out of its original context in order to be reconstituted as a narrative device.

*The Crying of Lot 49* is set in the late 1950s, a time when, as Winter notes, Freudian theory was “culturally pervasive as a form of psychological common sense” (4). Being an analysand herself, Oedipa is knowledgeable of psychoanalysis. Winter explains, “[S]ome of Freud’s ideas [...] have gone beyond being possessions of his ‘school’ or entries in textbooks of medical history to become attitudes and ‘complexes,’
explanations that people rely on to make sense of their lives” (7). When the narrator dips into Oedipa’s thought processes, readers become aware of how entrenched she is in thinking psychoanalytically. We are told, after she gets lost in San Narciso, “[T]here seemed no way out of the area. Then, by accident (Dr. Hilarius, if asked, would accuse her of using subliminal cues in the environment to guide her to a particular person) or howsoever, she came on one Stanley Koteks [...]” (67). The very existence of this parenthetical aside shows the pervasiveness of the psychoanalytic lens. She evaluates her actions, and even her inner narrative, through the eyes of her analyst. At 'The Greek Way,' a gay bar she was led to during a tour of San Narciso, Oedipa speaks with a member of Inamorati Anonymous. Inamorati Anonymous is a group which participates in the W.A.S.T.E. system and is composed of people addicted and trying to kick the habit of love. Its name is a play on other addict support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. Speaking to the I.A. member: “Oedipa took off her badge, put it in an ashtray and said, quietly, trying not to suggest hysteria, ‘Look you have to help me. Because I really think I am going out of my head’” (emphasis mine) (90). Oedipa is aware of hysteria; here she is consciously “trying not to suggest” that she warrants such a diagnosis. She is, however, beginning to believe she is “going out of [her] head.” It should be noted here that in the decades after Freud and Breuer's initial studies the term “hysteria” had lost its psychoanalytic connotation and become a more general term. However, given the other instances of Freudian vocabulary in the novel, it is important to understand the term “hysteria” as it is used in the novel as further evidence of the novel’s
appropriation of psychoanalysis. Oedipa is conscious of psychoanalytic theory the same as the reader is. It is this awareness of psychoanalytic interpretation which structures the way she thinks of herself—primarily as a patient, an analysand.

Oedipa sees neurosis as an escape from the dizzying Inverarity estate because she believes that psychoanalysis fulfills a normative function. Having a neurosis would free her from the undecidability of the outside world. She longs for a simple diagnosis: “[S]he wanted it all to be fantasy—some clear result of her several wounds, needs, dark doubles” (107). Even close to the end of the novel, when Oedipa considers the four possible resolutions to the Trystero conspiracy, she “hope[s] she [i]s mentally ill” (141). She believes that clinical psychoanalysis has a normative function. Indeed, in Freud's early case studies the focus is on moving patients toward uncovering the root of their repressive patterns and thereby reintegrating them into society. In one of his few writings on analytic technique, Freud speaks of a “mechanism of cure” wherein the “subject's unity is restored” (“Analytic Therapy”). The goal here is a return to normalcy. This kind of analysis advocated by Freud's early writings would be the “clear” resolution.

Acknowledging Oedipa's mounting frustration regarding the postal conspiracy, the narrator explains:

Either the Trystero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up on and interpenetrated with the dead man’s estate. Here in San Francisco, away from all tangible assets of that estate, there might still be a chance of getting the whole thing to go
away and disintegrate quietly. She had only to drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix. (88)

Here, the narrator invokes the normative capacity of Freudian psychoanalysis. Oedipa’s “purely nervous” condition could be merely “a little something for her shrink to fix.” Indeed, if clinical psychoanalysis were effective as such then Oedipa’s crisis could “disintegrate quietly.” It would be amenable; her treatment would have a definite conclusion.

Oedipa derives her belief in the curative capacity of psychoanalysis from Dr. Hilarius, the novel’s psychoanalyst. Readers get enough information about Dr. Hilarius’s character to roughly piece together his past. Pynchon does not give us an upfront character description, but we learn through the novel that Hilarius is a former Nazi doctor. At Buchenwald, he studied “‘experimentally-induced insanity’” with Adolf Eichmann (112). As Oedipa’s analyst, he practiced in a seemingly unorthodox manner, using odd facial expressions to influence patients and conducting studies regarding the “effects of LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs on a large sample of suburban housewives” (8). When Oedipa visits him late in the novel, he has locked himself in his office. In this scene, the roles are reversed: the former patient is now coaxing the analyst and borrowing heavily from Freud: “‘Face up to your social responsibilities[.]’” Oedipa insists, “‘Accept the reality principle. You’re outnumbered and they have superior firepower’” (111). In this moment the novel exposes the
shortcomings of clinical psychoanalysis. Dr. Hilarius is not successfully reintegrated into society. He cannot “[a]ccept the reality principle.” In fact, the scene in his office is the last we see of his character. Oedipa considers him lost. This moment, where the tables are turned such that the analysand becomes the analyst, points to a shift in psychoanalytic theory. The analyst himself cannot benefit from clinical psychoanalysis.

Hilarius himself renounces the clinical component of Freudian psychoanalysis, a move which motivates his breakdown. When Oedipa arrives, Hilarius has barricaded himself in his office. He explains to her, “I tried [...] to submit myself to that man, to the ghost of that cantankerous Jew. Tried to cultivate a faith in the literal truth of everything he wrote, even the idiocies and contradictions. It was the least I could have done, nicht wahr? A kind of penance” (109). The language he uses indicates the unreasonable expectations of Freud’s clinical psychoanalysis. Note that Hilarius says that he merely “tried”—a word used twice here—to follow Freud. Noting the lack of concrete support for Freud’s clinical practice, he uses the word “faith.” In “Dr. Hilarius as a Reader in Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49,” Tom Allbaugh argues that Oedipa’s central and inconclusive quest is to figure out how to read properly and that she encounters examples of different readers throughout the text. For Allbaugh, Dr. Hilarius is an example of a poor reader, one who focused too much on the literal meaning of the words and has therefore fallen into “madness and isolation” (2). We must see Hilarius’s character not just as an example of misreading. His abandonment of Freud importantly highlights the shifting domain of psychoanalysis. His “faith” cannot hold the weight of reality. His
past as a Nazi doctor haunts him:

“[P]art of me must have really wanted to believe—like a child hearing, in perfect safety, a tale of horror—that the unconscious would be like any other room, once the light was let in. That the dark shapes would resolve only into toy horses and Biedermeyer furniture. That therapy could tame it after all, bring it into society with no fear of its someday reverting. I wanted to believe, despite all my life had been.” (110)

The goal of Freud’s clinical practice is to “let in” the “light” in this way. Hilarius’s character is a weighty symbol of this failure. He can no longer “believe.” There is no cure; he knows this.

Freud himself moved away from the idea of a definitive cure in his later writings. His focus shifted from the individual to culture itself. “Civilization and Its Discontents” hints that there may be a way to understand certain cultural institutions as functioning like the superego:

If the evolution of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations, or some epochs of civilization—possibly even the whole of mankind—have become neurotic? (144)

Here he opens up the possibility of cultural criticism. Thus there is less emphasis on the effectiveness, even the necessity, of clinical practice. The novel shows us Hilarius
questioning Freud's early, clinical work. Even before his breakdown, the analyst's attitude is not quite in line with that of a Freudian trying to help his patient come to terms with social reality. He calls at three in the morning to persuade Oedipa to take part in his psychedelics experiment. Refusing, Oedipa explains that “[s]he didn’t want to get hooked in any way.” Hilarius responds, “‘So […] on me are you not hooked? Leave then. You’re cured.’” The narrator comments, “Who’d know the day she was cured? Not [Hilarius], he’d admitted that himself” (8). Even this early in the novel Hilarius does not seem to have faith in Freud's clinical writing. His patients cannot be “cured” or reintegrated into society. This task is especially difficult if, as implied by “Civilization and Its Discontents,” society itself is a cause of neurosis.

Dr. Hilarius’s attitude changes radically once he has his breakdown. After chasing the postal conspiracy, Oedipa goes to his office in hopes of forgetting the Trystero and going back to the clichéd suburban life she inhabited at the outset of the novel:

“I came,” she said, “hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy.”

“Cherish it!” cried Hilarius, fiercely. “What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don’t let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be.” (113)

Here, he clearly distances himself from “the Freudians.” We must consider, then, if he qualifies as a Lacanian. Oedipa wishes for her analyst to “talk [her] out of a fantasy,” and
he refuses emphatically. His reasoning for this is similar to the Lacanian conception of desire as constitutive of the self. Desire is individuation. Without it, Oedipa would “go over […] to the others.” That is, she would lose what makes her an individual. Hilarius figures this as detrimental, therefore he responds insistently that she “[c]herish” her desire.

This move from the Freudian to the Lacanian is evident also in the shift of the novel’s play with psychoanalytic concepts. The name of the fictional Southern Californian city where most of Oedipa's journey takes place—“San Narciso”—is a clear play on words indicating the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism. Oedipa travels to San Narciso when trying to sort out Pierce Inverarity's estate. It is a curiously self-contained community, having, among other things, its own highway. Most of the novel is set here: Oedipa meets members of W.A.S.T.E. in the Yoyodyne company bar The Scope; Dr. Emory Bortz teaches at the college in town; Oedipa sees Driblette's production of The Courier's Tragedy here. All of these companies and institutions, the entire city as far as Oedipa can tell, is connected in some way to the Inverarity estate. San Narciso is Pierce's city. Its name implies self-admiration; he built an entire city in his image.

San Narciso, the mirror city, points to a Freudian concept which Jacques Lacan adopts for his conception of the “Mirror Stage.” The mirror stage is a point in infantile development wherein the child is first able to recognize him or herself in a mirror. Lacan explains in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” that a “transformation […] takes place in the subject when he
assumes an image” (76). This stage is crucial in the development of a sense of self although Lacan considers this a “misrecognition” in that the child identifies with the image reflected back to him. Laplanche and Pontalis explain this concept in relation to Freud:

There is one important difference […] Lacan sees the mirror phase as responsible, retroactively, for the emergence of the phantasy of the body-in-pieces. This type of dialectical relation may be observed in the course of psycho-analytic treatment, where anxiety about fragmentation can at times be seen to arise as a consequence of loss of narcissistic identification, and vice versa. (251-252)

This “loss of narcissistic identification” occurs thematically as a result of Pierce's death. His mirror city has lost its subject. Similar trouble with mirrors occurs in the hotel room while Oedipa and Pierce's lawyer, Metzger, are supposed to be sorting through the dead man's will. Drunk and stumbling, Oedipa causes a hairspray can to fly indiscriminately through the bathroom. It hits the mirror “leaving a silvery, reticulated bloom of glass to hang a second before it [falls]” (25). Later, the narrator tells us, “Things grew less and less clear. At some point [Oedipa] went into the bathroom, tried to find her image in the mirror and couldn’t. She had a moment of nearly pure terror. Then remembered that the mirror had broken and fallen into the sink” (29). Here again is what Laplanche and Pontalis call a “loss of narcissistic identification.” What results, according to their definition of the “Mirror Stage,” is “anxiety about fragmentation.” This anxiety is
evident throughout the novel. San Narciso exists as fragmented as the hotel room's broken mirror; its fragmented narrative possibilities carry on in their dizzying discontinuity.

After Pierce's death, Oedipa is unable to piece together these fragments without help from others. Her experts repeatedly fail her. Speaking to Driblette after he has died, she says, “If they got rid of you for the reason they got rid of Hilarius and Mucho and Metzger—maybe because they thought I no longer needed you. They were wrong. I needed you” (133). She believes that each of these men were meant to help her sort out her life into a palatable narrative. Driblette, a literary man who might have been able to help her trace the usage of the word “Trystero,” commits suicide. Hilarius breaks down and abandons clinical psychoanalysis. Her husband Mucho effectively turns into a different person after using psychedelics. Metzger, Pierce's lawyer, should have been able to help her sort through Inverarity's estate. Instead he seduced her and then ran away with a younger woman. Oedipa not only recognizes that these authorities can no longer guide her, but she also develops a creeping suspicion of the fallibility of their authority.

Regarding the lines added to The Courier's Tragedy which Driblette refused to explain, she wonders, “Had he even known why?” (133). She is left without guidance, wandering among the fragmented narrative possibilities.

Our certainty as readers is problematized by the narrator. Indeed, the narrator's authority is directly questioned. Even when the third-person voice seems to exist outside of the influence of the protagonist’s consciousness, there is notable uncertainty in the
narrator's explanations. Speaking of Oedipa and Metzger’s trip to a San Narciso bar, the narrator starts, “It may have been that same evening [...]” (33). It is one thing for the reader to acknowledge the unreliability of a human character in retelling a story, but it is more radically jarring when the third-person narrator admits its own fallibility. We therefore cannot be sure what exactly is happening and in what order. The authority of the narrator is called into question by Oedipa herself. She undermines the authority of Dr. Bortz as he recalls the history of the Trystero. “‘Suggested by who, though,’” Oedipa asks, “‘Did you read that someplace?’” Bortz responds unfazed, “‘Wouldn’t somebody have brought it up? [...] Maybe not.’” (137). Shrugging off the question, he continues with the historical narrative which we as readers must see as unreliable. The position of the narrator in this novel is not a privileged point of view. Though Oedipa doubts the authority of the narrator, the narrator cannot see beyond Oedipa’s thoughts. The reader then knows nothing more than the protagonist, and the narrator reveals his own uncertainty.

Oedipa is often distraught at the undecidability of other characters in the novel. Although she has abandoned Mucho for the Trystero, Oedipa is upset by his dramatic personality shift. He has taken part in Dr. Hilarius’s LSD experiments, and his boss at the radio station describes him as no longer a unified self. Speaking with him, Oedipa realizes, “She didn't know him. Panic climbed out of a dark region of her head” (117). Dead or alive, Driblette's motivations are of great concern to her; she strives to know him so as to resolve the Trystero mystery. After his suicide, she speaks with Professor Bortz
about Driblette's version of *The Courier's Tragedy*. Oedipa seems sure that "'something must have happened in his personal life, something must have changed for him drastically that night, and that's what made him put the lines in.'" Bortz responds to this by asking, "'You think a man's mind is a pool table?'" Though Oedipa answers that she "'hope[s] not,'" it is clear that she holds faith in the pool-table model of reality. She believes that an explanation can be uncovered. The implication is that people do not exist necessarily as easily decipherable entities. Their personalities are fragmented. However the role of psychoanalysis as narrative can aid the fragmented self. Psychoanalysis offers a domain of storytelling concerned with the construction of self. The novel occupies this space. For Pynchon, psychoanalysis is about weaving a narrative of self. This narrative is not easily constructed or concluded. Rather we see an emergent sense of self, one which is pulled together out of fragments, continually reconstituted and revised.

Having to deal with an undecidable world, Oedipa must project her own desires in an effort to piece together a narrative. Mike Fallopian tries to make her aware of this self-deluding act. He instructs Oedipa regarding the increasingly hallucinatory postal conspiracy, "'Write down what you can’t deny. Your hard intelligence. But then write down what you’ve only speculated, assumed’" (138). If readers were to do the same with the novel’s events, the task would be disorienting. The fact that the narrator is at times indistinguishable from Oedipa's thoughts confuses the reader. Just over halfway through *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa sleeps fitfully and we are told, "'What fragments of dreams came had to do with the posthorn. Later, possibly, she would have trouble sorting the
night into real and dreamed” (95). It is not outrageous to propose that what follows in the novel could very well have been imagined, or projected, by Oedipa. We must also consider what might have been “dreamed” by the protagonist throughout the novel given her early acknowledgment of projection: “If not project then at least flash some arrow on the dome to skitter among constellations and trace out your Dragon, Whale, Southern Cross. Anything might help” (65). The narrator tells us that, as Oedipa drives to speak with Genghis Cohen about Inverarity’s stamp collection, “She was somehow sure, driving in on the slick freeway, that the ‘irregularities’ would tie in with the word Trystero” (emphasis mine) (75). The narrator implores us to believe in Oedipa even when she seems to be “flash[ing] some arrow” to make connections. Our protagonist constructs the narrative of the Trystero conspiracy. Of course, the novel makes any investigation thereof only speculative if not wholly impossible. With no authority—not even a reliable narrator—left to pin down the narrative, the positive-feedback loop of narrative possibilities leaves Oedipa paranoid and projecting her desire for a unified narrative.

Instead of acknowledging the undecidability of postmodern narrative, Oedipa blames herself, that is, her lacking mental faculties for her inability to fully understand the entirety of the postal conspiracy. The narrator informs us of this idea that somehow the truth’s incomprehensibility is due only to not being observant enough:

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals […], as the epileptic is said to —an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure.

Afterward it is only this signal […] and never what is revealed during the
attack [...] that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (76)

The narrative does function in this way: it has an empty center around which “compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations” circulate and proliferate. Like the epilepsy metaphor, we are told when “a revelation [...] tremble[s] past the threshold of her understanding” (14). While speaking with Driblette, “Something came to her viscera, danced briefly, and went” (61). These moments torment her. She laments “[a]ll these fatigued brain cells between herself and the truth” (74). Oedipa believes that she can put together a cohesive narrative, but her endless quest does not conform.

Reading the novel as advancing a Lacanian perspective can illuminate why sex, understood typically as the crux of psychoanalytic inquiry, plays such a small role in the novel. The only sex in the novel is between Oedipa and Metzger. It is an easily overlooked scene, the disappointing and anticlimactic result of “strip Botticelli.” Oedipa goes so far as to avoid sex by piling on layers of clothes before the game. She's so drunk that she hardly participates: “She awoke at last to find herself getting laid; she'd come in on a sexual crescendo in progress, like a cut to a scene where the camera's already
moving” (29). In his essay “God is Dead but He Doesn't Know It: Lacan Plays with Bobok,” Slavoj Žižek explains the “false free choice” of the Lacanian superego. It is significantly different from Freud's conception of the superego as prohibitive. This new understanding of the superego sheds light on the changed role of psychoanalysis:

Traditionally, psychoanalysis was expected to allow the patient to overcome the obstacles that deprived him or her of access to normal sexual satisfaction: if you can't achieve it, go to the analyst who will enable you to get rid of your inhibitions. Today, however, we are bombarded from all sides by different versions of the injunction to “Enjoy!” [...]. Enjoyment today effectively functions as a strange ethical duty: individuals feel guilty [...] for not being able to enjoy. In this situation, psychoanalysis is the only discourse in which you are allowed not to enjoy—*not forbidden to enjoy, just relieved of the pressure to do so.*

(104)

It is this way in which psychoanalysis has changed even since “Civilization and Its Discontents.” Freud’s understanding even in this essay was of a superego which functions to suppress and forbid enjoyment. Žižek’s claim is that the superego’s function has reversed, that the superego now perversely mandates enjoyment. So, no longer do analysts “allow the patient to overcome the obstacles” that prohibit them from functioning normally. Instead, psychoanalysis is a space that resists the “pressure” of this new incarnation of the cultural superego which perversely insists that one always enjoys.
The domain of psychoanalysis is not constituted in *The Crying of Lot 49* as sexual. Instead, its worth comes from being what Žižek calls “the only discourse in which you are allowed not to enjoy.” The novel appropriates this space wherein one is free from the perverse mandate of enjoyment.

Ultimately the narrative form of *The Crying of Lot 49* mimics the notion of the Lacanian drive. The narratives of *The Crying of Lot 49* exist only to perpetuate themselves, not to read a conclusion. In a world lacking the kind of resolution which clinical Freudian psychoanalysis offered, a new narrative form is modeled by the novel. This form is reflected on the level of the novel itself as well as on the thematic level of the Trystero conspiracy. Other minor storylines, *The Courier’s Tragedy* in particular, reflect this. Storytelling in the novel is circular, uncertain, and without definitive closure. Threads of narrative proliferate without clearly delineated causality or resolution. These traits are uniquely postmodern as well as Lacanian. Lacan’s conception of the drive is a helpful model for understanding this narrative form. In “The Partial Drive and Its Circuit,” he explains, “If the drive may be satisfied without attaining what, from the point of view of a biological totalization of function, would be the satisfaction of its end of reproduction, it is because it is a partial drive, and its aim is simply this return into circuit” (179). The novel's narrative form concludes physically with the last page “without attaining” a resolution to the Trystero conspiracy. Instead the protagonist is left at the auction of Inverarity's curiously counterfeit stamp collection. We can see that the plot serves this end. The “aim is simply this return into circuit,” not resolution of the
mystery of the narrative. In this way we see the narratives of the novel circulate, perpetuating themselves without ever reaching a resolution.

In “Oedipa Crisis: Paranoia and Prohibition in The Crying of Lot 49,” Gregory Flaxman argues that Oedipa cannot accept uncertainty. He explains, “Oedipa realizes, at the novel’s end, that the only possible certainty is the certainty of waiting and, at the limits of that horizon, the certainty of doubt” (58). It is important to consider Flaxman’s argument in light of the novel’s imitation of the path of the Lacanian drive. Instead of reaching a resolution at the end of the novel, Oedipa moves circuitously around the goal of the Tryster’s meaning. Her search perpetuates itself in its increasingly disorienting positive-feedback loop of clues. The novel acts the same for us as readers. Like Oedipa we try to piece together a unified meaning, only to find ourselves pulled into an endless story.
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