



The Strangeness of Allegory

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Chapter 8. Sabbath

Here are two quotations that pose, in very different ways, problems of borders crossed and realities confused.

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint: now, 'tis true,
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell;
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands:
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

Epilogue, The Tempest

The father was huddled in a shellhole on the steep cliffs of the Anzac beachhead, Turkish shrapnel flying all over the place. Neither Baby Igor nor Murray the dog were in evidence. "Now what the hell," said Oedipa.

"Golly," Metzger said, "they must have got the reels screwed up."

"Is this before or after?" she asked, reaching for the tequila bottle, a move that put her left breast in the region of Metzger's nose. The irrepressibly comic Metzger made crosseyes before replying.

*The Crying of Lot 49*¹

¹ The text of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* quoted here and throughout is that published by J. B. Lippincott Company, New York, 1965 (p. 35).

Closure in allegory is no less problematic and no less rich than opening. Closure, after all, is just another form of enclosure, and allegory resists it as insistently as it opposes any other sort of limit. In Prospero's final speech, the facts of the stage and the "facts" of the drama merge completely to make his statements literal and metaphoric, exact and figurative, at the same time in the same words. The actor will be trapped in the role, the mage fixed on the "bare island" of the stage, unless the audience accepts the magical power thrust outward to them from that stage and uses it to intervene in the action, ending the game by entering it, reproducing Prospero's magical gestures to free the actor trapped inside Prospero as Ariel was trapped in the tree, turning the play of the play into the earnest of "real life," granting indulgence "As you from crimes would pardon'd be." The audience extends the action of the play outside the play and the stage by replicating the actions of Prospero on the stage. *The Tempest* doesn't close so much as it opens, spills over into its audience and makes that audience complicitous in its actions – as in fact the audience has been at least from the moment in the second scene when Prospero told Miranda, and reminded us, that everything we see on that stage is an illusion that "convinces" us only because we conspire with it. Prospero's epilogue is no afterthought but the logical, the allegorically necessary, opening out of *The Tempest* into the wide world of journeys and storms the audience inhabits.

Pores

Indeed, allegorical closure is usually just such a form of opening: characteristically, allegories simply stop rather than close, and they stop by enacting their ontological openness rather than their textual containment. They break the confines of whatever super-form or meta-form has seemed to hold them. In the final analysis, allegories cease to exist as words on a page in order to – and because they have – come into existence as a *gestalt* in their reader. Mimesis and its shifts – the jump from acting to enactment, reading or seeing to participating – create and are created by allegory and its discontinuities. One could make a strong case for allegory's arising from and by discontinuities of the very sort that conventional narrative and conventional notions of narrative or history or logic will not tolerate. Pynchon's marvelous juxtapositions of disparate acts and discrete orders of being in *The Crying of Lot 49* illustrates such discontinuities and disjunctions clearly: even in so small a fragment of the work as the few lines quoted above, the anti-logical, anti-sequential intersections of sex and soap opera, historical events and personal losses, public and private, past and present, events and their representation produce not merely comedy but the conflation of what we normally regard as separate levels or versions of reality.

Aspects of reality that we normally accept as equally "true" but that we keep separate, compartmentalized, crash together in Pynchon's prose with disorienting impact. Even when we view the phenomena in question – for example, the sexual drive and the comic urge – as continuous even though separate, like color bands in a spectrum, or separate and ranked, hierarchical, in the manner of steps on a ladder, their forced collocation, their enjambment, in fiction has the same disordering effect upon the reader. It enacts in prose boundaries crossed and proprieties violated, expectations upset, with consequent shattering of the conventional readerly relation to the text – which is exactly why allegory uses the technique. Allegory jumps intervening steps and shades to juxtapose extremities: the events in Baby Igor's grade-Z, World War I movie – themselves already at a remove from the historical events they draw on ("I know

this part," Metzger told her, his eyes squeezed shut, head away from the set. "For fifty yards out the sea was red with blood. They don't show that." [35]) – actually affect the actions of Metzger (formerly Baby Igor) and Oedipa in the present. The sequential and narrative discontinuities enacted epigrammatically by the jumbling of reels (reals) in the Baby Igor film both mirror and anticipate the narrative, logical, and sequential discontinuities in which Oedipa here participates and in which she – and we – will wander for the rest of the novel. She – and we – will become an Ariadne who has lost the thread, trying to figure out the pattern of the labyrinth in order to make sense of it and get out of it.

Allegory as a form or mode or genre – whichever it may be – takes as its most fundamental assumption the reality of a multiplex, multivalent universe. It accepts even the possibility that that convolute universe is ultimately patternless, or at best so vast and so intricate as to overflow the human mind. And as its second most important assumption (you can reverse the priorities if you like), allegory posits the co-equal reality of the human mind's propensity for pattern-finding or pattern-making. So in embodying and reflecting the universes in which they transpire, allegories often make themselves into a *gestalt* or incorporate significant *gestalts* within themselves. Every *gestalt* requires three things: enough data to make a pattern or patterns possible; enough lacunae to make any single pattern evitable; and a mind to perceive or create a pattern or patterns. Unlike other kinds of writing whose formal structures and patterns of imagery or figuration exist "objectively" – i.e., as factual elements of a text, as constructs of language and images without lacunae – allegory creates its most significant structures "subjectively," in the minds of its readers. More conventional forms of literature cannot afford the *gestalt*-gaps and discontinuities that allegory builds on because they are striving after what Deconstruction denounces as "the teleology of controlled meaning." Allegory is not so striving, though it is much more ambitious. In the finite system that is any literary text, allegory creates the possibility of infinite variation, infinite signification, by its constant inclusion of the single most powerful variable available to it: its reader.

Discontinuities are the heart of allegory and its seedbed. Discontinuities, aporia, lacunae, gaps, holes, disparities, misfits, incommensurabilities, inappropriatenesses, indecorums, irregularities, illegalities, incongruities, illogicalities, irrationalities, contrary-to-fact conditions, impossibilities, paradoxes, ironies, allegories: they arise out of and create each other. Typically, even in their barest *littera*, allegories engage the actions of opening, disclosing, enlarging, freeing, moving on. Allegories tend to be written at those historical junctures when the world-as-it-is-perceived-to-be no longer meshes with the available descriptions (or prescriptions) of the world-as-it-is-supposed-to-be, which is one of the reasons that a criticism that is only historically driven or historically determined can never fully comprehend them. Like St. Paul reviewing the Torah, such criticism refuses to recognize gaps and discontinuities. Rather, like Paul, it disguises them as transmissions and inheritances. Contrarily, allegory focuses itself and us precisely on the gaps in the transmission, on what is left out of the heritage. Allegory wants to lead us into the free spaces between the dots and dashes of preordained codes, into that open, unstructured indeterminacy that Pynchon will image, in *The Crying of Lot 49* and in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as *dt*, the nanosecond in which change takes place.

So strong is the readerly tendency to resist allegorical openness that it can make whole generations of readers – strong readers as well as weak, appreciators as well as agonists –

simply look past obvious gaps and disparities in search of a putative and highly suspect regularity and/or orthodoxy. Where is the whole body of the medieval church and what is its role in Dante's salvation? Where is all the praise of prudence that criticism has imagined in *Joseph Andrews*? The closer one looks at even a marginally allegorical text such as Fielding's first novel, the more one sees incommensurabilities masquerading as narrative cohesion. Putting aside for a moment the large-scale alterations of narrative mode that sharply distinguish book from book in *Joseph Andrews*,² consider only the incongruities and utter, bald, artificiality of the interpolated tales of "Leonora, or the Unfortunate Jilt," and of Leonard and Paul, or of Adams's and Wilson's midnight symposium on *The Iliad*, or even of the argument of the poet and the player. These are only the formal disparities that the novel incorporates, and indeed only the largest-scale examples of those: such incongruities and indecorums continue down to the minutest levels of style and paragraph structure.

Of course most such elements and events can be accounted for, can be made to fit: that has always been the principal endeavor of conventional criticism in this and similar cases. But such apologetic efforts ignore – as most criticism has continuously chosen to do – the most glaring characteristic of elements like these, which is their misfit, their inappropriateness. In an author like Fielding, who knew his Aeschylus and his Aristotle at least as well his characters do, these "failures" of basic plot unity are egregious – as they are meant to be. They are there to shock us out of our readerly lethargy and to prod us out of our safe patterns and to shove us willy-nilly into the freedom of the structureless void, where only our own energetic efforts to understand can create new patterns to replace the exploded old ones. "The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up."³

Spores

Lord Jim incarnates a paradigm of the lacunate allegorical text, a narrative shot through with rents and fissures in continuity and point of view, fragments of fictional perspective encapsulating a crucial central void, which is Jim's apparent – apparent because never actually narrated – jump from the Patna. As Frederic Jameson so acutely remarks in his landmark essay on *Lord Jim*, Conrad's novel is:

a privileged text in this respect – a kind of reflexive or meta-text – in that its narrative construes the "event" as the analysis and dissolution of events in some more common everyday naive sense. The "event" in *Lord Jim* is the analysis and dissolution of the event. . . . We have understood very little about this narrative unless we have come to

² Fielding's strategy and the results he seems to be looking for bear comparison to the radically different narrative strategies of each of the four books of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, though there the allegory, if there is any at all, is far different from the simple-minded analogies usually suggested for bits and pieces of it (Little Endians and Big Endians = High Church and Low Church, Laputa = the Court, or the Court party, etc.).

³ The quotation is from Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, edited by Morton Dauwen Zabel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, The Riverside Edition, 1958), p. 153. All subsequent quotations will be from this edition. Not the least part of the richness of reference and signification of these words that Conrad puts in Stein's mouth is their distinct recollection of Satan's arduous journey through the destructive elements of Chaos in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

realize that even that “real story” itself is for Conrad hollow and empty, and that there is a void at the heart of events and acts in this work which goes well beyond simple anecdotal mystification.⁴

Even in its largest structures, *Lord Jim* is fissured, divided between the Patna and Patusan stories, fragmented into detective story and adventure story, popular romance and high literature. The interpretations fostered by those differing and often antagonistic elements of Conrad’s text are equally varied and antagonistic. Jameson concisely categorizes and describes them for us:

[T]he “romance” or mass-cultural reading of Conrad as a writer of adventure tales, sea narratives, and “popular” yarns; and the stylistic analysis of Conrad as a practitioner of what we will shortly term a properly “impressionistic” will to style. . . . we can distinguish other influential kinds of readings: the myth-critical, for instance, in which *Nostromo* is seen as the articulation of the archetype of buried treasure; the Freudian, in which the failure of Oedipal resolution is ratified by the grisly ritual execution of Conrad’s two son-heroes (Jim and Nostromo) by their spiritual fathers; the ethical, in which Conrad’s texts are taken literally as books which raise the “issues” of heroism and courage, of honor and cowardice; the ego-psychological, in which the story of Jim is interpreted as the search for identity or psychic unity; the existential, in which the omnipresent themes of the meaninglessness and absurdity of human existence are foregrounded as “message” and as “world-view”; and finally, more formidable than any of these, the Nietzschean reading of Conrad’s political vision as a struggle against *ressentiment*, and the structuralist-textual reading of Conrad’s form as an immanent dramatization of the impossibility of narrative beginnings and as the increasing reflexivity and problematization of linear narrative itself. (208-209)

To this list we should also add Jameson’s own interpretation of the novel, which – he claims – supercedes and indeed either includes or precludes all the others: that the “aestheticizing strategy” (230) of Conrad’s prose works to disguise the real content of the work, an “examination of what an act and what a temporal instant really are” (262), and that

Conrad’s work finally becomes contiguous to the elaborate presentation and self-questioning of the British aristocratic bureaucracy in Ford’s *Parade’s End*, and uses much the same anecdotal form of social *scandal* to deconceal social institutions otherwise imperceptible to the naked eye. In both works, therefore, the existential ‘extreme situation’ (the Patna’s bulkhead, World War I) is less a laboratory experiment designed to expose the inner articulation of the act and of the instant than the precondition for the revelation of the texture of ideology. (265)

⁴ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 257. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, Jameson’s view of Conrad became the canonical, almost canonized, understanding of *Lord Jim*, and as such I felt compelled to deal with it at length. Time has passed, and I now think it more appropriate to move most of that portion of my discussion of *Lord Jim* to an appendix, where you will now find it.

Clearly, no one ever accused Jameson's prose of an esthetizing strategy. The "texture of ideology" seems – and is – far removed from the texture of Conrad's prose, and Jameson's comments on that prose are often – too often – also at a far remove from its details. For instance: Jameson's remarks on the episode of Jim's escape from Rajah Allang's stockade focus on "the inner structure of this event" (257), which for him is revealed in Jim's maintaining that in the midst of it all "he slept – perhaps for a minute, perhaps for twenty seconds, or only for one second" (*Lord Jim*, 183). Jameson construes this whole section in the light of this brief oblivion and uses it as springboard for a meditation on time and on the existential absence of "any irreducible temporal present or presence at the heart of a project" (259). The "act itself suddenly yawns and discloses at its heart a void which is at one with the temporary extinction of the subject" (260).

Now, this is an interesting extrapolation from Conrad's text, and is even, in the particular of Jim's falling asleep, compatible with it. But it itself enacts a "temporary extinction of the subject": It is not a reading of Conrad's text, certainly not in its entirety. What happened to all the other particulars of the episode, the facts of the compound, the geography of the escape, Jim's specific actions? None of these is adequately accounted for, and several are not even mentioned. Jameson's exegesis reads parts of the episode well enough. The emphasis on time is certainly there; after all, Jim is repairing a clock just before he makes his escape. And the void is there, if you are willing to take Jim's falling asleep for a moment as "the extinction of the subject." But does that observation, even in Jameson's terms, explain the inner structure of the event? I say not, for the simple reason that it leaves too much out – as must every ideologically bounded reading of *Lord Jim*, or of any other text worth bothering with.

We need to have the episode in its entirety before us. Jim is being detained in Rajah Allang's stockade, and has been there apparently for several days.

They did actually bring out to him a nickel clock of New England make, and out of sheer unbearable boredom he busied himself in trying to get the alarum to work. It was apparently when thus occupied in his shed that the true perception of his extreme peril dawned upon him. He dropped the thing – he says – 'like a hot potato,' and walked out hastily, without the slightest idea of what he would, or indeed could, do. He only knew that the position was intolerable. He strolled aimlessly beyond a sort of ramshackle little granary on posts, and his eyes fell on the broken stakes of the palisade; and then – he says – at once, without any mental process as it were, without any stir of emotion, he set about his escape as if executing a plan matured for a month. He walked off carelessly to give himself a good run, and when he faced about there was some dignitary, with two spearmen in attendance, close at his elbow ready with a question. He started off 'from under his very nose,' went over 'like a bird,' and landed on the other side with a fall that jarred all his bones and seemed to split his head. He picked himself up instantly. He never thought of anything at the time; all he could remember – he said – was a great yell; the first houses of Patusan were before him four hundred yards away; he saw the creek, and as it were mechanically put on more pace. The earth seemed fairly to fly backwards under his feet. He took off from the last dry spot, felt himself flying through the air, felt himself, without any shock, planted upright in an extremely soft and sticky mudbank. . . . The higher firm ground was about six feet in front of him. "I thought I would have to die there

all the same,' he said. He reached and grabbed desperately with his hands, and only succeeded in gathering a horrible cold shiny heap of slime against his breast – up to his very chin. It seemed to him he was burying himself alive, and then he struck out madly, scattering the mud with his fists. It fell on his head, on his face, over his eyes, into his mouth. He told me that he remembered suddenly the courtyard, as you remember a place where you had been very happy years ago. He longed – so he said – to be back there again, mending the clock. Mending the clock – that was the idea. He made efforts, tremendous sobbing, gasping efforts, efforts that seemed to burst his eyeballs in their sockets and make him blind, and culminating into one mighty supreme effort in the darkness to crack the earth asunder, to throw it off his limbs – and he felt himself creeping feebly up the bank. He lay full length on the firm ground and saw the light, the sky. Then as a sort of happy thought the notion came to him that he would go to sleep. He will have that he *did* actually go to sleep; that he slept – perhaps for a minute, perhaps for twenty seconds, or only for one second, but he recollects distinctly the violent convulsive start of awakening. He remained lying still for a while, and then he arose muddy from head to foot and stood there, thinking he was alone of his kind for hundreds of miles, alone, with no help, no sympathy, no pity to expect from anyone, like a hunted animal. (181-183)

Jim's escape from Rajah Allang's stockade is an extraordinarily dense episode. Where to begin with it? Let us start with the clock: "Mending the clock – that was the idea." In its most literal manifestation, the broken "nickel clock of New England make" serves as a crystalline Conradian objective correlative, summing up Jim's situation: he lives in suspended animation, pacing Rajah Allang's stockade, doing nothing, killing time. He has passed outside the sphere of the mechanized world, the Western world of clock time and the worked metal objects – like the clock, like the Patna's bulkhead – that measure and contain lives.

Jim lives in stopped time and has so lived, ever since he jumped from the Patna – a jump he cannot remember ("I had jumped' . . . He checked himself, averted his gaze . . . 'It seems,' he added." 81). Here, after his flying leap over the stockade fence, he briefly falls asleep – that is, into a void, which like the central void of his moment of jumping from the Patna defines the missing subject at the center of Conrad's narrative. The moment that is present in its absence, whose presence is an absence; the arc of the leap that bears the jumper across orders of being, across lives; the stopped time of broken faith and abandoned duty, of opportunity missed, of hesitations forestalling action, and of thinking freezing the thinker and the moment – all these can be released only by a movement out of time entirely, a passage out of the fixed present moment of clock time and into a different sort of timelessness, an absence of time marked by an absence of self-consciousness, an absence of reflexiveness, and an absence of Westerners.

The step-by-step and largely inadvertent pilgrimage that Jim makes in answer to his exacting faith takes him counter to the movement of time and the sun, eastward to beginnings and to the dawn of time, of human time at any rate, back to a Homeric world and out of the world of Shakespeare – "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,/ That ever I was born to set it right" – whose Hamlet has haunted the pages of *Lord Jim* at least since Stein started paraphrasing key bits of it ("This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature. . . . Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece" [149]; "How to be! *Ach!* How to be" [153]). Jim moves back before interiority and

before self-consciousness, if you will, before the soliloquy and the interior monologue, to a world where ideas come to one seemingly from the outside, “without any mental process as it were.”

At the same time, that world is – *is*, not figures – those mental processes. Like the Homeric world it mimics, Conrad’s Patusan and Conrad’s prose actively and insistently “foreground” everything, externalize interior acts.⁵ Figuration and its submerged meanings, its implied “insides” of language and ideas and persons, come earlier in the novel, in the world of clock time and incontrovertible facts. Back then, at the trial, Jim cannot externalize his thoughts, cannot say what he means, and his interior reality can only be described figuratively:

The facts these men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time. . . . and something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body. He was anxious to make this clear. . . . He wanted to go on talking for truth’s sake, perhaps for his own sake also; and while his utterance was deliberate, his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind: it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find a weak spot, a crevice, a place to scale, some opening through which it may squeeze itself and escape. This awful activity of mind made him hesitate at times in his speech. (24)

Jim’s situation in Rajah Allang’s stockade literalizes the imagery that had earlier described his mind: in Patusan he is literally “alone of his kind” – whatever kind that may be. He even “flies” as his mind does in the earlier passage: the earth flies back from his feet, he takes off, he feels himself flying through the air. We read those statements as hyperboles, as trite figures of speech, but their literal statement concretizes and realizes what Conrad had earlier depicted metaphorically as the frenzied activity of Jim’s mind seeking to break its enclosure. The two passages both polarize and pollute each other: in the “real” world of the Patna debacle and the trial, figurative language dominates an investigation into the facts. In its mirror image, in a world of romance, facts usurp the place of figures, actions the functions of thoughts. That the two passages are intimately connected is perfectly clear; how they are connected, and what the linkage means is much less so. The reader’s problem is what and how to make of this particular breaching of separate and seemingly discrete orders of being and modes of writing about them. Precisely in such knotty collocations lie the seeds of allegory in *Lord Jim*.

These are not yet all of the faces of the interpretive box: the linguistic stockade of Conrad’s prose makes a more substantial enclosure for the reader than the flimsy palisades of Rajah Allang’s courtyard do for Jim. In complex and mysterious ways, the simple physical setting of the stockade is charged with potential significance by its replication of Conrad’s earlier

⁵ I take the word and concept of foregrounding, in the sense used here, from Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, wherein he describes Homeric style much as I am at the moment describing Conrad’s in the Patusan episodes. Need I add that I do not believe that Homer – whoever and however many he may have been – was any less aware of the effect of his language than Conrad?

description of Jim's mental processes, but exactly how and what that significance is does not surrender itself easily to a reader. So too, echoes of Jim's Hamlet-like hesitations come home to roost in his mending the clock, which is in itself an action rich in other sorts of significance – for instance, the implications about existential time that Jameson seizes upon. Beyond and before these, there is also the matter of Jim's imprisonment, both as a narrative fact and, at very least, as a quite transparent psychological and even sociological metaphor – and its significance is further compounded by its forming one more link in the chain that binds Jim to his *doppelgänger*, Gentleman Brown, who later confesses to him:

“This is as good a jumping-off place for me as another. I am sick of my infernal luck. But it would be too easy. There are my men in the same boat – and, by God, I am not the sort to jump out of trouble and leave them in a d—d lurch. . . . I am here because I was afraid once in my life. Want to know of what? Of a prison. That scares me, and you may know it – if it's any good to you. I won't ask what scared you into this infernal hole. . . .” (275-276).

Brown's repetition of “jump,” besides stirring in Jim memories of his own fateful jump from the Patna, feeds even greater resonance back into the episode of Jim's escape from the stockade, because his meeting with Brown takes place at the same spot. Conrad's language once again insists on our seeing the interconnectedness of all these events, their as-it-were simultaneity in the phase space of allegory:

They met, I should think, not very far from the place, perhaps on the very spot, where Jim took the second desperate leap of his life – the leap that landed him into the life of Patusan. . . . They faced each other across the creek, and with steady eyes tried to understand each other before they opened their lips. . . .”

“The fellow started at this,’ said Brown, relating to me the opening of this strange conversation between those two men, separated only by the muddy bed of a creek, but standing on the opposite poles of that conception of life which includes all mankind.” (273-274)

As you can see, this later incident even retrospectively tells us explicitly what we all infer in the earlier episode, that the creek embodies some kind of boundary and that Jim's crossing that creek enacts a transition from one state of being to another, a transition considerably less clear-cut but just as profound as Dante's in crossing Styx or Lethe. But primarily this meeting with Brown emphasizes the linkage of the leap from Rajah Allang's stockade with Jim's jump from the Patna. It makes us see the structural sutures that bind the two supposedly opposed halves of the novel together, each built around an initiatory leap and a subsequent trial and judgment. They are opposed only as mirrors are opposed, as all allegorical replications echo and alter, echo and distort.

Jumping is, according to Jameson, “symbolically invested and privileged for Jim” (262): that is true, and it is so not just because of the young Jim's daydreams of heroism and glory, but because of what the jump is in itself. As in all allegories, the literal meaning of almost everything that appears to be figurative is primary. Jumping is breaking gravity, sailing through the air without support, rising – however briefly – from the earth. It is starting, in both senses of that word: getting a jump start and jumping because startled. It is seizing an opportunity.

More than anything else, it embodies transition: covering distance, crossing boundaries and obstacles, overcoming impasses. One jumps out of one's skin. One makes a leap of faith. One jumps at an opportunity. A jump is a bridge across the void and a void bridge: both a bridge over nothingness and a bridge that isn't there. A jump enacts *aporia* reversed, a gap turned inside out. Jim's failure to remember or to acknowledge his leap from the *Patna* amounts to a gap within a gap, an abortion or misdirection of the jump that compounds his failure to jump at all during the emergency aboard his training ship. Within the structural symmetries of Conrad's supposedly disorganized novel, two such botched jumps can only be set right by two "correct" jumps: i.e., Jim's first and second jumps into Patusan (which is only, lest its most obvious signification be missed, the *Patna* with "us" aboard⁶).

Moreover, Conrad has shaped the jump in *Lord Jim* into a central *gestalt*, a *gestalt* that, in turn, gives the novel its peculiar and variable shape for each reader. The whole action of jumping in *Lord Jim* falls into several parts, all of which are present prototypically or archetypically in the first jump episode aboard the training ship: the jump takes place 1) from a ship or boat; 2) in a crucial situation, a crisis or turning point; 3) into a boat; 4) finally, into a trial or review that culminates in a judgment on the conduct of the jump. All of these elements are present in the earliest version of the jump, Jim's missed opportunity of heroism. In a gale, with a collision between two vessels spotted from Jim's training ship, others leap into the rescue boat while Jim hesitates and moves too late.

"Too late, youngster." The captain of the ship laid a restraining hand on that boy, who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with pain of conscious defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. "Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart." (8)

Conrad also presents that *gestalt* in its entirety in the *Patna* episode, though there judgment is separated from the jump by a large lapse of time, and paradoxically precedes the jump in the sequence of the narrative. Jim's disastrous jump from the *Patna* both ironizes the pattern and fulfills it, voids the *gestalt* and revalues it simultaneously. The *Patna* jump culminates in the negative judgment of Big Brierly's court – but it doesn't end there, because Jim's jump spawns others, sends echoes of itself rippling off through the world of the novel. Jim's jump causes Brierly's and necessitates Jim's own subsequent jumps, his flights from post to post and place to place and his final, definitive – of himself if nothing else – jump from the sea into Patusan.

To use the old-fashioned seaman's expression, Jim jumps ship into Patusan. That is the figurative way of describing Jim's entry into his world of romance and reality, and its value for us, its truth to the narrative, lies in the fact that it conceptualizes the entire Patusan half of the book as what in essence it is, a single entity, a *gestalt*, Jim's leap of faith from the world he has betrayed into a world he may be able to save. The "factual" jump the narrative gives us is something else again. This jump begins the process of reversing and voiding the *Patna* jump by

⁶ Crude as they may often seem, such obvious puns and near anagrams and playings with names constitute an important part of the way allegories work. They are yet one more underlining of the un-ignorable importance of the literal, and even the letteral, in setting in motion allegory's multiplicities.

both inverting the roles of the faithful and the deserters and by revaluing, once again, the act of jumping itself. Jim is being conveyed upriver in a dugout canoe:

At the first bend he lost sight of the sea with its labouring waves forever rising, sinking, and vanishing to rise again – the very image of struggling mankind – and faced the immovable forests rooted deep in the soil, soaring towards the sunshine, everlasting in the shadowy might of their tradition, like life itself. . . .

“I suppose I must have been stupid with fatigue, or perhaps I did doze off for a time,” he said. The first thing he knew was his canoe coming to the bank. He became instantaneously aware of the forest having been left behind, of the first houses being visible higher up, of a stockade on his left, and of his boatmen leaping out together upon a low point of land and taking to their heels. Instinctively he leaped out after them. At first he thought himself deserted for some inconceivable reason. (175-176)

This jump delivers Jim, the deserter now deserted by the formerly faithful “native” crew, to the agonized judgment of Rajah Allang, from which he escapes by his subsequent jumps – themselves subdivisions of the whole jump *gestalt*, replications and multiplications of the primal, defining act of the *Lord Jim* cosmos – from the stockade and across the creek.

Both of those jumps in their turns have been necessitated by the facts of Jim’s entering leap in Patusan, which both omits a key element of the jump *gestalt*, the leap *into* a boat, and delivers Jim to the judgment of the wrong person, Rajah Allang rather than Stein’s friend Doramin. The latter element is partially corrected in Jim’s escape from Rajah Allang’s stockade, after which he makes his way to Doramin, but the former, crucial pieces of the *gestalt*, the entry into a boat and the subsequent judgment of Jim’s conduct, are not supplied, and the pattern of the *gestalt* is not completed, until Jim once again enters into a boat, to be paddled by the faithful Tamb’ Itam, to face Doramin and his final judgment. Thus the whole narrative of Jim’s Patusan adventure is contained, whole and entire, within the frame of the jump *gestalt*, within a parenthesis in time and space, within the arc of a leap.

Jim dozes in his upriver passage just as he remains oblivious to his peril in Rajah Allang’s stockade, just as he “slept – perhaps for a minute, perhaps for twenty seconds, or only for one second” (183) during his escape. These naps, like his blanking out of his actual jump from the Patna, create voids around the central fact of the jump itself, isolate it and emphasize its liminal nature. Jim’s jumps carry him across borders, into and out of worlds, into and out of alternate geographies and histories, different spaces and times.

Time stops and starts again several times in *Lord Jim*, in the languorous decay of his convalescence ashore and in the enduringness of the pilgrims’ faith, but nowhere does time start anew so dramatically and so importantly as in Patusan, which is, as I remarked before, the Patna enlarged to include us, a ship so vast that there is only one way that Jim or any of us can jump from it. In the stopped time of the stockade and the broken clock, Jim suddenly gets the alarm to work: “the true perception of his extreme peril dawned upon him” (181) and “without any mental process” (182) he leaps over the palisade. He jumps again, and this second jump “plants” (the word is Conrad’s (182) him deep in the mud – and “It was only when he tried to move his legs and found he couldn’t that, in his own words, ‘he came to himself.’” (182)

Jim awakens first to his danger, then to himself, and he will awaken again, to a consciousness of his uniqueness, his solitude, his exile, in short, to the total truth of his situation in Patusan and in life, after he extricates himself from the mudbank and lapses once more into the brief oblivion of sleep. It is the fact and the manner of his delivery from the mudbank that defines and characterizes the new time, the new world, that begins for Jim on the far side of the creek. Jim is a creature of mud, almost buried alive in it, covered with it from head to toe, blinded by it, “a shiny heap of slime” (182). Time telescopes: he remembers the stockade as a long-ago phenomenon, and he longs to be back there, “mending the clock” (182). Conrad’s language in describing Jim’s struggles to escape from the mud transforms his efforts into the birth throes of a titan:

He made efforts, tremendous sobbing, gasping efforts, efforts that seemed to burst his eyeballs in their sockets and make him blind, and culminating into one mighty supreme effort in the darkness to crack the earth asunder, to throw it off his limbs. (182)

Jim becomes a giant Adam, born of the slime of the earth, and awakening to Eden and exile simultaneously, arising at once to the dominion of Adam and the punishment of Cain:

[H]e arose muddy from head to foot and stood there, thinking he was alone of his kind for hundreds of miles, alone, with no help, no sympathy, no pity to expect from any one, like a hunted animal. (183)

Whatever all this may mean – and it obviously means in multiple directions – its language is cosmogenic: Jim’s birth pangs and Conrad’s prose create a “new heaven and new earth,” a whole new sphere of action for a protagonist whose primary attribute is that he is “one of us.”

The body of criticism that has accreted around Conrad in general and *Lord Jim* in particular abounds in clichés to describe this aspect of Conrad’s writing: “dreamlike quality,” “nightmare world,” “mythic drama” and so on. Such phrases convey a certain truth or half-truth about *Lord Jim*, but not the heart of what Conrad’s language is doing, not the core of the purposes it serves. *Lord Jim*, to put it plainly, is a prototypic modern allegory.

As such, it adapts and renovates many (if not all) the techniques of, for instance, Spenserian allegory (including, again for instance, Spenser’s device of the narrative topos, which become Lord Jim’s *gestalt*). As such, it plays with and transcends the conventional binary categories of its world as thoroughly as *The Faerie Queene* explodes and implodes the polarities of its age: Renaissance reason and passion, spirit and body, angel and animal dichotomies, all of the ideological pairings that Spenser adapts and exploits, transform in Conrad’s prose into conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational, civilized and wild, inhibited and free, us and them, reflecting putatively modern thought systems putatively different from their Renaissance antecedents, but just as rigid in their binary, exclusionist logic, and just as manipulable by a conscientious allegorist.

As a prototypic modern allegory, *Lord Jim* employs language and deploys style in the service of multivalent signification – just as Spenser and Dante did. Conrad’s language generates charged

fields around individual events and images and ideas, makes them into strange attractors. Spenser, within his cultural set, can begin with icons that already contain meanings or allow meanings; Conrad must establish or create those meanings around null points. For Conrad, the world may well be a *text* to be read and interpreted, but it is a blank text, a *tabula rasa* to be filled with human meaning only by human action, and therefore the world, for Conrad, is a text we extrapolate from, read out from, because by itself, at its heart, it is void, null, empty of all meaning save the meaning we bring to it and take from it again.

For Conrad, for modern allegory, the world is not, cannot be, what it was for Spenser, a *book* already filled with writing, traced with signs and symbols pointing to a meaning hidden in it and them. Thus the key difference between “traditional” and “modern” allegory lies not in anything they do, but in the underlying nature of their textuality. Traditional western allegory deals with a world already conceived as textual, as readable. It points inward, toward a world of texts and textuality, and it seeks, by achieving a kind of critical mass of texts, to implode signification to a single, blinding point of unitary and multiplex vision – Spenser’s punning, multiplely meaning “Sabbaoth’s sight,” Dante’s Beatific and Beatricic Vision. One way to verbalize this thrust of traditional allegory is Platonically: it seeks to break out of a noumenal world – the phenomenal has been left well behind – and into the sphere of the One which is also in our limited human terms the Other.

Conversely, modern allegory seems to point outward, beyond textuality: Lord Jim is one of us, and we are – if nothing else – extra-textual. That quite succinctly indicates modern allegory’s final goal and sphere of operation, more often than not: we, not God, constitute modern allegory’s major One and Other. Because this is so, much of modern allegory’s energy seems to be invested in exploring and rupturing the fragile border between life and art, and to do so modern allegory takes a deeply ambivalent or multivalent awareness of its own artifice, its own writerliness, as one of its primary bases. Thus the prose of modern allegory often moves readily – and easily, as in the case of Conrad – between the poles of a sharply observed “realism” and an evocative “impressionism.” This is, of course, a dichotomy as false, as escapable or as transcendable as any other allegory deals with, as verbally “true” and as “phenomenally” false as the distinction between traditional and modern allegory, which, in the terms of their two different cultural universes, are engaged in the very same enterprise: to break out of “mere literature” and into what each culture considers “reality.”

For Conrad, the accomplishment of that rests on the quasi-Jungian perception that the individual is at heart universal, the paradox of the coincidence of the One and the Many – or, to put it in more appropriately allegorical terms, the One and the Other. For Conrad and his allegory, this perception is the real entry into the worlds of myth and dream and reality. The “dream-like quality” of a book like *Lord Jim* rests not in the incidents or appurtenances of the tale but in Conrad’s mode of conveying their simultaneous uniqueness and universality.

The world of dream and myth is breached not by universal experiences and cosmic acts, but by totally individual circumstances and commonplaces – the mud of a riverbank rather than the arms of some Faulkerian cross. To be truly one of us, Jim must be utterly alone. Conrad criticism makes too much of the “us” in “one of us” and not enough of the “one” (or of the “us” in Patusan, for that matter). Us is a collective: one is not. We are in the myth just as Jim is. He

both is and is not us – no Everyman, but nevertheless “one of us” in all the paradoxical splendor of that formulation.

Dream and myth depend on the kind of ritual repetition by which the commonplace is transformed into the sacred, like the priest at Eleusis showing a stalk of wheat. Allegory depends on the kind of repetition with variation by which the commonplace original is transvalued yet preserved intact, kept in play in a constantly expanding field of meaning – exactly, in fact, what I have been describing as the fate of Jim’s jump in *Lord Jim*. In his escape from Rajah Allang’s stockade, Jim in some sense recapitulates his personal past, the events that have made him uniquely Jim; at the same time and in the same acts, he frees himself from the world of time and history in which those events have bound him to be this specific and unique Jim, this Jim of failure and betrayal.

In entering Patusan, Jim surrenders his specialness – the Caucasian racial superiority that separates him from the “natives,” the class superiority that separates him from the Old Robinsons and German skippers and Gentleman Browns – just as he surrenders his westernness and his time-rootedness: he carries, and surrenders, an unloaded gun; he surrenders to Rajah Allang; he flees to Doramin – and Marlow, who keeps saying he is one of us, begins to see him as Homeric. His immersion in the mud also constitutes his baptism into primitive reality and an Iliadic world of love and war – and, inevitably, a world where glory and long life constitute a binary set of which Jim and we, like Achilles, can choose only one pole, a world like that of the *Iliad* where the acceptance of one’s uncommon, common humanity is also the acceptance of the universal fate of one’s own unique death.

Marlow may call Jim and his Patusan Homeric, but mythic or romantic or fairy-tale-like would describe them as well. The Patusan episodes of *Lord Jim* are as book-derived as are the materials of the young Jim’s daydreams,⁷ or the saga of Stein’s youthful adventures among the islands of the East. Indeed, fairy tale seems to fit the case best of all: in this distant never-neverland, the misfit becomes an all-conquering hero. He is loved and guarded by a beautiful young maiden, Jewel (even her name is significant in the context of fairy tales), through whose power he becomes lord of the land. He acquires a dark and powerful Father in Doramin, and a great friend and constant companion, a brother and almost a second self, in Dain Waris, who later dies as a consequence of his acts (compare Achilles and Patroclus, Gilgamesh and Enkidu). He has a gnomish servant, Tamb’ Itam, who accompanies him everywhere. He defeats a pair of comic devils, Rajah Allang and Sherif Ali, and is in turn defeated – or triumphs? – in a confrontation with his shadow self, Gentleman Brown (compare Aeneas and Turnus, an encounter every bit as ambiguous, in terms of victory or defeat, as Jim’s and Brown’s).

⁷ *Lord Jim*, p. 9: “On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.” Significantly, Conrad describes the world in which Jim already lives isolated as “babel,” not “babble”: Jim already moves in the world of exile and dispersion, in which the unity of “us” in a common language has already been shattered into the isolation of each “one” in his own private speech.

Even the “veiled bride” that Jim weds in death (and whose imagery has pervaded the Patusan episodes) can be related to fairy- and folktale motifs,⁸ as can Stein’s ring, the talisman that first gains him admission to Doramin and that lies at his feet in death. All of these acts can be construed as transpiring as much on a psychological level as in myth or fairy tale (if there is any real difference among those). Jim’s almost-ritualized meeting with Gentleman Brown in particular enacts that confrontation with the truth of the self that lies both at the core of many myths (consider Oedipus, or Spenser’s Houses of Recognition, or Kinbote and Gradus) and at the heart of analysis.

It is very, very wrong – it is hopelessly inadequate – to understand that episode exclusively as virtuous Jim’s confrontation with evil as personified in Brown, or as simple, innocent nature undone by the corruption of civilization as embodied in “Gentleman” Brown. Certainly those ideas are present – but Conrad’s prose prods us to see Jim seeing himself in Gentleman Brown, Jim viewing himself wholly and truly, Jim therefore himself integrated and complete as he could not have been before his entry into the dark forest and the ancient land. More than anything else in the novel, it is this meeting that completes Jim, that frees him from his past and himself, that enables him to do what he could not do in the Patna episode, to accept responsibility for his act and to confront Doramin’s judgment.

Because he has come to self-knowledge, he can complete the leap that brought him to Patusan in the act that literally and figuratively separates him from Patusan – and us – forever. He can accept his own death because it embodies, it enacts, in the most literal and the most sophisticated senses, not separation but communion:

People remarked that the ring which [Doramin] had dropped on his lap fell and rolled against the foot of the white man, and that poor Jim glanced down at the talisman that had opened for him the door of fame, love, and success within the wall of forests fringed with white foam, within the coast that under the western sun looks like the very stronghold of the night. Doramin, struggling to keep his feet, made with his two supporters a swaying, tottering group; his little eyes stared with an expression of mad pain, of rage, with a ferocious glitter, which the bystanders noticed; and then, while Jim stood stiffened and with bared head in the light of the torches, looking him straight in the face, he clung heavily with his left arm round the neck of a bowed youth, and lifting deliberately his right, shot his son’s friend through the chest.

The crowd, which had fallen apart behind Jim as soon as Doramin had raised his hand, rushed tumultuously forward after the shot. They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead. (299)

Modernism and post-modernism have provided many categories under which to recognize Jim’s absurd, heroic act. The available models include everything and anything from grade-B movies – Ronald Coleman saying “It is a far, far better thing I do than any I have ever done” – to Kierkegaard’s Abraham to Camus’s stranger’s wish for jeering crowds at his execution. But none

⁸ It can also of course be related to the unknown bride destined for Aeneas – Lavinia – for whose as yet unknown sake the Trojan warrior must lose his wife Creusa and leave his loved Dido.

of these fully comprehend or fully explain Jim's death, because Jim dies as he has lived, inarticulate, "with his hand over his lips." Conrad's veiled bride image and the mythic archetype of the mother/wife/destroyer merge in Jim's death, in the fullness of his self-knowledge and self-communication. He has been initiated into the mysteries of the unspeakable, the incommunicable. He has entered the haven of allegory.

Jim's final act illustrates the kind of logical and psychological distances that he – and we – have crossed. It is impossible to say whether his act is rational or irrational, victory or defeat, motivated by despair or courage, responsibility or evasion, civilized codes or savage impulses. It is almost certainly both and neither, both and more, of each of those binary choices, all and none of all of them, just as Jim himself is, in Stein's and Jewel's views, both false and true. For Marlow too Jim remains an enigma. Lord Jim the character and *Lord Jim* the book climax in a moment of incommunicable knowledge. This is summed up in the final gesture of Jim's life and death: "Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead."

The hand-to-his-lips attitude in which Jim is frozen could register shock, or pleasant surprise, or the suppression of speech. In classical times, the Egyptian Horus – a solar deity, victor over the forces of darkness, and a god of illumination in all senses of the word – was frequently depicted in statuary as a youth with his fingers to his lips: the gesture was understood as representing the necessity of "mystical" silence.⁹ It is unlikely in the extreme that Conrad was aware of this; nevertheless, Jim's gesture ironically speaks for itself, expressive of Jim even in its ambiguity, as Jim, ever inarticulate, was never able to do for himself.

Lord Jim is almost obsessively concerned with the problems of knowledge and coming to knowledge: coming to know one's self, coming to know another's inner reality, trying to judge or express one's own or another's inner reality. Jim struggles to express and explain himself. Marlow struggles to understand and explain Jim, to express his inner reality – and so do Stein, and Jewel, and Gentleman Brown, and Big Briery, and the court. The task of expressing Jim's inner reality amounts to the core undertaking of Conrad's novel, which is for that reason a novel about the near-impossibility of writing a novel – in ways more fundamental and more important than the fashionable cliché.

Lord Jim, like all allegories, is not *about* hermeneutics: it *is* hermeneutics. It enacts hermeneutics, and it forces its readers to do so too. It brings us, as it brings Jim, to the verge of that knowledge that can be perceived but not spoken, apprehended but not articulated. In that sense, *Lord Jim* embodies and enacts allegory in the "modern" idiom, just as certainly and just as clearly/obscurely as Dante's *Commedia* does in "traditional" terms. Jim's unspoken knowledge joins ranks with the pilgrim's unspeakable vision as the end and source of allegory, synchronous closure of text and opening of meaning. In precisely that sense, allegory – all allegory – is not hermeneutical: allegory is hermeneutics, the thing itself.

⁹ Among the ancient Greeks, statues of the youthful Horus (Harpocrates) "putting his finger to his lips were interpreted as the epitome of 'mystical' silence": Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 40-41.

Allegorical closure is no less problematic and no less rich than allegorical opening. In Prospero's final speech, the facts of the stage and the "facts" of the drama merge completely to make his statements literal and metaphoric, exact and figurative, at the same time in the same words. The actor will be trapped in the role, the mage fixed on the "bare island" of the stage, unless the audience accepts the magical power thrust outward to them from that stage and uses it to intervene in the action and end the game by turning it into earnest.

The audience extends the action of the play outside the play and the stage by replicating off-stage the actions of Prospero on-stage. *The Tempest* doesn't close so much as it opens, spills over into its audience and makes that audience complicitous in its actions – as in fact the audience has been at least from the moment in the second scene when Prospero informed us that everything we saw in the first scene was a lie and an illusion. From that point on, we can have no illusions about the "reality" of anything we witness. It can "convince" us only because we wish it to, because we conspire with it, just as we conspire with the fictive reality of a novel.

Prospero's epilogue is no afterthought but the logical, the allegorically necessary, opening out of *The Tempest* into the wide world of journeys and storms the audience inhabits. Just so, the 50-odd pages of Marlow's *post-mortem* of Jim are no mere elaboration of his last sight of his friend ("For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma" [241-42]). Rather, those pages are the extension of that vision outward to us, the focal point of the process by which we readers come to see the elaborate ways in which, if Jim is "one of us," we are therefore one of him.

Diaspora

Indeed, allegorical closure is usually just such a form of opening: characteristically, allegories simply stop rather than close, and they stop by enacting their ontological openness rather than their textual containment. In the final analysis, allegories cease to exist as words on a page because they have become a *gestalt* in their reader. Mimesis and its shifts – the jump from acting to enactment, from reading or seeing to participating – create and are created by allegory and its discontinuities. Pynchon's marvelous juxtapositions of acts and orders in *The Crying of Lot 49* illustrates this clearly: even in so small a fragment of the work as the few lines quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the anti-logical, anti-sequential intersections of sex and soap opera, historical events and personal losses, public and private, past and present, events and their representation, work not merely to create comedy but to flood us with "reality," to saturate us with what we normally regard as separate levels or versions of reality, differing aspects or even realities of such different natures that we normally think of them as totally distinct.

In our conventional readerly habits, we expect a fiction, a novel, to select one of these versions and to achieve its "realism" by fulfilling the norms, the self-restricted criteria, of the perspective it has chosen. Pynchon instead exposes the unreality of all of the "realisms" by invoking them all, simultaneously *and as texts*. Quasi-archetypes and half-memories – of personal experiences and cultural bric-a-brac, of seduction scenes, of heroic children with faithful dogs, of the historicity and horror of "The Great War," of Saturday matinees in cheap movie houses, as well as, later in the novel, of western movies and pentecostal visitations, bloody Jacobean plays, and

cold-blooded political intrigues – destroy the antiseptic enclosure of literature’s usual partial realisms by throwing down the walls to admit the interpenetration of all realities. All the discrete yet continuous levels and aspects of “reality” come flooding into *Lot 49* by way of the artistic – and I use the word in its broadest possible sense – vehicles and conventions that normally bear and isolate them. And those vehicles, whether they be bad movies, accurate history, political analogy (e.g., the Peter Pinguid Society and the John Birch Society), or Biblical event, furnish the pre-texts, the areas of reference, the strange attractors that shape *The Crying of Lot 49*’s narrative and our oddly conflicted readerly expectations of it.

The events in Baby Igor’s grade-Z, World War I movie – themselves evocative of the historical events they draw on (“‘I know this part,’ Metzger told her, his eyes squeezed shut, head away from the set. ‘For fifty yards out the sea was red with blood. They don’t show that.’” [35]) – actually affect the actions of Metzger (formerly Baby Igor) and Oedipa in the present. The epigrammatic jumbling of reels (reals) in the Baby Igor film anticipates the narrative, logical, and sequential discontinuities in which Oedipa will wander for the rest of the novel, discontinuities present in the narrative precisely because Pynchon has eschewed the unreality of “realistic” fiction’s unitary frame of reference and selective standard of verisimilarity. Oedipa – and we with her – will become an Ariadne who has lost the thread, trying to figure out the pattern of the labyrinth in order to make sense of it and get out of it. Oedipa never accomplishes that by the time the narrative stops, but we readers do, because we are one with Oedipa just as we are one with Jim: We are One, and also Other, just as allegorical narrative is One and also Many.

Much – much too much, in fact – has been made of the potential religious symbolism with which Pynchon lards the text of *The Crying of Lot 49*. Even astute readers of allegory like Maureen Quilligan have fallen into the Pentecostal pit and read the ending of *Lot 49* as if it were a revival meeting and Oedipa Maas were about to make a decision for Christ, if not meet him face to face; or as if the crying of lot 49 were equivalent to the Apocalypse in its sense of world-end rather than in its sense of The Book of Revelations – an even more egregious error.¹⁰ It would be pretty to think that such a view of the novel was generated by profound respect for allegorical tradition, that modern critics, having correctly identified one of the novel’s ancestors as allegory, were solicitously aligning Pynchon’s heroine with Spenser’s narrator in their patient awaiting of the full revelation of the Sabbaoth God. No one has even remotely suggested that affiliation, however. Realistically, it seems that the religious reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* is

¹⁰ The corpus of criticism on Pynchon is among the more manageable of those I have had to deal with in this book, and I have tried my best to read all of it – at least all of it that bears on *The Crying of Lot 49* and the kinds of problems that interest me. Among the chief items that I have drawn on for agreement or argument are the following: Peter L. Cooper, *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1983); David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, 1980); Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983); George Levine and David Leverenz, ed., *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon* (Boston: Little, Brown 1976); Edward Mendelson, ed., *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978); Stacey Olster, *Reminiscence and Re-Creation in Contemporary American Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1981); David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988); John O. Stark, *Pynchon’s Fictions: Thomas Pynchon and the Literature of Information* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980).

the simple result of misreading the novel, of opting for only one, or of willfully suppressing the second of the binary choices that the novel consistently offers us, and of failing entirely to see that Pynchon also presents us with, at very least, a *tertium quid*, and perhaps a *quartum* and a *quintum* too.

Take just the religious language of the novel as a case in point. While some of its overtly Christian references have gotten almost all the critical attention, Pynchon's "theology" in *The Crying of Lot 49* is a lot more ecumenical than that, hinting – and not only in *The Courier's Tragedy's* parodies – at diabolism as well as other vague sorts of anti-religions or loosely "theosophist" cults: *vide* Pierce Inverarity's secular testament, which becomes for Oedipa a gospel to be decoded and explored, the sacred scripture encapsulating all of America and all of truth, perhaps all there is to know. *Vide* Jesus Arrabal and his anarchist miracle (120). *Vide*, at the end of the book, the hieratic Loren Passerine and the rite he enters upon. *Vide* also such incidental mentions and chance meetings as the "hieroglyphic streets" (181) of America and the perhaps muddled recollections of old Mr. Thoth – Thoth being, you will remember, the ibis or baboon-headed Egyptian god whom later tradition credited with inventing numbers and letters; the Greeks thought of Thoth as a god of learning, wisdom, and magic, and linked him in those capacities with Hermes, who was not only *psychopompos*, the conductor of souls to the underworld, but also the patron and source of esoteric knowledge (thus Hermetic philosophy).

The ubiquitous "hieroglyph" (52) of the muted post horn obviously reinforces this pattern of reference all throughout the novel. Indeed, *The Crying of Lot 49* even skews its Christianity in odd directions, as in its excursus on Dr. Diocletian Blobb and the Scurvhamite text of *The Courier's Tragedy*, wherein Puritan Christianity is presented not only as word-enamored or word-enslaved but also as determinist, dualist, mechanist, and Manichean: i.e., Christianity is reinterpreted as a purely binary system, salvation or damnation being the result of the operations of a sort of cosmic Maxwell's Demon.

This seems to an instance of opposites transforming into each other: a spiritual religion based on the superior reality of a non-corporeal world turns inside out into a mechanical, materialist cult. The novel shows us the opposite version of this process then in the Nefastis Machine, wherein a purely mechanical, material process is meant to be controlled immaterially and mentally by a properly "sympathetic" or "sensitive" medium. In that sense then Scurvhamite Christianity and its word-obsession – which becomes Oedipa's focus too – mirrors John Nefastis's obsession – which is a concentrated icon of the circuit-board world's focus – exactly as the Trystero mirrors Thorn und Taxis and the Pony Express and the US mail service, and all obsessions, all over-riding centers of belief or motivation, share equally in the religious, the hieratic, the magical.

The final reflection of this perverse religious syncretism in the book is the actual crying of Lot 49: 49 is certainly the Pentecostal number, but the occasion of the auction is hardly Easter Sunday,¹¹ and the celebrant of the rite seems more Egyptian than Christian: "Passerine spread

¹¹ Which would be an at best awkward, at worst preposterous, conflation of the ecclesiastical calendar and its significance. Maureen Quilligan nevertheless suggests this as a possibility, but even fictionally it's not really in the

his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote culture; perhaps to a descending angel" (183). The "pale, cruel faces" of the attendees and Loren Passerine's own appearance – "his eyes bright, his smile practiced and relentless" – do not suggest any meek and Christian Holy Spirit, brooding dove-like over the abyss, but rather point to more hawk-like deities: I mean Horus, the falcon-headed god (actually, his head is a sparrow [i.e., passerine] hawk's) – a solar deity who defeats Set, the god of darkness and evil, who may be his own brother and dark antagonist.

Horus is a god of illumination, in both senses of the word, and as such a fitting deity to preside over the final actions of a heroine who has wandered in the dark so long as Oedipa. In attending the auction, Oedipa emulates her namesake – and not for the first time – in seeking the will of the gods, consulting the oracle. Her chief activity, as more than one reader of the novel has remarked, is sorting, an action that links her closely with Maxwell's Demon, particularly in this final scene of the novel, where she is enclosed in the sealed auction room, "looking at the napes of necks, trying to guess which one was her target, her enemy, perhaps her proof" (183). Immediately before she entered the auction room, Oedipa, even more Demon-like, "stood in a patch of sun, among brilliant rising and falling points of dust, trying to get a little warm" (183). Now demons are always an iffy proposition, and in *The Crying of Lot 49* sorting is hardly innocent either, as Stanley Koteks tells Oedipa:

"Since the Demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn't have put any real work into the system. So you would be violating the Second Law of Thermodynamics, getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion."

"Sorting isn't work?" Oedipa said. "Tell them down at the post office, you'll find yourself in a mailbag headed for Fairbanks, Alaska, without even a fragile sticker on you."

"It's mental work," Koteks said, "But not work in the thermodynamic sense." (86)

Communication may well be the key, as John Nefastis will later tell Oedipa (in a direct comment on the Demon in the box: 105), and as her own immediate connection of sorting with the work of the Post Office here implies, but puns and ambiguities keep impeding it: the dual meanings of work, the distinct meanings of entropy in thermodynamics and in communications, the resemblance of their equations – the latter a mathematical pun, if you like.¹²

Even sorting is a pun, and a profoundly important one in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Sorting is distinguishing, separating, categorizing, even cataloging (*cf.* Genghis Cohen and the stamps), but it is also investigating, discovering, illuminating, predicting: taking one's *sortes*, reading the

ballpark: the novel's first words, and the beginning of its brief time scheme, are "One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Maas came home."

¹² Nefastis began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy. The word bothered him as much as "Trystero" bothered Oedipa. But it was too technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. The equation for one, back in the '30's, had looked very like the equation for the other. It was a coincidence. The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon. (105)

"Entropy is a figure of speech, then," sighed Nefastis, "a metaphor. It connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow. The Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally graceful, but also objectively true." (106)

lots – fraught word, for this novel. That is one of the ironies of the Nefastis Machine: The word *nefas* in Latin means not merely blasphemous or impious, but in its adjectival form – *nefastus* – it primarily designates days on which judgments cannot be rendered, assemblies held, or auguries taken. So just as Oedipa stared at the portrait of James Clerk Maxwell on a “*sortes*” machine from which no auguries should be taken, just so she sits, at the end of the novel, staring at the backs of heads and the napes of necks, sorting her enemies, herself become the Demon she sought to consult, awaiting – in the novel’s titular and final puns, the sale of a bunch of forged stamps, the making public – the communication – of the hidden mysteries of her lot.

Pynchon piles puns on top of puns to open up depths in language for the reader exactly as the action of the novel opens up holes in quotidian reality for Oedipa. Everything – even the words we use to describe and control everything – comes to take on an aura of mystery, an air of the uncanny, comes to share equally in religion and in magic, in the uncertainty of powers – be they divine or diabolical, mechanical or human – beyond our knowing and control. For the reader, *The Crying of Lot 49* haunts language the way the Trystero haunts Oedipa.

The Crying of Lot 49 has consistently flirted with the concepts of mystical illumination in the dual disguises of modern language and ancient metaphor. Oedipa’s first epiphany offers the reader San Narciso perceived as a circuit board, a thoroughly twentieth-century image that, through Oedipa’s mental vision of her husband Mucho at his radio station – “Communication is the key” (105) once again, or rather “Communications are” – modulates to the hieratic vision of a disk jockey as priest and seer, “with movements stylized as the handling of chris, censer, chalice might be for a holy man, yet really tuned in to the voice, voices, the music, its message, surrounded by it, digging it, as were all the faithful it went out to” (25). She seeks, throughout the novel, an illumination, a vision, that here as throughout the novel “tremble[s] just past the threshold of her understanding.” The world, for Oedipa, is increasingly charged with potential significance, with meanings she wishes to know but can never quite grasp. This first vision sets the pattern for all her attempts at illumination:

She thought of the time she’d opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There’d seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out). (24)

The resemblance of the circuit board and the streets of San Narciso is a visual pun, parallel to the mathematical pun of the resemblance of the two entropy equations, and in both cases the coincidence promises revelation and illumination. (To true believers: Oedipa has her doubts about the Nefastis box, though she rarely seriously questions her own juxtapositions.) In both cases, the light fails to go on. The revelation is aborted – in both cases, in all cases – by Oedipa’s passivity.

There's no limit to what Oedipa could find out from the printed circuit, or San Narciso, or Pierce's will – "if she had tried." Oedipa hardly makes a devoted, obsessive detective of the sort *Lot 49's* Grade-B mystery plot seems to demand: not really very Demonic, she is consistently distracted by happenstance, allowing one line of inquiry to fade indiscriminately into another, consciously or unconsciously refraining from asking some questions, not pressing others, finally simply and fearfully ceasing to want to know specific answers, even uncertain, up to the very last minute, whether or not she will actually attend the auction.

And she makes as poor a mystic as she does a researcher. Mystical illumination comes at the end of a *via negativa* actively pursued, an *iter mentis ad deum* that involves the painful, conscious, step-by-step disengagement of the would-be mystic's affections and thoughts from personal desires and fears to refocus the mind fully and selflessly upon the One. Oedipa's career parodies that. In hearing the news of Driblette's death, she responds only passively, ambiguously, narcissistically:

Even a month ago, Oedipa's next question would have been, "Why?" But now she kept a silence, waiting, as if to be illuminated.

They are stripping from me, she said subvocally – feeling like a fluttering curtain in a very high window, moving up to then out over the abyss – they are stripping away, one by one, my men. My shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself and away, hopelessly away, from what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love; my one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved 15-year-old; my best guide back to the Trystero has taken a Brody. Where am I?

"I'm sorry," Bortz had also said, watching her.

Oedipa stayed with it. "Did he use only that," pointing to the paperback, "for his script?" (152-53)

They are stripping from *her*. She surrenders nothing of herself, and perceives the horrors (Driblette's suicide, Hilarius's past and present, Mucho's addiction) and comedy (the child star runs off with a child) of their actions only as her losses. What Oedipa fears most is precisely the price of mystical illumination, precisely the cost of productive research: the sacrifice of self, the expense of spirit in pursuit of the Other. She "left it alone, anxious that her revelation not expand beyond a certain point. Lest, possibly, it grow larger than she and assume her to itself." (166)

Oedipa is emphatically not one of the currently fashionable de-centered selves; if anything, she is far too securely, far too timidly and fearfully self-centered. The kinds of excesses the other characters of *Lot 49* enact embody various species of selflessness – often grossly exaggerated, sometimes grotesque, occasionally repulsive – that Oedipa flees, and all those excesses have relation to intellectual or mystical illumination, whether the route be art (Driblette, Remedios Varo) or politics (Mike Fallopian, the young Hilarius), alcohol (too many characters to mention) or drugs (Mucho, Hilarius) or science (Nefastis, Hilarius) or scholarship (Bortz, Genghis Cohen). Each concretely manifests an aspect of coming to knowledge, of the process of vision, a process which Pynchon comically opens to Oedipa in her initial encounter with Metzger, but from which synesthesia and *déreglement du sens* Oedipa consistently thereafter flees. Granted, most of her

invitations to it, like Nefastis's "Come on in on the couch. The news will be on any minute. We can do it there" (107), are fairly unappealing. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Oedipa is as frightened by the visionary as she is by the real, and she does her best to avoid both:

She wanted Hilarius to tell her she was some kind of a nut and needed a rest, and that there was no Trystero. She also wanted to know why the chance of its being real should menace her so. (132)

"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?" (138)

Knowledge and insight, research and mysticism: vision, trance, hallucination, DTs, schizophrenia, and paranoia – all are parodically or comically linked in *The Crying of Lot 49* as ways of breaking through the mere surface of things into a reality or realities presumed to underlie that surface, to give that surface literal and figurative depth and meaning. Each of these offers something Oedipa wants, and each, in its extreme form, embodies a way she will not go, an illness – Oedipa's view of it – that she will not contract. For Oedipa, the *rapture* of vision equals the *seizure* of epilepsy. That pun, with its opening to both possibilities, remains Pynchon's, while the unequivocal, pejorative vision of attack and amnesia are Oedipa's:

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to – an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure. Afterward it is only this signal, really dross, this secular announcement, 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. In the space of a sip of dandelion wine it came to her that she would never know how many times such a seizure may already have visited, or how to grasp it should it visit again. Perhaps even in this last second – but there was no way to tell. She glanced down the corridor of Cohen's rooms in the rain and saw, for the very first time, how far it might be possible to get lost in this. (95)

Later Oedipa wonders whether the "clues" she finds during her 24-hour descent into the underworld of San Francisco (the antithesis and mirror image of circuit-board-orderly San Narciso) are "some kind of compensation," like the epileptic's "secular announcements," signs left to "make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (118). Pynchon's ironies run deep. "The cry that might abolish the night" is also – the noun demands it – the crying of lot 49, which may equally well bring either illumination or the night. The sip of wine that triggers Oedipa's sudden quasi-Proustian perception of the void, of the presence of gaps and absences in her own life, is made from dandelions that grew in an old cemetery that has now been ripped up and erased, replaced by a freeway.¹³ Oedipa's

¹³ It is a moot point, but one well worth further investigation, how much Pynchon's phrase derives from/is meant to recall Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*, bittersweet stories of recollected childhood in a now-gone-forever small-town and rural America.

awareness at this point of this paradoxical persistence of the vanished connects directly with her last perception in that same chapter, stirred by Genghis Cohen's remarking:

"In spring, when the dandelions begin to bloom again, the wine goes through a fermentation. As if they remembered."

No, thought Oedipa, sad. As if their home cemetery in some way still did exist, in a land where you could still somehow walk, and not need the East San Narciso Freeway, and bones still could rest in peace, nourishing ghosts of dandelions, no one to plow them up. As if the dead really do persist, even in a bottle of wine.¹⁴ (98-99)

The dream, the nightmare that Mucho could never tell her without the anodyne of LSD, was, simply "the sign . . . of the National Automobile Dealers' Association. N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky" (144).

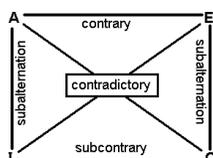
As the novel moves toward its final opening, Oedipa lists – in a perfectly orthodox logical square of opposition – the four possibilities that as she sees it confront her: that there actually is massive underground anti-system; that she is hallucinating; that it is all a plot against her, arranged by Pierce; or that she is imagining such a plot.

Those, now that she was looking at them, she saw to be the alternatives. Those symmetrical four. She didn't like any of them, but hoped she was mentally ill; that that's all it was. That night she sat for hours, too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, oh God, was the void. (171)

For those who have long forgotten their undergraduate logic, remember that the square of opposition is a traditional mode of expressing the possibilities of immediate inference from a premise.¹⁵ Its putative validity rests on two pillars: first, our old friend the principle of non-contradiction, that a thing cannot be true and not true in the same respect at the same time; and second, that all valid conclusions are already contained within the premise. To spell it out: Oedipa's entrapment within the logical box of her four alternative statements means that she is no longer proceeding inductively, by the gathering of evidence that would lead to conclusions, but deductively, reasoning from premises already obtained or simply held downward to the conclusions already formulated by and within her premises. She has abandoned the empirical method, scientific method, to enter the self-contained world of formal logic. The square of opposition, for Oedipa and for the reader, constitutes the logical and linguistic equivalent of the

¹⁴ I want to call attention here to Oedipa's phrase, "no one to plow them up." It importantly recalls her earlier (128-29) translation of DTs into delirium tremens and subsequent literalization of the metaphor: *delirium* = going out of the furrow, deviating from a straight line, going crazy, "a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare." I will have more to say about this image/metaphor of plowing later in this chapter.

¹⁵ Here is a typical diagram of the square of opposition, drawn from William L. Reese's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, and Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 253 (see Inference):



Nefastis Machine. It enacts Oedipa's acceptance of a rigid and merciless enclosure, her entrapment within a totally binary system. *That*, oh God, is the void.

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the void is very full, just as the underworld is very crowded in *The Odyssey* and in *Vineland*.¹⁶ Oedipa has located herself smack in the center of that paradoxically crowded vacuum, like that busy little Demon in its empty box, sorting, sorting, sorting: hot from cold, friends from enemies, true from false, real from imagined, fact from fiction – just as if they were really different, just as if the polar oppositions themselves were real. For readers, those very questions, those for-Oedipa-fundamental distinctions, open on a readerly void, the deconstructionist never-never-land of textual unreliability, linguistic betrayal, logical derangement. We readers are reading a fiction made up variously of facts (Remedios Varo, the Dardanelles campaign, Thurn und Taxis), quasi-facts (the Peter Pinguid Society, the Pony Express, the Nefastis Machine), and outright inventions (Oedipa Maas, Pierce Inverarity, Metzger, etc.). Just breaking these novelistic data into those three groups already demonstrates – for us at least – the invalidity of Oedipa's binary distinctions.

Some of the data of *The Crying of Lot 49* present themselves to us as participants in two worlds, both fact and fiction, true and false. Indeed, I would argue that once Pynchon assembled all these phenomena into a novel, they all, at that instant and by that act, began to participate in both worlds, to become the amphibious entity that we know as artistically wrought prose. And we readers consciously or unconsciously assent to this and – unlike the reluctant Oedipa – join the conspiracy. We embrace the fictions as facts, at least to the extent that we make obvious inventions like Oedipa our anchors and focal points in the narrative. It is about these aspects of the novel that, as readers, we have the fewest doubts, the most minimal confusions. We take the overt fictions as our baseline for our own sorting of true and false, real and imagined, fact and fiction within the “facticity” of the overarching fiction. The fundamental muddling of the supposedly separate, putatively inviolable binary categories of fact and fiction replicates itself on every conceivable level of discourse, both within and without the novel, in the reader as in the book. Welcome to the void of allegory.

Oedipa's overt, almost obsessive, attention to problems of textuality reflects and acts reflexively upon the reader's attention to the text of *The Crying of Lot 49*. Before we ever begin mimicking Oedipa in seeking recondite meanings in small phrases and actions or pursuing cryptic connections through the text and its many subtexts, Oedipa replicates within the text our conventional readerly attentions and inattentions.

It may have been an intuition that the letter would be newsless inside that made Oedipa look more closely at its outside, when it arrived. At first she didn't see it. It was an ordinary Muchoesque envelope, swiped from the station, ordinary airmail stamp, to the left of the cancellation a blurb put on by the government, *Report All Obscene Mail To Your Postmaster*. Idly, she began to skim back through Mucho's letter after reading it to see if there were any dirty words. “Metzger,” it occurred to her, “what is a postmaster?” (46)

¹⁶ Cf. the scenes in the secret relocation camp, the Thanatoid meetings, and – most important – Brock's final journey to the land of the dead, guided by Blood and Vato.

Oedipa scarcely regards the inside of Mucho's letter, but instead scrutinizes its envelope, and after noticing something there, on the outside of the letter, she returns to its text to search that for things connected to the outside phenomenon. Moreover, she does all this before she ever fully realizes or appreciates the genuine oddity (that curious misspelling) of the external item that caught her eye.

And of course she never really takes into account the implications of its externality or the ironies of her own shifting focus, from the contents of Pierce's will to the envelope of Mucho's letter. It is probably redundant at this point for me to point out that this tiny letter-and-envelope incident puts us back in touch, once again, with some of the most traditional language of conventional, outside/inside, allegorical theory, the envelope or integument or husk that enwraps or envelops or conceals the putative kernel of alleged allegorical meaning. In yet one more bursting of binary bonds, Pynchon tropes this conventional language, tropes even Conrad's redistribution of it: his fiction locates its key signifiers not within the tale, not even in its envelope, but on and as something outside even that, the stamps and their cancellations, things pasted or imprinted on the envelope as a sign and symbol of the message's fitness for delivery and of its having been delivered.

Nor does Pynchon's linguistic jest-and-earnest stop here. Using what forms a characteristic strategy of all his fiction, Pynchon (like his master Swift) compounds his meaning, and significantly complicates the reader's problems, by literalizing the underlying image or metaphor of the very figures he is troping. Like so much else in *The Crying of Lot 49*, delivery too is a pun, meaning on one hand mail (that too a pun, and so on endlessly) delivery and on the other hand birth. Late in the novel, for instance, references to Oedipa's childlessness accumulate: Grace Bortz thinks Oedipa's harassed look betokens children; Oedipa passes herself off as Grace Bortz and tells a San Francisco physician she thinks she's pregnant; and, perhaps most important, in view of the novel's playing with religious imagery, "Your gynecologist has no test for what she was pregnant with" (175). Delivering the mail, delivering a message, delivery as birth, even delivery as freedom or salvation: all are operative meanings, indeed to some extent cognate meanings, within this novel. All take off from and expand upon the fundamental kernel-and-husk, envelope-and-contents image and opposition, and all do so in the direction of externalizing the internal, bringing to the surface that which was hidden deep within, letting out what was imprisoned. Oedipa never understands any of this. She continues to wrap herself in multiple layers of clothes, to insulate herself, to hide within whatever she can find, despite the fact that most of what she learns points the way outward.

Most of Oedipa's discoveries are of the outside, the underside, the flipside of the life and world she has known, and she has a great deal of trouble determining whether she or those she thinks of as the others – the Trystero, the drunk in San Francisco, Inamorati Anonymous, Max Fallopian and the patrons of The Scope – are the insiders. Needless to say, Pynchon makes that a problem for readers too: "The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost. Oedipa did not know where she was" (129).

Neither does the conscientious reader. Inside what? or outside what? are totally relevant and fundamentally unanswerable questions at this and many other points of the simple narrative of this short novel. To cite just one important complication: John Nefastis tells Oedipa that

entropy is a metaphor that Maxwell's Demon (a prosopopoeia, but who's counting?) makes "objectively true" (106). *The Crying of Lot 49* generates complexities disproportionate to its small size because from the outset it makes its allegorical heritage part of its subject matter. By – among other ways, to be sure – using the language and imagery of religion, it moves the process of revelation and initiation to center stage, and makes itself, over and above anything else it may be, an allegory built out of allegories, and primarily religious allegories (or works that have been thought allegories) at that. That, among other reasons, is why the novel closes (and implicitly opens itself) with the possibility of pentecostal visitation: Pentecost is revelation, initiation, illumination, confirmation, all in one, and all of which are relevant to Oedipa's narrative quest. But most important of all, Pentecost is the gift of language, the gift of tongues, the descent upon the initiated apostles of the fiery tongues of the spirit (parodied explicitly in *The Courier's Tragedy*), which confer the miraculous ability to speak so that all hearers, of whatever class or education or nation, will understand what has been said *in their own language* – which, I hasten to point out, is exactly the modest goal that all allegories seek, and the only way, if there is any even provisional truth to what I have been arguing, the only way they can accomplish their ends and succeed, as allegories.

The Crying of Lot 49 makes the problem of interpretation its central subject. It does this in peculiarly but not exclusively literary ways, principally by making its initiatory action result from a text – the letter Oedipa receives – that in turn focuses Oedipa upon another text – Pierce's will – which rapidly becomes the center of her attention and the regulator of her actions.¹⁷ More than that: Pierce's will becomes the instrument by which Oedipa becomes aware of significances that she had not noticed before and of mysteries she never suspected. The will itself becomes one of those mysteries, a document demanding understanding and explanation. The will makes Oedipa aware for the first time that there *is* a problem of interpretation, and from the knowledge of her ignorance Oedipa becomes a seeker – timorous and halfhearted, it is true – after revelation and illumination.

In purely literary terms, which are quite appropriate here, Oedipa's seeking is grievously flawed. She searches for allegorical illumination with conventional critical tools, looking always for the one-to-one correspondences of prosopopoeia, and ending up thereby trapped in the closed box of that scholastic square of opposition discussed above: either the Trystero is real, or she's imagining it, or Pierce invented it to plague her, or she's imagining that. From that kind of logical box there is no exit: the Demon can only sit and sort endlessly. Whether it be plot or paranoia, conspiracy or craziness, Oedipa, trained by her mentors "Secretaries James and Foster and Senator Joseph" (104) and equipped with all of the apparatus of conventional criticism (she was "just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts" [104]) demands whole-meaning systems: whatever it is, it all has to make sense all the time. Oedipa, along with most criticism since Aristotle – for whom, not at all by the way, Oedipa's namesake was paradigmatic in formulating the norms of criticism – insists on regularity, on uniformity, on a peculiarly restrictive sort of esthetic dominated by the logic of an ineluctable either/or, by the unbendable principle of non-contradiction and the exclusionist, self-contained logic it generates: in short, she must have an orderly system, at whatever cost to sanity.

¹⁷ Pierce's will also becomes the prototype or archetype of the other texts that will demand Oedipa's attention throughout the novel: Mucho's letter, *The Courier's Tragedy*, the forged stamps.

At least since Aristophanes, systems and system-builders have been among the favorite targets of satirists, in whose company it is only fair to number Pynchon. If half of *Lot 49's* literary ancestry is allegory, the other half is certainly satire. Allegories and satires by themselves are complicated enough. When they copulate, however, their union produces monsters and wunderkinder, and *The Crying of Lot 49*, like most of Pynchon's book-length fictions, is just such a prodigy. Jonathan Swift, Pynchon's great master in this bastard form, has demonstrated all its potential for brilliance and opacity, and from many critics of Swift we can learn embarrassing lessons in how *not* to read Pynchon. The kinds of false binary choices that Swift offers us – fool or knave, Yahoo or Houyhnmhm – can help us to realize that Oedipa's alternatives of conspiracy or paranoia and readers' choices of meaninglessness or divine plan are equally false. They recreate exactly the kind of false dilemma that Gulliver faces in confronting Yahoos and Houyhnmhms. To put it simply: those are not the only alternatives. Gulliver himself is a third. That significantly parallels Oedipa, who is named not just for a riddle solver, but for a riddle solver whose answers were of exactly the sort Swift suggests through Gulliver. To the sphinx's riddle, Oedipus's response is "man"; to the oracle's mystery, the solution is himself. What is Inverarity's bequest? Who can answer Oedipa's questions? Oedipa's name, rather than anything she reads or sees, is our best clue to that.

Systems and system-builders and Swift furnish useful clues too, clues to some of *Lot 49's* most fundamental concerns. Just as behind the limpid prose of Pynchon's *Vineland* there lurks the strange attractor of Homer's *Odyssey* (especially its Telemachiad), so hidden behind the barrage of twentieth-century cultural bric-a-brac that ostensibly serves as *Lot 49's* pre-texts, beneath all the modern movie plots and mystery novels and Mircea Eliade, there lies the strange attractor of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*.

The two texts share a significant number of narrative and ideological counters, and the ones they share are central to both; in fact, are constitutive of both. In Swift, the narrative device of a Will to be executed, understood, dealt with, analyzed, come to terms with, which serves as both the central spring of the action and the link to all the "digressions." The matter of the digressions themselves – made narrative from the beginning in Pynchon as it becomes narrative at the end in Swift – focuses on criticism, interpretation, modernism, digressions themselves, and madness. The principal targets of the satire in both cases include the narrators (Swift's mad hack and Pynchon's Jamesian, nearly-Oedipa authorial voice) as well as religious and philosophical and political empire builders, who are characterized as deluded, insane, ridden by their own whole-meaning systems to such an extent that they either wish to convert the world to their belief or are solipsistically sunk in themselves. Both texts in turn flog all these targets by means of a pervasively deployed imagery and metaphors of insides and outsides, fools or knaves, Sartorists or Aeolists, wearing one's vices "Inlaid or Emboss'd." Every Peter has his Jack, every Sartorist his Aeolist opposite number: so too every Thurn und Taxis is opposed by a Trystero, every Hilarius by a Nefastis, every Oedipa seeking a way out of the tower by a Mucho burrowing within. The strange doublings of Pynchon's text – e.g., the duality of entropy; Fangoso Lagoons, Lake Inverarity, and the Lago di Pieta; Echo Courts and San Narciso; Manny di Presso and Metzger – all have their roots deep in Swift's elaborately sustained parodic binomialism. Even the Nefastis Machine, that most modern of Oedipa's tormentors, can be

traced to Swift's parodic, punning literalizations of ordinary religious language (*anima, spiritus*) in *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*.

Allegories are works written in traditions, and Swift stands at the head of at least one of the traditions Pynchon invokes for himself. One could argue in fact that Swift's satires stand at the head of the whole modern tradition of allegory, at least in their deployment of a parodic binary logic in the service of exploding both the modes and tools of conventional reading and the "totalizing" (to use that fashionable word for once in its proper sense) systems that result from them. This does not in any small sense alter what *The Crying of Lot 49* is or modify what it says: rather, this ancestry and its presence within *Lot 49* as a strange attractor establish what the novel is and says. They ground the book and inform it.

Let me press this point of the importance of *A Tale of a Tub* to *The Crying of Lot 49*. Swift's characteristic satiric method – and it is his nearly exclusively – involves the literalization of the phrases and figures of ordinary discourse so that his characters and his prose both "say what they mean" and mean a great deal beyond what they say. We've already looked at some of this back in Chapter five. A quick and simple example of it can be found in the fourth book of *Gulliver*. The commonplace definition of man is *animal rationale*, the rational animal. Fine: so Swift provides his readers with a totally rational, completely affectless quadruped to demonstrate the inadequacies of that definition. His treatment of terms like "spirit" and "inspiration" in *A Tale of a Tub* is far more complex than that, but it grows from a similar, simple base of literalization. Pynchon deploys the same sort of tactic in *Lot 49* on terms like entropy. He literalizes both its meanings as close to simultaneously as he can, so that – to choose just one very clear instance – he can make W.A.S.T.E. equal communication. Loss of energy = increase of information. Trash = mail.

The world of *Lot 49* is a pun, ordered and disordered simultaneously. Swift's satire forces its narrator to intolerable binary choices to educate its readers beyond them, to make its readers realize alternatives, to push readers to see a *tertium quid*. Pynchon's allegory does that too, and goes even a step further: it tries to make us see that we are dealing not with either/or but with both/and. Thus the most basic building block of *The Crying of Lot 49*, its narrative – our old friend the integument, the envelope – is neither/both an outside nor/and an inside, neither/both a vehicle of meaning nor/and the meaning: it – the fiction – is a double-edged metaphor for both life and art (which is why Oedipa is both wrong and right to "read" life as a text).

So firmly rooted in this tradition of religious and artistic satire is *The Crying of Lot 49* that Pynchon plays boldly with his antecedents, turning their texts and their actors into his characters and their actions. Pierce Inverarity sounds like a prosopopoeia. His surname is a synchronous oxymoron, a localized pun: Inverarity = "into truth," as in "pierce into truth," and "untruth," as in lie. This seeming personification figure's will propels Oedipa to such action as she is capable of. His will and the old drunk sailor, who passes on to Oedipa the responsibility of a final letter to his wife (his will?) and thereby opens her to as much revelation as she is capable of, between them tap into some of the deepest sources and richest potential fields of meaning for Pynchon's novel.

The drunk's DTs send Oedipa into an intellectual fugue that carries her from the sailor's *delirium tremens* to their literalization, "a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare" (128), to the connection of that with miracle (specifically the paradoxical in name and action St. Narcissus, "The saint whose water can light lamps"), to clairvoyancy, to paranoia, to dreams, to the word, to metaphor ("a thrust at truth and a lie"), to memories of school and the dt of calculus, which stands for time differential ("a vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last for what it was"), to the "high magic" of "low puns," to loneliness, death, and extinction, and finally to a W.A.S.T.E. can to deliver the sailor's letter.

In that process she too suffers *delirium*: "Trembling, unfurrowed, she slipped sidewise, screeching back across the grooves of years." (129). This recasting of memory as delirium and vision seems to me specifically to recall Oedipa's earlier moment of perception, sparked by Genghis Cohen's dandelion wine (95), in which she also linked memory and vision, vision and absence, and which concludes also with the imagery of plowing and the persistence of the vanished: "a land where . . . bones could still rest in peace, nourishing the ghosts of dandelions, no one to plow them up" (99). Later in the book, very near the end, Oedipa realizes that if all she has seen and suspected is real, the only way she can relate to it is "as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia" (182). It has taken all the posthumous efforts of Pierce the Plowman to drive Oedipa out of her rut – and of course, there is a coarse sexual sense to that too, because in Pynchon, just as inspiration cannot happen without rhetorically ordered words, the spirit operates only in and through bodies, even when they are, as in this case, an inert Maas that resists transformation into a sacramental Maas.

Not for nothing does Pierce's letter find Oedipa idle in Kinneret-Among-The-Pines. Kinneret is the farthest limit of the Promised Land, the running-out of the heritage at the edge of the most salt sea:

From thence they shall come eastward to the sea of Kinneret: And shall reach as far as the Jordan: and at the last shall be closed in by the most salt sea. This shall be your land with its borders round about. (Numbers 34.11 - 12)

Heritage and disinheritance, the will and the bankruptcy of the Testament, the promise and exhaustion of the inheritance and the land, the last dribbling out of the Puritan new covenant at the edge of the most salt sea: all these, filtered through centuries of English satire, prosopopoeia, and allegory, constitute the latent and overt contents of the narrative of *The Crying of Lot 49*.

There was the true continuity, San Narciso had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America. (178)

The New World replicates the Promised Land of the Old Testament, Pierce's will miniaturizes/parodies/replicates the New Testament at the same time that it tropes the will Swift's unnamed Father leaves for the instruction and guidance of Peter, Martin, and Jack, at the same time that it distantly recalls Will the Dreamer's vision of Piers the Plowman, the only man who speaks what he means and means what he says. Everything – and everything is in this

little book – comes down to language, which *is* both the inside and the outside, the will and the testator, the envelope and its contents, the truth and the lie. In any other novel, forged stamps could only deliver news from nowhere: in this one, with its odd congeries of subtexts and strange attractors, the most profound news may well be that which is never delivered – as is usually the case in allegories.

The archetypal allegorical problems – the relations of insides and outsides, envelope and contents, fiction and truth, language and meaning – are consistently framed, both outside and inside allegories, as binary choices. Such Swiftian false dilemmas belong, by right, in *Lot 49*, to Maxwell's Demon, the great separator of opposites and accumulator of information. The demon in the box, in both the mechanical or electronic and the sexual senses of the word, becomes Oedipa's plague and temptation all through the novel, from the mixed reels of the televised showing of Baby Igor's movie and the reverse striptease and semi-comatose seduction that accompany it, to her perception of San Narciso as the printed circuit board of a computer, to the mailbox bearing the magical letters W.A.S.T.E. that she searches for, to the Nefastis Machine and its inventor's graceless proposition, to Oedipa's final emulation of Maxwell's Demon, closed in the box of the auction room, waiting to make her binary choice, to sort the pieces of information that the actual crying of lot 49 may reveal.

Puns and their literal meanings – especially the literal meanings of words and phrases and statements that we normally take figuratively – play crucial roles in all allegories, but in none more prominently than in *Lot 49*. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow looks like Buddha: an enlightened one, but also a pagan idol. Maxwell's Demon is, among other things, also a real demon, with a demon's capacity to delude and ensnare, a spiritual (or at least only quasi-corporeal) entity entirely consistent both with the pervasive pan-theological or ecumenical religious imagery of the novel and with its scientific imagery. By the same token, Pierce Inverarity's will is, among other things, an abstraction of volition, an incomprehensible – we're never permitted to read the document – relic of a vanished person's mind, as well as just Pierce Inverarity's list of bequests, the written expression of the heritage he would pass on.

That his will enslaves Oedipa only shows the weakness of her will: she ends the novel as she began it, passively waiting for revelation just as she waited to be rescued from her tower – Thurn, Torre – where she was formerly only her own prisoner but is now besieged by the Trystero. Like the Demon, Oedipa doesn't really do anything: she is only busy, and she identifies herself ironically more accurately than she knows when, just before the auction, she tells Genghis Cohen "I'm only being a busybody" (182). Reading mysteries is a good escape from serious thinking: living mysteries – and the plot of *Lot 49* is a classic the-witness-died-before-he-could-name-the-killer cornball – living mysteries of that kind is a good escape from yourself. In that context, if Oedipa's name means anything at all, it should remind us that, quite literally, she can't escape from herself any more than Oedipus could – or, for that matter, any more than Narcissus could.

Oedipa's persistent seeking for revelation and explanation outside herself is an error of just the same order. She is named, after all, for a man who always found the answers to his puzzles in himself, however uncomfortable that knowledge may have been. But Oedipa looks for enlightenment outside herself – at books, wills, envelopes, trash containers, portraits of James

Clerk Maxwell – just as she waits for some external power to free her from her imaginary tower, wherein, it is worth pointing out, usually resides the maiden who is the goal of the quest, not the maiden who has undertaken a quest: it's hard to do much questing without leaving home (or is it? That's one of the paradoxes that readers of *Lot 49* must resolve individually, each time they read the book). Not surprisingly, Oedipa's quest is always frustrated.

The Crying of Lot 49 painfully establishes a *gestalt*, quite consistently maintained, of imminent but always aborted communication, from the grand symbolism of the muted post horn through the comic mixing of the reels of Baby Igor's movie to the more ominous deaths or disappearances of Driblette and Mr. Thoth and the burning of Zapf's bookstore. And for a while at least, *The Crying of Lot 49* turns us all into replicas of Oedipa. We too grow suspicious of coincidences. We search for significance in casual presences and equally casual absences. We hunt for clues, for patterns – and the major pattern the alert reader finally sees is not the one Oedipa sees. She can discern conspiracy, or, if that is not true, paranoia: we begin to see someone looking in the wrong place for the wrong thing, we begin to recognize a *gestalt* of quest and frustration, of clues followed until the key clue disappears or aborts or misfires. The fine touch lies in the fact that, like Oedipus until very, very late in Sophocles' play, Oedipa's faith in her detective powers and in the certainty that the truth lies outside her never wavers: at the end of the novel, she still pursues her clues.

As in many allegories, an important part of the strategy of *The Crying of Lot 49* is to implicate the reader into the work, not by means of a naive identification or empathy with the hero but by inducing in us a kind of mirroring of the protagonist, the sort of replication of the novel's and the protagonist's essential action that we have just been discussing. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, this implication of the reader works so pervasively, from so early on in the narrative, that it completely usurps the role played by framing and the transgressing of frames in other allegories. That is, we are caught up in the narrative by the same device that distances us from it, just as the mediation of the stage, in *The Tempest*, both initiates us into the cosmos of the play and by its violation (in the first and second scenes, in the epilogue) re-aligns us with it, or just as the multiple narrators and perspectives of *Lord Jim* or *Heart of Darkness* or the donning and slipping of masks and tones and stylistic/grammatical relations at the beginning of *Pale Fire* conduct us into those works, simultaneously attracting and repelling us, drawing us near and pushing us away. So we in effect "become" Oedipa, imitating her assiduous cryptographic activity. Like Oedipa, we begin to divine connections, to suspect meanings behind the surface of things. We start looking for clues, for patterns, and like Oedipa, we encounter constant frustration, a sense of meaning hovering just beyond our comprehension. Unlike Oedipa, we learn from this frustration of expectations – we would have to be poorer readers than she not to notice it. It pushes us away, distances us from her: We want to know more actively than she does.

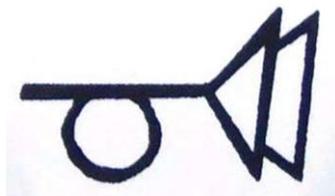
To the reader, it should be clear that Oedipa has had all the revelation she is going to get when she observes, on her way into the auction room, that Genghis Cohen's fly is unzipped: that, after all, has been exactly the pattern of all her other attempts to trace down clues. At the end of the trail, she has always found not revelation but copulation, or at least the offer of it. In the sexually punning sense of the words that has hovered just below or above their commonplace

metaphoric meaning, that has been the demon in the box that Oedipa has had to contend with, a demon whose binary choices are between revelation and copulation, as was clearly demonstrated by Oedipa's encounter with John Nefastis and his machine.

It is a significant set of alternatives, because in some ways they are not alternatives at all: revelation and copulation are for Oedipa effectively the same. What Oedipa seeks in revelation is the copula, the connection, the "is" statement, the datum that will let her say *X is Y*, Trystero *is* real, the surface *is* false, she *is* right. She wants the connection that will let her pierce through the surface of things into the heart of their darkness and return with the kernel of their meaning. Oedipa desires, with all the lust of a Roland-Barthesian reader, the certainty and univocation of personification. She (and Pynchon, to be sure) charges with a heavy freight of eroticism her search for an escape from her tower, from Pierce's will, from the multiple layers of clothing with which she insulates herself, but the search, however erotically conducted, is not aimed at any grand passion – unless it is a passion for order, for clarity, for unmitigated connotation.

But allegory does not convey meaning in that way, nor will it allow you to impoverish the richness of either the depth or the surface of things so easily. Therefore, the auction at which Oedipa awaits her revelation is exactly that, an auction. And Oedipa is not there to bid, to participate, to act; only to watch, to wait, to interpret, to read the event – "to be a busybody," as she herself says. For Oedipa, a static truth lies beneath a deceiving surface, and the surface is clue or symbol that she, as a disengaged observer, can follow inward to the heart of the mystery. Whodunits reveal their secrets that way, but allegories don't. They don't signify in that crude, symbolic manner. They enact their meaning and they entrap their reader in that meaning, just as Oedipa's quest has enacted meaning that the reader has learned by, at least in part, replicating. Oedipa has learned to read the muted post horn univocally, as a symbol for the Trystero; the reader understands it multivalently as, among other possibilities, an image of frustrated communication, an ideogram of stifled art, and a paradoxical symbol that does in fact communicate meaning in its depiction of silence.

Beneath the notice, faintly in pencil, was a symbol she'd never seen before, a loop, triangle and trapezoid, thus:



It might be something sexual, but she somehow doubted it. She found a pen in her purse and copied the address and symbol in her memo book, thinking: God, hieroglyphics." (52)

A circle and tangent, a triangle and quadrangle: From the reader's point of view, the ideogram might as well be an abstract expression of the action of the novel and of Oedipa's final situation vis-a-vis her "symmetrical four" alternatives. It might be a meaningless doodle. But Oedipa perceives it from the first as a symbol, that is, as in itself a blank, a void, to which meaning not-

necessarily-intrinsic to itself must be attached. The meaning she finally attaches to it – she reads it as a sign of the vengeance of Trystero upon Thurn und Taxis – is unequivocal, however mysterious her Trystero may be.

But hieroglyphics, as every literalist knows, are sacred writings, scriptures, and scriptures are notoriously difficult to interpret and rarely unequivocal. We can read this hieroglyph in relation to the last trumpets, which will blow “at the round earth’s imagined corners” in the Apocalypse that a lot of Pynchon criticism wants to see in this novel. We can read it as a peace symbol, like any other negating image: the trumpet of war silenced. We can see it as an emblem of art muffled, voices silenced – either by the “Industrial *anything*” (51) Fallopian opposes or by the likes of Fallopian and his followers. It could represent failed communication, signals and messages stopped at their source and undelivered.¹⁸ We can see it too as a pure anti-symbol, an abstract image of negation, a sign cancelling itself, voiding its own meaning – in that sense, the concise emblem of language itself, language already deconstructed, language flying apart into the opposing meanings of puns and negations. Above all, we can grasp the muted post horn as a symbol of symbols, an ideograph of symbolism, an image demanding and denying significance and signification at the same moment, by the same means, and in this way too imaging language, deconstructed and irrational, showing its irrationality and multiplicity at every moment, and thereby – thereby – showing also how deeply and accurately it reflects, embodies, conveys reality and real meaning.

The muted post horn is a speaking picture, the instrument that plays at the Deaf-Mute dance, and the reader hears it clearly enough, hears it as clearly as the Deaf-Mute dancers at the Convention hear the “unthinkable order of music” (131) they all dance to, despite Oedipa’s fears of collisions. Once again, Oedipa’s failure to consider any aspect of the muted post horn but the single one she selects enacts important meaning in the novel: all those other possibilities are as available to her as they are to us.

So too Oedipa enacts meaning once more at the novel’s close: she waits, as in essence she has always waited, for release from her tower, for an external force to shatter the shell of her world – and the simple fact is, the novel has conditioned us by now to anticipate that nothing will happen. Perhaps this time we will be wrong. Perhaps a revelation will come. After all, Oedipa, for all her inertia and her fear, is *here*, is still, however timidly, questing. If revelation does come, we readers will not be given it, because ours is the harder quest of working through the allegory, each for him or herself, each as alone as Oedipa ever was. These final paragraphs of *The Crying of Lot 49* carry us back to the very beginnings of allegory, to allegory as rhetorical and grammatical kin of riddle and enigma and irony, allegory as a veil over meaning rather than a spotlight on it. Whatever revelation Oedipa may or may not get (remember that her namesake did finally find out what he sought, and the knowledge cost him his eyes and his homeland), she will certainly have to continue waiting until she learns, as the reader by now knows, that the choices, in allegory as in life, are always greater than either/or. Oedipa will

¹⁸ I refer at this point not only to the post horn in itself and to the use of musical instruments to signal things like troop movements and so forth, but also to the common colloquialism of “the horn” for the telephone: *cf.* p. 148: “First thing after unpacking she was on the horn to Randolph Driblette, the director. After about ten rings an elderly lady answered, ‘I’m sorry, we’ve nothing to say.’” In this capacity, the muted horn signals the repression of all communication within the social body.

have to continue waiting in the limbo of her passivity, trapped inside Clerk Maxwell's binary box, until she can hear the music of a muted post horn – which is, in itself, no mean symbol of allegory.