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"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME" AND *THE CRYING OF LOT 49:* A SEMIOTIC MAP FROM THE TOWER

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Mr. and Mrs. Russell Paulk

who have shown unwavering love and support in every endeavor that I have undertaken.

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ABSTRACT

Using a Lacanian and French feminist approach, this paper draws parallels between two startlingly different works of literature: Browning's "Childe Roland To the Dark Tower Came" and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. Both works have been interpreted as psychological narratives, and from a Lacanian stance, the poem and novel can be read as neurolinguistic journeys. Specifically, Childe Roland's journey to the tower represents his transition from infanthood to the symbolic realm. On the other hand, Oedipa's journey begins at the tower, and she must travel Roland's path in reverse in order to integrate into the semiotic. "Childe Roland" and *Lot 49* share common motifs—the quest, the horn, the tower, the lifeless road, the old man—which indicate common psychological stages.

A linguistic analysis of the works addresses the stages of the development of language on several levels: From a broad perspective, such an analysis mirrors the sociopolitical environments of the authors, focusing on the ways in which language has influenced and has been influenced by sociological transitions. Moreover, a Lacanian study provides insight into the psychologies of Browning and Pynchon individually and helps to delineate their roles as major literary figures within their respective societies. On a universal level, a comparison of "Childe Roland," a product of pre-Lacanian times, to *Lot 49*, a post-Lacanian work, reveals that the process of initiation into the linguistic realm is inherent to humanity.

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". . . the whole of literature, from Flaubert to the present day, became the problematics of language" Roland Barthes.

INTRODUCTION

According to Victorian scholar Walter E. Houghton, "The problem with communication, the split between the poet and his audience, the alienation of the poet—all these literary diseases of our [present] time were first experienced by the Victorian writers" (xv). This modern problem of communication had originated during the birth of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution when a "new reading public" emerged due to more widespread social advantages (xvi). In addition, the Age of Reason had established self-consciousness as central to human existence and as a central focus of art. Because the Age of Reason appealed to science and objectivity, the possibility of universal values emerged, meaning that standards such as specific cultural religious beliefs were suddenly challenged by scientific discoveries. As a result of this shift in social structure and values, "serious writers shared a conviction that new modes of thought and behavior called all in doubt" (xvi). Victorian poets were especially concerned with issues of alienation, and writers were particularly aware of the incompatibility of the languages of poetry and science. Tennyson's close friend Richard Trench asked: "'When except in our time . . . did men seek to build up their poetry on their own individual experiences instead of some objective foundation common to all men?'" (Houghton xvii). The modern period resolved the conflict of the Victorian period by focusing almost exclusively on the importance of establishing individual values. As a result, the individual mind took

priority over the shared experiences of humankind. As Edward Mendelson notes, modernist literature, like Romantic (and for that matter Victorian), "imagines that it establishes its own value and uses only its own terms to question itself" (2846).

As a Victorian "poet-prophet," Robert Browning struggled to find an effective means of communicating with an audience that he did not know or understand. In fact, one recurring theme in Browning's poetry is the unsuccessful attempt of lovers to achieve anything beyond a superficial communication (xvii). In the early years of his career, Browning followed in the footsteps of his Romantic predecessors, imitating the work of Byron and Shelley to some extent. John Stuart Mill criticized Browning's first published poem "Pauline," stating that he had never witnessed "'a more intense and morbid self-consciousness'" in another human being (164). In his later poetry, Browning consciously strove to reconcile the objective and subjective in both form and subject matter, and "a more coherent individual continuity is allowed to exist" (Bloom 494). Despite Browning's own assertion that his poems were dramatic monologues, Harold Bloom argues that they are "antiphons in which many voices speak, including several that belong to Browning himself" (494). Browning's work reflects the conflict that characterized the Victorian age--that is, whether to give priority to the individual experience or to the collective experience of society. Browning's standards differed from predominant Victorian ideals concerning morality, and he was often criticized for presenting evil characters objectively. Walter E. Houghton notes, "[H]e delighted in showing ways by which man's spirit and standards of conduct are molded by time and place, by his beliefs and his language" (Houghton 166)--practice that foreshadows the modernist precept.

Despite Browning's treatment of ethics as a relative concept, his poetry ultimately reflects his personal moral scale: "Evil is the rejection of life, and good the affirmation of it, the commitment to it" (166). Such is the case with Childe Roland, who commits himself on a very individual and personal level to his quest. Indeed, Browning's poetry is the harbinger of the postmodern self-consciousness to come.

Aware that self-consciousness was only one means of perception and that the necessities of "science and literature shape personal choices and are in turn shaped by those choices" (Mendelson 2844), Thomas Pynchon emerged on the forefront of the postmodern movement. Like Browning, Pynchon had occasion to consider the problematics of language and communication. When he was a Navy seaman, his duties included updating information boards on the ship. These clear plastic boards were viewed from above by officers but were updated from below--an arrangement that required Pynchon to write backwards (Lane 3). Certainly, this experience forced him to consider the relativity of meaningful communication. Pynchon himself cites his most serious flaw as a young writer as being his "Bad Ear." He credits Jack Kerouac, Saul Bellow, Herb Gold, and Philip Roth as having helped him develop "his perception of voices by showing him 'how at least two very distinct kinds of English could be allowed in fiction to exist'" (Mendelson 2839). This statement parallels Bloom's assessment of Browning's unintentional "antiphon [consisting of] many voices"; however, Pynchon's awareness of and effort towards using multiple voices simultaneously indicate a postmodern attitude on communication.

Browning's "Childe Roland To the Dark Tower Came" and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* are quest narratives representative of the Victorian and postmodern periods, respectively, and of the dilemmas concerning language and communication. Critic Susan Hardy Aiken points out: "As a symbolic evocation of the dilemma of modern humanity deprived of the securities of a traditionally sanctioned world view, disoriented by the loss of old values, and questing aimlessly for some new certainty, 'Childe Roland' is an ironic inversion of the traditional quest patterns, a striking elaboration of the Victorian wasteland motif" (34). Browning's "Childe Roland" results in the protagonist's development of individual self-awareness, while Oedipa, Pynchon's protagonist, confronts the impasse of self-reflection in a manner that allows her to redefine herself in terms of her community. Thus, not only do the works mirror individual acquisition of and reaction to language as experienced by Roland and Oedipa, but they also mirror issues of expression that were pertinent to their respective socio-political eras. A comparative reading of "Childe Roland" and *Lot 49* in terms of Lacanian linguistic theory reveals the dis-ease with and struggle for communication throughout modernity, emphasizes the stages of psychological development that Lacan believed were inextricably linked to the attainment of language, and explores the possible effects that linguistic stages can have on society as a whole.

Bloom debates the effectiveness of applying psycholinguistic theories, such as those of Lacan and the French feminists, to poetry. He contends that "the grammar of poetry produces the grammar of poetry," explaining that poetry is discursive rather than linguistic. However, since poems are expressed in language, they move from discursive

to linguistic space. While the language of poetry may suggest abstract meaning, the language (linguistics) becomes the concrete representation of these ideas. Once the writer expresses himself, he leaves only words to indicate a moment that is already in the past; that is, once a thought has been expressed, it is already in the past. Critic Stephen A. Leavy emphasizes the significance of Lacanian theory to literary criticism by quoting a review of a book by James Joyce. Referring to the influence of psychoanalytic and linguistic theory, the reviewer maintains that:

> classic realistic fictions and conventional literary criticism depend for their existence upon the notion of a unified conscious subject with confident and unquestioning access to the world of objects. Language is held to be a transparent means of reference to this world, especially in the case of the narrational "meta-language" of the realist, that which judges other discourse and denies its own practices of constructing meaning. But language can also be a threat to this easy correspondence. A heightened conception of its modes of operation and of the arbitrariness of its signs can lead us to fundamental questions about the production of meaning and our constitution as thinking subjects. (Leavy 6)

Leavy contrasts Freud's methods with Lacan's: Freudian criticism isolates unconscious conflicts and analyzes them in terms of either characters or the author's subject. Like Freudianism, Lacanian criticism "questions the assumptions on which the text is written--namely, that it means what it says and that the author knew what he or she meant" (7). Lacan takes the importance of language in psychoanalysis to another level by "propos[ing] that the word and writing govern the writer and reader . . . (The reader--and here we might add, the listening analyst--is also not a 'unified conscious subject' dealing with an external object.) The situation seems anarchic, possibly chaotic, and silently paradoxical, because notwithstanding all this, the speaker or writer always is saying something and addresses it to somebody else" (7). In other words, Lacanian thought not

only questions the basis of the text but also undercuts the existence of a linear relationship between the conscious analyst and the unconscious subject. Of the Freudian slip, Lacan states that "Freud discovered that truth manifests itself in the letter rather than the spirit, that is, in the way things are actually said rather than in the intended meaning" (Gallop 22). Leavy distinguishes two paths of interpretation: "the thematic" and "the word, the concrete utterance" (11-12). Although Freud insists on "the word," "Lacanian literary criticism . . . always inevitably uncovers, beneath the play of the signifier, recognizable Lacanian themes" (27). Concerning the application of Lacanian thought to literature, critic Jane Gallop contends that "[c]ertain models of the psyche, certain psychological truths discovered in psychoanalysis operate as the revealed latent content of a work of literature" (25).

For example, Browning realized after writing "Childe Roland" that the poem "went much deeper into his subconscious than is indicated by his reference to Edgar's line in *King Lear* . . . He realized later that a tower he had seen in the Carrara Mountains, a painting he had seen in Paris, and the figure of a horse in a tapestry . . . had entered into his conception" (Harrison 505). Browning's acknowledgment of a subconscious source of inspiration supports Joyce Meyer's contention that "Childe Roland is not telling an objective tale but is narrating a psychological experience" (335). Aiken, too, maintains that, "as a nightmare journey into the self, an exploration of the unconscious, it is a remarkable anticipation of Freudian and Jungian insights" (24). Family relationships also seem to have played a major role in Browning's subconscious attitudes. According to Betty Miller, Browning's father was "tender-hearted and 'gentle as a gentle woman'" with

"an almost total dependence on the will of others." In the household, he seemed to be a second son, allowing his wife to make important decisions (7). Robert Browning obviously followed in his father's footsteps, allowing his mother, and then his wife, to dominate his life. Browning's admiration of Shelley and his adaptation of Shelley's ideals, including atheism, threatened to destroy his relationship with his mother. Realizing that he had to choose between his beliefs and his mother, he chose the latter and destroyed all evidence of his early life and ideals (7-8). Possibly, because of Browning's lifelong dependence on mother-figures, he failed to signify himself, instead allowing himself to be signified by the (m)other. From a Lacanian point of view, Browning's relationships with his mother and his wife indicate a failure to move beyond the Oedipal fixation, meaning that Browning located his "Ideal-I" in these two women. Harold Bloom maintains that, in compensation for having not been independent of mother-figures, Browning wrote "Childe Roland"--"a representation of power" (200); this idea fits with Lacan's theory that language is a substitution for primal union with the mother (Moi 99). Bloom states that the poem is at once "nothingness and Absolute Being . . . the rhetorical irony or illusio that always permits a belated poem to begin again in its quest for renewed strength. Signification has wandered away, and Roland is questing for lost and forgotten meaning, for representation, for a seconding or re-advocacy of his own self" (200). Thus, in the writing of "Childe Roland," Browning provides himself with the opportunity to re-invent his subjecthood time and again, thereby eternally regaining the voice that he never fully possessed in life.

Lacan posits that everything, including the nonverbal, is present in words; language is our only access to the nonverbal (16). Lacan subscribes to Saussure's notion of the signifier and the signified; however, the relationship of signifier to signified is arbitrary, "arising out of the discriminatory lexicon of a natural language, [and] its meaning is burdened with history and tinged by association" (16). Therefore, any signifying word will invariably have overlapping signification with other words; "interpretation aims not at closure but at disclosure" (16).

If the words "our patients" are replaced with "literature," Leavy's assertion of Lacan's value to the field of psychoanalysis is equally applicable to literature:

> As long as the basic structure of psychoanalysis was unchallenged within our own ranks, we approached that completion of our science . . with the libido theory, metapsychology, ego psychology, and structural hypothesis; it is quite unlikely that anything unsettling would be heard from our patients because we would have determined what we would hear and what we would ignore. When the emphasis is put on speaking, the science cannot be completed, and every new generation of analysts stands before a new world. (19)

CHAPTER 1

Lacanian Theory

During the middle years of his career, from approximately 1938-1966, Jacques Lacan developed theories concerning the acquisition of language as being the precipitator of the development of the individual ego (Ayerza 2-3). His theories on meaning in language and the way in which language becomes male-dominated have formed the basis for other related theories, including French feminism. Lancan melds his linguistic theory of the Imaginary and the Symbolic order with Freud's theory of the Oedipal crisis. Lacan asserts that the Imaginary stage is pre-Oedipal and is the time during which the child perceives him or herself to be unified with the mother as well as with the entire world (Moi 99). In the Imaginary, no absence or difference exists—only presence and identity. The transition to the Symbolic order is marked by the child's acquisition of language and by the concurrent development of the Oedipal fixation. The "Law of the Father" becomes dominant, and the child therefore suffers a loss of identity with the mother and the world; Lacan characterizes this stage with the words "'I am that which I am not'" (Moi 99).

According to Lacan, the child is in the imaginary realm during the stage of nursling dependence and during his identification with the (m)other; the child perceives no separation between himself and his surroundings. The child enters the Mirror stage at approximately six months of age, at which point he assumes an upright position and recognizes his own image in the mirror but sees no difference between himself and his reflection. The "I" is "precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other" and prior to its initiation into subjecthood by

language (2). The Ideal-I moves the ego in a fictional direction before it is socially determined by the symbolic because, as Jane Gallop points out, "the intersubjective structures are covered over by mirroring" (59). The function of the mirror stage is to establish a relationship between the inner self and the outer world (Lacan 4), though it is a fictional relationship. The child's perception of other people, therefore, is formed by his own image, meaning that the perceived other is always a fictional projection of the self (Gallop 61). Lacan characterizes the mirror stage as a "drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation" and in which the individual subconsciously creates fantasies; in turn, the subject's image adapts an alienating identity that serves to structure rigidly the individual's ego (4). The individual must break the mirrors of the imaginary in order to enter the symbolic, which is the realm of language--the "locus of dialogue" (Gallop 60). Although the individual still perceives others in terms of his own image, he understands his perception as "structuring projections" (Gallop 61). The process of integration into the symbolic is generally recognized as a traumatic time during which the child is torn from his mother by the intrusion of the Law of the Father. For the first time, the individual's world is signified by language, rather than images, and the child is spoken into subjecthood. Because the language of the symbolic forces rigid order onto the individual's thought processes and images, the symbolic realm holds no mystery or creativity (Moran 125). According to Lacan, the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic is an "ethical imperative," meaning that individuality must be established; the only alternative is psychosis (25).

The intrusion of the Father also functions as the "inscription of subjectivity in the Other," as in the system of signifiers, such as name, language, sexual designation, nationality, and all other cultural forms (Jackson 30). Moran posits that language constitutes the position or place of a person; in other words, the subject is determined by the letter or signifier (134). In addition, "the subject is referred to only in terms of its relationship to the dominant chain of signifiers, which are themselves invested with agency" (138). Lacan's position is that humans constitute the symbolic world, but to a lesser degree than they are constituted by it (Moran 138).

From the point of transition into the symbolic, the eternal human condition is one of unfulfilled longing for the (m)other, and language becomes a substitute for the loss of primal union with the (m)other. Since desire is unconscious and is the result of the separation from the (m)other (Moran 125), an individual cannot recognize the phallus as signifier prior to initiation into the symbolic. Brivic calls it the "'signifier par excellence of the impossible identity'; that is, it represents something that is equal to itself" (27). In *Ecrits: A Selection*, Lacan differentiates between the penis as a biological organ and the phallus as a symbol (284). The phallus is created by the child in response to his fear of castration; thus, it is built on emptiness and must constantly be reinvented and reaffirmed (Brivic 28). According to Lacan, the phallus is a neutral symbol but "is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire" (287). In other words, desire is inextricably linked to castration because the "phallic signifier" represents desire; "desire shall henceforth be wed to castration because the phallic signifier is the mark of desire" (Gallop 145). Furthermore, Lacan

explains that "as the authority that enforces langauge, the phallus stands for the firm center that controls the unclear shifting of meaning [that is] associated with the feminine" (285).

Lacan holds that "desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting" (287). In other words, need and demand are conscious, while desire is unconscious and is the result of the separation from the (m)other as the child is integrated into the Symbolic Realm (Moran 124). Language becomes a substitute for the (m)other but can never completely fulfill the desire for reunion with the (m)other, since symbolic language, as stated above, holds no mystery or creativity (Moran 125). Thus, Lacan contends that desire springs from the gap between the ego and its ideal; the gap is created during the Mirror Stage when Symbolic Law intrudes upon the child and (m)other. Just as the Symbolic initially functions to cut off the primal union of (m)other and child, so does it continue to frustrate the movement of desire in every direction. The mathematical asymptote curves toward the line but never reaches it, just as the subject moves closer to the fulfillment of desire (or reunion with the [m]other) without ever achieving its goal. In fact, the closer the subject gets to the metaphorical line, the further the subject falls from truth (Moran 125). Similarly, as the ego (or self-realization) gets closer, doubt becomes greater: "The ego is structured so that it is always coming toward itself, but since it never arrives, it remains in doubt as to actually being an 'itself'" (Jackson 28). The ego seeks its image but can never reach the ideal. Furthermore, since no modern cultural standards exist to reinforce certainty, the subject must constantly create new evidence for validating himself, a practice which results in narcissism. In

addition, the subject views the world as other to or mirroring of itself; if the world does not reflect what the subject wants to see, the subject must destroy, change or deny the world (Jackson 29).

CHAPTER 2

"Childe Roland To the Dark Tower Came"

Although Bloom opposes linguistic analyses of poetry, his Freudian assessment of "Childe Roland" paves the way for a Lacanian reading:

> In Romantic quests or internalized romances, an object of desire or even a sublimated devotion to an abstract idea cannot replace the precursor element in the id, but it does replace the ego-ideal, as Freud posited. For Roland, the Dark Tower has been put in the place of the ego ideal of traditional quest, but the obsessed Childe remains haunted by precursor-forces and traces of his own former self in the id. (107)

Other critics have proffered interpretations of "Childe Roland" that are based upon elements of psychoanalytic theory. In her 1960 commentary on the poem, Maud Bodkin draws considerable attention to Roland as a "'childe'" and as the "'uninitiated'" and then suggests "that the intention of Browning's mind in its unconscious world may have been to present the undergoing of . . . an initiation" (60). Furthermore, Bodkin emphasizes the Rebirth pattern (60). Charles Woodard uses Bodkin's idea and further analyzes the poem in terms of Jung's Rebirth archetypes: One is a "quest whose object is sometimes exceedingly vague; the other is the sterile, blighted, desolate landscape . . ." (97). As John W. Willoughby notes, Browning fails to identify the time, locale, or any specifics regarding Roland's situation--an unusual approach for Browning. This lack of temporal setting makes the character seem unreal or "more than real," indicating that the work is symbolic (292) and universal in meaning. Willoughby's interpretation, suggesting that Roland "is a projection of a mind with which the reader's only contact is this projection" (291), offers an option that prefigures Lacan's theory of the individual's projection of his own image onto his world. Furthermore, the critic observes that the poem's action may be

internal or subconscious--"a psychological drive the existence of which he [Roland] does not suspect, much less understand or control," which would explain Roland's apparent lack of command over his actions (296).

Gallop's comments concerning the transition to the symbolic bear an uncanny resemblance to Roland's journey:

> It could be said that the symbolic can be encountered only as a tear in the fabric of the imaginary, a revealing interruption. The paths to the symbolic are thus in the imaginary. The symbolic can be reached only by not trying to avoid the imaginary, by being knowingly in the imaginary. Likewise, mastery of the illusions that psychoanalysis calls transference can be attained only by falling prey to those illusions, by losing one's position of objectivity, control, or mastery in relation to them. (60)

Such is the path that Childe Roland takes as he embarks on his metaphorical journey, not towards physical death, but towards the "radical intersubjectivity" that characterizes the symbolic (Gallop 59).

The opening stanza of "Childe Roland" meets one of Bloom's criteria for the beginning of a Post-Enlightenment poem: "It must know and demonstrate that nothing is in its right place" (106). In the first line, Roland holds the old man's word in contempt, yet he later indicates that he believes the cripple. Roland begins his narrative with a description of an ominous old man, "that hoary cripple" who "lied in every word" (1-2) and is armed with his staff, a phallic image that seems to attest to his age and authority. Surprisingly, the decrepit man evokes hatred rather than pity from Roland, who declares him a "hateful cripple" (43). Joyce Meyers explains that "the old man seems to be an accomplice of the victimizing forces in Nature and takes delight in his role . . ." (336). Despite the fact that Roland does not want to follow the man's direction, he takes the

path, thereby indicating his lack of control over his actions and perhaps signifying that he is fulfilling his ethical imperative, however bleak it may seem. Since the man directs Roland toward the path leading to the symbolic, he represents the intrusive Lacanian father who rips the child from his blissful union with the (m)other. Roland is aware that the old man is "malicious[ly]" taking him as "victim" (2,6). Obviously, Roland is aware that the old man tells the truth about the direction of the path, for Roland recognizes "that ominous tract, which all agree, / Hides the Dark Tower" (4-5); thus, "Roland is inevitably saying one thing while meaning another . . . [his] consciousness is grounded in the realization that meaning has already wandered away" (108).

Roland begins to describe the landscape, which is "gray plain all round" (52). He remarks that he thinks he "never saw / Such starved ignoble nature, nothing throve" (55-6). Thus, the terrain serves as a metaphor for the symbolic world, which is barren and oppressive and into which Roland is being initiated. Nature answers "peevishly" (63), personifying the natural processes that are complicitous in Roland's transition. In other words, he does not traverse untraveled land but rather embarks on a journey that every human must take. Almost from the moment that Roland steps onto the path, he begins to feel trapped, as if he has been "ensnare[d]" by the old man (8). When Roland does stray from the ordained path, the day shoots "one grim / Red leer to see the plain catch its estray" (47-8). Norton Crowell states that Roland's perception of his surroundings reveals his own mindset; "every fear is wholly within the soul of Roland" (Crowell 145). Likewise, Bloom maintains that "Roland's world is wholly visionary, its 'realism' a pure self-imposition. Roland's landscape is a kind of continuous metonymy, in which a single

thing substitutes for the thing itself" (110). The world which he has entered is not only one over which he has no control, but also a world which controls him, just as language defines human existence for the most part (Moran 138). Although the child feels despair, he resigns himself to continue because "naught else remained to do" (54). As Meyers points out, he even descibes the plants as prisoners, again projecting his feelings onto the landscape (336). When Roland looks back for "a last view / O'er the safe road, twas gone" (51-2); therefore, the safe arms of the (m)other have disappeared, and Roland begins his journey to the Dark Tower.

In stanza XIII, Roland encounters "one stiff blind horse" (76), which serves as a symbol of the idea that even the most powerful creatures are reduced to lifelessness in this environment. Armistead notes that a horse usually indicates potency; the fact that this particular horse "might be dead" (79) suggests that this world is infertile and cannot sustain even the most formidable of creatures. In addition, the horse traditionally is a phallic symbol, meaning that, as a symbol, it is built on emptiness and must constantly be reinvented or reaffirmed in order to remain in control of the unclear shifting of meaning that characterizes the feminine. The fact that the horse in Roland's landscape "might" be dead (79) suggests that the young boy has experienced fear of castration; however, he has not yet developed the individual ego with which to empower the phallus, nor does he feel the overwhelming need to overpower the feminine.

Early in his quest, Childe Roland remembers "knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed" but failed. Of course, the narrator does not realize that the knights must fail in conquering the tower, for that failure is the ethical imperative. When Roland

feels hopeless and tries to recall "happier sights" (87), he can only remember his two friends who preceded him in the quest and never returned, yet another indication that the landscape supports no significant life.

The landscape gradually begins to incorporate phallic images among the infertility, and, unlike the relatively benign staff, the images become increasingly malevolent. For example, Roland comments on the fact that no thistle stalk is permitted to grow "above its mates . . . the bents were jealous else" (67-69). In the imaginary realm, jealousy has no role, since the child perceives everything to be one; only in the symbolic, when the individual realizes a separate though incomplete identity, is jealousy possible. Next, Roland describes the river that crosses his path "As unexpected as a serpent comes" (110). The river has a twofold meaning: On one hand, water is classically construed as the feminine element and provides life to the barren land--characteristics that are suggestive of the (m)other; the fact that her presence is "unexpected" implies that Roland suddenly recognizes a separation between himself and the pre-Oedipal mother. In other words, he no longer perceives himself to be one with the mother. On the other hand, the serpent is a phallic image; the only characteristic that the river and serpent share is their unexpectedness. Roland's entrance into the water, which is reflective, represents his passage through the Mirror Stage. Along the banks of the river, "drenched willows," or feminine flowers, are drowning and "alders kneeled down" (116-17) because of "the river which had done them all wrong" (119), suggesting feelings of betrayal, just as a child feels betrayed when abandoned by his or her caregiver. While crossing the river, Roland stabs the water-rat and remarks that "it sounded like a baby's shriek" (126), suggesting

that during his journey across the river, he has destroyed innocence (Hoar 27), or perhaps has made the final break with the (m)other. The fact that Roland uses a spear for the first time implies that he is beginning to develop a sense of phallic authority. In terms of Lacanian theory, he has broken the mirrors of the imaginary.

Once Roland reaches the other side of the river, he believes that he will find "a better country" (128) but soon realizes that his hopes are in vain. Upon Roland's crossing the river, the theme of entrapment is further emphasized. Roland observes "toads in a poisoned tank, / [And] wild cats in a red-hot iron cage . . . [and wonders] what penned them there, with all the plain to choose?" (131-32, 134). The implication is that, in the symbolic, language serves to imprison and limit the wildest of natures. Roland suddenly becomes aware of mountains that surround him: "Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view . . . How you get from them was no clearer case" (166,68). Although Roland has been able to escape the staff, the thistles, and the river, he cannot avoid the imperious mountains which cage him. He is trapped just as the wild animals are trapped. On a psychological level, the mountains signify the phallic authority that is being imposed on Roland's world. At this point, Roland begins to identify consciously his situation as a state of mind: "Yet I half seemed to recognize some trick / Of mischief happened to me, God knows when-- / In a bad dream perhaps" (169-71). The narrator realizes that he and the images he has perceived are possibly situated in the imaginary realm although he still has no understanding of the destination of his journey. In addition, he begins to realize the full impetus of his entrapment as the metaphor assumes a more malicious tone: "one more time, came a click / As when a trap shuts--and you're inside the den!" (173-74).

In the next stanza, he discerns that his goal is in sight. Appropriately, it is marked by "two hills on the right, / Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight, / While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . ." looms (176-78). Again, the phallic symbolism is apparent in the bulls, the single mountain, and then in the Dark Tower that Roland notices "in the midst . . . / The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart, / Built of brown stone, without a counterpart in the whole world" (181-84). This description bears an uncanny resemblance to Lacan's description of the development of the ego: "The formation of the I is symbolized in dreams by a fortress, or a stadium--its inner arena or enclosure, surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tips, dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle whose form (sometimes juxtaposed in the same scenario) symbolizes the id in a quite startling way" (Lacan 5).

The hills observe him "like giants at a hunting . . . to see the game at bay," as some unidentified force instructs: "Now stab and end the creature--to the heft!" (190-92). Roland will be stabbed with the privileged signifier, or phallic authority, thereby making complete his transition to the symbolic. Suddenly, "noise was everywhere" and Roland hears "names in [his] ears" (193-94), indicating that language is now defining Roland's thought processes; words now label and categorize his life. He bids goodbye to the imaginary as he assumes a phallic signifier for himself: "Dauntless the slug-horn to [his] lips [he] set" (203). Roland assumes "dauntless" control of the horn. Roland has met his ego-ideal [the Tower], has been inscribed with subjecthood, and will always be on the asymptotical curve—desiring to retrieve the ideal but always falling away from it. Bloom

contends that "The perspectivism of the Dark Tower metaphor has been overcome by that final line, where the Childe presents himself as the limner of his own night-piece, the poet rather than the subject of his poem" (115), thereby attributing newly-gained linguistic power to Roland. Lacan would reject Bloom's heroic reading of "Childe Roland"; however, Bloom's analysis of the final stanza of the poem echoes aspects of Lacanian thought. The Dark Tower, a silent phallic image, has been replaced by an instrument of communication that embodies both masculine and feminine energies in its convex and concave shape. Roland remains within the domain of the Dark Tower and will henceforth be limited by it. The final image of the poem is Roland at the center of the universe, defiantly assuming the horn as his own. Thus, his journey has created in him a solipsistic self-consciousness--an artistic exaggeration of the attitudes that dominated the Victorian and modern periods.

CHAPTER 3

The Crying of Lot 49

While Childe Roland's quest ends at the Dark Tower, Oedipa Maas' journey in *The Crying of Lot 49* begins with her imprisonment in a tower. Oedipa, whose name immediately evokes the Oedipus myth, remembers a painting she had seen in Mexico:

> [There] were a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships, and forests of the earth were contained in the tapestry, and the tapestry was the world . . . She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been a couple of thousand miles away in her own tower, was only by accident known as Mexico, and so Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape. What did she desire to escape from? Such a captive maiden soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all . . . . (Pynchon 21)

According to Hanjo Berressem, Oedipa's identification with the girls in the painting is her first encounter with the Mirror Stage in the novel: "The painting thus becomes a perfect allegory of the reflexive space and the 'symbolic matrix' in which Lacan describes the construction of the ego, as well as, by extension, the symbolic space of the subject . . ." (92). In addition, critic Robert Watson interprets the tower of imprisonment to be a metaphor for an "oppression of sensitivity" (66), suggesting that Oedipa's place in society denies her feminine expression. In Lacanian terms, Oedipa's tower represents phallic imprisonment in that the structure controls the "unclear shifting of meaning [that is] associated with the feminine" (Lacan 285). The fact that the tower's "height and architecture are like her ego only incidental" parallels Lacan's theory of the relationship

between the construction of the ego and phallus: The ego emerges as an ethical imperative, while the phallus is erected incidentally, born of fear of castration and of desire for reunion with the (m)other. Oedipa's position in the tower mirrors Roland's in that he has arrived at the Dark Tower by necessity; he has assumed the horn only incidentally. In contrast to Roland's pre-Freudian journey involving pre-dominantly phallic symbols, Pynchon uses Freudian concepts allegorically and parodically.

Oedipa compares her relationship with Pierce Inverarity to his entrance into her tower: She fantasizes that "dauntless" he slipped the lock with a credit card in order to rescue her, but "'all that had gone on between them had never really escaped the confinement of that tower'" (Watson 61). Thus, Oedipa remains in a marginalized position, which, according to Julia Kristeva, is the typical place for women within a patriarchal society. Kristeva, unlike many other feminist theorists, offers no theory of "femininity" or "femaleness"; instead, she discusses women in terms of "marginality, subversion, and dissidence." In the marginal position, women are the border between man and chaos, at times even merging with the chaotic element. Thus, "women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of all frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown" (Moi 167). Furthermore, women assume the paradoxical role of being the frightening outside darkness or unknown wilderness, as well as being the shield that protects the symbolic order from this chaos (Moi 168). Because women are marginal to the patriarchy, their experience can be discussed in terms of "any other struggle against a centralized power

structure" (169). The force that Oedipa perceives to be "magic, anonymous and malignant" is the unseen patriarchal force.

Like Roland, Pierce, whose name suggests phallic authority, is ineffective in his attempts to control his surroundings and is not interested in freeing his relationship with Oedipa from the authority of the tower. While Pierce cannot serve as Oeidpa's saviour during his life, he can guide her toward self-awareness--ultimately her only means of salvation--after his death. Just as "that hoary cripple" guides Roland down the path to the tower, so does Pierce direct Oedipa out of her tower when he appoints her executrix of his will; she emerges from the marginalized "pines and salt fogs of Kinneret . . . with no idea she was moving toward anything new" (20,23). Just as the Oedipus of Greek mythology undertakes the quest of solving the riddle of his paternity, so does Oedipa embark on a quest to unravel the legacy of Pierce's will (Moddelmog 244). Like Roland, Oedipa projects her own attitudes and desires onto the landscape as she begins her journey: She describes San Narciso "like many named places in California . . . less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts--census tracts, special purpose bond-issue directs, shopping nuclei, all over-laid with access roads to its own freeway" (24). In contrast to Roland's bleak description of his world, Oedipa uses a metaphor of fertility to describe inanimate objects: She notices a neighborhood of houses "which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth" (24). Furthermore, she likens the order of houses to the patterns on a circuit card in a transistor radio; "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 . . ;

so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding" (24). Her feelings echo Roland's perception: "Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick / Of mischief happened to me . . ." (168-69), indicating his awareness that some truth exists even though he cannot access it. Although Oedipa is aware of the smog and describes the sun as "painful," she feels that she is "at the centre of an odd, religious instant. As if . . . words were being spoken" (24-5). Obviously, Oedipa's surroundings are just as lifeless as are Roland's, but she is capable of looking past the barrenness to consider the possibility that a deeper meaning may exist within. The fact that Oedipa feels that words are being spoken indicates that she has already begun to transcend the rigidity of the symbolic.

San Narciso is a reference to the mythological Narcissus, whose name derives from the Greek *narcosis*, meaning numbness. Narcissus believed that his reflection in the water was another person; "he adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system." He was impervious to Echo's attempts to win his love with fragments of his own speech (Abernethy 28-9). When Oedipa stops at Echo Courts motel, the sign depicting a nymph catches her attention: "The face of the nymph was much like Oedipa's, which didn't startle her so much as a concealed blower system that kept the nymph's gauze chiton in constant agitation, revealing enormous vermilion-tipped breasts and long pink thighs at each flap" (26). Just as she sees herself in the painting, so does she see an "extension" of herself in the sign--reiterating the fact that her self-awareness continues to be defined "within" (rather than "against") the mirror (Berressem 90). Similarly, Roland's world seems to be "a giant reflecting mirror . . .Wherever the speaker looks, the imagery

implies, he sees himself, and he can never escape himself" (Shapiro 92). Oedipa is not shocked by her reflection but rather by the femininity associated with it. Later, in her hotel room with Metzger, Pierce's lawyer, Oedipa puts on layers upon layers of clothing to avoid having to expose her body when they play "Strip Botticelli." When she looks at her own reflection, now void of any trace of sexuality, she collapses in laughter and inadvertently breaks the mirror (36-7). As the night progresses, she becomes intoxicated and sexually involved with Metzger; she tries "to find her image in the mirror and couldn't. She had a moment of nearly pure terror" (41). When Oedipa loses her own reflection as an affirmation of her identity, and, for that matter, her world, she has feelings of horror, similar to those that Roland expresses as he breaks the mirrors of the imaginary by crossing the river and killing the rat, causing the sound of a baby's shriek.

As she familiarizes herself with Pierce's domain, she passes by his missile-building complex, Yoyodyne:

> To her left appeared a prolonged scatter of wide, pink buildings, surrounded by miles of fence topped with barbed wire and interrupted now and then by guard towers: soon an entrance whizzed by, two sixty-foot missiles on either side and the name YOYODYNE lettered conservatively on each nose cone . . . Pierce . . . [was] a founding father. (25-6)

This description bears an uncanny resemblance to Roland's arrival at the Dark Tower, which is marked by "two hills on the right . . . While to the left, a tall scalped mountain" looms (176-78). Pierce's role as "Father" has resulted in the feminine (pink buildings) being imprisoned and controlled by phallic signifiers; the very act of missile-building implies a constant need to reinvent the phallus. In contrast to Roland, Oedipa does not attribute any supernatural powers of force to the complex; in fact, the name "Yoyodyne"

undermines the very power of the phallus by playing on the name of a child's toy--an extended metaphor suggesting the ineffectiveness of the yo-yo in that it never goes anywhere but instead simply moves up and down on a string.

Later, Oedipa and her attorney Metzger visit Pierce's most recent development, which is oceanside. On the drive, Oedipa expresses some identification with the water, the feminine element: "Oedipa had believed, long before leaving Kinneret, in some priciple of the sea as redemption . . .some unvoiced idea that no matter what you did to its edges the true Pacific stayed inviolate and integrated or assumed the ugliness at any edge into some more general truth" (55). Thus, Oedipa characterizes the ocean in much the same way that Kristeva characterizes the role of women within the patriarchy--as the border between order and chaos, as the border between the knowable land and the mysterious depths of the ocean. Oedipa's reverie is interrupted as they approach Fangosa Lagoons--another ridiculous name for Pierce's accomplishment. Again, the landscape, with "all the dark beige hills" (55) resembles that of "Childe Roland": "They came in among earth-moving machines, a total absence of trees, the usual hieratic geometry, and eventually . . . down in a helix to a sculptured body of water named Lake Inverarity. Out on it, on a round island of fill among blue wavelets, squatted the social hall, a chunky, ogived, and verdigrised, Art Nouveau reconstruction of some European pleasure casino. Oedipa fell in love with it" (55-6). Pierce controls even the water, the feminine, by "sculpturing" it and then imposes his phallic structure on it. When Oedipa and her group approach the social hall by boat the "air suddenly [goes] cold, the sun [is] blotted out. The three looked up in alarm to see looming over them and about to collide the pale green social

hall, its towering pointed windows, wrought iron floral embellishments, solid silence . . ." (58-9). These features are again reminiscent of Roland's sterile landscape, of the "squat turret" that he sees as he approaches the Dark Tower and, for that matter, of Oedipa's tower of imprisonment. Pierce's development at Fangoso Lagoons is a literal expression of Luce Irigaray's belief that "woman constitutes the silent ground on which the patriarchal thinker erects his discursive constructs" (Moi 131).

In contrast to patriarchal discourse, Kristeva has formulated the idea of the "semiotic," a form of communication associated with the pre-Oedipal mother, which embodies both masculine and feminine, with no opposition between the two. Despite the fact that many feminists interpret the semiotic to be directly associated with the feminine, Kristeva insists that it is not: "Any strengthening of the semiotic, which knows no sexual difference, must therefore lead to a weakening of traditional gender divisions, and not at all to a reinforcement of traditional notions of 'femininity'" (165). However, the semiotic is parallel to the feminine in terms of position; just as the feminine is marginal to the patriarchy, so is the semiotic marginal to language. The symbolic cannot be said to repress the feminine essence but rather its position (Moi 166). Kristeva asserts that the semiotic is "always already caught up in the multiple frameworks of conflicting ideologies, [yet] can still unsettle these frameworks" (162). For instance, semiotic pulsions challenge the closure or absolute meaning that is imparted through binary opposites. Since patriarchal society is typified by sexism, all speech will be in the context of the power struggle between the sexes. The actual language of men and women will be the same, but differences lie in conflicting interests, all of which intersect in the sign.

Hence, the meaning of the sign becomes indefinite, making the sign "polysemic" rather than "univocal," as the patriarchy perceives it to be. Although the dominant group is the masculine, the feminine is not left in total silence: Meaning intersects, overlaps, and perhaps overshadows, but one meaning is never destroyed by another (Moi 158). This intersection of meaning echoes the popular French feminist notion of "the free play of the signifier." In semiotics, the symbol, or signifier, is never limited to one essential meaning but rather has the freedom to "play" among various interpretations, thereby disrupting or subverting rigid symbolic discourse (Moi 158).

While executing the will, Oedipa encounters several unusual signifiers, including a muted postal horn, the name "Tristero," and the acronym "W.A.S.T.E." She eventually learns that Tristero was the leader of a postal reform that took place in Europe hundreds of years before; the muted horn was the rebels' symbol for secrecy (Pynchon 107). Over the centuries and across continents, the significance of the symbols has changed, and W.A.S.T.E. (We Await Silent Tristero's Empire) has come to be associated with them. At Yoyodyne, Oedipa discovers a "'wasted' population," the members of which are linked by a seemingly complicated system of communication, implying that waste "signifies and communicates" (Hite 76). The fact that this non-traditional group engages in fertile communication is juxtaposed with the sterility that is associated with other more traditional forms of communication, such as television, radio, and the mainstream postal system. Oedipa eventually learns that W.A.S.T.E. is used by many people throughout California and perhaps throughout the world, thus revealing a widespread discontent with traditional means of communication. Oedipa's sole purpose becomes finding the means

of operation behind the W.A.S.T.E. system, and her quest leads her to meet a variety of men, including Mike Fallopian and Stanley Koteks, whose names "are punning female metaphors (the former a synecdoche, the latter a metonymy)" (Mendelson 97) and who also regard America as oppressive: "Their names and opposition correspond to Oedipa's gender and growing resistance to the hegemony of the 'US Male.' Thus, the possibility of fertility in [the novel] is proffered . . . in tropes of femaleness" (Kharpertian 97).

Oedipa first encounters the symbol of the secret postal system in a women's restroom at a bar called "The Scope" where she meets Mike Fallopian, who proselytizes for the Peter Pinguid Society (PPS; "fat peter"). While visiting with him, Oedipa discovers that he is a part of yet another underground postal system that operates through Yoyodyne. Because PPS requires its members to send at least one piece of mail every week, most correspondence is meaningless. Unlike the purposeful communication of Stanley Koteks and the WASTE system, the PPS is "capable only of conventionality, of repetition without a sense of the numinous" (Mendelson 203); nonetheless, they are searching for an alternative. Although Oedipa is intrigued by the mysterious symbol of a muted postal horn, she, unlike Roland, does not attempt to control the horn; rather she attempts to unravel its significance, embracing both its masculine and feminine aspects. While Roland believes that his quest ends with the discovery of the Tower and the horn, Oedipa's search begins only after she abandons the Tower and encounters the horn; her quest is not for an object but for meaning.

While Oedipa is interested in discovering meaning, she searches for more words and is discouraged when she fails to find them; when she looks in a restroom for further

evidence of the horn and finds none, she feels "threatened by this absence of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for" (70). Her quest eventually leads her to a play that recounts the history of Trystero and the postal horn. As she tries to understand the connection between the past and present, "she look[s] around for words, feeling helpless" (76) and eventually consults the producer of the play. Driblette, whose name connotes weepiness and a definite lack of phallic empowerment, pinpoints Oedipa's dependence upon traditional language:

> "You guys, you're like Puritans about the Bible. so hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for, but—" a hand emerged . . . to indicate his suspended head—"in here—that's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh. The words—who cares? They're rote noises to hold line bashes with . . . ." (79)

Oedipa takes Driblette's speech seriously and begins to apply it to her execution of Pierce's will, intending to give his estate "pulsing stelliferous Meaning" (82), implying that Oedipa believes that the will contains a universally significant truth.

When Oedipa meets the stamp expert who is evaluating Pierce's collection, she begins to think of her search in terms of an epileptic seizure, in which the victim recognizes and remembers the signal announcing the seizure but cannot recall the revelation that occurs during the attack:

> 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 . . . 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)

Although Pynchon's idea of the seizure is probably not intended to parallel French feminist thought, it bears a remarkable similarity to Julia Kristeva's idea of the semiotic's relation to the *chora*, which is derived from the Greek word for "enclosed space, womb" (Moi 161). In his *Timaeus*, Plato defines *chora* as "an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible" (161). Kristeva redefines *chora* in terms of linguistics: "*Chora* is neither a sign nor a position but 'a wholly provisional articulation that is essentially mobile and constituted of movements and their ephemeral stages . . . Neither model nor copy, it is anterior to and underlies figuration and therefore also specularization, and only admits analogy with vocal or kinetic rhythm'" (161). In the Imaginary, the *chora* is fully present; however, the intrusion of language represses the *chora* so that the it is manifested only as "pulsional pressure on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic language" (162). Therefore, Oedipa experiences the pulsions of the *chora* in a way that is dramatic enough that she feels she could "get lost" in her explorations and in fact believes that she has been lost in them before.

At this point, Oedipa, unlike Roland, has the option of returning home and thus retreating into the security of the symbolic, but "she miss[es] the exit and that solved it" (100). Instead, she goes to Berkeley in search of the original text of the play and checks into a hotel where there is a deaf-mute assembly--"a truly ponderable *silence* occupie[s] the building" (101-italics mine). The desk clerk, who communicates with her using sign

language, leads her "to a room with a reproduction of a Remedios Varo in it, through corridors gently curving as the streets of San Narciso, utterly silent" (101). It is almost as if Oedipa has stepped into the corridors of Cohen's house. The reference to the Remedios Varo painting implies that Oedipa will be forced to "remediate," that is, perhaps to re-experience (and thus re-evaluate) some aspects of her growth. Although she falls asleep easily, she continuously awakens from a nightmare "about something in the mirror, across from the bed. Nothing specific, only a possiblity, nothing she could see" (101). She then dreams of making love to her husband on "a soft white beach that was not part of any California she knew. When she woke in the morning, she was sitting bolt upright, staring into the mirror at her own exhausted face" (101). Based on the details given about Oedipa's nightmare, critic David Cowart surmises that the Varo painting that Pynchon refers to is *Encuentro*. The painting depicts a woman who is surrounded by caskets, and, when she opens one, finds her own face staring back at her. About the work, Varo wrote: "This poor woman, full of curiousity and hope at the opening of the little casket, encounters only herself . . . who knows if when she opens [the other caskets] she will encounter anything new" (24). Although she still has not escaped her own reflection, she has confronted and embraced her femininity and sexuality this time--in an imaginary state that is punctuated by silence, which Kristeva calls the discursive space of the semiotic (Moi 154).

Oedipa's perception of her quest in terms of metaphors broadens: She is "faced with a metaphor of God knew how many parts; more than two, anyway . . . she had nothing but a sound, a word, Trystero, to hold them together" (109). She also begins to think

consciously of W.A.S.T.E. as a system of communication "for those of unorthodox sexual persuasion, inventors who believed in the reality of Maxwell's Demon, possibly her own husband . . ." (109)--that is, for all people who do not fit the norms of society. Thus, Trystero and the post horn become the polysemic signs. The fact that Oedipa thinks in terms of metaphors suggests that she is comfortable with using open-ended signifiers to redefine her reality; words no longer have only one meaning but rather signify and communicate multiple meanings.

Just as Roland's world becomes defined by "Names in [his] ears," so does Oedipa's quest lead her to a place where names are inverted, eventually forcing Oedipa to acknowledge and re-evaluate her femininity. Her quest leads her to a gay club, where she finds herself sitting at the bar, wearing a man's nametag, and surrounded by homosexual men; she is "anonymous and unsexed" (Watson 63). She speaks with a man who tells her "'We're isolates Arnold Snarb' . . . Oedipa sat, feeling alone as she ever had, now the only woman, she saw, in a room full of drunken male homosexuals . . . Despair came over her, as it will when nobody around has any sexual relevance to you" (116). Oedipa experiences marginalization within an already marginalized group, and as a result, she is forced to question her sexuality or lack thereof. When she initially arrived at Echo Courts in San Narciso, she was unable to recognize her own feminine sexuality and, in fact, purposely tried to stifle it; now she is desperate to have others validate her existence as a sexual being--in terms of difference. As the semiotic becomes a stronger force in Oedipa's life, her own gender as a mark of difference weakens. Furthermore, by being labeled with an "Arnold Snarb" nametag, Oedipa is called out of her name, which

provides her with an alternative perspective that eventually allows her to enter into a communicative system with the other, thereby gaining insight into herself.

As Oedipa becomes increasingly consumed by her search for Trystero, she tries to stay awake; "later, possibly, she would have trouble sorting the night into dreamed and real" (117), indicating that the line between the symbolic and imaginary is blurring. Next, Oedipa stumbles into a café, where she "[finds] a piece of her past," Jesus Arrabal, whom she and Pierce met in Mexico. Jesus is a member of the Mexican CIA, the Conjuracion de los Insurgentes Anarquistas, a revolutionary anarchist society. The alternative meaning for the initials CIA works to undermine the traditional meaning. Jesus' explanation of ontology directly relates to Oedipa's recent experiences:

> You know what a miracle is . . . another world's intrusion into this one. Most of the time we coexist peacefully, but when we do touch, there's cataclysm . . . Where revolutions break out spontaneous and leaderless, and the soul's talent for consensus allows the masses to work together without effort . . . if any of it should ever really happen that perfectly, I would also have to cry miracle. An anarchist miracle. Like your friend [Pierce]. He is too exactly and without flaw the thing we fight . . . (120)

If the reader applies Jesus' theory of anarchy to Oedipa's quest, the conclusion is that the muted post horn has led Oedipa to experience another world's intrusion into hers--the Imaginary and/or semiotic has intruded on her existence in the symbolic. Pierce comes to represent the symbolic in his proliferation of the phallic; through his death, Oedipa has encountered a revolutionary force that affects communication.

Feminists have argued that "'those who have the power to name the world are in a position to influence reality.' It is argued that women lack this power and that, as a consequence, many female experiences lack a name" (Moi 158-59). On the other hand,

Kristeva contends that a desire for a "label" indicates a need to "fix meaning," and in turn to use that closure as a means of aggression: as an authoritative statement . . ." (159). French feminists often see the act of labelling "as betraying a phallogocentric drive to stabilize, organize, and rationalize our conceptual universe . . . [while] masculine rationality [has worked to] silenc[e] and exclud[e] the irrationality, chaos, and fragmentation that has come to represent femininity" (159-60). As Moi points out, "the attempt to fix meaning is always in part doomed to failure, for it is of the nature of meaning to be always already elsewhere" (160).

When Oedipa follows a WASTE mailman, hoping to understand how the system works, her chase leads her back to the point at which she had begun twenty-four hours earlier (Pynchon 130). Nevertheless, she has meaningful experiences during her trek through San Narciso. She meets a sailor who suffers delirium tremens (DTs); she "[takes] the man in her arms and actually [holds] him. . . . [S]he fe[els] wetness against her breast and saw that he was crying again. . . . She let[s] go of him for a moment, reluctant as if he were her own child" (Pynchon 127). As Oedipa takes him to his own room, she fantasizes about making a better life for him; "But with a sigh he had released her hand, while she was so lost in the fantasy that she hadn't felt it go away, as if he'd known the best moment to let go" (127). Oedipa has her first truly semiotic experience:

> Behind the initials [DTs] was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful and threatening about the central pulse of himself, the dreamer whose puns probe fetid shafts and tunnels of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatsoever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from. The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were:

> inside, safe, or outside, lost . . . "dt," God help this old tattooed man, meant also a time differential, a vanishing small instant in which change had to be confronted for what it was, where it could no longer disguise itself as something innocuous . . . She knew that the sailor had seen worlds no other man had seen if only because there was that high magic to low puns, because DTs must give access to dt's of spectra beyond the known sun, music made purely of Antarctic loneliness and fright . . . . (128-29)

In her meeting with the sailor, all is contained: Oedipa has acted as mother to the man, caring for him and desiring a better life for him; simultaneously, he has acted as father to her, knowing when to let her go and pointing her in the right direction. For a brief time, Oedipa steps inside the metaphor and becomes fully present in the chora; she ventures past the "buffering" words to the essence. She uses DTs as a metaphor for human existence, allowing the freely playing signifier to impart limitless meaning to her. What she experienced at Cohen's house as pulsions, or epileptic seizures, she now experiences as full, almost divine, revelation. As Mendelson notes, "Here Oedipa performs an act in which she takes personal responsibility for the patterns of correlation and coherence which one has found in the world outside. Her embrace of the sailor is a tangible manifestation of the unlikely relations for which the Tristero is an emblem" (141). However, she is incapable of remaining there. As Berressem points out, "the saint, the clairvoyant, the paranoiac, and the dreamer have all transcended the realm and laws of discourse. They are outside language and the metaphorical construction of reality." Oedipa, who remains within the symbolic, though admittedly close to its edges, functions as the "'medial,' thereby maintaining a position from which to question truth" (107). In Lacan's estimation:

> Truth hollows out its way into the real thanks to the dimension of speech. There is neither true nor false prior to speech. Truth is introduced along with it, and so

> is the lie . . . And then, what else?—ambiguity, to which, by its very nature, speech is doomed. Because the very act of speech, which founds the dimension of truth, always remains, by this fact, behind, beyond. (Lacan Seminar I 228)

When Oedipa leaves the sailor, she walks "in the direction he'd told her" (129), just as Roland follows the direction of the "hoary cripple." After following the mail carrier for 24 hours only to arrive at her hotel--her starting point--Oedipa wanders into a dance for deaf- mute people, where "each couple on the floor danced to whatever music was in the fellow's head . . ." (131). She cannot understand how the people dance without colliding and realizes that "the only alternative was some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined . . . Oedipa, with no name for it, was only demoralized" (131-32). According to Kharpertian, the fact that "the participants in this 'anarchist miracle' are deaf-mutes reflects their exclusion from orthodox means of communication, and their muteness corresponds in part to the WASTE-Tristero symbol of the muted postal horn" (91). Oedipa has followed the WASTE system to a world where names and labels seem to be unimportant--a world that completely undermines her psyche, which still is rooted in the symbolic. As Roland's world is becoming defined by names, Oedipa's quest is forcing her to adapt to a space where names hold a very different value. Oedipa's demoralization at having no name for the phenomenon of the deaf-mute dance stems from a need for power and control that has been inculcated in her by the patriarchal world in which she has existed. The dance is a functional chaos that defies all rational explanation; in fact, the dance is Tristero enacted: Members of a non-traditional, marginalized society communicate effectively using an inexplicable, non-symbolic means. The deaf-mute

group embodies "the heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language, that which can never be caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory" (Moi 162).

When her attempt to resume her old life in Kinneret fails, Oedipa resigns herself to continuing the search for Trystero. When Oedipa questions Bortz, a scholarly expert on the Trystero play, she asks why Driblette added two lines to one of his productions of the play. Bortz explains that Driblette was "a particularly moral man. He felt hardly any responsibility toward the word, really; but to the invisible field surrounding the play, its spirit, he was always intensely faithful" (152). At this point, Oedipa learns that Driblette, "true to his name, which derives from driblet" (Berressem 98), has committed suicide by walking into the Pacific Ocean, almost as if he so completely abandoned the structure of the symbolic that he was absorbed by the chaos and fluidity of the feminine; Oedipa muses that he walked "into that vast sink of the primal blood of the Pacific" (162), suggesting a desire or need for reunion with the (m)other. The implication is that his refusal to acknowledge the role of texts and language, his complete devotion to "the spirit" rather than humanity, has rendered him ineffective. As Lacan postulated, a rejection of the Symbolic has indeed led to insanity. As stated earlier, Roland had to approach the tower; his relationship to the horn and tower will determine his role in the linguistic and communicative framework of society. Oedipa thinks: "they are stripping away from me . . . one by one, my men. My shrink . . . has gone mad; my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child; my one extra-marital fella has eloped . . .; my best guide back to the Tristero has taken a Brody. Where am I?" (153). Oedipa's recognition that she has no men on whom she can rely leaves her feeling helpless.

Bortz explains the historical significance of the Tristero, speculating that it was originally used to symbolize "the brute Other" (Pynchon 156). The founder of the postal monopoly was a rebel who called himself "The Disinherited" and used black "to symbolize the only thing that truly belonged to them in their exile: the night" (160). Eventually, the organization "enter[ed] the penumbra of historical eclipse . . . . The Tristero drifted on, deprived of nearly all the noble patronage that had sustained them; now reduced to handling anarchist correspondence; only peripherally engaged . . . . By far the greatest number, however, fled to America during 1849-50, where they are no doubt at present rendering their services to those who seek to extinguish the flame of Revolution" (172-73). As Bortz explains, modern day Trystero's emphasis is "toward silence, impersonation, opposition masquerading as allegiance" (174). The Trystero stamps are "almost kosher-looking; but not quite" (174). The 1893 stamp of "Columbus Announcing His Discovery" depicts fright on the faces of three courtiers; the 1934 Mother's Day stamp features *Whistler's Mother*, with the flowers around her altered to Venus' flytraps, belladonna, and poison sumac; the stamp commemorating postage reform depicts the Pony Express rider with a broken neck; and the Statue of Liberty stamp has a menacing smile. Obviously, Trystero works to invert mainstream American institutions, mocking the social, political, and historical foundation on which the patriarchy is erected.

The Trystero as a revolutionary force parallels Kristeva's early work, which reveals anarchist tendencies. Just as the Trystero masks its rebellion as allegiance, so does Kristeva assert that the phallocentric structure should not be fought "through a

straightforward rejection of the symbolic order . . . There is no other space from which we can speak" (Moi 168). Furthermore, Kristeva calls semiotics an "explanatory metalinguistic force, an agent of social cohesion" (162).

Oedipa realizes that "here were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by US mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery . . . there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world . . ." (125). As Oedipa allows herself to become more immersed in the Trystero, she becomes more paranoid: "The toothaches got worse, she dreamed of disembodied voices from whose malignance there was no appeal, the soft dusk of mirrors out of which something was about to walk, and empty rooms that waited for her. Your gynecologist has no test for what she was pregnant with" (175).

On the night before Pierce's stamp collection is to be auctioned, Oedipa returns to Echo Courts "to drink bourbon until the sun went down and it was as dark as it would ever get" (176). Oedipa, like the Trystero, has begun to claim the night as her own, as if she too has been exiled. She drives around the city and finally telephones an anonymous man she had met in the gay bar, hoping that he will confirm her paranoia regarding Trystero; however, he hangs up on her. She stands "in the night, her isolation complete, and trie[s] to face toward the sea. But she'd lost her bearings . . .and could find no mountains either. As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land" (177). Oedipa's paranoia and alienation echo Pynchon's own paranoia and self-imposed isolation. According to James Draper, "Pynchon alludes to paranoia, through

which his characters often assign an organizing principle to a world that would otherwise be random and meaningless" (2839). In developing a character such as Oedipa who uses paranoia in a positive way, perhaps Pynchon achieves catharsis. Certainly in the writing of *Lot 49*, Pynchon has entered into meaningful and fertile communication with humanity, though he remains reclusive. Just as Browning reinvents subjecthood with "Childe Roland," so does Pynchon escape his tower through Oedipa.

Both Roland and Oedipa reach their moment of complete isolation. At this point, Roland plans to sound the horn; Oedipa loses all fear and embraces Pierce's legacy, which she suddenly determines is America and its "excluded middles" (Pynchon 181). She identifies that "magical Other" as a feminine presence, who "must someday call into being the trigger for the unnameable act, the recognition, the Word" (Pynchon 180). As Driblette knew, the Word is the essence, as opposed to words, which are meaninglessness. Although Oedipa began her search for the meaning of the mysterious symbols with the intention of finding one transcendental truth or "the direct epileptic Word" (Pynchon 108), she finds that truth reveals itself in "myriad shifting signs" (Cooper 18). Alec McHoul expands this idea: "[Oedipa] lives in a world where there is no longer any clear correspondence between [signifier] and [signified]--and so she can't take the option of bringing the two together. . . .[W]e could say that Oedipa has to exist uncertainly between signifier and signified . . ." (88). The acronym WASTE must be understood as an intersection of various and sometimes paradoxical truths. The fact that WASTE is represented by an ostensibly decadent society engaged in fertile communication parallels the French feminist idea that feminine nature, though seemingly

illogical and unproductive, is actually valuable and effective. She realizes that she must choose to embrace multiple meanings or be forced to resign herself to total meaninglessness (Pynchon 182).

As Oedipa discovers, WASTE "signifies and communicates" in that it links members of various subcultures in effective communication (Hite 76). The insinuation is that the WASTE system uses human energies that mainstream society lets go to waste (Sklar 2842). Despite the fact that Oedipa searches for the means by which WASTE operates, she finds only a random procedure; like semiotics, it is effective though incomprehensible. The idea of waste is also significant in terms of Oedipa's personal life, which is unproductive and is virtually being "wasted" away on Tupperware parties and shopping centers. As Molly Hite notes, Oedipa's quest leads her to discover an excluded population for which she develops compassion (80). Her previously sterile world gains significance in her acquisition of an understanding of humanity (Hite 84). On the other hand, "the speaker in 'Childe Roland' undergoes no such transformation, no growth in sympathy and awareness. He creates, rather, another picture, with himself as center" (Shapiro 94). While Shapiro's assessment of Roland's quest is accurate, his statements cast Roland in a negative light. In terms of Lacanian and French feminist theory, Roland has reached the first plateau in the acquisition of language--a necessary step for every human. Like Oedipa, he too will have the opportunity to journey outside of his tower and to quest for meaning that lies beyond the traditional linguistic framework. Mendelson juxtaposes Oedipa's postmodern quest with that of previous eras: "Either, like the Romantics amd modernists, they will project their own private aesthetic order onto what

they perceive as the malleable or ultimately inaccessible objects of the world, or else they will accept responsibility for and to the order which exists already in the world of which they are an active part . . ." (2844).

Prior to her quest, Oedipa feels "the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix" (Pynchon 20). By the end of the novel Oedipa imagines herself as a social reformer who wants to lead the disinherited to their rightful "legacy," "the unnameable act, the recognition, the Word" (180). Oedipa's decision to become a revolutionary figure in the Trystero movement echoes Kristeva's idea of the function of semiotics: "[I]t places itself at the service of the social law which requires systemization, communication, exchange" (43). According to Kristeva, "the subject of the semiotic metalanguage must, however briefly, call himself in question, must emerge from the protective shell of the transcendental ego within a logical system, and so restore his condition with that negativity--drive-governed but also social, political, and historical--which rends and renews the social code" (162-63). Certainly, Oedipa, in stepping out of her tower, has stepped away from her own reflection in the Mirror, calling her own being into question, almost to the point of madness, and has redefined herself as a "negative" presence within the patriarchy. Her quest has prepared her to use semiotics to achieve revolutionary social changes. Appropriately, Oedipa identifies the "Other" as a female entity; she has given birth to that for which "your gynecologist has no test" (Pynchon 175) and is giving voice to the unnameable.

When Oedipa enters the auction hall for the bidding of Lot 49, she sits alone in a room full of men with "pale, cruel faces . . . trying each to conceal his thoughts." The

auctioneer stares at her, "as if saying, I'm surprised you actually came" (183). Oedipa's silent entry into the auction hall has disrupted the dominant discourse, bringing the marginal into the midst of the symbolic order. When an assistant closes "the heavy door on the lobby windows and the sun, [s]he hear[s] a lock snap shut; the sound echoe[s] a moment" (183). Although the imagery of the door closing is similar to the description of the trap door locking behind Roland, the situation is very different. Oedipa has made a conscious decision to enter the auction hall, while Roland has no choice but to approach the Tower.

CONCLUSION

Both the poem and the novel end before giving voice to the characters; the reader assumes that Roland will sound the horn, but we are unsure as to whether Oedipa will actually bid. Critics such as Molly Hite predict that Oedipa will not bid and that the mystery of the Trystero will not be revealed (69). If, in fact, she does bid on Lot 49, she will in essence be bidding on a part of herself, since Pierce kept the stamp collection as a substitute for her (Pynchon 45). Furthermore, if she bids, she will succeed in radically subverting the patriarchal order, re-appropriating the space in semiotic terms and achieving Cixous' goal of feminine expression: "to proclaim women as the source of life, power, and energy and to hail the advent of a new feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women" (Moi 105). Oedipa's quest for the Tristero has led her to develop a sense of her own unique feminine voice; she embodies Cixous' idea of the speaking woman:

> The voice in each woman is not only her own, but springs from he deepest layers of her psyche: her own speech becomes the echo of primeval song she once heard, the voice of the incarnation of the 'first love which all women preserve . . . in each woman sings the first nameless love: It is in short, the Voice of the Mother, that omnipotent figure that dominates the fantasies of the pre-Oedipal Baby: 'the Voice, a song before the Law, before the breath . . . was split by the Symbolic, reappropriated into language under the authority that separates the deepest, most ancient and adorable of visitations. (Moi 114)

While Roland has been spoken into subjecthood by the Law of the Father, Oedipa is essentially rejecting that Law and is speaking herself into subjecthood. Roland raises the slug horn to his lips to give the instrument his new-found voice; Oedipa, on the other

hand, has discovered a mute horn and allows its silence (reminiscent of Kristeva's idea of the discursive space of the semiotic) to give voice to ostensibly "wasted" populations:

> It was her voice that made
> The sky acutest at its vanishing.
> She measured to the hour its solitude.
> She was the singing artificer of the world
> In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
> As we beheld her striding there alone,
> Knew that there never was a world for her
> Except the one she sang and singing, made.
>
> Wallace Stevens

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