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NEW ESSAYS ON

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I: *Lot 49* and the Post-ethical," *Pynchon Notes* 18–19 (1986): 39–54, explores the novel's "radical hermeneutics" in its deconstruction of origins and thus of traditional modes of signification and interpretation; these ideas are elaborated in McHoul's and David Wills's *Writing Pynchon: Strategies in Fictional Analysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). In "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory," *Social Text* 7 (1987): 3–35, Aijaz Ahmad discusses the relation of the political and historical unconscious to Pynchon's work at large. Bruce Herzberg, "Breakfast, Death, Feedback: Thomas Pynchon and the Technologies of Interpretation," *Bucknell Review* 27 (1983): 83–95; David Porush, *The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 112–35; and Allon White, "Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics and Deconstruction," in *The Theory of Reading*, ed. Frank Gloversmith (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1984), pp. 123–46, argue for new senses of the act of interpretation in Pynchon's fiction. Frank Palmeri, "Neither Literally nor as Metaphor: Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and the Structure of Scientific Revolutions," *ELH* 54 (1987): 979–99, discusses revisionary views of metaphor as the vehicle of significance within the context of Thomas Kuhn's paradigm theories. Robert D. Newman, "The Quest for Metaphor in *The Crying of Lot 49*" in his *Understanding Thomas Pynchon* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 67–88, declares that "[i]n learning to translate the hieroglyphs [the signs of Tristero that she sees everywhere], Oedipa discovers metaphor as a means of making sense . . . an act of imaginative creation, one that asserts similarity or connection based upon the recognition of some pattern" (82). Finally, Georgianna M. Colville, *Beyond and Beneath the Mantle* (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1989), the first book-length study of *The Crying of Lot 49*, offers a feminist reading of Pynchon's novel.

Borges and Pynchon: The Tenuous Symmetries of Art

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Nostros (la indivisa divinidad que opera en nosotros) hemos soñado el mundo. Lo hemos soñado resistente, misterioso, ubicuo en el espacio y firme en el tiempo; pero hemos consentido en su arquitectura tenuous y eternos intersticios de sinrazón para saber que es falso.

—Jorge Luis Borges¹

You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Tristero the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth.

—Driblette, *The Crying of Lot 49*

IN 1967 John Barth published an article inspired by his love for the Argentinean poet and short story writer Jorge Luis Borges entitled "The Literature of Exhaustion," in which he set the Argentinean master into a more general context that included Joyce, Beckett, and Kafka. It is not necessary to review the history of the readings, rereadings, and misreadings of Barth's article, an appreciative reception that turned the "literature of exhaustion" into a critical commonplace. I would like, however, to note two rather interesting consequences of Barth's essay. First, while Borges was well known and much appreciated in Latin America both in his own right and as a precursor of the "Boom" writers of the 1960s, for many inhabitants of North America Barth's article revealed a startling new talent on the world literary scene. Borges was, through Barth, reinvented as an American author, becoming for Barth's readers, if not for Barth himself, the "contemporary" of U.S. fiction writers like John Hawkes, William Gass, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, and Barth himself. Indeed, in a later reflection on his famous article entitled "The Literature of Re-

plenishment,"² Barth becomes, unconsciously perhaps, seduced by this now pervasive comprehension of contemporary literary history; he there categorizes Borges as a postmodernist, along with such writers as those listed above, and also includes as his contemporaries Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez (the quintessential Boom author) and Italo Calvino.

The second point I wish to make is that this curious violation of chronology in the conflation of two or three generations of writers is, in a bizarre way, appropriate, as it both reflects and respects the implicit aesthetics of Borges's work. Just so, Borges himself often violates temporal schemes in order to have books converse with each other across the shelves of a library; in one instance among many, Borges resurrects his precursor, Leopoldo Lugones (1874–1938), in order to have him comment on Borges' own recently released miscellany of short sketches and poetry (*El hacedor*, 1960). In a like manner a critic who carried out in practice the implications of a postmodern conflation of temporal schema might speculate on the possible influences of Thomas Pynchon's novels on the Borges short stories of the 1940s and 1950s, instead of merely producing a more conventional influence study that respects standard chronology. My aim here is more modest: I propose that in reading the two authors together we can uncover some of the more puzzling aspects of Pynchon's aesthetics.

A reader coming from Pynchon to Borges cannot help but notice the startling congruity of styles between the American and the Latin American. Both are masters of what we might call a desperate comedy of inaccessibility, marked and defined by an adamant insistence on a few intensely imaged symbols: in Borges, the dreams, labyrinths, mirrors, and tigers so familiar to his readers. Pynchon shares the dreams and the labyrinths, but for him, modern media substitutes for the Borgesian mirrors, and technological marvels are his tigers. Likewise, both authors rely heavily on a few insistently reiterated metaphors: in both, we are drawn into the temptations and unrealities of mathematics and the physical sciences; in both, as John Updike notes of Borges, "we move . . . beyond psychology, beyond the human, and confront . . . the world atomized and vacant. Perhaps not since Lucretius has a poet so definitely felt men as incidents in space."³ Borges' tenuously

imagined librarians, his dreamers within the dream, his immortals, and his metaphysical gauchos resonate comfortably with the equally tenuous characters of *The Crying of Lot 49* – Oedipa and Mucho Maas, Pierce Inverarity, Genghis Cohen, Professor Bortz, Dr. Hilarius, names so comically overdetermined that, like the Tristero itself, they are atomized and exploded by their very semantic richness.

Such relativization and negation reaches into all levels of these confections. Carefully constructed and firmly established plot lines are demolished at a stroke, infected by impossibly corrupt or undeniably fictitious elements; even at the micro-level of a noun clause the author gives us nothing firm and resistant without also suggesting the irrational fault lines of the fiction's architecture, linking abstract nouns to concrete modifiers and the reverse. From Borges: "innumerable contrición" ("innumerable contrition"), "rigorosamente extraño" ("rigorously strange"), "el interminable olor" ("the interminable fragrance"), "ese pasado equívoco y lánguido" ("that equivocal and languid past"), "la casi infinita muralla china" ("the almost infinite Chinese wall"), "se recluyó en un palacio figurativo" ("he retired to a figurative place"), and "neuro destino . . . es espantoso porque es irreversible y de hierro" ("our destiny is horrifying because it is irreversible and of iron").⁴ Similarly, chosen almost at random from *The Crying of Lot 49*: "the unimaginable Pacific," which "stayed inviolate and integrated or assumed the ugliness at any edge into some more general truth" (55), or Manny Di Presso's warning, "Not so loud . . . They're watching. With binoculars" (57), or the characters' anticipation of a "solid silence, air somehow waiting for them" (59). The children in Pynchon who sort reality from dream (117–18) recall Borges' dreamer who dreams a real man in "The Circular Ruins"; the unlikely addendum on the Tristero stamp pasted into Cohen's copy of the stamp catalogue reminds the reader of the singularly corrupt copy of Borges' 1917 edition of *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* which testifies to the existence of Tlön in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"; and Oedipa's hypothetical amnesiac seizures which prevent her from grasping the essential truth (95) parallel the frustrated searches of any number of Borgesian librarians who hypothesize the existence of a Book of Books in the infinite stacks

of the Library of Babel, or the philosophers who attempt to discover the name of God written in the stripes of a tiger.

Certainly, both Pynchon's and Borges' dramas of dazzling combinatorics and differential decay respond to the pre-posthum(or)-ous dissection of the postmodern (in Pynchon, also post-postal) condition. We can distinguish in both the wary, weary recognition that the search for eternal verities – God, science, a center – are inevitably conditioned and contaminated by the seeking mind, that the unrealities of existence militate against the very possibility of the search, much less its successful conclusion. In the words of the physicist Stephen Hawking:

If Euclidean space-time stretches back to infinite imaginary time, or else starts at a singularity in imaginary time, we have the same problem as in the classical theory of specifying the initial state of the universe. God may know how the universe began, but we cannot give any particular reason for thinking it began one way or another. On the other hand, the quantum theory of gravity has opened up a new possibility, in which there would be no boundary to space-time and so there would be no need to specify the behavior at the boundary. There would be no singularity at which the laws of science broke down and no edge of space-time at which one would have to appeal to God or some new law to set the boundary conditions for space-time. One could say: "The boundary condition of the universe is that it has no boundary." The universe would be completely self-contained and not affected by anything outside itself. It would neither be created or destroyed. It would just BE.⁵

The disturbing and seductive corollary for fiction is clear. No longer is the fictional universe bounded by the classical rules of verisimilitude and plausibility; instead, it is conceived, in a fictional parallel to quantum physics, as a self-contained game with the sole responsibility of maintaining consistency with its own rules. For Borges and, I will argue, for Pynchon as well, the rules are deceptively simple; in the words that Borges gives his character Herbert Quain: "Yo reivindico para esa obra . . . los rasgos esenciales de todo juego: la simetría, las leyes arbitrarias, el tedio" ("I revindicate for this work the essential elements of every game: symmetry, arbitrary rules, tedium").⁶

The first element, symmetry, suggests the structuring force and subject that stands before any access to the game; pattern and

congruence are the foremost qualities of these structuring elements. From one point of view, the requirement of symmetry will intimate the formal principle of structure in a given text – the parameters of the paradigm, as it were. Symmetry is the frame of the picture, the geography of the Monopoly board, the necessary precondition for defining the nature of the artifact. It is also, simultaneously and conversely, an active principle: the will to form which imposes order on apparent chaos, the closure without boundaries of the solipsistic circle, the miracle machine that creates plot out of disorganized fragments. The end of Pynchon's novel, Georgianna M. Colville suggests, only returns us to the moment before opening the book when we were awaiting "the crying of lot 49."⁷ The book has announced itself, defined itself, and, in a peculiarly postmodern variation of this tightly symmetrical construction, put quotation marks around its own title – the key to unlock this structure – thus displacing formal symmetry into an active, metafictional shadow writing.

The second Borgesian requirement, arbitrary rules, corresponds to and derives from the first. Borges' surprisingly apt recognition is that *all* rules – generally mythologized in common practice as unchanging, eternal, necessary laws handed down from God or his avatars – are in fact as entirely arbitrary as the rules governing more recognizably fictive games. Why does a player have to go to jail in Monopoly when she lands on a specific square? Are the structures for fines just and equitable? Are property prices fair? Why can we play partners in bridge and not in chess? Since structures are conceived by humans to fill a particular need, they are of necessity tentative and egocentric. It follows that they are also recognizably arbitrary, and not required to correspond to any rules outside the game. A set of rules, then, may be uniquely applicable to a particular fiction; in practice, habitual metaphors and obsessive images constrain the set of options available to an author. Within the structure of the game, the rules, though arbitrary in conception, become the norm which, once imposed, is inviolate. It does not help the player to question, within the bounds of Monopoly, for example, the "fairness" of the written set of procedures for playing Monopoly. The player has to "play by the rules" or leave the game. What does *not* follow, however, is that the rules of the

game in postmodern fiction are necessarily available in toto to the players. Often the instruction sheet is missing or incomplete. In fact, in both Borges and Pynchon, one of the primary problems for the characters is to determine the set of rules that governs their particular circumstances; naturally, they can never be certain that the rules they do manage to deduce are more than the peculiar constructions of their own minds.

Finally, the game is "tedious"; for, while the players can engage in an infinite number of games, or a single eternal game, the elements of the game are finite and respond to a mathematically determinable number of combinations which, given a long enough playing time, must recur. The classical expression of this rule in Borges can be found in "The Library of Babel." The head librarian of one of the hexagons (the primary spatial unit of the library) derives a basic set of axioms to describe the operation of the library: "de esas premisas incontrovertibles dedujo que la Biblioteca es total y que sus anaqueles registran todas las posibles combinaciones de los veintitantos símbolos ortográficos (número, aunque vastísimo, no infinito) o sea todo lo que es dable expresar. . . . Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden (que, repetido, sería un orden: el Orden)". "From these incontrovertible premises he deduced that the Library is total and that its stacks contain all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographic symbols (a vast, but not infinite, number), that is, it contains all that it is possible to say. . . . If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, he would prove after centuries of travel that the same volumes repeat themselves in the same disorder (which, repeated, would be an order: the Order)".⁸

Any game invented by humans, then, can never be more than apparently open-ended. In the more radical sense, all games are by definition repetitious, total, uncontaminated, and closed: in short, tedious. It could be argued, of course, that this repetition conditions and is conditioned by the nature of the game itself. The return to the moment just prior to the beginning of the text in *The Crying of Lot 49* is created by the Borgesian revindication of the fictive process: the return to the beginning of the game, so as to

start playing once more; the return of that redundant, overdetermined element repressed in the opening moves so as to allow the game to continue.

In what follows, I will read *The Crying of Lot 49* as a symmetrical structure (at the level of plot), as a quest for a hidden set of rules (through the protagonist's grasp of essential metaphors), and as a Borgesian tedium. One caveat is required, however. Any categorical separation of the novel is as artificial as the object of analysis: the structure is inevitably disrupted by the tenuous and arbitrary interstices of irrationality; the apparently arbitrary responds to a higher order; the tedium is necessarily masked by the excitement of the game.

Symmetry

As Tony Tanner has argued, plotting about plot is at the very heart of *The Crying of Lot 49*: "Pynchon's work is full of plots and codes — at every level, from political plots, spies, conspiracies and all kinds of private forms of communication, to larger, national, global, even metaphysical and religious questions concerning the possible presence or absence of plots."⁹ The semantic range of the key word, "plot," easily runs the range of possibilities outlined by the *American Heritage Dictionary*: ". . . a measured area of land; lot . . . A ground plan. . . . The series of events consisting of an outline of the action of a narrative or drama . . . A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose, a scheme." In all of his plotting, Pynchon is scrupulously fair, warning the reader from the very beginning that this "lot" is a "plot" (a circumscribed place, perhaps a gameboard) and that the plot (narrative) is always and only a plot (secret plan) which, if uncovered and displayed, will demonstrate only the machinations of the game. Hence, Rodney Driblette warns Oedipa Maas, "[i]t isn't literature, it doesn't mean anything," or later, "[y]ou can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several. . . . You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it." (80)

Such admonitions serve as both warning against and invitation for overreading of the novel, and indeed Pynchon's critics (we

scholarly detectives) have delighted in taking Oedipa's role, searching for revelations that are, seemingly, absurdly easy to discover.¹⁰ Thus, to take only one recent example, Colville devotes the fourteen pages of her second chapter, "From Words to Worse," to a detailed decrypting of the possible meaning systems hidden in the patently symbolic names of the novel's characters. This is all great fun, of course, an intellectual game, as Colville herself joyously and self-consciously recognizes: "Oedipa could just as well have been Oedipussy [a scandalous reference to a James Bond character], but there comes a time when the bouncing has to stop."¹¹ The name anchors description – in Foucault's words, "the name is the *end* of discourse"¹² – providing a superficial point of reference, an index of functionality. It is a curious feature of Pynchon's novel that the most functional of all things – the solid, stolid clues, so recalcitrant in their thingness, their quiddity, their resistance to the allegorizing impetus – tip perilously into a sort of hyperrational variation. The absolute blurs into the hypothetical, the irreducible, individualizing name into the generalized function of naming, as if the one inescapable flaw of even the most rational formula is the fundamental suspicion of a merely constructed symmetry underlying the precisions of mathematically defined calculation. There is a certain tense distancing between name and thing that recognizes and mocks efforts at detection or interpretation; a creeping inconclusiveness and dematerialization taints efforts to find definitive answers: "San Narcisco was a name; an incident among our climatic records of dreams and what dreams became among our accumulated daylight" (178). Always, the name is the figure to suggest the unnamed or unnameable, as in Oedipa's first description of the city as "like so many named places," which, inversely, suggests other, unnamed places. The city and its name are contaminated by technology and abstraction: "it was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts," a "circuit card" of hieroglyphic streets and houses reflecting back (how can it not do so, with Narcissus as a nominal referent?) the observing eye of the automotive self (24).

Pynchon's openly allegorical names playfully generate a series of potential stories, perhaps even necessary fictions, but he gives us both too much and too little nominative significance. In hesitating

between dream and materiality, the overdetermined and the literal, he provokes a ritual reluctance to choose a single story, a single identity, an unequivocal name, a clear motive, a definitive solution. It is in this respect that Pynchon's plot, while following the outward form of the detective novel or quest narrative, denies that form's most basic expectations for a final revelation (as opposed to a decision merely to arbitrarily end this particular game). This contrasts with a theory of narrative structure *as game* present in the type of text described by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*:

Expectation thus becomes the basic condition for truth: truth, these narratives tell us, is what is *at the end* of expectation. This design brings narrative very close to the rite of initiation (a long path marked with pitfalls, obscurities, stops, suddenly comes out into the light); it implies a return to order, for expectation is a disorder: disorder is supplementary, it is what is forever added on without solving anything, without finishing anything; order is complementary, it completes, fills up, saturates, and dismisses everything that risks adding on: truth is what completes, what closes.¹³

The problem posed by both Barthes and by Pynchon's fictional hermeneut, the housewife-cum-literary-detective Oedipa Maas, is a question of reading and interpretation, of apertures and closed doors, of right turns and dead ends in a gradually uncovered pattern of revelations. The postmodern game, however, is quite other. Oedipa is seeking a plot, a pattern; obligingly, the narrative complies. She expects seduction – "Either he made up the whole thing . . . or he bribed the engineer over at the local station to run this, it's all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction, *plot*" (31) – and is seduced. She hopes to find revelations, and so is overwhelmed by a substantial surplus of them. She is obsessed with "bringing something of herself" to Inverarity's legacy ("She would give [his business interests] order, she would create constellations" [90]), and she finds the constellations all too easy to construct, the connections so embarrassingly simple that she begins to suspect a plot behind the plot, begins to suspect herself of either paranoia or overinterpretation. The traditional detective, as Holquist notes, is able to triumph "because he alone in a world of credulous men holds to the Scholastic principle of *adequatio rei et intellectus*, the adequation of mind to things, the belief that mind, given enough

time, can understand everything. There are no mysteries, there is only incorrect reasoning. This is the enabling discovery Poe makes for later authors; he is the Columbus who lays open the world of *radical rationality* which is where the detectives have lived ever since."¹⁴ Oedipa's problem is that, curiously, her world begins to limit itself to her hypothesized equation.

For this postmodern detective, radical rationality becomes not an enabling discovery, but a crippling handicap. Oedipa's clues either point too clearly and too obviously in one direction – the Tristero, the postmodern equivalent of "the butler did it" – or proliferate in a branching labyrinth of potential directions too multiple to be followed, or circle back endlessly to the ambiguous, multiply significant "crying of lot 49." The clear, strong impetus of the formulaic novel is somehow diverted into its near opposite; rational reconstruction falters at the edge of a shimmering void, a mirage of understanding. Chaos, rather than ceding to order and reason, resists interpretation, not as an actively malevolent force, but as a kind of deadening inertia – Pynchon calls it "entropy" – barely sensed under an opaque surface. It is not so much even a matter of beginnings and endings, or posing a puzzle and promising a solution, as it is a question of muddling through and confronting an inexplicable excess in two almost mutually exclusive forms of representation, equally deadly and deadening. There is both too much evidence and too many connections between clues, yet this overabundance of "something" fades into "nothing" (the clues are real, but strangely insubstantial), leaving an uncanny trace trapped in an "excluded middle" between meaninglessness and meaning. The purposeful movement of the detective fades into Oedipa's exhausted overstimulation and her dawning awareness that even the most frenetic mental and physical exertion merely disguises an external stasis and an almost entirely *internal* perception of an advance in the plot.

This novel is in many ways more *about* its genre than *of* it, and the repeated "almost" of my last few remarks reflects recognition of an inherent stress point in even the most formulaic works, an incipient deconstruction from within. As Geoffrey Hartman recognizes, "the trouble . . . with the [mass-market] detective novel is not that it is moral but that it is moralistic; not that it is popular but

that it is stylized; not that it lacks realism but that it picks up the latest realism and exploits it." Pynchon's literary detective novel puts pressure precisely upon these stress points, exploiting and emphasizing these troubling features, suggesting, paradoxically, that these meditations on genre, in departing from formula, return to a purified version of it. What is most surprising is that such a sharpening of attention seems so remarkable. Hartman continues: "A voracious formalism dooms [the detective novel] to seem unreal, however 'real' the world it describes. In fact, as in a B movie, we value less the driving plot than the moments of lyricism and grotesquerie that creep into it."¹⁵ A "B" movie, an Ian Fleming thriller, already approach the boundary dividing genre fiction from trash on the one hand and elite art on the other. Or are both hands the same hand, a sleight of hand, as it were? Pynchon's extraordinary feeling for rubbish, well documented by Tanner, attests to his ability to sift together commonplace and existential angst in his feverish and ferociously funny depictions of billboards, TV programs, department store Muzak.¹⁶ As Mucho says, "It was only the sign in the lot, that's what scared me. . . . We were a member of the National Automobile Dealers' Association. N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky. I used to wake up hollering" (144). The echoes of Hemingway's stoics and Fitzgerald's famous billboard (the eyes of T. J. Eckelburg in *The Great Gatsby*) are obvious in this throw-away spoof/homage to the urban novel of high modernism. The reader in search of a profound meaning will find exactly what Pynchon has already offered openly: nothing.

This reversal of the paradigm of the Faustian quester transformed into a jester striving to decode a vast urban text and finding only the text writ large accords with Robbe-Grillet's discussion of the French "new novel" of the 1950s as an inverted detective story: "The exhibits described in a thriller . . . provide a fairly accurate illustration of the situation. The various elements collected by the detectives . . . would all seem at first sight to call for an explanation, [but] whether they conceal or reveal a mystery, these elements that defy all systems have only one serious, objective quality – that of being there."¹⁷ The novelist Robbe-Grillet suddenly sounds uncannily similar to physicist Stephen Hawking,

who can dismiss God in favor of a self-contained universe defined by simple "being," with no religious overtones.

At issue is no longer a matter of rational understanding of the truth, but another enabling/disabling condition – that which forces us to recognize the world as it is, in the middle between an elegantly posed problem and its hermeneutically satisfying conclusion, in the world of a text whose only significance lies in its existence as text. And further we are forced to recognize the subterfuge of languages: as Jameson says of Raymond Chandler, "he feels in his language a kind of material density and resistance: even those clichés and commonplaces take on an outlandish resonance [and] are used between quotation marks, as you would delicately expose some interesting specimen."¹⁸ The clue becomes a word, a fragile verbal arabesque delicately framed between figurative quotation marks, an unreadable – if undeniably aesthetic – cipher, a zero degree artifact of writing.

As in Borges, what is essentially at issue is another, unsought surplus: the irreducible remainder of the individual self, a peculiar variation on the self-consciously reflective narrative mirroring typical of the postmodern text. The search for the other intimates and initiates a search for the self within the overlap and reversal between the various and overdetermined stories of the corpses of soldiers and mail carriers that figuratively litter the novel and the *corpus* (the corpse of the story itself).

Oedipa seeks not only the logically satisfying rational reconstruction of a hidden (killed) story, but also that which precedes the beginning of the story, the pre-history (fully one third of *The Crying of Lot 49* consists of interpolated stories that seek to anticipate or explain some aspect of the story that Oedipa attempts to reconstruct), the pre-lude (before the game), the pre-face (can we hypothesize about the original face behind the grimaces Dr. Hilarius uses in his therapy sessions?) – all that exists at the boundary of the legitimate story. Solution of the ostensible mystery only reconfirms the existence of this impossible boundary, dooming the protagonist to yet another reenactment by anticipation of the subtext, the as-yet-unenacted, multiply ambiguous crying of lot 49.

In the end, as is the case in the Borges detective story explicated by J. Hillis Miller, "the reader feels himself or herself left with

nothing in hand but the artifice of a dead figure."¹⁹ The stamps, painstakingly described in the novel as slight, morbid variations on the more familiar stamps in circulation, identified by the experts as forgeries through a questionably reliable addendum to a standard reference catalogue, serve as a final example of the duplicitous, reduplicated text both hidden from and in clear view of later scholars, which in its various stages of corruption haunts the entire work. The stamps, like the play *The Courier's Tragedy*, the Baby Igor movie *Cashiered*, and the Nazi war tales stored in the mobile face of Dr. Hilarius, almost too easily offer themselves as what Stephen Heath has called the "scriptural of narrative," with both religious/mythic and redundantly literary overtones.²⁰ Pynchon and Borges show us only too clearly how little we learn from the neat, rational, hermeneutical process and what abysses of ignorance these processes uncover.

The Crying of Lot 49 configures itself as a "double" escape fiction, not only for the reader but also for the characters and the narrator, who call up a scriptural of narrative most emphatically defined as an escape from literature itself – this despite the inescapable presence of a central text of evidence and artifact evoked through Wharfinger's play and the assorted "literary" and "historical" studies that surround it. Here, there is a recognition that there is no escape, despite buffering, despite "insulation" (one of Pynchon's key words), and despite efforts to retain a certain irreducible remainder of the self free from contamination:

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 upon her from outside and for no reason at all. Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition . . . (21–2)

Certain moments, Pynchon's novel suggests, are available only by a symmetrical balancing of magic and experimental physics, of myth and rational focus. They are accessible only in the mutual deconstruction of both competing belief systems. Furthermore, it is in moments like these that we catch a glimpse of an Oedipa en-

tirely different from the typical suburban housewife who goes to Tupperware parties, gets drunk on the kirsch in the fondue, and has a fondness for popular television programs like "Bonanza." Interlinearly, we recall a buried remainder of another self – scholar adventurer or scientist – exercising vigorously those "psychic muscles that no longer existed" (161): the reader of *Scientific American*, the woman familiar with Cornell University, Jay Gould, experimental physics, and the music of Bartok (9–10). The housewife is also the hermeneutical critic with an eye for symmetry in her fourfold analysis of what McHale calls "the epistemological cul-de-sac into which she has backed herself."²¹ Oedipa theorizes that either she has stumbled onto the Tristero's plot, or she has been self-deceived into believing in the Tristero, or she has been deceived by a plot against her, or she is fantasizing some such plot. The range of "solutions," then, runs the gamut from the epistemological to the psychological. Oedipa herself, insulation lost, breathless and pregnant with the cloudy ghosts of her superstitions/suppositions, "hoped she was mentally ill; that that's all it was" (171), but she cannot escape the tenuous persistence of the other alternatives, just as she cannot ignore the ghosts of the other great "as if" troubling her quest: "As if their home cemetery in some way still did exist. . . . As if the dead really do persist, even in a bottle of wine" (99), or in the exhaled smoke of a cigarette filtered through charcoal made from the bones of heroes. As if the symmetries of plot do have some transcendental meaning; as if, frighteningly, the self IS, self-contained and without boundary.

Arbitrary Rules

The second of the essential elements for the Borgesian game is that it have a finite set of arbitrarily determined but consistently applied rules. At the heart of this rule system is what Jacques Derrida in another context describes as "the law of economy . . . acknowledged in the movement from one constituted figure to another at least implicitly constituted figure, and not in the production itself of the figure."²² This movement of metaphor, enabled by a buried resemblance between the terms, functions partly as a displacement, partly as a translation, and partly as a way of addressing an

unknown, ciphered "X," figured (or disfigured) in and by the text. In *The Crying of Lot 49* Pynchon marks, unambiguously but with crafty complexity, both the instances of the rule of metaphor and its practice.

First rule: "Now here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of God knew how many parts; more than two anyway. With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Tristero, to hold them together" (109). No longer can metaphor be defined as the imagination's bridge, flung between two concepts. The wild proliferation of evidence means that Oedipa has to consider higher geometries and mental bridges in more than merely the standard three dimensions. That problem, however, is minor compared to the other: even if she could imagine bridges, the grounding for metaphor would still be slipping away beneath her feet. The word, the sign, "Tristero," becomes arbitrary, "nothing but a sound." It exempts itself from the internal meaning system of the English language, then reestablishes itself as a motive for metaphor, translating, representing, or inducing by its very sound the force moving between figure and figure. And that force is impossible to understand, although Oedipa can recognize its existence readily enough.

Second rule: "The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost" (129). I pause at this image, in which the definition of metaphor enacts metaphor through a conflation of the concepts of "home" ("inside, safe") and "truth," as the chain adduced by Oedipa seems suspiciously binary: truth–inside–safe vs. lie–outside–lost. Once again, however, the force of the statement lies not in the chain adduced, but in the emphasis on the "thrust," the force that moves metaphor through the image, compromising the comfort of homeliness, the housewifely history of being, contaminating it with the distinctive force of its passage. It is the force itself – not the image but the process – that is clearly at issue in Oedipa's meditations on the act of metaphor. This "force" is to be imagined less in traditional metaphorical than in mathematical terms, as a vector, in the example that immediately follows upon Oedipa's generalization. In her conversation with the homeless man with the DTs, his alcoholism-induced trembling offers Oedipa, through

"the high magic of low puns," a dazzling isomorphism with the mathematical concept of the infinitesimal, dt (derivative with respect to t), otherwise defined as the "time differential," that is, "a vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last for what it was . . . where velocity dwelled in the projectile though the projectile be frozen in midflight, where death dwelled in the cell though the cell be looked in on at its most quick" (129). The critic's job, like Oedipa's, lies in the intuitive grasp of this mental construct, the impossibly small instant in which the force of metaphorical movement can be frozen for inspection, preserving it in a still life (in Spanish, "una naturaleza muerta"). This "vanishingly small instant" is, of course, also a mental construct, a physicist's theoretical game, which, like the linguistic games of a purely theoretical version of the Tristero existing only at the level of sound, slips away and hastens decomposition even as it seems to halt momentarily the precipitous decline.

Third rule: metaphor is in itself a hallucination, an access to an unexpected place, not home, not homey, but a force slipping sideways across the merely linguistic grooves or tracks left by the passage of time: "Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare. . . . Trembling, unfurrowed, she slipped sideways, screeching back across grooves of years" (128-9). Or later, in a much-quoted climactic recognition, Oedipa recalls

knowing as if maps had been flashed for her on the sky, how these tracks ran on into others, others, knowing they laced, deepened, authenticated the great night around her. . . . For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, *unfurrowed*, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (179, 182; my emphasis)

The either/or assumptions of this passage are playfully stark. Figuratively, either America will have to change for Oedipa to fit into it, its symmetrical fertile furrows going as unseeded as her brain and her womb, its amber fields of grain slipping back into a pristine, unfurrowed state of expectation, or she, the unfurrowed one in a world of burgeoning growth, must become part of the unnur-

turing solipsism of an alien existence. There is, one could argue, an entire philosophy of "as if" in Pynchon's short novel, a shifting map of possibilities for the unfurrowing of resemblance through the counter-factual. Clearly, as well, the metaphorical force behind the unfolding revelation – and this is the beauty and duplicity of the "as if" – makes no pretense at uncovering or duplicating the reality of the world. Instead, the work of metaphor in the novel intimates a conflicted decomposition and recomposition of language as such; in its very arbitrariness, the metaphorical language of *The Crying of Lot 49* involves a progressive dissolution and reconstitution that implicates, furthermore, the entire history of Oedipa's selfhood. This self, in turn, is metaphorized as either an unfurrowing, a slippage across the hallucinatory memory of tracks and grooves worn smooth (can Oedipa remember her own memories?), or conversely, as an unwanted furrowing, as when the cognition of the "symmetrical four" alternatives results in a figurative and inexplicable impregnation as Oedipa is seduced, finally, by her own plots. The function of the unfurrowing "as if," then, is to reestablish the tentative self as a person and as a linguistic construct from the minimal clues – perhaps entirely imaginary – of a tenuously held theory. "I am," Oedipa seems to be telling us, even if "I" persists as a metaphor for a certain kind of madness.

Fourth rule, derived from and implicit in the first three: metaphor is a desiring/desired machine. What is desired ranges from religious to purely secular revelations about the nature of the universe and the self. Pynchon, I believe, intends these concerns to be taken ironically, but also wholly seriously. The machine is, of course, a central thematic and symbolic presence in Pynchon's work, an implicit metaphorical bridge between the forces of technology and those of hallucination or dream. The point is made early in the novel with reference to Oedipa's husband, Mucho, who had suffered "exquisite torture" in his former job as a used car salesman: "He could still never accept the way each owner, each shadow, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else's life. As if it were the most natural thing. To Mucho it was horrible. Endless, convoluted incest" (14). For Mucho the horror is only partly in the identification of owner and

machine that makes them strictly interchangeable. Much more horrible is the futureless, unending processing of desire, the unchanging flow of people and machines, the unidentified force that limits the perceived parts of this metaphor to the traditional two poles, establishes a system of equivalences, and funnels variety into homogeneity at the exchange point of the car dealer's office.

Mucho's new job, as a disk jockey, is not much better. Instead of automobiles, he deals with tape recorders, but the system of distortion insures that, once again, a unilateral system of appropriation and exchange takes place in the working of the machine:

Mucho thrust the mike in front of her, mumbling, "You're on, just be yourself." Then in his earnest broadcasting voice [obviously not "just being himself"], "how do you feel about this terrible thing?"

"Terrible," said Oedipa.

"Wonderful," said Mucho. . . . "Thank you Mrs. Edna Mosh . . . for your eyewitness account of this dramatic siege at the Hilarius Psychiatric Clinic. . . ."

"Edna Mosh?" Oedipa asked.

"It'll come out the right way," Mucho said. "I was allowing for the distortion on these rigs, and then when they put it on tape."

(139)

In order to name the witness, Mucho must machinate the presentation, calculating the degree of distortion in one machine so as to compensate for it in another. He must, operating on the principle of linguistic slippage along the tracks of his tape band, find other names in order to establish his equivalences. In so doing, he misses the element in the machine that functions according to the same principles as the hidden Tristero, the appearance of work (communication, reproduction of the human voice) thrust into a slightly deviant track by severe irony: the name "Edna Mosh," mechanically reproduced in his own "earnest broadcasting voice."

To some degree, the machine that has most intrigued readers of this novel, Maxwell's box or the Nefastis Machine, is a madman's answer to these other homogenizing machines, as its function, in the hands of the adept, is to accomplish "work" — move an experimental piston — through discrimination between fast and slow molecules. I would argue, however, that the question of sorting derived from the discussion of this machine and explicitly ex-

tended to the problems of the postal service and to Oedipa's own quest for information, functions as a colorful, highly overdetermined false lead, a kind of dream-machine. The Nefastis Machine functions most clearly as a dream of functioning, and works in the novel as a hallucination of utility, its meaning defined in the muted distortions of pure loss. Analogously, the role of the literary detective (Oedipa, the reader) in Pynchon's novel is less one of separating clues into valid and fraudulent than of engaging, slipwise if necessary, the system machinating what might be termed a structural incapacity to think without binary categories. To put the matter in the form of a question rather than a statement, what happens if we as readers conceive of the narrative as a progressive and strictly uninterpretable distortion rather than as jumble of zeroes and ones from which the critic, like Maxwell's Demon, sorts true from false, inside from outside, hot from cold, relevant from nonsensical? What if we were to make no claim to understand the linguistic forces and movements of *The Crying of Lot 49*, but merely to read the ion trails of their passage?

In this exemplary postmodern text, Pynchon clearly indicates to what degree any reader organizes a story by the fact of naming it and claiming for it a preferred interpretation.²³ These require an act of self-distancing that compels recognition of the arbitrary nature of the fictions we live by, and the force of language as mediating between mind and whatever we choose to consider reality. Like Borges's famous cartographer, who drew increasingly detailed maps only to discover that the topography finally described the features of his own face, Pynchon's characters, and his readers, forcibly confront how we are constituted by the unconscious projections of our particular linguistic structures, how we are dominated by the ambiguities of the "as if," and how our dreams and our language produce, rather than reflect, what we consider "truth."²⁴

A variation of the figure of the cartographer recurs in Pynchon's novel through Oedipa's meditation on the painting of Remedios Varo, "Bordando el manto terrestre," which she sees in Mexico City with Pierce Inverarity. The reflexivity of a text on a painting depicting a tapestry that describes an interior state through allusion to textualized myth (Rapunzel, Arachne, Philomela and

Procne, the Lady of Shalott) is essential. Varo's painting, to use Nancy Miller's term, is a quintessential "arachnology," an inescapable textual web: "Oedipa had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been woven together a couple 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" (21).²⁵ The textual web spills out over the frame of Varo's painting and under Oedipa's feet, constituting itself as a magic carpet, a tapestry at least partially of her own embroidery. Oedipa, presumably taken away from the complacencies of southern California by her lover, is taken aback by a painting that tells her the process of fabrication and self-fabrication is continual, or that reminds her she has been taken in by her dream of escape, by her image of herself as the Rapunzel of Kinneret. "What happens, for example," asks Maurice Blanchot, "when one lives an event as an image?" He answers his own question in terms directly applicable to Oedipa's situation: "To live an event as an image is not to remain uninvolved. . . . But neither is it to take part freely and decisively. It is *to be taken*: to pass from the region of the real where we hold ourselves at a distance from things the better to order and use them into that other region where the distance holds us."²⁶ Caught up in a web of her own weaving, in an ecstasy of discovery and reordering, Oedipa passes almost imperceptibly from fabricator to fabrication; she is taken into her desiring machine and lost.

Tedium

What tends to be forgotten in these ecstasies of plotting is the way in which the game, assiduously played, masks its own tedium, its hyper-redundancy. It is a game, ultimately, less of signs than of graphisms, a muted discourse running along the surface of the increasingly insubstantial things among which Oedipa wanders, not surprisingly, lost amid the silence of the signals. In a recent article, Marc Redfield uses Jameson's comment on the postmodern sublime – noting Jameson's insight that one effect of postmodern narrative is to imagine the world as "a rush of filmic images without density" – as a point of departure for a carefully argued discus-

sion of Pynchon's narrative strategies.²⁷ In his discussion of *V.*, Redfield shifts from the filmic to the theatrical metaphor, suggesting that, "[t]he clenched drama between rudimentary agents or subjects that marks the narcissistic scenario attains theatrical reenactment as the possibility or condition of Stencil's 'narcissism,' which, in the logic of this fiction, is the possibility or condition of the fiction itself."²⁸ Redfield's perception strikes me as elegant, and absolutely correct not only in relation to *V.* but to *The Crying of Lot 49* as well. What I wish to note here, however, is the striking affinity of the images (film, theater) and their relation to the concept of narcissism as conditioned by the "logic" of fiction. Such terms can be derived, in a luxuriant specularly, directly from Pynchon's own obsessions: Oedipa's seduction by the ex-child actor "Baby Igor" Metzger upon her arrival in San Narciso is emblematic of the novel's incipient narcissism. The game goes on. Just as Oedipa Maas borrows images from a Remedios Varo tapestry (the metaphor of her own life, really) to read the hypothetical Tristero, so too Redfield borrows from Jameson – but also, initially, from Pynchon – to read Pynchon. The reflexive or narcissistic play of textual repetition is akin to the "automotive incest," the redundant exchange of essentially empty identical items intuited by a horrified Mucho Maas in the sign of N.A.D.A./nada; this reflexivity or redundancy enacts what Borges would signal with approbation as the tedium of game.

It is no coincidence that the graphic sign of the Tristero/W.A.S.T.E. system is a muted, silenced horn. A rigorously flat, obliterated language – the ciphers of N.A.D.A. or W.A.S.T.E. – is dissected through the machinations of the literary detective's desire for meaning. These graphisms disguise both *something*, if only the waste and rubbish of a postmodern society, and *nothing* at all: they are silent, empty signifiers. They carry no message, but represent, fitfully and inconsistently, the binaries of falsity and truth, the script for both the actor and the "real" housewife. N.A.D.A., W.A.S.T.E., and the hieroglyphic graphism of the horn describe the continually changing surface of fragmentary repetition and rarefied reproduction, the unspeakable words that exist only as repeated sound (paradoxically, immutably silenced) in Oedipa's "world."

Frequently, at the level of syntax, Pynchon makes use of convoluted phrasings and carefully staged precautionary rituals to elaborate repetitions that, in their very insistence, act as attenuating factors decrying the concrete existence established in the statements just made. He substitutes instead a reproductive matrix, what in a computer would be a self-replicating virus, which spins out its hopelessly flawed duplications into a muted, improbable void of endlessly redundant supposition. The model is a variation on a logical impossibility: the anti-sentence, framed ambivalently in the schematic representation "X-not is not X." The opening paragraph of Chapter 3 suffices to set the pattern, repeated throughout the novel with the insistence that marks a Borgesian tedium:

Things then did not delay in turning curious. If one object behind her discovery of what she was to label the Tristero System or often only The Tristero (as if it might be something's secret title) were to bring to an end her encapsulation in her tower, then that night's infidelity with Metzger would logically be the starting point for it; logically. That's what would come to haunt her most, perhaps: the way it fitted, logically, together. As if (as she'd guessed that first minute in San Narciso) there were revelation in progress all around her. (44)

"Things then did not delay in turning curious": the curious awkwardness of this opening sentence calls attention to itself, forcing the reader back over it once again. "Things": a loaded word, since one of the most curious aspects of this curious novel lies in the degree to which the silent presence of tangible objects is persistently undermined, not only "then," at that moment, but continually, from the title page of the novel to the final page with its promise of a revelation still withheld from the reader at the auctioneer's clearing of his throat. Although the mystery revolving around the history and present status of the underground communications systems is "solved," and the crowding revelations do indeed reveal, contrary to expectations, that the Tristero is in fact "something's secret title" (or is it, since the "something" exists only vaguely as a second-level corrupted text within a text?), at the same time the novel manages to suggest that no logically constructible explanation for its resolution is possible. However,

Oedipa's repetition of the word "logically" until it becomes almost a mantra chanted to stave off the creeping infection of illogic ("that night's infidelity with Metzger would *logically* be the starting point for it; *logically*. That's what would come to haunt her most, perhaps: the way it fitted, *logically*, together") already reminds us how easily the appeal to logic enigmatically tips into its opposite. We are forced beyond the logical endpoint; we are shown that it is necessary, in J. Hillis Miller's words, "to go even further, even though one might not want to go any further in the direction that 'further' goes."²⁹ In Pynchon, this movement is intensified when we don't have an inkling of where "further" is taking us, if anywhere at all, or when we suspect "further" of hiding another treacherous conspiracy, if only to mask its necessary illusion. Are we being taken in, or taken for a ride on another circular track through the space without boundaries of the postmodern universe? According to David Seed, in this novel "text leads into text in a way which explains retrospectively why . . . texts and sources recede into each other apparently without end, stretching towards resolution but never reaching it."³⁰ In any case, the structuring of meaning from chance clues reflects not the (disputable) order of the world but the ordering process of the individual mind. In this process, we recognize the interplay between participation in and alienation from a fascinating, redundant game, played "as if there were revelation in progress," but remaining poised on the necessary uncertainty of the grammatical tense of the subjunctive verb.

I began with an epigraph from Jorge Luis Borges; — the final sentences of his essay on Zeno's second paradox, "Avatars of the Tortoise." The infinitely receding frames of Seed's hypothesized text recall the inverted infinity of Zeno's paradox, in which Achilles, who has given the turtle a handicap of ten paces, is mathemagically unable to recapture a lead in the fractional infinity stretching between zero and one. The paradox of the infinite regression, whose resolution seems so absurdly obvious to a thinker using common sense, represented an insoluble problem for almost two thousand years until the construction of irrational numbers allowed thinkers to fill in the infinitesimal gaps between the infinite fractions, creating the mathematics of a temporal continuum. I would like to end, then, with the first sentences of that same

essay, Borges's "revelation in progress": "Hay un concepto que es el corruptor y el desatinador de los otros. No hablo del Mal cuyo limitado imperio es la ética; hablo del infinito. Yo anhelé compilar alguna vez su móvil historia" ("There is a concept that is the corruptor and distorter of the others. I am not speaking of Evil, whose limited empire is ethics; I am speaking of the infinite. I desired to compile some time its mobile history.")³¹ Pynchon's novel is another chapter in that mobile history, and this essay perhaps a footnote appended to the study of the aesthetics of the infinite game.

NOTES

1. Jorge Luis Borges, *Otras inquisiciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1960): "We (or the indivisible divinity that operates in us) have dreamed the world. We have dreamed it resistant, mysterious, ubiquitous in space and firm in time, but we have allowed in its architecture tenuous and eternal interstices of irrationality so as to know that it is false" (p. 156; my translation).
2. Both articles were originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. "The Literature of Exhaustion" appeared in vol. 220 (August 1967): 29–34, and has been much anthologized since; "The Literature of Replenishment" appeared in vol. 245 (January 1980): 65–71.
3. John Updike, "The Author as Librarian," *The New Yorker* 41 (30 October 1965): 245.
4. These citations appear, respectively, in *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1956), pp. 11, 143, 143, 162; and in *Otras inquisiciones*, pp. 9, 10, 256.
5. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), p. 136.
6. Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 79.
7. Georgianna M. Colville, *Beyond and Beneath the Mantle: On Thomas Pynchon's "The Crying of Lot 49"* (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 1988), p. 14.
8. *Ficciones*, pp. 89, 95.
9. Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 22.
10. In the best postmodern fashion, Pynchon has also included in the text a parody of the overeager overinterpreter in Professor Bortz, the Wharfinger expert: "But should Bortz have exfoliated the mere words so lushly, into such unnatural roses, under which, in whose

red, scented dusk, dark history slithered unseen?" (163). The lush exfoliation of Pynchon's own prose in this passage is very much to the point.

11. Colville, *Beyond and Beneath the Mantle*, p. 27.
12. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. 118.
13. Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), p. 76.
14. Michael Holquist, "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction," in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. Glenn E. Most and William Stowe (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 157.
15. Geoffrey Hartman, "Literature High and Low: The Case of the Mystery Story," in Most and Stowe, eds., *The Poetics of Murder*, p. 225.
16. Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon*, p. 20–2.
17. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 188.
18. Frédéric Jameson, "On Raymond Chandler," in Most and Stowe, eds., *The Poetics of Murder*, p. 123.
19. J. Hillis Miller, "Figure in Borges's 'Death and the Compass': Red Scharlach as Hermeneut," *Dieciocho* 10 (1987): 58.
20. The term derives from Heath's discussion of mid-century French fiction in his book *The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), p. 136.
21. Brian McHale, *Pöstmödernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 24.
22. Jacques Derrida, *The Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 222.
23. Consider, as Borges does, the vast difference in the variant readings of an imaginary novel by Herbert Quain, *April March* (the novel that provoked his observation on the nature of the literary game): "Hasta el nombre es un débil calembour: no significa *Marcha de abril* sino literalmente *Abril marzo*" ("Even the title is a weak *calembour*: it does not mean *The March* [in either sense] of *April* [or, we might add, the proper name "April March"] but rather, literally, [the months] *April March*" (*Ficciones*, p. 79); that is, it signals only the backwards march of time: sixty-one days' worth, to be exact.
24. Jorge Luis Borges, *El hacedor* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1960), pp. 155–6.
25. Miller defines the arachnology as:
a critical positioning which reads *against* the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subject; to recover within

representation the emblems of its construction. . . . In the neologism of the text as hyphology, the mode of production is privileged over the subject, whose supervising identity is dissolved in the web. But Arachne's story . . . is not only the tale of a text as tissue: it evokes a bodily substance and a violence to the teller that is not adequately accounted for by a torn web. (Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], pp. 80, 82)

It would be tangential to this project to read Varo's paintings in this respect.

26. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 261; my emphasis.
27. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 77.
28. Marc Redfield, "Pynchon's Postmodern Sublime," *PMLA* 104 (1989): 158.
29. Miller, "Figure in Borges's 'Death and the Compass,'" p. 59.
30. David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 127.
31. Borges, *Otras inquisiciones*, p. 149.

Toward the Schizo-Text: Paranoia as Semiotic Regime in *The Crying of Lot 49*

JOHN JOHNSTON

I

FIRST and foremost, Thomas Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, is concerned with signs and their "reading" or interpretation. This would seem to be an obvious constant in Pynchon's fiction. In his first novel, *V.*, signs proliferate — above all, the letter V and the V-shape — as one of the major characters, Herbert Stencil, attempts to link the appearances of a mysterious woman with episodes of violence and decadence in the history of the twentieth century. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the central character, Tyrone Slothrop, as well as many of the minor characters are particularly adept at reading signs — not only shapes in the sky but mandalas, whip scars, reefers, trout guts, and Tarot cards amid a whole spectrum of semiotic material. *The Crying of Lot 49* differs from these two much longer flanking novels in that its focus is confined to the experience of one character, Oedipa Maas, or rather, to a kind of specific reading and interpretation of signs that for the moment we can simply call "paranoia." In reading the novel, however, we are compelled to consider paranoia less as a mental aberration than as a specific "regime of signs," that is, as a basic type of organization of signs in which the semiotic or signifying potential is dominant.¹

A basic postulate of semiotics is that signs refer to other signs. Thus the first question is not what a given sign signifies, but to which other signs it refers, or which signs add themselves to it to form an endless network that projects its shadow onto an amorphous atmospheric continuum. In the beginning, as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss tells it, there was a delirious pro-