De-faced America:
The Great Gatsby and The Crying of Lot 49

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In recent history, the acceleration of radical change has been so great that it has become ever harder to create intelligible links between oneself and the past. Extremely rapid change implies a series of breaks in historical sequence; episodes of contemporary life seem anomalous, lacking a past against which to measure them, and every event seems a crisis. The victim (or perpetrator) of such radical change can try to wipe out the past and to deny it, in which case the repressed elements torture themselves into potential neurosis. Alternatively, one can analyze the past, searching for key elements with which to explain change, in which case prolonged retrospection invades and shapes--according to the patterns of the past--the "new" present that had been so fervently craved.

Whatever form the sudden shifts of contemporary history take, they throw a tremendous burden on the individual's ability to "read" his own past; in addition, they virtually force him either to explain it or to wipe it out. In the latter case, a potentially meaningful set is turned into informational static: "My past means nothing." But if the past means nothing, by what means does the observer "read" the present? To what do all the signs seem to refer?

When radical changes of this type begin to occur at the level of an entire culture, an additional problem arises, simply because it is more difficult for society as a whole to profess amnesia. Police states have had notorious lapses in memory, but in a free society the past is not always buried so easily. What is more likely to happen, as F. Scott Fitzgerald recognized in The Great Gatsby, is that a culture's inherited ideals, and its actual values and methods, can co-exist even when the two are contradictory, just so long as no one attempts to integrate them, or to resolve their contradictions. When, however, some attempt is made to resolve the problem because the contradictions constantly tease the mind into the effort of reconciliation--despite the fact that these same contradictions also make true resolution impossible--then the disparity

between past ideals and present actuality can lead to something approaching schizophrenia, or to a situation in which an unreadable message or system of meanings defies every effort to de-code it. This is exactly the case in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, where history has literally become unreadable; furthermore, since many of the images in Pynchon's novel are borrowed wholesale from Gatsby, the entire question of integration is complicated by both literary and cultural history. In both these novels, certain themes and preoccupations having to do with history, culture, and "reading" coincide, and they do so around a central image: the face.

In fiction generally, the face serves as an index to character; it is the window to the soul, and so on. These assumptions depend on the reader's, or a character's, ability to "read" the faces presented to him; if the face is not a text, it is at least a series of signs that indicate a set of meanings, even when a character is being duplicitous and is holding up a phony mask for the world to read.[1] Only an innocent or a fool shows the world, via his face, what he thinks and feels all the time. But when a character or a culture goes through a radical change, and still professes to believe the earlier discarded ideal, something beyond acting, or hypocrisy, occurs. The contradictions begin to cancel themselves out, and the face becomes a blank, or it may do its best to mirror the other. The face becomes unreadable, or vacant. Its emptiness reflects a self perceived as an absence. The experience of the face-as-absence (and it can be perceived by either characters in fiction, or by the reader of fiction[2]) tends to point to a larger problem of reading signs in general whenever the world is turned into a text; at this point, the fictional character, or the reader, is forced to examine faces or texts in which most of the signs and meanings either cancel one another out, or cannot be de-coded. Since the disappearing face implies an obliterated history and a crime buried within it, it suggests the ascendancy of doubt and guilt together, a sense that all is not well historically: what wants to be said or expressed cannot find its form, and so obliterates the forms that do exist.

In a culture popularly without self-doubts about its ethos (America from 1865 to 1900), the individual achieves his success through widely-sanctioned means. He is told that wealth is earned through hard work; he works hard and gets what he wants. Opportunities, it is thought, abound. Once success is achieved, the self-made man tells others what he has been told, since the message has, he believes, reflected what the case is. Both his words and his face are "sincere"--they are presumably what they mean; Horatio Alger's novels overflow with sincerity of this type. Doubts in Alger are sublimated into the freak shows and "curiosities" in almost every novel; doubts in others at this period and before (Thoreau, Henry Adams) are expressed by actual, physical withdrawal or by a style that withdraws from what it examines (Adams's irony). These withdrawals assume that the social world can be escaped, or at least evaded. Faces at this period either show what is felt, or they lie; they do not disappear, with one prophetic exception--Stephen Crane's "The Monster."

But when opportunities slip, and the individual still wants the success he has been promised, an unstated shift must take place. He must repeat what he has been told the case is, but he must act in a wholly contradictory way, which is to say that he will go outside society's bounds and commit crimes to gain what he wants. But since he still supposes that the ethos of opportunity holds, he begins to be (though not to say) a self-contradiction. He wants, as Stephen Crane says, to "efface" himself. He cannot be read as a hypocrite, because he believes at some level what he says. For example, "I believe in America" is the first line of the film of The Godfather. (The gangster is "a man of respect.") Truth, then, does not for such a person emerge from a good opinion of the self, because one's opinion of the self reeks of contradiction and chaos; the truth of character must come from others, be donated by others and repeatedly asserted in defiance of palpable actions; the name for this sort of good opinion is "respectability." It is the classic form of existentialist bad faith.

When Gatsby is published in 1925, the norm of respectability has already started to slip toward the curious: the freak show is invited into the Gatsby

mansion, where it entertains others by entertaining itself. But the narrator, who comes virtually out of nowhere, is no freak; he is "one of the few honest people" he has ever known, and it is his duty, almost his calling, to understand Gatsby and Gatsby's legacy, and to be able to see the contradictions within it without being sucked up into them. He is honest and sincere, he thinks. Both attracted and repelled by Gatsby's world, he tries to reserve judgment, being "within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled," in a critical nowhere that permits irony but not commitment.

Nick Carraway's efforts to understand Gatsby's personal and financial fortunes lead him away from character analysis into what amounts to a piece of detective work. As in most detective fiction, a crime has been perpetrated and the criminal is putting on an act. Furthermore, Gatsby has arranged the tableaux in which he appears, so that no one will see the split between the private and public selves, the one that smiles and the one that "makes deals." It is important in this connection to remember that Gatsby is a self-obliterated man. As a youth, James Gatz's heart is in a "constant, turbulent riot"--a mess of desires--and in order to realize his dreams he kills off his old self, "at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career--when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior."[3] Thinking that history and selfhood can be renounced, he invents Jay Gatsby, a conception of selfhood meant to reach the "meretricious beauty" represented by Cody's yacht. Gatsby does not achieve respectability; he invents it, as he invents his new self. He discards his old name, identity, and parents--"his imagination had never accepted them as his parents at all." He becomes a fiction. The self-made man starts as a void, or so he thinks.

His mistake, as Nick Carraway discovers, is to believe his own fictions and to forget the crimes that finance them. Gatsby's face is his most extraordinary creation. The private face and self bankroll the public ones, but if respectability shines forth in the public image, "turbulent riot" leers out from underneath and seems to be expressed by Gatsby's party guests. Gatsby's particular innocence is that he cannot see or recognize the riot. Speaking of Meyer

Wolfsheim's fix of the 1919 World Series, Gatsby says, "He just saw the opportunity," an Alger-ish remark that translates crime into romantic possibility. Nick may be horrified that Wolfsheim has tampered with the "faith of fifty million people," but the faith of fifty million people is exactly what Gatsby left behind when he changed his name and wiped out his past. Gatsby's self-faith makes other crimes seem irrelevant as well: he has been mixed up in bootlegging and stock-market fraud, though to what degree is unclear. Fitzgerald leaves the underground business ventures more-or-less underground; it is not the burden of Nick's investigation to discover how far into the culture Gatsby's influence has permeated, or how far his deceit has been systematized. That kind of quest belongs to Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49.

What Nick does see is the enormous discrepancy between public and private worlds, what is on stage and what is behind the scenes. Gatsby's estate is like a Hollywood set. The theater of appearance, of fiction, appears on weekends, and "tak[es] the sun on the hot sand of his beach." Extravagance (public) is processed into waste (private) that must be cleaned up and disposed.

> On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.
>
> Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York--every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. (39)

Behind the mansions and their lawns is the familiar urban dump, rural America's hideous double, "where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens."

In such a landscape, where quotation marks suddenly sprout around words like "success," faces grow confused,

their expressions clogged. Informational noise overrides true information. Myrtle Wilson's sister Catherine has

> a complexion powdered milky white. Her eyebrows had been plucked and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle but the efforts of nature toward the restoration of the old alignment gave a blurred air to her face. (30)

Jordan Baker's face looks like a balancing act (9), and Daisy's presentation of self seems to Nick to be "a trick of some sort to exact a contributary emotion" (18). At the center of attention is Gatsby's face, with its two outstanding qualities: the way it can mirror hope, and its ability to disappear.

> It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced--or seemed to face--the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself. . . . Precisely at that point it vanished. . . . (48)

Behind this disappearing face is the Art Deco corruption and waste that the smile hides, an emotional clutter like the messes Tom and Daisy Buchanan leave in their wake, a mess that must be cleaned if "faith" is to survive. Nick confronts two systems of communication, two interlocking mythologies here: one built upon conscious, Alger-esque, smiling, positivistic principles; the other upon unconscious, Hobbesian, libido-soaked impulses. Both systems can explain certain phenomena, but neither system can explain how the other system came into existence, or how it operates. The smiling face cannot explain the corruption, because that is not part of its system. Each gives contradictory explanations for the same phenomena, but the contradictions exist in a suspended state for any individual who can, like Nick, reserve judgment. What these myths cannot do is form a synthesis; what lies between them is an ideological no-man's land ruled (or at least gazed over) by the most famous billboard in American literature, the vacant face of Dr. Eckleburg.

Between these two mythologies, then, there is no compromise. Nick cannot reconcile the obscene word scrawled on "that huge incoherent failure of a house" with the house itself, at the end of the novel. The house and the obscenity constitute an insupportable contradiction, even granting Nick's capacity for "reserving judgment." He rubs out the word. But erasing the word cannot redeem the house. Like the fake mansions de Tocqueville sees upon arriving in America, with whitewashed brick meant to look like marble, the obscenity stands for a larger system that cannot be so easily obliterated; it is to the house what Gatsby's swindles are to the smile. It is like a plate of hors d'oeuvres intermixed with garbage. Nick's good fortune is to have seen both systems, and not to have been sucked up into either one. In Gatsby some kind of detachment seems to triumph for the moment; Nick frees himself from the tar-baby, but Gatsby's legacy is nonetheless a deeply disturbed and embryonically schizoid vision of America. The Eckleburg face moves off the billboard and into the streets.

Forty-one years later, in The Crying of Lot 49, the legacy has been so hopelessly tangled that to sort it out--"sorting" is one of the book's primary metaphors--seems a virtually obsolescent activity. "Sorting" implies clear categories, and categories suggest some kind of sure epistemological methodology; but there is no such certainty here, not even the suggestion of one. Nick Carraway has turned into Oedipa Maas, puzzle solver, and Gatsby has turned into Pierce Inverarity, a "California real estate mogul" and Oedipa's ex-lover, who as the novel opens has died, leaving Oedipa as executor. His assets, Pynchon remarks cryptically, are "numerous and tangled." Thus begins Oedipa's investigation into Pierce's "will," an investigation that, unlike Nick's, leads not to shocking epiphanies and revelations, but to increasing confusion and despair. In this novel it is no longer possible to tell the mansion and the legacy from the waste surrounding it (here systematized, employing a mode of communication called W.A.S.T.E.). Possessor and the thing possessed are now confused, fused to a point where they dissolve one another.

The first signals in Lot 49 that echo Gatsby and its preoccupations appear on the first page. Gatsby,

it may be remembered, has a portrait of his idol and surrogate father, Dan Cody, hanging in his bedroom, a curious place for this picture of a man "with a hard, empty face." As he begins Lot 49, the reader is told that Pierce Inverarity's idol, Jay Gould, is represented in the Inverarity bedroom by a "whitewashed bust . . . the only ikon in the house"--that stands on a narrow shelf above the bed. Oedipa has worried that some day this hard face will teeter and fall on herself and Pierce, and she wonders whether this image from the past may have accidentally fallen and killed Inverarity in his sleep, "among dreams." While both Gatsby and Inverarity inherit hard faces and dreams from the past, what they pass on cannot be so well-defined. If Gatsby's face and smile are ambiguous, Inverarity's is virtually invisible. The reader is introduced to him as he speaks to Oedipa on the phone, his voice modulating from role to role, in a constant evasion of self-hood.

> . . . there had come this long-distance call . . . by a voice beginning in heavy Slavic tones as second secretary at the Transylvanian Consulate, looking for an escaped bat; modulated to comic-Negro, then on into hostile Pachuco dialect, full of chingas and maricones; then a Gestapo officer asking her in shrieks did she have relatives in Germany and finally his Lamont Cranston voice, the one he'd talked in all the way down to Mazatlán.[4]

And as Lamont Cranston, the Shadow, he follows her all through the novel, in both his will and its mirror, the Tristero.

Also in the first chapter is a man who calls Oedipa on the phone and whose voice "sounded like Pierce doing a Gestapo officer." This voice belongs to Oedipa's psychotherapist, Dr. Hilarius, an ex-Nazi whose specialty is "faces." Hilarius apparently has the ability to make faces that either cure or drive men mad. Now, as a good ex-Nazi, he is out to cure.

> His theory being that a face is symmetrical like a Rorschach blot, tells a story like a TAT picture, excites a response like a suggested word, so why not. He claimed to have once cured a case of hysterical blindness with his number

37, the "Fu-Manchu". . . (18)

It is Pierce's face, or rather the absence of it, that will drive Oedipa out of the norm (though not into the arms of Hilarius, who will be mad himself, his guilty past having come back to seize him after his attempts to obliterate it).

Oedipa also asks Ralph Driblette, the director of The Courier's Tragedy, a question about faces: whether the ominous and dreamlike "knowing looks" his actors give one another are accidental or directed. Directed, Driblette tells her from the shower, and when Oedipa asks him about "this Trystero," Ralph Driblette's face "abruptly vanished back into the steam." It is like asking Gatsby about the sources of his cash.

In her quest, Oedipa recapitulates Nick Carraway's feelings of being both within and without, except that being "within" now means being a prisoner, like a maiden in a tower. Unfortunately "the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic." An ironic reserve is difficult; actual withdrawal from the social world is impossible. The concepts of "in" and "out" are gone, or are part of each other. As Oedipa is imprisoned in the spreading boundary, amorphous and web-like, of Inverarity's "estate," she first believes the estate to be simple: his headquarters (a "grouping of concepts" called San Narciso) and a stamp collection. But looking at this town/concept of San Narciso, Oedipa has one of her first unpleasant shocks: San Narciso looks like a printed radio circuit, a hieroglyph of "concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate." As she gazes at objects-as-information, it may occur to her that she may be a piece of information, too. The meaning of San Narciso hangs above her.

> There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding. . . . As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken. (24-25)

Confronted with the first evidence of the "estate,"

Oedipa approaches the point of meaning but never reaches it. Compare this "odd, religious instant" (Pynchon's phrase) with the end of Chapter Six of Gatsby, after Nick has heard the story of Gatsby's romance with Daisy.

> Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something--an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever. (112)

Both Nick and Oedipa approach meaning--the key to the tower--but for both it is elusive. Later that evening she watches television, and the faces on the screen evoke the unnameable "immediacy" again. It is as though the entire culture she lives in has undergone a radical change, re-named itself and disguised itself, and turned an Eckleburgish face to the world.

The Tristero is in part a vast expansion of the outcasts of Gatsby, who live in the ash-heaps behind the mansion. Its members communicate by means of Significant Looks and other private forms of discourse: graffiti and the W.A.S.T.E. operation. The graffiti, like the obscenity that appears on Gatsby's mansion, gives expression to the outsider's version of things. On a latrine wall, Oedipa finds invitations to "sophisticated fun," responses to which must come by W.A.S.T.E. Underneath is another hieroglyphic, a muted post horn. As writing or as a system, however, the signification here is garbled. Just as Gatsby's personality can be represented through an image of contradictions (an empty face, a beautiful mansion with FUCK scrawled on it), the Tristero and W.A.S.T.E. systems can be read in two ways, by those within and those without. Those outside see W.A.S.T.E. boxes as trash containers, those within as mailboxes. In this schizoid landscape, meaning explodes out of the forms that initially gave rise to it. Like Inverarity's holdings, signification spreads relentlessly, filling in gaps where it seems to be absent. There is a clutter, a junkyard of meaning in the book.

> There was an intermission. . . . Oedipa headed for the ladies' room. She looked idly around for the symbol she'd seen the other night in The Scope, but all the walls, surprisingly, were blank. She could not say why, exactly, but felt threatened by this absence of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for. (69-70)

In a late chapter of the novel, Oedipa wanders around the Bay Area at night, as Nick Carraway wanders around Long Island and Manhattan, observing the "curiosities" who have lost the Alger-esque American dream, but who seem to have inherited a counter-community, the Tristero wasteland whose emblem is a sign of silence, a muted post horn.

> Among her other encounters were a facially-deformed welder, who cherished his ugliness; a child roaming the night who missed the death before birth as certain outcasts do the dear lulling blankness of the community . . . Decorating each alienation, each species of withdrawal, as cufflink, decal, aimless doodling, there was somehow always the post horn. (123)

But what has Inverarity to do with this collection of people and signs? The Tristero system would seem to be antithetical to everything Inverarity stands for. But as it turns out, he has rights to most of the crucial places where the code surfaces, or, as Pynchon says, "Every access route to the Tristero could be traced also back to the Inverarity estate."[5] The haves cannot be sorted out from the have-nots; the "establishment" may be in league with the resistance. It is impossible to read the situation properly. Whatever face Inverarity seems to hold up is contradicted by one that may or may not be an expression of his "will"--and the whole operation may be part of an enormous joke whose intentions are so byzantine that Oedipa cannot pursue them and stay sane. Alger-esque faith, reduced in Gatsby to skepticism, has been further reduced here to paranoid doubt and fear. The legacy knows no bounds and cannot be classified.

Pynchon tells us that what Oedipa had not guessed to begin with was "that the legacy was America," in all its unnameability. One may reach, make a gesture,

toward the unnameable thing, as Gatsby does as he rides on the train away from Louisville, Daisy's home town.

> The track curved and now it was going away from the sun, which, as it sank lower, seemed to spread itself in benediction over the vanishing city where she had drawn her breath. He stretched out his hand desperately as if to snatch only a wisp of air. . . . But it was all going by too fast now for his blurred eyes and he knew that he had lost that part of it, the freshest and the best, forever. (153)

Or as Oedipa does as she walks along another set of tracks, realizing that dreams and language are intertwined, and that when dreams expand they become less accessible to any kind of discourse, finally dropping into the realm of silence.

> She walked down a stretch of railroad track next to the highway. Spurs ran off here and there into factory property. Pierce may have owned these factories too. But did it matter now if he'd owned all of San Narciso? San Narciso was a name; an incident among our climatic records of dreams and what dreams became among our accumulated daylight, a moment's squall-line or tornado's touchdown among the higher, more continental solemnities--storm-systems of group suffering and need, prevailing winds of affluence. There was the true continuity; San Narciso had no boundaries. (177-78)

In the great meditations that end these two novels, the similarities between them are made even more clear. As Oedipa thinks about Inverarity in her walk along the tracks, she remembers a statement he once made to her, a summation of his philosophy of pointless energy. "'Keep it bouncing,' he'd told her once, 'that's all the secret, keep it bouncing.'" This piece of advice, which amounts to Inverarity's epitaph, is remarkably similar to the rhymed quatrain on Gatsby's title-page, by "Thomas Parke D'Invilliers":

> Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
> If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,

> Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
> I must have you!"

The non-existent poet who starts off Gatsby by advising the reader to "bounce" in order to please "her," and make her cry out for possession, believes in the same dynamic principles that brought the nearly-mythic Pierce to his fortune. In both cases the American idea of energy-at-all-costs is the only means to quell or to satisfy the equally American hunger for possession. Both Fitzgerald and Pynchon have made their tycoons into lovers who must possess--infuse themselves (con-fuse themselves) into what they own. Though Inverarity is rather more successful, they both leave a mess of relics behind. Inverarity is unsatisfied with just Oedipa; he must have more:

> Though he had never talked business with her, she had known it to be a fraction of him that couldn't come out even, would carry forever beyond any decimal place she might name; her love, such as it had been, remaining incommensurate with his need to possess. . . . (178)

The wording of this passage and its tone may remind the reader of a bit of history with which Gatsby ends:

> . . . for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (182)

"Something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" has given way to an inadequate love, "incommensurate with his need to possess." Wonder has been erotized, or, rather, it has been marketed into desire and then into possession. The progression moves through space: the Dutch sailors see the continent at a distance and are possessed, themselves, by wonder; Gatsby reaches out to the object of his love, but it and she draw back before he can touch them; closer still, Inverarity grabs what he desires and, in effect, becomes indistinguishable from his possessions, melting into them. As this progression continues, the face of the possessor (and the possession) is harder and harder to

make out. At last the face is so de-faced that analytical effort is just wasted. "Inner" and "outer" boundaries are lost: what Oedipa thinks is also what she hallucinates.

A man looking at the world in the twentieth century runs a risk, as Heisenberg and others have warned, of finding only himself. Nature is covered or obliterated by the artifacts of man. Wonder gives way to desire and desire to exegesis. Perhaps, as both Fitzgerald and Pynchon suggest, an identity with the country has also meant a sense of separation, a feeling that unites the mid-westerners of the first part of this century with the drifters of the present time.

> We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before we melted indistinguishably into it again. (Gatsby, 177)

> She remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in; and walkers along the roads at night . . . too far from any town to have a real destination. (Lot 49, 180)

But Pynchon, predictably enough, goes further: his novel has no space in it uninvaded by man, and therefore no place where the exegetical capacity can rest (if one means to understand it on a cognitive level). For every object created by man is also a projection of sorts, by which both conscious and unconscious desires are manifested in space. To build a car is, depending on its design and horsepower, to say something about power, sexuality, and domination. Those who are able to "read" the mythology implicit in a fairly simple object like a car, for example, will find themselves bewildered by the multiplicity of mythologies bombarding them in an advanced technological state. The face that Fitzgerald's America presents is relatively simple, if somewhat schizoid, resting as it does on a sequence of dualisms, one-half of which are blessed with innocence (the "green breast of the new world"). Innocence does not require reading, because it is not a message. It just is.

The other half, the part that has been defaced or submerged, requires decoding. One looks at the world and instead of seeing trees, sees Dr. Eckleburg's empty face staring back. This look seems to imply judgment and projection, but since it is a blank, it can imply anything. Nick Carraway can "read" the situation in Gatsby and withdraw--presumably--from it, carrying the reader with him. By the time Pynchon writes, the suggestion is that the entire culture has been through a radical change of some sort, that there is some crime buried in its past, that Pierce Inverarity is a key to this crime, and that the blank look of Eckleburg is now . . . everywhere, on everybody's face. Processing this code for even "sensitized" people like Oedipa becomes impossible. She ends the novel by "settling back," waiting, almost wholly passive. In this, in her trouble with signals, she resembles the schizophrenic patient described in Gregory Bateson's "Epidemiology of a Schizophrenia."

> At one end of the classification of those [syndromata], there will be more or less hebephrenic individuals for whom no message is of any particular type but who live in a sort of chronic shaggy-dog story. At the other end are those who try to over-identify, to make an overly rigid identification of what sort of message every message is. This will give a much more paranoid type of picture. Withdrawal is another possibility.[6]

After going through stages one and two, Oedipa ends the novel at Bateson's stage three. If she escapes the fate of Pynchon's subsequent hero, Tyrone Slothrop, who is transformed into energy itself and distributed through time and space, she nonetheless has found herself lost, in the realm of "excluded middles" and "bad shit." Nick Carraway escapes with his integrity intact and his true inheritance of wisdom, back to the midwest (or at least out of the poisonous East), but the only place Oedipa can escape to is the privacy of her own interior, in psychic withdrawal--depression. She cannot physically or rhetorically escape from the legacy--the "estate"--of wrecked and merged identities.

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Notes

[1] For example, see Roland Barthes's essay on Garbo's face in Mythologies (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 56-57. Garbo's face, says Barthes, is an Idea; Audrey Hepburn's, by contrast, is a series of "morphological functions."

[2] But see Stephen Koch's analysis of Warhol's deadpan in Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and His Films (New York: Praeger, 1973), 136-38.

[3] F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Scribner's, 1925, 1953), 98.

[4] Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1966), 11.

[5] This, incidentally, is very similar to the central plot device in Roman Polanski's and Robert Towne's film "about" California, Chinatown. The parallels are numerous, and require a separate essay.

[6] Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind (New York: Ballantine, 1972), 199-200.