

Pynchon's Textual Revisions
of The Crying of Lot 49

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There has been considerable speculation about whether Pynchon's story "Under the Rose" was written before V. or simply extracted from the manuscript, published separately, and then extensively revised as Chapter 3 of the novel. David Cowart has put forward evidence for the latter hypothesis,¹ although the question will not be answered definitely until the manuscript of V. comes to light.

Similar questions exist about the relation of the manuscript of The Crying of Lot 49 to its "satellite" pieces. Before it was published, two excerpts appeared in print, one in Esquire in December 1965, and the other in Cavalier for March 1966. A publisher's note at the end of the Esquire excerpt suggests that Pynchon had already placed the novel with J. B. Lippincott and also that the manuscript was complete. There are a number of quite striking differences between the two published sections and the first edition of the novel, which indicate that an earlier text--probably of the whole novel--existed, and that Pynchon carried out fairly extensive revisions as the novel was going to press. It is not clear why excerpts appeared before the novel itself. Pynchon's former college friend Jules Siegel has suggested that Pynchon was short of money;² alternatively it may have been at the initiative of Pynchon's agent, Candida Donadio. Whatever the reason, the textual differences shed a fascinating light on Pynchon's compositional methods and on his scrupulous care over the smallest details of phrasing.

A number of printing and grammatical errors are corrected. Thus when Oedipa sees her lawyer Roseman and has to stave off sexual advances, she is described as "insulted," but in the novel as "insulated"--an important difference, although both would make sense because the early sections of the novel deal with the progressive peeling away of Oedipa's layers of insulation. Unnecessary commas are removed, as are a

number of hyphens and speech-marks, thus making the punctuation less obtrusive. Words are replaced by their corresponding numbers and song titles taken out of italics. Some capitals (e.g. "Whiskey Sours") are also removed.

So far the changes have been quite minor, a matter of cleaning of the text. But in view of the complex syntax Pynchon was to use in Gravity's Rainbow, it is interesting to note that he several times replaced finite verbs with participles, sometimes with the effect of lengthening sentences. Thus, the text of the drunken seduction scene with Metzger originally reads:

. . . [he] settled for nodding and smiling, a drunken largeness to the gestures that called up as much exaggeration in the way Oedipa would scowl back. She grew more and more certain. . . .³

In the novel Pynchon cut out the long cumbersome phrase indicated, so that the passage reads:

. . . [he] settled for nodding and smiling. Oedipa would scowl back, growing more and more certain. . . .⁴

For one thing, the excluded phrase draws unnecessary attention to the growing drunkenness; for another, it distractingly suggests a comic equivalence between Metzger's behaviour and Oedipa's, whereas the scene actually shows a growing nervous edge to her reactions. The participle helps to show that this is a gradual and constant process.

Several of Pynchon's revisions tighten up his meaning either in adding clarification or in cutting out unnecessarily explicit details. Thus two clear indications of Mucho's feeling disappear, one phrase ("Awful for him: God" [E, 296]) concluding Oedipa's memory of his broadcasting activities. Two other significant changes affect the presentation of Mucho, this time from the Cavalier excerpt, "The Shrink Flips," from chapter 5 (pp. 132-45 of the novel). As Mucho is reporting on Dr. Hilarius' breakdown, he presses his cough button but only smiles. In the novel, Pynchon added an important nudge to the reader: "How could they hear a smile?" (L, 139). By this stage in the

novel Oedipa has become anxiously preoccupied with discrepancies--in her information sources or, as here, in the information media. The added sentence alerts the reader to yet another of these discrepancies and looks forward to the revelation that Mucho is high on drugs. At this point the main revisions from the Cavalier passage occur. Mucho tries to explain his addiction to LSD as follows:

"Because you hear and see things, smell them,
taste even like you never could. Because the
world is so abundant. No end to it, baby.
You're an antenna" . . .⁵

In the novel Pynchon shifted "even" to the less awkward position before "smell them." The next two sentences distract us from Mucho's central idiom of communication; LSD has in effect transformed him into a medium (in the non-psychic sense) by, as he thinks, granting him access to a transcendental realm. The statement "the world is so abundant" sounds flat and adds virtually nothing. Although Pynchon retained it (and the next sentence) in the Lippincott, Bantam and Cape editions of the novel, both sentences disappear in the Picador reprint of 1979. Later in their conversation Pynchon added a gesture ("Flipping her hair a couple times, furious" [L, 144]) to make Oedipa's reaction to Mucho's escapism absolutely clear.

Two other changes should be noted here, this time in the description of San Narciso which opens Chapter 2. Indicating the characteristically abstract nature of its layout, Pynchon points out that its areas are "all overlaid with access roads to various freeways" (E, 296). In the novel the sentence concludes "to its own freeway" (L, 24), an important detail because it tightens up the impression of San Narciso as a self-contained system and thus looks forward to the analogy of a printed circuit which follows this passage. Later, in the descriptive list of buildings, Pynchon added the phrase "escrow services" (L, 25), again a strategic addition because it reminds the reader of Oedipa's own legal obligation (to execute Inverarity's will), just as the preceding phrase ("auto lots") both glances at the title and harks back to Mucho's former job.

There are three quite major changes made in passages from Chapter 1. During Oedipa's retrospective account of Mucho's job as a car salesman, the following sentence occurs:

He could have given us definitive monographs on Myths, Images, Aspects of the Used-Car Salesman, but that would have required a sense of humor. (E, 172)

Apart from thoroughly overhauling the punctuation and phrasing of the paragraph in which this sentence occurs, Pynchon cut out the sentence itself, perhaps because it makes unnecessarily explicit one of Mucho's embarrassments about his job. "Definitive monographs" also sounds rather too intellectual for Oedipa, and indeed several of Pynchon's revisions seem directed towards increasing the colloquial flow of the text. Similarly when Mucho is describing an argument with his director, Funch, about what is sexually admissible over the radio, Funch is quoted thus:

"He came back with his stock line, 'At KCUF, no matter how short the skirts of our listeners get, or how tight the trousers, babies still come by stork.' So I muttered 'fink,' and fled." (E, 172)

For the novel Pynchon cut out the long sentence. This is again an improvement because his emphasis is primarily on the media's interference with the "message" and not on any social reasons why this should occur. The media's treatment of sexuality would thus be essentially a side-issue.

The long paragraph which concludes Chapter 1 received the main revisions, particularly in its opening and concluding lines. In Esquire the paragraph begins:

As things developed, she was to find out a lot. Hardly anything about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but all manner of revelations about what remained: their Republic. It had somehow, before this, stayed away, there had hung the sense of buffering. . . (E, 173)

These lines are revised as follows:

As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering. . . . (L, 20)

The changes remove the banal ending of the first sentence and give "revelations" its correct prominence at the head of the paragraph. Pynchon thus introduces the series of gestures towards a quasi-religious other dimension; at the same time, his revisions keep open and ambiguous exactly what is being revealed. "Their Republic" prematurely hints that America itself is the object of revelation, whereas this possibility correctly belongs much later in the novel. The phrase which in the novel begins "but about what" also improves on the earlier text because the syntax contrasts the familiar ("what remained") with the unfamiliar ("yet had somehow . . . stayed away"). Towards the end of the paragraph we encounter more major changes. Summing up his Rapunzel-image Pynchon comments:

Yet: what did she so desire escape from? Not Kinneret, certainly, nor that "prison of the self" people ran endlessly off at the mouth about. For such a captive maiden . . . soon realizes that . . . magic [is] visited on her from outside and for no reason--her blank innocence doesn't merit it. (E, 173)

Pynchon deleted the opening "yet" which awkwardly suggested a contrast, and cut out the whole of the second sentence. The latter ends awkwardly but also makes it too explicit that the narrative focus is not on Oedipa's psychology; she is rather presented as at the mercy of forces or as a focus for varied information. The deletion helps to keep the narrative enigmatic in its contrasts between cosy interiors (house, Kinneret, tower) and a threatening outside. The concluding clause also disappears in the novel, perhaps because the notion of deserts is irrelevant to the action and because Pynchon has already in effect demonstrated Oedipa's "blank innocence."

These are the major differences between the published excerpts from The Crying of Lot 49 and the

first edition of the novel. There are, however, other differences to note, as in the following passage from Chapter 6:

. . . [she] raised her head as if to sniff the air. She became conscious of the hard, strung presence she stood on--knew as if maps had been flashed for her on the sky how these tracks ran on into others, and others, and others, knew they laced, deepened, authenticated the great American night, so wide and now so suddenly intense for her.

These lines should correspond exactly with page 179 of the novel, but they do not. In line with the revisions noted earlier, Pynchon replaced most of the finite verbs with present participles ("becoming," "knowing," etc.). He cut out the flat repetition of "and others," the epithet "American" (unnecessary since Pynchon has indicated the U.S.A. in other ways), and revised the concluding phrase into the more concise "the great night around her." Where then does this passage occur? It is one of two quotations which appear in Richard Poirier's review of the novel in The New York Times Book Review.⁶ Poirier also quotes from the account of Mucho's spell as a car salesman, and the small differences between his quotation, the Esquire text and the Lippincott edition suggest that three versions of The Crying of Lot 49 exist: an early manuscript, probably of the whole novel, which is represented in the Esquire and Cavalier excerpts; an intermediary text which was partly revised (it has changed words into numbers, for instance, but retained other details cut out later); and the Lippincott text which may have undergone subsequent minor revisions from edition to edition. Oscar Handlin, who also reviewed the Lippincott edition, suggests that uncorrected copies of the galley-proofs were sent out for review.⁷ This would explain discrepancies between reviewers' quotations and the published text. A retrieval of this review copy would shed even more light on Pynchon's method of working, and would no doubt clarify many aspects of the novel.

Notes

¹ David Cowart, Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1980), 74.

² "He felt that he had rushed through The Crying of Lot 49 in order to get the money." ("Who is Thomas Pynchon . . . and Why Did He Take Off with My Wife?" Playboy, 24, No. 3 [March, 1977], 172).

³ "The World (This One), The Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity," Esquire, 64 (December, 1965), 303, emphasis added. Hereafter cited as E.

⁴ The Crying of Lot 49 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1966), 41. Hereafter cited as L.

⁵ "The Shrink Flips," Cavalier, 16 (March, 1966), 91.

⁶ "Embattled Underground," The New York Times Book Review (May 1, 1966), 42-43.

⁷ In a letter of June 6, 1983. Richard Poirier does not answer enquiries on this subject.