

## **“Hi! My Name Is Arnold Snarb!”: Homosexuality in *The Crying of Lot 49***

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*The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) has evoked a wealth of critical attention, but this attention has overlooked its frequent references to male homosexuality. J. Kerry Grant, for example, in his *Companion to The Crying of Lot 49*, ignores all but a couple of Pynchon’s most obvious gaytalk or straight-slang references to homosexuality. On the one hand, Pynchon treats the hidden gay-world as an undesirable, almost unthinkable, underside of San Francisco, carrying the mark of the pariah; on the other hand, he makes it a necessary component of a distorted and distorting heterosexuality. Through her encounter with this homosexual underworld and its symbolic value system, Oedipa learns what it means to be a heterosexual woman capable of standing on her own in a world dominated by (supposedly) straight men.

Cathy Davidson’s 1977 essay “Oedipa as Androgyne” answered critics who ignored Pynchon’s use of gender altogether.<sup>1</sup> But even before that, in 1974, Daniel Harris had thoroughly deconstructed the notion that androgyny was a cusp that joined the best of male and female characteristics and abilities, bluntly concluding, “That no woman should want to internalize the male myth in androgyny, except perhaps those who wish an easy accommodation with a masculine world they fear to offend, is plain” (172). I argue that, instead of seeing Oedipa as an androgyne, we should follow the steps of her feminist radicalization, a process in which male homosexuality guides and tutors her.

Reading *Lot 49* from the vantage of the 1990s greatly distorts the ghetto atmosphere that surrounded the gay community of the early 1960s—even in San Francisco. Mafia ownership and frequent police raids stigmatized the bars, forcing them into disreputable, often dangerous neighborhoods, thereby reifying the “unmentionable,” “diseased” or “criminal” marginalization of homosexuals, identifying them with the economically deprived, politically un-American and socially outcast.<sup>2</sup> Pynchon’s tour guide, herding a Volkswagen-busload of tourists “on route to take in a few San Francisco nite spots,” identifies the location of The Greek Way as “‘famous North Beach’” and promises to take the tourists next to Finocchio’s, a bar famous for its female impersonators (110). Pynchon, who later writes of approximately this same time in his own life that he had set out “to

visit the places Kerouac had written about" (SL 22), may have identified North Beach as one of the centers of the Beat rebellion and a Mecca for openly gay men like Allen Ginsberg. But to introduce The Greek Way as a tourist attraction during a period of police harassment is, at its least, surprising. It is what Alan Sinfield identifies as a textual "faultline"; it "disrupts" the political acceptability of Pierce Inverarity's dominant capitalistic empire and its accompanying male-heterosexual positionings by introducing a worldview that threatens those positionings.

References in *Lot 49* to homosexuals and homosexuality are the common ones of the 1960s: "'the Drop-The-Soap crowd'" (77); "fag," "'the third sex,'" "'the lavender crowd'" (110); "drag" (116). Pynchon even puns on "gay" (110), although the word was not then in wide public use to designate either a person or sexuality (see Duberman 205). The name "The Greek Way" derives directly from gaytalk for anal intercourse. That tourists have infiltrated a gay bar seems, at first, a statement on the crass commercialism we can identify in Pierce's far-flung empire; it is also a comment on the straight public's infringement upon a private gay-world. Because the tourists (and Oedipa, despite her protestation) have sought out and moved into the gay world, the direction of this movement reverses the usual public/private polarity (in a gay bar the straight person is marginalized) and thereby challenges the dominant society's assumption of unquestioned heterosexual prerogative. The movement of tourists into the bar defines heterosexual curiosity about those whom sexual polarity has marginalized and, by treating this curiosity as "normal," blurs the distinctions that position straight sexuality over any "deviance" from it. The proximity of same-sex anal intercourse to tourists in San Francisco is transgressive: the tourists want to "'see'" (110) what they do not want to acknowledge, the silenced sexual Other that valorizes their own centrality. To see homosexuality—to make it visible—implicitly recognizes its existence. But by recognizing its existence, the heterosexual observer acknowledges sexual difference that questions his position as the only valid sexuality (see Edelman).

Because the name of the gay bar signifies anality, it also suggests the elimination of waste. WASTE is not revealed as an acronym until Stanley Koteks angrily and disgustedly tries to put Oedipa in her place (87–88), a turn-off as sharp as Metzger's revelation that Pierce had told him Oedipa "'wouldn't be easy'" (43). Often overlooked is the appropriateness of Oedipa's first seeing WASTE in a toilet, a location (like The Greek Way) of abjection, a socially approved place to deposit waste. That Pynchon here so emphatically links toilet and shit, as he later does in *Gravity's Rainbow*, may explain his choice of the contact's name, Kirby, for Kirby is the name of another medium for disposing of

waste—a vacuum cleaner.<sup>3</sup> Kirby remains, in the popular imagination, the Rolls-Royce of cleaners partly because of its cost; it is an expensive tool for eliminating something we assume has no value. That Kirby can be reached “through WASTE only” (52) is an inward-folding allusion: the Kirby is the medium through which waste is collected or removed, but waste calls attention to itself because it creates the need for the Kirby to exist. To answer Kirby’s sexual text creates the need for WASTE, but WASTE creates Kirby’s ability to leave his proposition and get an answer. On the one hand, waste is rejected, unwanted, despised; on the other, it is desired, though hidden, something that reveals itself on toilet walls. Because there is waste, people make vacuum cleaners and toilets, neither of which exist apart from the desire to eliminate that waste.

Uncompromising in his refusal to simplify, Pynchon constructs such a network of unsettling information and disinformation to fold the text in on itself. He makes self-referential allusions to trap the reader, like Oedipa (the Reader in the text<sup>4</sup>), in unresolved and unresolvable conundrums. Quite early, for example, he forces us into one of the most basic methodological questions of interpretive theory. Are we to read *The Courier’s Tragedy* as if the seventeenth-century Richard Wharfinger intended us to read his puns and allusions as similar to our own, or are we to approach it from a view that holds that textual interpretation derives from the reader? Oedipa begins her search by seeking the writer’s intention, and we follow the stages of her analysis. But Pynchon traps us here. Despite Driblette’s assertion that critics who seek historical authenticity are “like Puritans are about the Bible” (79), Oedipa’s methodology disillusion us because *we know* the play is a twentieth-century parody of an imaginary Jacobean revenge tragedy, yet, despite this disillusionment, we still read the novel the same way she reads the play within the novel.

But when we examine the play within the novel, we (the readers outside the novel) find ourselves entrapped in the unthinkable: if the play within the novel is a twentieth-century novelist’s construct parodying an earlier genre that apparently took itself seriously, how can we assert that we should take the twentieth-century novel any more seriously? Are we to interpret allusions like “the court of Faggio” (66) as reflections of a seventeenth-century homosexual subculture or as modern redactions of the text similar to a reading of the play as a condensed short story rather than a drama? Could the puns have been linguistically valid to the “original writer,” or are we reading our own preoccupations with homosexuality into an earlier text? Pynchon unsettles our expectations. Like Oedipa, we are unable to resolve our questions about interpretation.

Wharfinger's name suggests a printer's font, the guiding finger to help the reader identify importance or *Wahr*, "truth" (Takács 304); but the word also signifies the owner or keeper of an embarkment or pier, a structure that connects land and ship and represents a passage rather than an end in itself. According to the first meaning, we expect *The Courier's Tragedy* to carry an answer within, but according to the second, Wharfinger's play points outside itself, connecting the reader to a truth or answer not inherent in its text. Following the second signification, Oedipa as Reader searches for answers from the actor/director, the historical development of the text, and the editor, while she overlooks that she herself may be the source of interpretation, the reader as writer. In contrast, we (the other readers) concentrate on the text of the novel and thus duplicate Oedipa's methodology even while we question it. When we feel most confident in questioning Oedipa's methodology, we face the alarming possibility that a text (in this case, the play within the novel) points nowhere outside itself. When we seek answers within the text, we find that what seemed substantial dissolves into further doubts that seem to justify Oedipa's methodology. Pynchon traps us in a bewildering circle where the separation between reader and writer blurs and all but disappears. The resulting confusion forces us to doubt basic, usually unquestioned, assumptions we would prefer to accept at face value.

Sandwiched between her watching De Witt surreptitiously deliver mail and her learning from Mike Fallopian that she was not supposed to see what she has just witnessed, Oedipa's trip to the toilet at The Scope exemplifies this folding of text in on itself. First, a trip to a toilet usually marks a hiatus in important matters for a necessary natural function; but here Pynchon introduces WASTE, Kirby and the muted post horn—all important in the complex plot that follows. Second, the material in these two paragraphs raises questions that, as in *The Courier's Tragedy*, Pynchon refuses to address; so the more we examine, the more we find ourselves slipping from one set of significations to another.

Kirby's message "[o]n the latrine wall" seems to have been written by a man: both the handwriting ("engineering lettering," which gender bias leads us to associate with a man) and the content ("Interested in sophisticated fun? You, hubby, girl friends") seem masculine.<sup>5</sup> But did a man get into "the ladies' room" to indite the message (52)? What is the meaning of "sophisticated fun"? Is it, indeed, a sexual message, as Oedipa thinks? If so, is it a heterosexual proposition that offers the possibility of a relation with Kirby together with other women? Or, if written by a woman, is it a lesbian proposition that seeks a relation primarily with the woman presumed to read it? Or is it a bisexual

proposition for mixed sex? Why does Oedipa first question the word WASTE? Why does Oedipa—who imagines yet “somehow” doubts the symbol “might be something sexual”—“cop[y] the address and symbol in her memo book” (52)? And if she copies them because the sexual content interests her, how are we to interpret her interest? Were the message and the symbol meant to be read together? Why does Pynchon introduce important plot keys in such a trivializing manner?

This sort of conundrum plunges us into a subtextual—and, in mainstream America in 1966, largely unthinkable—area of sexual ambiguity. Pynchon leads readers to the underside of mainstream America to question some of the most cherished and least examined assumptions in mainstream thought. Just as he suggests that waste is valuable, he forces us to examine a subtext on which heterosexual “normality” is grounded, the notion that homosexuality is secondary to and deviant from heterosexuality.

In chapters 1 and 2, Pynchon constructs Oedipa as a woman stereotyped by the men in her life, men who are themselves markedly incomplete. She is a woman who seeks her difference from presumably heterosexual men who have tried to control her. But the men in her life are unable or unwilling to fulfill her desires or to support her building a positive self-image. John Johnston has analyzed these men—Pierce, Mucho, Dr. Hilarius, Roseman and Metzger—to establish the parameters of the masculine heterosexual world in which Oedipa acts. With the possible exception of Pierce, each man positions himself as her superior by demanding that she conform to him, limit her vision to match his and deny whatever intelligence or desire differs from his.

But if, on one level, these nominally heterosexual men represent masculine power that opposes and controls femininity, they also, on another level, devalue that center by demonstrating that an implicit but powerful underlying homosexuality threatens heterosexuality. Dr. Hilarius has tried to create a disguise with which to hide from his Nazi past at Buchenwald, but even in Kinneret he continues to experiment on his patients. At Buchenwald he worked “‘on experimentally-induced insanity’” (137); in Kinneret (Hebrew for “circular”) he completes this circle by running an experiment on the “effects of LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs on a large sample of suburban housewives” (17). Whether driving Jews or women into fantasy, Hilarius has so deeply concealed his own identity behind childish making faces and behind his unquestioning adoption of Americanized Freudianism that he has lost touch with his own reality. He even asks Oedipa, “‘have I seemed to you a good enough Freudian? Have I ever deviated seriously?’” (134), and later confesses that he never used LSD because “‘I chose to remain in relative paranoia, where at least I know

who I am and who the others are” (136). These seemingly straightforward statements, especially from the mouth of a Freudian psychiatrist, however comic his portrayal, open a wealth of underlying possibilities.

Freud reported in 1911, when analyzing the etiology of paranoia,<sup>6</sup> that he (together with Jung and Ferenczi) was “astonished to find” that all the cases of paranoia that came under his observation shared “a defence against a homosexual wish [that] was clearly recognizable at the very centre of the conflict which underlay the disease” (162). Earlier, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud—unable to define heterosexuality directly apart from its procreative biological function but unwilling to base psychology on biology—had founded his views of sexuality on a homosexual/heterosexual polarity, beginning his analysis by examining “sexual aberrations” and then deducing undefined “normality” from its observable opposite. Unlike American psychoanalysts who rejected his view that homosexuality was universally inherent in heterosexuality (Abelove 391), Freud believed in 1905 and reiterated in 1911 that the achievement of male heterosexuality grew from successfully shifting sexual instincts from the self (in the narcissistic stage) to a love-object other than self. During the “half-way phase between auto-erotism and object-love,” the libido seeks “the choice of an outer object with similar genitals.” Homosexuals, Freud argued, “never emancipated themselves from the binding condition that the object of their choice must possess genitals like their own” (163). At the same time, he believed that a heterosexual does not simply end or put aside these homosexual desires but that they “are merely deflected from their sexual aim and applied to fresh uses” (164). Male heterosexuality, he asserted, remains so tenuous that the “wish-phantasy of *loving a man*” creates “a large number of instances of every variety of paranoic disorder” (165)—homophobia, hyper-heterosexuality (super-machoism), jealousy and even rejection of sexuality altogether. In other words, though mainstream straight men may condemn homosexuality and regard it as abjection, homosexuality is the foundation on which they have built their sexuality.

Pynchon interweaves allusions to homosexuality and paranoia so that, as in Freud’s analysis, they compose two sides of a single fabric that represents both the surface appearance of the men Oedipa encounters and their necessary but unspoken underside. Dr. Hilarius’s experimentation on women, for example, may indicate his fear or dislike of women, just as Mucho’s and Metzger’s preying on teenage girls may reveal their fear of dealing with adult women who threaten their sexuality by asserting themselves. David F. Greenberg summarizes the Freudian argument concerning the paranoia such heterosexuals may

experience: "If intolerance of homosexuality stems from one's fear of one's own hidden homosexual impulses, hostility toward those believed to be homosexual should be greater if they are one's own sex, for it is they who as potential sexual partners should arouse the greatest anxiety" (289). Characters' choice of transgenerational sexual objects, as well as their dependence on drugs (liquor and LSD) to escape adult responsibility, suggests failure to achieve what Freud saw as mature heterosexuality.

Of the men with whom Oedipa has sexual experience, only Pierce, whom we see exclusively through her recollections, seems to have reached what Freud considered mature sexuality; and it is Pierce who acted as The Shadow (who "knows what lurks in the hearts of men"), who tried to rescue her from her Rapunzel tower, and who sparked the action of the novel through his will (a pun on his last testament and his desire). In contrast, Metzger refers in his first long speech to the dominant-mother theory of homosexuality popular in the United States in the 1960s: "'You know what mothers like that turn their male children into'" (29); then he sets out to seduce Oedipa through a game of "'Strip Botticelli'" (36) that focuses on his preadolescent role as Baby Igor. If someone can be a "latent" homosexual through the mechanism of repression without ever being aware of overt homosexual desires (Greenberg 425), Metzger's allusion to his mother and his willing infantile regression (Baby Igor) to seduce Oedipa (who has become a fetish by putting on virtually her entire wardrobe) present a case for his sexual failure. Metzger remains sexually immature, unable satisfactorily to resolve his Oedipal crisis.

Granted, Pynchon does not directly refer to homosexuality as we recognize it today. He merely describes cases of arrested development that we can read through a Freudian lens. If all men have homosexual wish-fantasies, those who deny or try to escape such fantasies push themselves toward self-destructive behavior that inhibits the development of mature heterosexuality. Although Pynchon does not develop the Paranoids as a band of sexually ambiguous teenagers (see, however, 147), he does enfold possible interpretations of their behavior. Punning on the band's name, Oedipa calls Miles paranoid when he pouts after her rejection of his sexual advances; she says he *is* a paranoid after he has introduced himself as a Paranoid. This enfolding parallels the textual enfolding of the play within the novel and of Oedipa's trip to the toilet, and is explicit in other characters in the first three chapters. Roseman, for example, is a heterosexual lawyer drafting an indictment against a fictional lawyer, Perry Mason, played by an actor, Raymond Burr, widely rumored in the 1960s to be homosexual. Meanwhile, Manny Di Presso, a lawyer-turned-actor, plays

the Metzger-like role of an actor-turned-lawyer who periodically reverts to “acting”—just as Perry Mason “‘becomes an actor’”—in front of a jury (33). This “‘convolution’” (33) of roles, the wearing of masks that conceals further wearing of masks, becomes most sexually explicit in chapter 5 when Oedipa enters the gay bar inadvertently wearing the disguise (the ID badge) of a man disguised as a woman.

At *The Greek Way*, Oedipa masquerades as Arnold Snarb: she is a woman pretending to be a man who is pretending to be a woman. If Oedipa is indeed mistaken for a man in drag, then she has slipped into a nebulous area wherein men have taken her body, or at least her self-knowledge or sense of identity, from her and recast it as a referential mirror that turns in on itself. She finds herself in a disconcerting position like that in which Liza Minnelli found herself:

A friend of Liza’s recently told me that he took her to a gay bar in Los Angeles. When she went into the rest room, a drag queen was putting on makeup in front of the mirror. The drag queen took one look at Liza and, mistaking her for a fellow gender illusionist, quipped, “Keep trying, honey.” (Busch 50)

But unlike Liza, Oedipa controls the mask. In this disguise her conversation with the man from *Inamorati Anonymous* is, on the surface, a conversation between a strange man and a woman wearing a strange label, or, on the level of masks, a conversation between a love-denying man and a gay man in fully convincing drag.

While the man effaces the specificity of his identity by neither wearing a name badge nor offering his name, he affirms identity through his lapel pin, through being in a gay bar and through his admission of membership in *Inamorati Anonymous*. For Oedipa to find a man who defines himself as love-denying in a locale identified with sex and with anticipatory love-making again enfolds the text so that it points toward the unthinkable: if a label is self-limiting even as it empowers (see Butler 13–17), the unnamed man both speaks against love and suggests that love is necessary and undeniable. Furthermore, the masks (labels) Oedipa and the unnamed man wear cause additional enfolding: although the story of the founding of IA deals with heterosexual betrayal, the unnamed man tells the story in a gay bar where he wears the symbol we first saw in a woman’s toilet. By withholding his name, he is free to act—in this case, to tell Oedipa the story of the organization’s founder (112–16)—but, by identifying with the organization, he loses the freedom to help Oedipa when she later telephones (176–77). Likewise, because she met the man in *The Greek Way*, she labels him gay (despite his telling her, “I don’t swing that



way'" [111]; who, in the 1960s, would frequent a gay bar except a gay man?) and thus telephones him though she can only describe his physical appearance to the "musical voice" (176) that answers.

After her failure to be a "sensitive" calls her femininity into question (because, stereotypically, all women should be sensitive) and her abrupt rejection of Nefastis's attempted seduction prevents her falling back into a cultural stereotype of the heterosexual woman, Oedipa's movement through sexual ambiguity marks her entrance into a new world distinct from that into which male heterosexuals have tried to force her. As a woman, she has lost personal identity behind the gender masks imposed on her—masks as diverse as that of the suburban housewife in chapter 1 and that of the Barbie doll in chapter 2. Without a mask, she faces the uncertain, the unlimited and the confusing, for she lacks constructs to interpret her experience. Donning a sexual mask as the "cherubic" Snarb (110), she poses as a male transvestite, transgresses sexual roles, and thus questions maleness. Wearing a label that identifies her as a man puts her in the position of the men who have tried to reduce her to gender masks like that of the sex object without brains (Barbie). But posing as a male transvestite (Snarb as a drag queen), she questions masculinity itself. She is both an image and a reflection of that image: she takes on the power of the dominant (Snarb) and scandalously undermines that power by choosing the subordinate (the female she really is but that others cannot verify).

Earlier, although Oedipa wants to control the sexual game with Metzger, she finally lets him turn her into an object. When Nefastis tries to seduce her, she rejects the game itself. Metzger uses a televised movie in which he was a child to dominate a woman he finally undresses like a doll (42). Nefastis, the professor who lectures about communications, wants sexual intercourse in front of a news show. Metzger seduces her in a world of fantasy where she reverts to the child abused by a man in control; Nefastis wants to seduce her in a world of information, specifically about China's population explosion, that he has turned into fantasy. Her rejection of sex mediated by television is immediately followed by a more life-threatening assault: "a swift boy in a Mustang, perhaps unable to contain the new sense of virility his auto gave him, nearly killed her" (108). Metzger, Nefastis, the boy—all use technology to support or strengthen their male heterosexuality. But in *The Greek Way*, Oedipa finds an environment where "nobody around has any sexual relevance to [her]" (116). She knows she is not a man, yet she does not know how the men in the bar interpret her: hence she frees herself from them.

If Oedipa's twenty-four-hour journey through San Francisco "takes on the surrealistic quality of a dream—or a nightmare" (Merrill 60), the

narration itself breaks from daytime rationality by beginning its most intense phase with a sentence fragment that significantly omits its subject: "And spent the rest of the night finding the image of the Trystero post horn" (117). The omission of the subject suggests more than a self-effacing movement toward finding an object that remains outside the subject's ability to contain or comprehend it. It also suggests 1) that Oedipa is passing *from* the male-heterosexual world in which the subject had been masculinized and she had been reduced to an object, and 2) that she is moving *toward* sexual neutrality in which subject/object, masculine/feminine and worth/waste collapse.

Although male homosexuality becomes a means whereby Oedipa frees herself from male-heterosexual dominance, this conflation of gender and sexuality echoes the 1960s popular stereotype of the male homosexual as a "womanly man." This conflation, though insulting to today's gay sensibility, goes hand in hand with the sexual ambiguity that lets Oedipa escape from the gender-role stereotyping that male heterosexuals have used to keep her subordinate. The enfolding of heterosexual woman and homosexual man, like the conflation of gender and sexuality, further collapses usual social constructs. Both heterosexual woman and homosexual man desire the same object, the male body; thus the male finds himself being turned into a desired object, losing control as the subject who objectifies others. This enfolding of dream and reality, internality and externality, subject and object repeats the repression of Oedipa's desires and the unlocking of those repressions through a double reference in which sexual opposition collapses. What Oedipa discovers is simultaneously trivial and significant, both the dregs of social interaction and the foundations on which social interaction builds.

After leaving The Greek Way, "she came on a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were dreaming the gathering" (118). If, as in Freud's paradigm, homosexuality results from arrested maturation, the inability to grow to full adult heterosexuality, then we can read Oedipa's meeting these children as a further step in her learning to accept her otherness. Freud's paradigm conflates homosexuality and childhood so that both represent the condition from which male-heterosexual maturity grows, with the difference that, while children can grow to mature sexuality, homosexual men supposedly remain juvenile, or even preadolescent. In both regards, Oedipa acts as the subject who controls (objectifies) others. Because neither child nor gay man, she stands outside the Freudian paradigm as a psychoanalyst stands outside his/her clients' experiences. Through her detachment from the child/homosexual nexus, she realizes a transference of the

other's desires whereby she finds the identity the men she has known denied her.

At the same time, Oedipa crosses from reality to myth (or dream) through the childish and childlike incantation. Unable earlier to elicit a response from Maxwell's Demon, she here becomes active. The children teach her their incantation for moving into the imagination, even though she "stopped believing in them" (119). The children are not in Golden Gate Park, for they are "dreaming the gathering"; but, if dreaming is "really no different from being awake" (118), then they *are* in the park because the dream is itself reality. To will herself to stop believing is like trying not to think about a white horse. In this sense, adulthood is inconceivable without a prior childhood—the developmental nexus Freud found between homosexuality and heterosexuality. From the heterosexual day-world before she entered The Greek Way, Oedipa has crossed through homosexuality into an emotional, concrete and abjective night-world, an unspeakable San Francisco that is the silenced underside of that day-world. Though adulthood and heterosexuality seek to silence their indebtedness to childhood and homosexuality, Oedipa faces what the men in her life deny.

The next stage of her night-journey—beginning in "an all-night Mexican greasy spoon off 24th" (119)—marks the breakdown of expected categories. Usual signification fails. The CIA is not the Central Intelligence Agency, Jesús is not Jesus, revolutions lack participants, the ordinary is preternaturally terrifying. Yet in its enfolding of the expected into the unusual, each reference is strangely fitting. Church/state, dream/reality, ordinary/miraculous—each side of a binary evokes and, at the same time, slides into its opposite. Then, DEATH becomes an acronym warning against her search ("Don't Ever Antagonize The Horn" [121]), for her search for the horn is, after all, a search into the depths of her psyche. The acronym AC-DC, well-known slang for bisexuality, also signifies death ("Alameda County Death Cult" [122]). The failure of expected signs, and the blurring and confusion of space as the action jumps arbitrarily around the city relocate Oedipa in a world in which the sureties that keep mainstream society orderly cease to exist. When linguistic tags that police behavior shift their signification, the hidden underside of San Francisco forces itself into the awareness of those who had assumed control by repressing its existence. As "voyeur and listener" (123), "feeling invisible" (122), Oedipa experiences the waste of life, the "alienation, each species of withdrawal" (123) hidden or rejected by the day-city.

WASTE, omnipresent and marked by the symbol of the muted horn, includes all the discarded of urban life Oedipa sees and hears during her night-adventure. From the women's toilet of The Scope to The Greek Way and finally to the airport latrine where she sees the AC-DC advertisement for SM sex, she learns what the mother tells her son: "Write by WASTE. . . . The government will open it if you use the other. The dolphins will be mad'" (123). The government (controlled by and representing self-justifying male heterosexuals) creates and oppresses waste—whether the acronym, shit, children or homosexuals. To escape that oppression requires the child's (that is, the homosexual's) vision of the mythic and fabulous (the dolphins).

Oedipa reaches a recognition that accurately describes both the government's disregard for what is deemed unnecessary and the inherent value of that "waste":

[H]ere were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U. S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. *But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery.* Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), *there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world.* (124-25; emphasis added)

*The Courier's Tragedy* textually and *The Greek Way* narratively foreshadow the enfolding of the culturally unacknowledged into culture itself. But, while *The Greek Way* is a tourist attraction and thus garners social awareness without gaining societal acceptance, the city of Oedipa's night-wandering, united by WASTE and the muted horn, defies adaptation that would make it acceptable to the day-world. As Other, it is both ontological reality and epistemological dream. It forces itself on the voyeur and listener but refuses to adapt itself to the subject, whose own limits thus mark its existence. It is real insofar as it can be dreamed and illusion insofar as it is real, waste having become the essence of non-waste, the foundation on which non-waste tries to build by rejecting and thus ignoring its own foundations.

Homosexuality teaches Oedipa that she can find strength by separating gender from sexual desire and that she can free herself from those heterosexual males who have controlled her. When the homosexuality that male heterosexuals have tried to make invisible and silent becomes visible and vocal, it becomes the wedge that cracks the façade behind which the cultural and societal thought police maintain

power. As in the 1969 Stonewall riots, it becomes a guide that teaches how to resist oppression.

By closing the distance between herself and the Other upon whom she has gazed, Oedipa makes subject and object become the same. Her journey reaches a point where further motion inward becomes motion outward. In an often-discussed paragraph (128–29), Pynchon associates an old sailor with the saint, the clairvoyant, “the true paranoid” and the dreamer, each of whom acts out the significance of metaphor, where truth and falsehood inextricably unite. Like Pynchon’s DT/dt metaphor/pun, Oedipa is both as irrational and unwanted as delirium tremens and as logical and needed as a differential in calculus. The old sailor suffers from disease that slowly smooths the folds of “masculine” rationality, turning him into an inexperienced (“feminized”) “child” (127) through “a trembling unfurrowing of the mind’s plowshare.” His condition reminds Oedipa of Ray Glozing, a collegiate lover, and his “bitching” in “high voice” about his freshman calculus. Both feminizations resolve the apparent conflation of gender and sexuality: the male heterosexual evolves into a feminized heterosexual or (keeping Pynchon’s conflation of male homosexuality and effeminacy in mind) returns to his homosexual origins. Oedipa is the common ground through which the metaphor/pun exists.

Her twenty-four-hour progress through San Francisco marks little immediately apparent change in her search or character. As if she needs a guide to return to the day-world, she follows a WASTE mailman back through the maze, finding herself back at Nefastis’s apartment house, whence she had fled. But her physical return is not a step back into the status quo, for when Oedipa returns to her hotel, she is “swept” into a ballroom full of people who also defy the society’s attempt to marginalize them, the California chapter of the American Deaf-Mute Assembly. Music without sound, choreography without plan, a lull in the dancing (a silencing of the already silent music)—the deaf-mute ball marks Oedipa’s return. Just as waste/WASTE is the neglected, oppressed or silenced dregs of the city, the world into which Oedipa returns is topsy-turvy. After her brief journey among the Other, Oedipa revisits Kinneret, the “manly” location she had assumed was rational and orderly, but now she finds madness, both Hilarius and Mucho having chosen fantasy and delusion/illusion in place of sanity and rationality.

When Oedipa phones the man from Inamorati Anonymous, he can help her no further, for now male homosexual and male heterosexual have merged into the masculine—men of both orientations—to oppose her. But marginalized by the masculine, she finds strength. Like the text

she tries to decipher, she aligns herself with waste—shit, the deaf, the economically deprived, the aged, the homosexual—and finds that waste repositions her in society. She reaches a position where she defines herself. Here she is free from male conceptions and preconceptions of what she should be or do. This feminization, like that of Prairie in *Vineland*, gives her the ability and strength to act outside the limits prescribed by societal labels. At the same time, however, Pynchon does not let us (the other readers of her adventure) off the hook. We are trapped in a text that folds its conclusion into its beginning so that we can neither rejoice with Oedipa's self-realization nor lament that we do not see her act as a result of her insight. We can only retrace in endless repetition a process that deconstructs itself whenever we try to establish the limits of certainty and finality.

In each of his novels, Pynchon constructs a set of subordinate, marginalized characters—Bondels, Hispanics and the physically disabled in *V.*; German communists and Jews, and Hereros in *Gravity's Rainbow*; students and Native Americans in *Vineland*; children, Native Americans and slaves in *Mason & Dixon*—as the abjected Other (waste) against which he places characters who represent gender and sexual dominance. He frequently presents the former characters in gender terms as feminine (emotional), weak (lacking the will to assert themselves against the dominant culture) and “naturally” inferior (prone to internality and agreeing to their status as second-class citizens). Against these characters he places dominant or dominating males—Foppl, Zeitsuss, Pointsman, Vond—oppressors whose control over subordinate characters is usually sexual.

Also, in each novel Pynchon structures a site where the clash between dominance and subordination is highlighted at a homosexual threshold. The gradual masculinization of V.—her movement from sexual inexperience as Victoria Wren in Egypt to condemnation of procreative sex as the Bad Priest on Malta (a sexual axis)—moves through Paris, the site of her homosexual alliance in “V. in Love.” In *Gravity's Rainbow*, a polarity of heterosexuality/homosexuality is replaced by the polarization of oral and anal sex, frequently imaged as masculine or feminine, and subverted by masturbation (which is genderless). In *Vineland*, DL opposes Vond's hyper-masculinity, this axis collapsing in the woman-identified retreat of the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives, where Prairie goes to discover her mother's past. And in *Mason & Dixon*, the tension between the two main characters' homoerotic bonding and their sexual desire for women who are usually absent leads us to reexamine the nature of bonding and especially of long-term relations. In all five novels, the enfolding of gender and sexuality questions prevailing cultural assumptions in such a way that

dominant and subordinate, like the sides of a Möbius strip, blur into one another, each justifying its other and opening for the searching character—Stencil/Profane, Slothrop, Prairie, Mason/Dixon—the possibility of moving beyond categories.

By suggesting that heterosexuality does not and cannot exist apart from homosexuality, Pynchon's texts deviate from both straight and gay orthodoxy and consistently valorize sexual difference. Though his attitude toward homosexuality is ambivalent, he stresses its importance as the unspeakable base for heterosexuality, the foundation his heterosexual males often want to keep closeted to maintain their power by laying claim to the "only" male sexuality.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, her pointed question in footnote 6 (40) or her conclusion that "in the setting of the middle sixties . . . Oedipa has charted a psychological path that more and more women in America are beginning to explore" (49).

<sup>2</sup>The association of Mafia, bars that catered to homosexuals, and police harassment has been widely documented. John D'Emilio draws the connection among the Beat subculture, North Beach and an emerging gay consciousness (GP 461–62; SP 182–86). Nancy May, Herbert Donaldson and Evander Smith give first-hand accounts of police harassment in San Francisco (Marcus 136–66). Lillian Faderman paints the same sort of picture when she describes lesbian bars of the 1960s (161–67).

<sup>3</sup>Kirby, the brand name of a cleaner manufactured in Ohio, is a subsidiary of Douglas Qui/Kut; according to a company spokesperson, it celebrated its eightieth year of production in 1993.

<sup>4</sup>MacAdam (563–64), Nicholson and Stevenson (92–93), and Hall (63–64) discuss Oedipa as a reflection or treatment of the reader who confronts textuality and tries to find her way through the maze of conflicting assumptions about text. However, none explores the related problems suggested by such studies as Flynn's analysis of the role of gender in the interpretation of text (especially Flynn and Schweickart 284–86), Ragland-Sullivan's application of Lacanian thought to reading (387–89), or Flannigan-Saint-Aubin's exploration of the effects of sexuality on reading (see, for example, 83–84). I am indebted to these studies throughout.

<sup>5</sup>In the production of this graffiti, Pynchon seems to reflect male experience: researchers into graffiti of the 1960s found that women wrote less restroom graffiti than men and that their graffiti usually lacked sexually explicit content (Arluke, Kutakoff and Levin 1, 5–6), a distinction also noted by the Kinsey report on female sexual behavior (see Reisner 111–12).

<sup>6</sup>Davis, for example, points out that Hilarius “cannot help but believe in and obey the urgings of the dark, irreconcilable elements in man’s nature” (374), but he does not explore what a Freudian might mean when using the word paranoia. Likewise, Siegel, who uses the term as a metaphor in the subtitle of his study of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, leans heavily toward Jungian analysis (see 62–70), but, so far as I can determine, overlooks Freud’s “On the Mechanism of Paranoia” (161–82), the work I examine here as Pynchon’s subtext. Mackey, also concentrating on *Gravity’s Rainbow*, sees Pynchon’s use of paranoia as “manifestly a religious attitude” (17). More recently, Johnston argues that both Oedipa and the reader are trapped by the novel’s interpretive structure, in which official history is a plot concocted by the dominant order (71–73). All these critics interpret paranoia primarily in the popular sense of an excessive or irrational distrust or suspicion of what others take on face value.

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