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# 论文题目

## **The Strategic Temporal and Spatial Narrative in *The Crying of Lot 49***

《拍卖第四十九批》的时空叙事策略

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**The Strategic Temporal and Spatial Narrative  
in *The Crying of Lot 49***

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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# ABSTRACT

## The Strategic Temporal and Spatial Narrative in *The Crying of Lot 49*

Xu Meihong

Thomas Pynchon is noted for his complex and intricate postmodern novels. *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* were listed among the best 100 English novels since 1923 by *Time Magazine* in 2005.

In the novel, Pynchon has presented a worldwide conspiracy through the protagonist Oedipa's investigation as an executrix of her late boyfriend Pierce Inverarity's will, during which she kept encountering some extremely interesting and absurd characters and events. The more clues Oedipa found, the more nervous she got, feeling that she was in an exitless labyrinth.

The novel is generally regarded as typical black humor. The complexity and obscurity of this novel are mainly achieved by Pynchon's narrative strategy. The thesis is to analyze the strategic temporal and spatial narrative, along with the narrative effect achieved. Through explaining anachronies of story time, relations of repetition between narrative and diegesis, and anisochronies of duration of narrative and story, the thesis is to analyze the strategic temporal narrative in order to comprehend its role in characterization, plot description and background introduction in the novel. The thesis also elaborates on the strategic spatial narrative through features and skipping of various story spaces and the complexity of Oedipa's psychological space to interpret people's living status and the operation mode of the postmodern American society depicted in the novel. Moreover, by analyzing the application of plot juxtaposition, with lots of characters and events regardless of temporal and spatial order, and ending juxtaposition, an open ending, it can be concluded that Pynchon succeeds in introducing a chaotic and indeterminate postmodern society which was turning into decadence and

entropy.

Keywords: Thomas Pynchon; *The Crying of Lot 49*; Temporal Narrative; Spatial Narrative; Juxtaposition

## 摘要

托马斯·品钦是一位美国后现代主义作家。他因一系列复杂而晦涩的作品闻名。其《拍卖第四十九批》和《万有引力之虹》于 2005 年被《时代杂志》列为自 1923 年以来的最佳百部英文小说。

通过女主人公奥迪帕执行已故前男友皮尔斯遗嘱的过程，品钦在《拍卖第四十九批》中呈现了一个遍布全球的阴谋集团。奥迪帕不断遭遇十分有趣且荒诞的人物和事件。随着越来越多的线索的不断涌现，奥迪帕却变得越来越神经不安，宛如进入一个巨大的迷宫，毫无出路。

《拍卖第四十九批》被认为是典型的后现代黑色幽默小说。这部小说的混乱、复杂和晦涩主要是通过品钦独特的叙事技巧实现的。本论文旨在研究品钦在本小说中的时间叙事策略、空间叙事策略及其达到的叙事效果。通过分析故事时间和叙事时间之间的关系，包括叙事中故事时序的倒错、对于故事的重复次数以及叙事和故事的非等时性，本论文介绍小说中的时间叙事特点，并解读叙事时间技巧对于小说人物刻画、情节描述和故事背景介绍方面的作用。其次，通过分析故事空间的特点、故事空间的跳跃性和主人公奥迪帕心理空间的复杂性，本论文介绍小说的空间叙事特点，以解读品钦所描述的这个美国后现代社会的运作模式以及人们普遍的生存状态。再次，通过着重分析小说中情节并置和结局并置的使用及其作用，可以看出品钦在小说中堆叠了大量的人物和事件，时间空间跨度极大、盘根错节，同时，通过开放性结局，作者又向读者预示了故事结局的多样性和不确定性。品钦借此叙事时间和空间策略向读者展现了一个混乱、充满不确定性、逐步走向颓废和熵化的后现代社会。

关键词：托马斯·品钦，《拍卖第四十九批》，时间叙事，空间叙事，并置



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# Chapter One

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces Thomas Pynchon, his postmodern novels and the theoretical framework of the thesis. The first part gives introduction to Thomas Pynchon, his major works and his literary reputation. The second part expounds some theoretical basis of both temporal and spatial narrative that has been employed to analyze the novel.

### 1.1 Thomas Pynchon and His Works

Thomas Pynchon (born May 8, 1937) is an important American postmodern writer. He is quite famous for his complex and intricate novels of *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Slow Learner*, a collection of short stories, *Vineland*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*. His writings involve a great variety of subjects, genres and themes. In 2005, Pynchon's two novels, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* were listed among the best 100 English novels since 1923 by Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo of *Time Magazine*, along with the works of other Nobel Literature Prize winners, such as Faulkner, Bellow, Woolf, Orwell and so on. Because of his great contributions to literature, Thomas Pynchon has won lots of honors, and has been frequently cited as a contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature. It is obvious that Pynchon and his works enjoy a very high status in American or even the world literary circles.

*Gravity's Rainbow*, published in 1973, is Pynchon's most noted novel, for which he received the National Book Award. It is an intricate and allusive fiction that covers many themes of his earlier writings, such as paranoia, racism, colonialism, entropy and conspiracy etc. The novel has spawned plenty of commentary and critical material, including reader's guides, books and scholarly articles, online concordances and

discussions, and art works. Its artistic value is often compared to that of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Moreover, it has been hailed as the greatest American post-WWII novel and, similarly, an anthology of postmodernist themes and devices by scholars.

*The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon's second novel, was published in 1966. Shortly after the publication, it won the Richard and Hilda Rosenthal Foundation Award. *The Crying of Lot 49* is considered excellent in plot arrangement and the most readable among Pynchon's novels. It is even selected as designated literary teaching materials in many American universities. Although it is much simpler and more concise concerning the overall structure than Pynchon's other novels, this novel is still very complicated and obscure, involving politics, history, religion, culture, science and technology, as well as elements of parodic song lyrics and punning names.

In the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas, the protagonist, was made the executor of the estate of her late boyfriend, Pierce Inverarity. As she diligently carried out her duties, Oedipa was gradually enmeshed in what would appear to be a worldwide conspiracy. She kept meeting some extremely interesting characters, and had attained a large amount of knowledge, which was far beyond her comprehension and thus puzzled her a lot. In the novel, the labyrinthine plot featured an ancient, secretive mail service system known as "The Tristero" or "Trystero," a parody of a Jacobean revenge drama Oedipa had seen, and a corporate conspiracy using the bones of World War II American GIs<sup>1</sup> as charcoal cigarette filters. Oedipa was haunted by such seemingly incredible interconnections among events and other similarly bizarre revelations. Besides, the narrative discourse was obscure, hard to understand but very humorous. By depicting the absurd characters and their bizarre activities throughout Oedipa's travel, the novel reveals an uncertain and meaningless postmodern society which gradually turns into decadence and entropy<sup>2</sup>.

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Notes:

1. GI (pl GIs or GI's) is a member or former member of the U.S. armed forces.

<sup>2</sup> Entropy refers to the degree of disorder in a system or an ultimate state of inert uniformity.

## 1.2 Theoretical Framework of the Thesis

In 1969, through the book *Grammaire du Décaméron*, “narratologie” was initially put forward by the French scholar Tzvetan Todorov. Then Genette firstly proposed to use the word *story* for the signified or narrative content, to use the word *narrative* for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and to use the word *narrating* for the producing narrative action. According to him, “Narrative Discourse implies a study of relationships: on the one hand the relationship between a discourse and the events that it recounts, on the other hand the relationship between the same discourse and the act of that produces it, actually or fictively” (Genette 26-27). Positing the priority of events to the discourse which reports or presents them, narratology establishes a hierarchy which the functioning of narratives often subverts by presenting events not as givens but as the products of discursive forces or requirements (Culler 119).

Narrative refers to the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events (Genette 25). The relation between time and narrative is an important aspect of the study of narratology. There is reading-time and there is plot-time, or as Chatman has distinguished them, discourse-time — the time it takes to peruse the discourse — and story-time, the duration of the purported events of the narrative (Chatman 62). In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette has analyzed the time-relations between story-time and discourse-time, and exemplified three categories of relations: those of order, duration and frequency.

The idea of spatial form was firstly proposed by Joseph Frank in 1945. He points out that “the novel, with its larger unity of meaning, can preserve coherent sequence within the unity of meaning and break up only the time-flow of narrative” (Frank 18). In 1978, Chatman firstly come up with the notion of “story space” and “discourse space” in *Story and Discourse*. He believes that “as the dimension of story-events is time, that of story-existence is space, and as we distinguish story-time from discourse-time, we must distinguish story-space from discourse-space. Story-space

contains existents, as story-time contains events. Events are not spatial, though they occur in space; it is the entities that perform or are affected by them that are spatial” (Chatman 96).

Long Diyong demonstrates that “无论是性格单一的‘扁平人物’, 还是性格复杂的‘圆形人物’, 作家们都可以通过创造出一个特殊的空间, 而把人物的性格特征形象、具体地揭示出来” (“writers can reveal characters’ personality by creating a special space, whether they are ‘flat characters’ or ‘round characters’”). Towards stories or plots that have no specific causal association or clear chronological order, he holds that “他们之所以被罗列或并置在一起, 仅仅是因为它们共同说明着同一主题或观念” (“the reason why they are listed or juxtaposed together simply because they collectively illustrate the same subject or concept”). “从形式或结构层面, 由于它们总是由多个‘子叙事’并置而成, 所以我们可以把它们称之为并置叙事” (“In form, because they are always juxtaposed by multiple ‘sub-narrative,’ they can be referred to as Juxtaposition Narrative (Long 49).

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing once mentioned, symbols arranged in juxtaposition can only express subjects of which the wholes or parts exist in juxtaposition; while consecutive symbols can only express subjects of which the wholes or parts are themselves consecutive. Concerning juxtaposition, Frank says “The time-flow of the narrative is halted and attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area. These relationships are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative, and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning.” He further points out that “both contemporary art and literature have attempted to overcome the time elements involved in their structures in its own way. Modern quality of the works maintain a continual juxtaposition between aspects of the past and the present so that both are fused in one comprehensive view” (Frank 63).

Italo Calvino once narrated such a scene: the lion was pouncing on the hunter, the hunter was shooting an arrow at the lion, presenting an absolute moment. After this moment, there were at least two possibilities: the lion bit off the hunter’s veins, or the lion was shot to the ground by the arrow. This moment in his eyes was as if it were a

frame in the film, Italo Calvino calling it “Time Zero.” Calvino holds that only “Time Zero” is the most crucial and interesting moment, that is, the open-end narrative structure. This kind of narrative predicts conceivable possibilities of various outcomes, revealing ending juxtaposition.

## Chapter Two

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Owing to his outstanding writing techniques and unique insights, Pynchon, together with his works, has been studied by many scholars and critics, and the main stream of criticism has also developed to a multi-perspective orientation. Researches on his narrative strategy are also included and have attracted much attention, both home and abroad.

#### 2.1 Studies on Thomas Pynchon and His Works Abroad

Pynchon's writings have been consistently considered as typical postmodern works. In 1965, an American writer, B. J. Friedman, edited a collection of novels titled *Black Humor*, Pynchon's works being collected in it. Since then, many researchers and scholars have been very interested in Pynchon's postmodern writings.

John Charles Farrel (1988) analyzes Pynchon's three major novels: *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. He accepts the argument that the essential problem embodied in postmodern texts like Pynchon's is the problem of late capitalism itself: how can the individual situate him- or herself in relation to a multi-national economic system with dimensions far beyond the grasp of the individual. According to him, *The Crying of Lot 49* is an attempt to portray the experience of cultural fragmentation (in the 1960's) from the point of view of an American with no culture or community of her own. Dramatizing a strong notion of cultural relativism, Pynchon leaves his story incomplete, stranding the reader at that enchanting and solipsistic aesthetic distance at which the character is held during her adventures.

Martin E. Gloege (1992) explores the metaphor of self fragmentation in works by three postmodern writers, Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison and Philip K. Dick. According to Gloege, the postmodern, fragmented self is the latest stage in the



evolution of the idea of the self in American writing. Novels by the three authors explore such fragmented self. The novels discussed include Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. In these works, Gloege considers ideas of vocation and national mission are still active, despite a postmodern sensibility that would fragment the self or cast it into an inhospitable landscape.

David Scott Messinger (1999) investigates the relationship between representations of the body, usually female, and the production of narrative. Messinger holds that in *V.*, Pynchon parodies the romance form to show the quest as ultimately destructive. He understands the convention of the female body as source of narrative and repository of meaning while he satirizes the reader's search for formulaic interpretations. *The Crying of Lot 49* inverts standard gender roles and changes the traditional shape of the quest paradigm. The protagonist in *Lot 49* is not a figure of delay but a heroine who finds more significance in digressive alternatives than in completing the quest.

Shawn Smith (2003) considers historical facts, metahistorical consciousness, and postmodern narrative strategies converge in Thomas Pynchon's "big novels": *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland*, and *Maxon & Dixon*. The author considers these novels have proven to be almost axiomatic in their linguistic and formal difficulties. They are also steeped in history. The premise is that Pynchon's idiosyncratic experiments with narrative form and figurative language reveal a philosophy of history, a coherent system of seeing and explaining the past. It is held that Pynchon uses his historical record as the catalyst for his anti-structuralist rhetoric, which plays off of his relatively stable prefigural patterns to represent the instability of the historical fields that concern him.

Patrick K. Hurley (2003) takes the form of a dictionary offering explanations of the names of characters in the novels of Thomas Pynchon, covering *The Crying of Lot 49*, and the aim is to offer a range of interpretive options for each name. In addition to explaining individual character names, this dissertation attempts to approach an understanding of the pattern of naming in Pynchon's novels. Hurley suggests that a set of identifiable categories account for a preponderance of the names in these novels. Taken together, these categories offer a solid understanding of the primary functions of the names in Pynchon. While individual character names may have multiple functions,

many of the names fall into at least one of these major categories: charactonym/description, comedy, allusion, doubling, social marker, anachronism and paradox.

Ira A. Walker (2011) reveals that Thomas Pynchon's literature is unique in subject and style. Postmodern by definition, Pynchon illustrates physics as a societal metaphor. Through the analysis of *The Crying of Lot 49*, the reader is capable of seeing a developing theme of physics as metaphor constituting multiple spectacles. The narrative devices offered by Thomas Pynchon become spectacular in nature and reflect the characteristics and environment of the tumultuous 1960s American culture. Although Pynchon does not make any comment about the 60s counter-culture which surrounded him, elements of that time are evident and, within socio-historical contexts, influence the subject matter of the text. The thread which runs through all three texts uniquely defines Pynchon's literature as postmodern with the parameters of natural law—using Entropy, the heteroglossic narratives become spectacle. For the characters of Pynchon's texts, as well for the readers, those who experience a metaphorical heat-death, those characters and individuals, then, experience a literary postmodern condition.

Sean Carswell (2012) believes that Pynchon's early works, including *The Crying of Lot 49*, are concerned largely with the radicalism of the sixties and seventies as a resistance to totalitarian powers and tend to feature paranoid characters swept up in a conspiracy beyond their comprehension and hurtling toward fragmented and somewhat dismal ends. Beginning with *Vineland*, this paranoia gives way to a more fully articulated global system of power. Pynchon's four most recent novels (*Vineland*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, and *Inherent Vice*) feature an examination of neoliberal capitalism's exploitive system of privatization, deregulation, militarization, and free market fundamentalism. The study elaborates upon the global systems of power what Pynchon constructs in his four most recent novels and examines the possibilities Pynchon explores for resistance to and advancement beyond these systems of power.

Russell Aaron Backman (2016) reads Pynchon's novels as partaking in the overarching project of representing the modern world. Based on this reading, the

dissertation formulates the distributed epic as a contemporary adaptation of the epic genre. The distributed epic is an interpretive rather than intentional object that is assembled after the fact based on affinities and affordances within the composing works. Pynchon's novels demonstrate an approach to literary holism and intertextual connection that creates a modular autonomy for internal elements as well as an emergent agency for its assemblages. These formal figures allow for a form of holistic epic representation without recourse to the concept of totality. Through a return to the epic and to engaged representation in Pynchon's work, this project describes Postmodern fiction as continuous with the Modernist and contemporary literatures that it has all too often been seen as a fissure form.

## 2.2 Studies on Thomas Pynchon and His Works at Home

Since the 1980s, there have been published academic articles on Pynchon and his works. Among them, there are one research monograph, several doctoral dissertations, nearly 50 master's theses, and more than 100 domestic journal and conference articles.

Sun Wanjun interprets Pynchon's novels, mainly including *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*, from the perspectives of ideological theme and narrative style, taking into account some of Pynchon's early short stories. Sun believes that Pynchon has critically reflected on the traditional American culture represented by Puritanism in his novel creation, challenging the hierarchical system, totalitarian tendency and the rigid metaphysical thinking mode of the American culture. Pynchon pays attention to the marginalized groups of American society and shows great enthusiasm for the multiculturalism represented by carnival ideas.

Sun Yan considers Pynchon's three novels and a collection of short stories: *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Slow Learner: Early Stories* as entropic texts, which is regarded as the most distinctive notion Pynchon employs in China's academic circle. This study tries to examine Pynchon's the above-mentioned earlier works from a cultural perspective and elaborates on the contextual and metaphorical use of the concept of entropy. On the whole, Pynchon's writing is devoted to the themes

fundamental to the postmodernist literature. Pynchon's distinction does not lie in his fusion of entropic concept into his writing but in his novelty of presenting his favored themes through a scientific metaphor, a courageous transgression of the literary dictums prevalent at Joycean times. Concerning *The Crying of Lot 49*, Sun elaborates how Pynchon fully transforms the labyrinth into a metaphorical process, a design that helps contribute to the postmodern, reflexive aspect of the novel. Entropy is only one of the metaphors Pynchon employs to reinforce his cultural and linguistic themes. What is more important is Oedipa's encounters that take her out of the tower of her white, middle-class, mainstream cultural life and down into a world of the Preterite — those alienated from official reality, the diverse and unassimilated, the socially, politically, and sexually “unrecognized” of American society.

Hou Guijie explores the narrative labyrinths in Thomas Pynchon's Fiction — taking *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* as examples, mainly focusing on labyrinth of narrative structure, characterization and narrative discourse. Labyrinth of narrative structure includes multi-level narrative structure and open-ended structure. Hou also analyzes the features of Pynchon's characters, illustrates indeterminacy and open-ended principles of characterization and explores the strategies of characterization. Labyrinth of narrative discourse is illustrated by discourse intertextuality and defamiliarization. From the perspective of theory of classical narratologies and postmodern narratologies, Pynchon's postmodern labyrinth embodies great breakthrough and innovation of narrative strategies against realism and modernism literature. It also becomes an important artistic technique of Pynchon's writing which attracts readers to participate in reconstructing text.

Jing Hongmei analyzes the themes of black humor in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* from the perspectives of war and fortune, namely, the world is manipulated by conspiracy and American heritage. The author holds that the protagonist Oedipa witnessed the darkness hidden under justice. Thomas Pynchon presented the readers an abnormal money-worshiped society.

Among the earliest journal study, Shi Xianrong's *Introduction to Contemporary American Novels* (3) points out that the central idea of Pynchon's works is “entropy”,

and his metaphysical philosophy and ridiculous plots are very abstruse. Liu Xuelan analyzes the structural, symbolic and linguistic function in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, which makes clear that, like other novels, *Lot 49* is an esoteric novel involving many profound and complex connotations and themes. Other related topics and themes on Pynchon and his *Lot 49* cover racism and the political discourse of McCarthyism by Liu Fengshan and Duan Guohua, Entropy by Wang Wenping, Qiu Huadong, Chen Shulan, Chen Shidan, postmodernist indeterminacy by Xu Ben, Jia Boya, historical discourse by Wang Jianping, reproduction of scientific knowledge in literary narrative texts by Chen Shidan, the ineffective communication by Sun Wanjun, Chen Lisha, exitless labyrinth by Wang Fanfan, Zheng Xiaoyun, Xiong Yanyan, Liu Yuanzhi, writing techniques of stream of consciousness, parody and anti-fiction by Zhou Xiaofang, spatial illusion of the spiritual order by Li Rongrui, the interpretation of metaphysical detective novels by Lu Xin, Cai Zhe, Oedipa's tragic spirit by Wang Guodong, open-ended narrative structure by Hou Guijie and so on.

Besides, there are about twenty master's thesis on Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. The themes and theories applied varied from a wide range, including the scientific discourse, alienation, black humor, postmodernism, existentialism, semiotics, deconstructivism, New Historicism, hauntology, indeterminacy or postmodernist indeterminacy, entropy and its metaphorical meaning, implications of space, Dialogicity, communication and identity from the perspective of trauma theory, confronting the Other: Oedipa's abjection, Baudrillardian Interpretation and Oedipa's Paranoid Quest.

Owing to the vast array of genres and themes and particular narrative style of Pynchon's fiction and non-fiction writings, Pynchon has been popular among researchers and scholars both at home and abroad, foreign studies being far too deeper than domestic research. Hence, in-depth studies of Pynchon's fiction in many perspectives are still quite limited and deserving much more attention.

In recent years, narrative approach invites critical attention, among which there are some essays and monographs on labyrinth narrative of Pynchon's fiction, but few have approached Pynchon from his strategic temporal and spatial narrative and the employment of juxtaposition, which shows exactly the innovation and importance of

the thesis.

## Chapter Three

### THE STRATEGIC TEMPORAL NARRATIVE

“Narrative refers to the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events” (Genette 25). The relation between time and narrative is an important aspect of the study of narratology. Genette has distinguished three categories of time-relations between story-time and discourse-time, those of order, duration and frequency. This chapter analyzes the strategic temporal narrative in *The Crying of Lot 49* and the effect achieved in characterization, plot description and introduction to background information.

#### 3.1 Order: Anachronies of Story Time

There is always a basic distinction between a sequence of events and a discourse that orders and presents events. “Narrative is a doubly temporal sequence: there is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative” (Genette 33). “The discourse can rearrange the events of the story as much as it pleases, provided the story-sequence remains discernible” (Chatman 63).

“Events can be recounted in the order of their occurrence or in a different order” (Prince 48). Genette suggests to compare the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story so as to study the temporal order of a narrative (Genette 35). He distinguishes between normal sequence and anachronous sequences. Concerning anachrony, there are: analepse, where the discourse breaks the story-flow to recall earlier events, and prolepse where the discourse leaps ahead, to events subsequent to intermediate events (Chatman 64). In the novel, both kinds of anachronies of story time are not hard to find for Pynchon’s strategy of narrative.

##### 3.1.1 Analepses

Throughout the novel, the core and linking character of the story, Pierce Inverarity, never appeared. He was said to have been dead at the very beginning. But after reading the book, thanks to analepses, readers can know what Pierce was like and what he had done during his lifetime. At the beginning of the first chapter, the background information of the story is introduced as follows:

One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary. (Pynchon 1)

Firstly, the discourse introduces the protagonist, Oedipa Maas, and her daily activities, from which readers can infer some basic but essential information about her: that is, she was a leisurely housewife who was occasionally invited to Tupperware parties and might get completely drunk. Most importantly, the discourse of analepses points toward a crucial event: Pierce Inverarity somehow died and Oedipa Maas, an ex-girlfriend of his and now a housewife, was named executor of his estate. This inevitably can arouse readers' interests and doubts, such as why it was Oedipa who had been named the executor of Pierce Inverarity's will? How was the relationship between Oedipa and Pierce? Why Pierce's estate could be so numerous and tangled? Would Oedipa successfully sort out all the assets? The facts are meant to discover: what in fact happened between Pierce and Oedipa, and what Pierce had done to get so much wealth in the past.

Structurally, Oedipa's leaving Kinneret for San Narciso to execute the will was the starting point of the story and the temporal reference, then the narration of anything happened before this time belongs to analepses. With the application of analepses, from Oedipa and other characters' memories and utterances, the doubts the readers have about Pierce or other aforementioned questions can be answered.

Oedipa remembered that a year ago at about three o'clock in one morning Pierce



had made a long-distance call with tones shifting from heavy Slavic, modulated to comic-Negro, to hostile Pachuco dialect, then to a Gestapo officer in shrieks and finally to his Lamont Cranston voice. Surprisingly, he said nothing important or emergent on the three-o'clock morning call. Later, when she saw the stamp collection Pierce had left, she recalled that the stamps were his substitute often for her. He could spend hours peering into each one of the stamps, ignoring her.

One night, Oedipa found Jesús Arrabal, who was said to be a pierce of her past. From their conversation, it can be known that Arrabal once met Pierce and Oedipa on the beach in Mazatlán, Mexico. In his view, Pierce was a rich, obnoxious, and terrifying gringo who spent too much money on her, as well as a oligarchist, an anarchist miracle. Arrabal asked Oedipa if Pierce was real, or a spy, or making fun of him, which confused her a lot.

From the characters' memories, analepses in discourse, though Pierce never appeared, it seems that his various accents and tunes can be heard vividly, his indifference and eccentric personality can be sensed by readers, and his name being always linked together with assets was revealed. There was no detailed narration specially set for introducing the omnipresent Pierce. His description is dispersed into segments all over the novel, mentioned by various characters. The discourse of analepses was crucial in the characterization of Pierce, Oedipa's late ex-boyfriend and oligarchist of the enormous mysterious conspiracy. Besides the characterization of Pierce, the employment of analepses also plays an important role in portrayal of and introduction to some other key characters and historical events crucial for Oedipa's execution of the will, especially in providing information for the Tristero System, the covert mail system's development since about 1300, from the previous prosperity to present decadence.

### **3.1.2 Prolepses**

On contrary to analepses, researchers believe that if the narrator narrates events that have not happened yet in advance, it constitutes prolepses. Shen summarizes that “预序同样出现在一些实验性较强的小说中，体现了一些后现代小说在叙事时间方面打

破经典叙事模式的尝试” (“Prolepses also appears in some experimental novels, reflecting some attempts by post-modern novels to break the classic narrative mode in terms of temporal narrative” (Shen 118).

At the beginning of chapter three, the omniscient narrative perspective is employed. Pynchon links the past, the present and the future together, mentioning both what Oedipa had experienced and what she was going to encounter. The author informs readers in advance of the various possibilities and difficulties that Oedipa would confront in the near future:

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 were to bring 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 there were revelation in progress all around her. (Pynchon 31)

Much of the revelation was to come through the stamp collection Pierce had left, his substitute often for her, ... he could spend hours peering into each one, ignoring her.... The thought that now it would all have to be inventoried and appraised was only another headache. No suspicion at all that it might have something to tell her. Yet if she hadn't been set up or sensitized, first by her peculiar seduction, then by the other, almost offhand things, what after all could the mute stamps have told her, remaining then as they would've only ex-rivals, cheated as she by death, about to be broken up into lots, on route to any number of new masters? (Pynchon 31-32)

From the previous two chapters, the readers can know that Oedipa had left her home in Kinneret and headed towards Pierce's domicile and headquarters in San Narciso, where he had begun his land speculating ten years ago. Ever since then, Pierce had accumulated a massive amount of capital, which was further put into use for more rickety or grotesque, toward-the-sky buildings. Oedipa had seen one of the giants of the aerospace industry named Galactronics Division of Yoyodyne, Inc., a large block of shares owned by Pierce as a founding father. She met the good-looking co-executor of the will, Metzger, in a motel called Echo Courts. During their watching the movie

*Cashiered*, a commercial advertisement kept appearing. Every time, Metzger would say, it was “Inverarity’s,” or he owned “big block of shares”, such as Fangoso Lagoons, a new housing development west of the place where they were, Beaconsfield Cigarettes, whose attractiveness was said to be their filter’s use of bone charcoal, the very best kind, and a Turkish bath in downtown San Narciso called Hogan’s Seraglio. For the first time, Oedipa had a vague impression of what Inverarity had left behind and the difficulty of her tasks to execute such a will. At that time she could not help yelling at Metzger, “say it once more, I’ll wrap the TV tube around your head,” and questioned, “what the hell didn’t he own”? In addition, that night then they got drunk and Oedipa began her extramarital affair with Metzger, unfaithful to her husband, Mucho.

Oedipa was still supposed to have no idea that she would discover the existence of an ancient, underground mail service named “Tristero System” or “The Tristero”, which had been constantly against the U.S. Mail owned by American government, and it would haunt her most in the following days; that instead of being encapsulated in her tower as a common and bored housewife, she would meet some extremely interesting people from all walks of life in American society and witness their absurdity and bizarre behaviors, even worse than her infidelity with Metzger whom she just met for the first time; that the mute stamps Pierce collected and cherished much more than her was about to be broken up into the lot 49 to a super-secretive book bidder, which would make her fully troubled and in the meantime provide some critical clues for her investigation and doubts; not to speak of that she could imagine there were countless but clueless revelations of the Teristero and Pierce’s legacy coming in progress around her and that as if the more she collected the more would come to her, until she suspected that the conspiracy could be the whole America, which made her rather horrified and nearly drove her crazy. Similar predictions of prolepses are easy to find within the novel:

So began, for Oedipa, the languid, sinister blooming of The Tristero.... As if a plunge toward dawn indefinite black hours long would indeed be necessary before The Tristero could be revealed in its terrible nakedness. (Pynchon 39-40)

Trystero. The word hung in the air as the act ended and all lights were for a moment cut; hung in the dark to puzzle Oedipa Maas, but not yet to exert the power over her it was to. (Pynchon 58)

The role of prolepses in the novel is mainly to inform the readers of the dilemma that the protagonist would encounter in her following execution of the will. The protagonist would be involved in a worldwide conspiracy and she would feel awkward and overwhelmed by what she saw and heard, Tristero System being the central factor. There were always more clues to be provided, but the investigation got tougher to proceed, revealing that the final truth she was eager to know would probably never come. Just at the starting point of the protagonist's intervening in the investigation, Pynchon informs readers of the outline and direction of development of the story in advance, indicating the ending of the novel, in order to tell the protagonist's fate and leave the readers with enough space for imagination, inspiring readers to continue to read and explore the truth together with the protagonist.

## **3.2 Frequency: the Relations of Repetition between the Narrative and Diegesis**

Concerning frequency, Genette distinguishes among: a. singularly, a single discursive representation of a single story moment; b. multiple-singularly, several representations, each of one of several story moments; c. repetitive, several discursive representations of the same story moment; d. iterative, a single discursive representation of several story moments (Genette 114-116). In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon mainly employs singulative narrative, iterative narrative and repetitive narrative.

### **3.2.1 Singulative and iterative narrative**

Singulative narrative tells an event once that happens once, and this is the most common phenomenon. The following discourse of this kind is about Mucho, Oedipa's husband:

The sight of sawdust, even pencil shavings, made him wince, ... all things viscous it distressed him ... He walked out of a party one night because somebody used the word “creampuff,” .... but there was your Mucho: thin-skinned. (Pynchon 4)

This narration is telling some of Mucho’s basic information. From the narration it can be learned that even some common-seen things like sawdust, pencil shavings would make Mucho terrified, and sticky stuffs would make him suffer from bad memories of his earlier work as a used-car salesman. He was too sensitive and fragile. When a refugee Hungarian cook referred him to “creampuff,” Mucho considered the utterance malicious, but he just left the party without defending himself or without any argument. As is known, when the word “creampuff” is used to depict a man, it symbolizes that the speaker thinks he is weak or ineffectual. Although the narration appears in the novel only once, it can not be out of no reason. Here it directly introduces Mucho’s image, that is, he was thin-skinned or even coward in personality.

The following iterative discourse is about Mucho’s daily activities in the morning:

Mucho shaved his upper lip every morning three times with, three times against the grain to remove any remotest breath of a moustache, new blades he drew blood invariably but kept at it; brought all natural-shoulder suits, then went to a tailor to have the lapels made yet more abnormally narrow, on his hair used only water, combing it like Jack Lemmon to throw them further off. (Pynchon 4)

Mucho’s way or process of shaving his moustache is very strange, so precise in times and procedure. He would not stop it even when he got hurt or wounded, like an obsessive-compulsive paranoid. His way of dealing with his suit and hairstyle is also eccentric. The author here employs iterative narrative to express Mucho’s absurd behaviors, indicating his hidden psychological and mental problems.

In addition, it is mentioned in the novel that Mucho suffered a lot from nightmares and could not get along well with his colleagues in the KCUF, a radio station. Not long after Oedipa left, he became addicted to Dr. Hilarius’ drugs. When Oedipa saw Mucho for the last time, Mucho had lost himself, his identity, behaving abnormally. His friend

Funch also confided to Oedipa that Mucho had not been himself. They were calling him the Brothers *N* behind his back. Mucho was less himself and more generic, like “a walking assembly of man” (Pynchon 115).

In the novel, singulative narrative and iterative narrative appear alternatively, making contribution to narrating events and shaping characters, Mucho being one. From the narrative, the readers come to recognize that Mucho was a completely tragic character. He was incapable of establishing good relationships with people around: there were always conflicts between him and his coworkers, and there were no true husband-and-wife concern and love between him and his wife Oedipa. Then it would not be hard for the readers to comprehend why he always seemed to be totally unsatisfied and unhappy about his work, his life and everything. Even his wife could not understand why he could get so upset all the time. He was always in a negative mood, pessimistic, sensitive, coward and paranoid. His loss of self identity and his tragic fate were inevitable.

### **3.2.2 Repetitive narrative**

“Repetitive narrative refers to several discursive representations of the same story time” (Chatman 78).

Dr. Hilarius is Oedipa’s psychotherapist. However, his manner of behaving himself in everyday life and his way of curing patients by making faces is quite eccentric and incompatible with his own professional identity, or even as a normal social being. From chapter one the readers have been told that he would make a three-o’clock morning call to his patient Oedipa, trying to persuade her to participate in his drug experiment, and insisted that it was Oedipa who made the call. He was devoted to helping the community hospital run on effects of some drugs on suburban housewives, and later broadened his program to include husbands. Besides, throughout the novel it had been repetitively mentioned that he often made faces to his patients and claimed to have cured patients by making faces:

- ① Hilarius only made a face at her, one he’d made before. He was full of these delightful lapses from orthodoxy. (Pynchon 8)

- ② He claimed to have cured a case of hysterical blindness with his number 37, the “Fu-Manchu,” which involved slanting the eyes up with the index fingers, enlarging the nostrils with the middle fingers, pulling the mouth wide with the pinkies and protruding the tongue. (Pynchon 9)
- ③ “You made faces now and then,” said Oedipa, “but that’s minor.” (Pynchon 109)
- ④ “There is a face,” Hilarius said, “that I can make. One you haven’t seen; no one in this country has.” (Pynchon 110)
- ⑤ Hilarius had been put in charge of faces. (Pynchon 112)

What’s worse, as a psychotherapist, he held that he was in favor of being in psycho disorder and he would choose to remain relative paranoid, where, he argued, at least he knew who he was and who the others were. When his patient, Oedipa could not bear the distress from the seemingly endless clues and complexity of her duty as a will executor, she pleaded that Hilarius could talk her out of a fantasy, the psychological suffering from her investigation of the worldwide conspiracy, instead of trying to cure her, he suggested that:

“Cherish it!” cried Hilarius, fiercely. “What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don’t let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be.” (Pynchon 113)

About Oedipa’s fantasy, Dr. Hilarius kept crying “cherish it,” or “hold it”, which should not be a possible option for a doctor to choose for his patients. Not unexpectedly, he himself was troubled with severe mental illness because of his former experience. He repented and suffered a lot from once doing his internship for Nazi, always thinking someone’s after him, the fanatics, the angles of death. He tried hard to prevent himself from dreaming, sleeping only about three hours a night, while spending the rest twenty-one hours at the forcible acquisition of faith. At last, he went crazy. He had shot

at half a dozen people and was taken away by the police. Characters can define themselves through single repeated actions, verbal mannerisms or obsessions. Hilarius is a character of such type. The application of repetitive narration of Hilarius's words and deeds and others' judgement on his words and deeds strengthen his absurdity and tragedy. In general, his such behaviors were, as what his name indicated, hilarious.

### **3.3 Duration: Anisochronies of Duration of Narrative and Story**

Duration concerns the relation of the time it takes to read out the narrative to the time the story-events themselves lasted. Five possibilities suggest themselves: a. summary: discourse-time is shorter than story-time; b. ellipsis: the same as the first, except the discourse-time is zero; c. scene: discourse-time and story-time are equal; d. stretch: the discourse-time is longer than story-time; e. pause: the same as the fourth, except that story-time is zero (Chatman 68). After exemplifying Genette's four kinds of relations between discourse time and story time, namely, summary, scene, ellipsis and pause, Shen further points out that “四种涉及时距的叙述手法构成了叙事作品中的不同节奏。它们往往交替出现在作品中，在不同程度上影响了叙事速度，使得作品犹如音乐一样随着话语模式的变化出现不同的运动方式” (“Four narrative techniques of duration constitute different rhythms in narrative works. They often appear alternately in the works, affecting the speed of the narrative to varying degrees, making the writings, like music, present different ways of movement with the change of the discourse mode”) (Shen 124).

#### **3.3.1 Summary narrative**

This discourse is supposed to be briefer than the events depicted. It summarizes a group of events. Such kind of narrative can be employed to help readers get some relevant background information.

In the 1950s and 1960s, an American woman was expected to occupy certain conventional roles. Actually Oedipa was in one at the very beginning of the novel: she attended Tupperware housewife parties; she went to the market to buy materials for



meals; she gathered herbs from garden; she made dinner and mixed drinks so that they could be ready when her husband Mucho came home. To have the protagonist of this novel be a stereotypical housewife was absurdly surprising. Though this task was far beyond her capacity and control, Oedipa dedicatedly carried out her responsibilities all the way: she was actually finding the history, the intertextuality and the variations of editions of the revenge play related to Pierce's property; she learned history of Inverarity's enterprises; and she learned history of the US and of Europe about the mail system. Whereas, a very considerable amount of information was revealed to her gradually, she began to feel more and more confused, desperate but powerless. When she was discussing the complicated history of the Tristero with Bortz, she was told the Tristero had staged the entire French Revolution. She had doubts on this point, but her reaction is narrated as follows:

She didn't press the argument. Having begun to feel reluctant about following up anything. (Pynchon 137)

This is a summative assessment of Oedipa's pessimistic attitude towards both the secret postal system, the Tristero and Pierce's tangled assets. Till this moment, Oedipa had really gone into the world and discovered the incredibly complex set of patterns of the society and the world, which was full of political pressure, racial tension, gender discrimination, alienation and hatred. She had been terrified and had realized her loneliness, her helplessness and the sense of anxiety for the indeterminate future. She was eager to know how could Pierce's legacy be the whole America? Could she ever be close enough to the truth? Whether her efforts would be in vain at last? The reason why she began to feel reluctant to follow up things was obvious that she knew her efforts would be fruitless all the same. She had confronted the worldwide conspiracy, a labyrinth, without exit.

Dr. Hilarius was Oedipa's psychotherapist, he suffered a lot from his internship for Nazi during World War II. He summarized his sleeping disorders to Oedipa that "I slept three hours a night trying not to dream, and spent the other twenty-one at the forcible

acquisition of faith. And yet my penance hasn't been enough" (Pynchon 112). From Hilarius's own statement, readers can learn that during WWII he worked on experimentally-induced insanity for Nazis. In order to gather data at their subjects, they had tortured the catatonic Jews with metronomes, serpents, Brechtian vignettes at midnight, surgical removal of certain glands, magic-lantern hallucinations, new drugs, threats recited over hidden loudspeakers, hypnotism, clocks that ran backward, and faces, treating them like dead men. Hilarius had been put in charge of faces. Such an inhumane working experience kept him living in deep penance. Every day he spent twenty-one hours on atoning and repenting for the crime he had committed. However, that was not enough. Because of his moral guilt, he thought someone's after him with submachine guns, terrorists, fanatics, like angels of death. As a consequence, he went crazy. The summary narrative of Hilarius's everyday living status exactly demonstrates Pynchon's irony and condemnation of inhumanity of Nazis and war.

### **3.3.2 Scene narrative**

"The scene is the incorporation of the dramatic principle into narrative. Story and discourse here are of relatively equal duration" (Chatman 72). According to Genette, the most common scene narrative is the presentation of dialogues in writings.

After knowing she was named the executor of Pierce's will, Oedipa asked her husband Mucho for help since she had no idea what to do. Mucho said he was not capable and insisted that she see Roseman, their trusted family lawyer. So there she went. She walked into his office and then the following scene began:

"You didn't use to look guilty, as I remember," Oedipa said. They often went to the same group therapy sessions, in a car pool with a photographer from Palo Alto who thought he was a volleyball. "That's a good sign, isn't it?"

"You might have been one of Perry Mason's spies," said Roseman. After thinking a moment he added, "Ha, ha."

"Ha, ha," said Oedipa. They looked at each other. "I have to execute a will," she said.

"Oh, go ahead then," said Roseman, "don't let me keep you."

"No," said Oedipa, and told him all.

“Why would he do a thing like that,” Roseman puzzled, after reading the letter.

“You mean die?”

“No,” said Roseman, “name you to help execute it.”

“He was unpredictable.” (Pynchon 9-10)

From the narration of the above scene, it is known that Roseman envied Perry Mason, a successful trial lawyer and Roseman’s ideal model as a lawyer. He eagerly wanted to be successful in his career, however, he also believed that he was not capable enough to keep up with his competitor. Instead of making enough efforts, he intended to destroy his ideal by undermining him. Oedipa caught Roseman stuffing with guilty haste a wad of different-sized and colored paper into a desk drawer. Then, in terms of Oedipa being named the executor, like any of the readers, he did raise his doubt of why Pierce chose Oedipa to execute his will. As is known from the very beginning of the story, Oedipa was merely a full-time housewife, who barely knew anything about execution of wills. Through this arrangement of scene narrative, we can really imagine how strange and unpredictable Pierce was, just the same as what Oedipa had said above.


Further, when they went to lunch, in the following scene after this, he tried to play footsie with Oedipa under the table. Roseman, as a trusted family lawyer, a profession that is supposed to be reasonable, serious and conscientious, flirted with his female customer Oedipa without thinking about the consequences. He asked Oedipa to run away with him, but when Oedipa questioned where to go, he remained silent. Such frivolous and absurd words and deeds in these scenes present the readers a flighty, weak and incapable anti-hero character.


### **3.3.3 Ellipsis narrative**

From the temporal point of view, the analysis of ellipses considers the story time elided. Duration can be indicated or not indicated, namely definite ellipses or indefinite ellipses. Explicit ellipses arise either from an indication of the lapse of time they elide or else from elision pure and simple plus an indication of the time elapsed, while the presence of implicit ellipses is not announced in the text and readers can infer only from

some chronological lacuna or gap in narrative continuity (Genette 106-108). In short, ellipsis narrative occurs when time continues to pass in the story but the discourse halts.

In Berkley, Oedipa went to John Nefastis' house to ask him whether she was a "sensitive." He talked about something called "entropy," which bothered him as much as "Trystero" bothered Oedipa. After leaving there, Oedipa "got off the freeway at North Beach drove around, parked finally in a steep side-street among warehouses. Then [she] walked along Broadway, into the first crowds of evening." However, "it took her no more than an hour to catch sight of a muted post horn" (Pynchon 88). Ellipsis narrative is employed here.

As the readers have been told, Oedipa recently had been severely bothered by the Tristero postal system, because wherever she looked, everything seemed to be related to Trystero, a muted post horn  being its symbol. The ubiquitous existence of the muted post horn symbol and Tristero puzzled Oedipa and nearly drove her crazy. She began to question herself that maybe the Tristero system was just her fantasy. She hinted at herself that if she would watch nothing happen while she drifted randomly tonight, she can be convinced that it was only attributed to her nervousness. Only after no more than an hour, another muted post horn emerged, though she was in San Francisco, away from all the tangible assets of Pierce's estate. The discourse stops here, without any description of what happened to Oedipa over the past hour: whether she still walked along the street? What did she see? Had she met some people? What exactly did she say and do? The discourse omits Oedipa's detailed actions during the hour. This is explicit ellipses as defined by Genette. In this way, the emphasis is mainly on the author's intention of telling the readers that the muted post horn symbol was not hard to find. It would not take more than an hour. It was everywhere.

During the investigation, Oedipa had discovered so many clues or the exact symbols of the Tristero system, the acronym WASTE or W.A.S.T.E., standing for WE AWAIT SILENT TRYSTERO'S EMPIRE, and its muted post horn symbol , which can be found on the wall of a ladies' room Oedipa went to; on one Stanley Koteks's doodling with a fat felt pencil in Yoyodyne company; on the ring of a 91-year-old Mr. Thoth, from the finger of one of the Indians killed by his grandfather; on the watermark

of a U.S. commemorative stamp; in the lapel of a guide, a pin in the shape of the Trystero post horn; on a sign among ideographs; on an ancient rolled copy of the anarcho-syndicalist paper *Regeneración* in 1904; on the back of a seat in a bus; on the bulletin board of a laundromat in a Negro neighborhood; on a little balance-book; on an advertisement by ACDC, Alameda County Death, Cult; on a can; on an old American stamp. So many of Oedipa's acquaintances appeared to know something about the Tristero, both men and women, the old and the young, from all walks of life in American society, especially the lower classes.

Then Oedipa helped an old sailor to mail his letter. It was designated to be posted by the WASTE. So did Oedipa. At that time, she decided to find out the operation pattern of the mysterious underground mail system. After that the following narration begins:

Oedipa settled back in the shadow of a column. She may have dozed off. She woke to see a kid dropping a bundle of letters into the can. She went over and dropped in the sailor's letter to Fresno; then hid again and waited. Toward midday a rangy young wino showed up with a sack; unlock a panel at the side of the box and took out all the letters. (Pynchon 105-106)

As depicted above, Oedipa, for the first time, witnessed the mode of operation of the Tristero mail system, and then traced its route. The discourse of implicit ellipses is employed. There was a time gap between when Oedipa settled back and when she saw a kid dropping letters, and a gap between she dropped the letter into the can and a young wino showed up and then took them. The exact time duration is hard to estimate, it may be several minutes, dozens of minutes, an hour or two, or even much more. The discourse here exactly indicates how strangely and mysteriously the mail system was operated.

Ellipsis Narrative also goes with the following narration concerning Oedipa's waiting for the due time when the bidder for Pierce's stamps, the lot 49, would show up:

"He decided to attend the auction in person," was all Schrift would tell her. "You might run into him there." She might.

The auction was duly held, on a Sunday afternoon, in perhaps the oldest building in San Narciso, dating from before World War II. (Pynchon 151)

Between the time Schrift told Oedipa that the mysterious bidder would come for the auction and the time it was held, the duration was unsure, which could be a day or two, several days or even weeks. Besides its structural meaning of highlighting the jump of events, this narrative also leaves readers some space to ponder before the end, the climax of the novel. During this period, what would Oedipa do? Who on earth the mysterious bidder was? Was he/she someone Oedipa had met before? If not, who would the person be? Would the bidder be Pierce himself? These thoughts are certain to come to readers, who at this point must have been quite likely to have been deeply absorbed in the complex plot and become more anxious to know what will happen next, waiting for the climax, the ending, to come.

### **3.3.4 Pause narrative**

Just like in descriptive passages, story-time stops though the discourse continues. “In fact, narrative never stops at an object or a sight unless that halt corresponds to a contemplative pause by the hero himself.” That is to say, “the descriptive piece never evades the temporality of the story” (Genette 100).

About Echo Courts, the motel located in San Narciso, it is depicted as follows from the narrator’s point of view:

Every now and again, like this evening, Echo courts became impossible, either because of the stillness of the pool and the blank windows that faced on it, or a prevalence of teenage voyeurs, who’d all had copies of Miles’s passkey made so they could check in at whim on any bizarre sexual action. (Pynchon 33)

According to the description, this motel was full of teenage voyeurs and bizarre sexual actions. Back to the novel, the first sight Oedipa saw the motel, she hesitated because of a representation of a nymph, a statue in front of the motel. As is known, nymphs are usually depicted as young, beautiful maidens. They are considered as divine spirits who animate nature and love to sing and dance. However the statue of the nymph

of Echo Courts was having a lipsticked and public smile and close to be naked, revealing enormous vermilion-tipped breasts and long pink thighs. What's more surprising is that the face of the nymph was much like Oedipa's. This cannot simply be a coincidence. Later, it was proved that it is in this Echo Courts motel that Oedipa had an extramarital affair with Metzger, the drafter and co-executor of Pierce's will, at their first acquaintance. In addition, it was in the same place that Oedipa was told Metzger had run off to get married with a boy's 15-year-old girlfriend. Another thing worth mentioning was the motel's manager. He was a 16-year-old drop-out named Miles, a member of a group named the Paranoids, who sang songs with English accent containing lustful, pornographic content. He even tried to lure Oedipa to engage in sexual activity with him. The pause narrative of the hotel and the statue of such a nymph predicted what can be expected to happen in the motel, representing the moral decadence of people living in the hotel, or even all over the society alike.

Moreover, a bar named The Scope, near Yoyodyne plant that Pierce owned a large block of shares, was a haunt for electronics assembly workers. The following is a similar pause narrative of the bar and people's activities in it:

The green neon sign outside ingeniously depicted the face of an oscilloscope tube, over which flowed an ever-changing dance of Lissajous figures. Today seemed to be payday, and everyone inside to be drunk already. (Pynchon 34)

Obviously, all the workers inside the bar got drunk, having no serious and significant business to deal with. Maybe just like the author implies, all they cared about was to numb themselves with alcohol after being paid wages. And later, from Oedipa's own observation, most of the workers were sitting there stagnantly, staring at others, with silence, except a few who got themselves involved in a boring, meaningless nose-picking contest to see how far they could flick it. How ridiculous.

As a miniature of American society, the living conditions of the people in Echo Courts and The Scope bar represented the general living conditions of the whole American society at that time.

## Chapter Four

### THE STRATEGIC SPATIAL NARRATIVE

Chatman states that the dimension of story-events is time, and the dimension of story-existence is space. Story-space contains existents, just as story-time contains events. “Events are not spatial, though they occur in space; it is the entities that perform or are affected by them that are spatial” (Chatman 96).

Joseph Frank points out that “the novel, with its larger unity of meaning, can preserve coherent sequence within the unity of meaning and break up only the time-flow of narrative” (Frank 18). Shen says that “结构主义叙事学家普遍认为, ‘故事空间’在作品中具有重要的结构意义。除了为人物提供必要的活动场所, ‘故事空间’也是展示人物心理活动、塑造人物形象、揭示作品主旨的重要方式” (“it is widely believed by structuralist narratologists that ‘story space’ has important structural significance in narrative works. In addition to providing the necessary venues for the characters, ‘story space’ can also play an important role in displaying characters’ psychological activities, shaping the image of characters, and explaining the theme of the works”) (Shen 132).

"Story space" can be further divided into "actual space" and "psychological space" of the characters. “Actual space” is the physical living space of a character, providing an environment and place for characters’ activities (Hu 26). In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the story mainly took place in Kinneret, San Narciso and Berkeley, California, the United States, which constitutes the actual "story space" of the novel. "Psychological space" is the result of the actual space and characters’ life experiences projecting into their psychological world (Hu 39), reflecting their psychological activities and revealing their confusion and ideology. In this chaotic post-modern society, people generally had lost their religious beliefs and moral standards, and characters suffered a lot from emotional deficiencies to varying degrees, thus failing to form a correct self-recognition and evaluation.



## 4.1 The Skipping of the Story Spaces

“Just as events may be simultaneous or not, they may occur in (or pertain to) the same space or (partly) different spaces. Moreover, different spaces may be joining, or very near one another, or very far apart. A narrative can therefore present events occurring at the same time and in the same space, or at different times and in different spaces, and so on and so forth” (Prince 66).

The actual space of *The Crying of Lot 49* mainly includes some American cities as Kinneret, San Narciso, Berkeley, San Francisco and Oakland in California in the 1960s in the United States. As for historical spaces, where these various historical facts happen, they were mostly revealed to Oedipa during her execution of the will, through her acquaintances, including, to name a few, a kitchen of a Yoyodyne’s former executive, a narrow shore of a lake and a village in Southern Germany during WWII, France and the Lowlands during the French revolution etc. Just as the life and destiny of the characters appearing in the novel largely depends on the social condition of that time, in other words, actual story space can predict the fate of the characters, the historical discourse makes contribution to introducing the change and development of the Tristero mail system that Oedipa cared so much for her investigation for the plot. More importantly, it provides enough persuasive background information and explanation for why on earth American people were in such a miserable living condition in the 1960s.

Pynchon has described scenes and events occurred both in the actual spaces and historical spaces, constantly making them skip from one to another despite of temporal factors, to illustrate a chaotic lifestyle of the American people and its causes and reasons. The actual spaces undoubtedly would, on the other hand, affect the characters’ thoughts and mental status, and vice versa, the characters’ psychological space depicted was another aspect to exemplify people’s actual living status and what the true America was like in the 1950s and the 1960s.

### 4.1.1 The skipping between historical spaces and actual spaces

Throughout the novel, in the process of Oedipa's execution of the will, she constantly kept meeting various characters, from whose utterances some related historical facts were mentioned. These history-based events, inserted and dispersed here and there from time to time, were more or less related to Pierce Inverarity's assets, the post horn symbol or the Tristero System, including the War for Southern Independence, the World War II, the slaughter of the Indians, the origin and development of the Tristero, the foundation of some interesting organizations and so on. The excessive abundance of information progressively provided was essential for Oedipa's investigation and at the same time made Oedipa's investigation hard to carry out, making the readers confused and uneasy to digest.

In the Echo Courts motel, Mike Fallopian, a member of the Peter Pinguid Society, whose members were accused of being paranoids, talked about the origin of their organization. From his statements, we can acquire some historical fragments of the War for Southern Independence in 1863: mass casualties caused by storms and disease; a ploy of Czar Nicholas II of Russia to keep Britain and France from intervening on the side of the Confederacy; the very first military confrontation between Russia and America; and the federal government's vigorous suppression of those independent mail routes in 1861.

During the day out at Fangoso Lagoons, one of Pierce Inverarity's last big projects, Manny Di Presso, Metzger's lawyer and actor friend, told them a tragic battle happened in 1943 in World War II: on the narrow shore of the lake huddled a handful of American troops, cut off without communications. Meanwhile Germans hit them day and night with fire from the cliffs; they died, every one, dumbly, without a trace or a word. After that, their bones in the lake were used for tourism, sold to a fertilizer enterprise, and then transferred to a company to develop the filter, on which Pierce Inverarity being a share holder.

In Vesperhaven House, a home for senior citizens that Pierce Inverarity had put up, a 91-year-old man, Mr. Thoth, talked about his brutal 91-year-old grandfather who rode for Pony Express ever cruelly killed a false Indian, who was highly likely to be a carrier of the Tristero, on whose ring there was a WASTE symbol.

Genghis Cohen, the most eminent philatelist in the L.A. area, mentioned to Oedipa the legend of Thurn and Taxis from about 1300 until Bismarck bought them out in 1867: Thurn and Taxis were the European mail service, whose stamps were almost like WASTE symbol, a post horn; Omedio Tassis, banished from Milan, organized his first couriers in the Bergamo region around 1290.

Someone in The Greek Way bar, a member of IA (Inamorati Anonymous), referred back to the founding of their organization in the early 1960s. The founder, once being Yoyodyne's executive, wanted to commit suicide, but when he found his wife's infidelity with an efficiency expert in his kitchen, he quit and swore to stay off of love and found a society of isolates, keeping in touch through the secret post system, the WASTE system.

Dr. Hilarius recalled his experience as an intern for Nazi in Buchenwald, a village in Southern Germany during WWII where tens of thousands of anti-fascist soldiers were brutally massacred. They did inhumane experiments on living people, treating catatonic Jews as dead men. The allied liberators then arrived. He also mentioned children in the strangling rooms, and ovens at Auschwitz. This experience made him now spend twenty hours a day to repent.

According to Professor Emory Bortz, teaching at San Narciso College, the northern provinces of the Low Countries, in 1577, led by William Orange, had been struggling nine years for independence from Catholic Spain and a Catholic Holy Roman Empire. From 1578 until March, 1585 when Alexander Farnese took Brussels back again for the Emperor, the Tristero kept up a guerrilla war. By 1795, Tristero had staged the entire French Revolution for an excuse to issue the Proclamation of 9<sup>th</sup> Frimaire, An III<sup>3</sup>, ratifying the end of the Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly in France and the Lowlands. From the battle of Austerlitz until the difficulties of 1848, the Tristero drifted on, deprived of nearly all the noble patronage that had sustained them, fled to America during 1849 and 1850. Around 1845 the U.S. government had carried out a great postal reform, putting most independent mail routes out of business. By 1861, the Tristero was

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Notes:

2. Frimaire, An III, stands for the third month in the French Republican Calendar.

well established, the messengers disguised as Indians, “their entire emphasis was changed to be on silence, impersonation, opposition masquerading as allegiance” (Pynchon 143) by using stamps that were highly similar, but not quite the same.

These above-mentioned events, happened in historical spaces, intertwined with the events in the real American life in 1960s, having a causal connection, made the content of the entire story seem more authentic and interesting, and the whole plot more tortuous and complex, and meantime caused the difficulty and obscurity for the readers to understand the text. More or less, the readers can have a vague comprehension of the reasons why Pierce Inverarity valued his stamps of the Tristero so much when he was alive, why these stamps were forgeries, how the Tristero existed in America, and the importance of Oedipa’s exploration for the mysterious bidder for the lot 49, Pierce’s stamp collection.

What’s more, it is obvious that Pynchon’s historical discourse in the novel is, in a large proportion, relevant to wars, slaughters and oppression. Indeed, in the middle of the 20th century, shortly after the destructive World War II, the Cold War began between the West and the Soviet Union. Civil rights was among the most important and pressing domestic issues. During the 1950s and 1960s, America was in chaos owing to the development of Red Scare, the prevalence of McCarthyism, the involvement in the Korean War and the Vietnam War, its competition with the Soviet Union in space contest and atomic energy, racial strife and riot at home, the assassination of President Kennedy (in 1963), all of which dramatically altered American life and culture. The following is a historical fact of the assassination of President Kennedy and its influence over people’s lives:

The temper, mood and political atmosphere in the country underwent a profound change. Few could believe that a young, handsome, seemingly energetic, well-loved president could be killed in plain sight during a public appearance in the streets of a major city. People went openly. In a single moment the nation seemed to age and grow morose. (Remini 269)

At that time, strong opposition to the war had begun to mount; hate and violence

escalated, which became a way of American life, quite the same as what people were acting in the novel. This was the real social historical background of this novel. Through Pynchon's narration, the readers can perceive his negative attitudes towards wars and massacres, his dissatisfaction with the government's suppression of the people and his sympathy towards common people, especially those from the lower classes.

#### **4.1.2 The skipping of different places in actual spaces**

For the need of the execution of Pierce's will, Oedipa left her home in Kinneret, and then moved toward many sites or places mainly located in San Narciso, Berkeley, San Francisco and Oakland, including freeway, motel, bar, industry, theater, book store, office, nursing home, college campus, street, greasy spoon, seashore, clinic, studio, pizzeria and so on. These places were where the common American were actually living in the 1960s. In these actual spaces Oedipa met some interesting characters, got herself involved in their conversations and witnessed some scenes and events, which offered clues for her investigation and in the same time led her to see people's different life styles in the American society, those of the lower classes in particular.

After leaving her home in Kinneret, Oedipa arrived in San Narciso. This city was said to be more of a grouping of concepts — census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei. Since ten years ago Pierce had made it his domicile and headquarter of land speculating. After accumulating enough capital, he built more and rickety, grotesque and toward-the-sky buildings afterward. In this place Oedipa suspected that “smog hung all around the horizon, the sun on the bright beige countryside was painful” (Pynchon 14).

In Vesperhaven House, Oedipa saw the following scene: an old man was nodding in front of a dim Leon Schlesinger cartoon show on the tube; a black fly was browsing along the pink, dandruffy arroyo of the neat part of in the old man's hair; a fat nurse was running in with a can of bug spray and yelling at the fly to take off so she could kill it, from which it can be seen that the environment created for the elderly was harsh, and the old themselves were not taken good care of.

Close at midnight, when Oedipa arrived at a sprawling, many-leveled

German-baroque hotel carpeted in deep green, going in for curved corridors and ornamental chandeliers, she saw a sign in the lobby said WELCOME CALIFORNIA CHAPTER AMERICAN DEAF-MUTE ASSEMBLY. She felt that every light in the place burned alarmingly bright and a truly ponderable silence occupied the building.

On the plaza in the campus of Berkeley, Oedipa saw that it was filled with corduroy, denim, bare legs, blonde hair, hornrims, bicycle spokes in the sun, bookbags, swaying card tables, long paper petitions dangling to earth, posters for undecipherable FSM's, YAF's VDC's, suds in the fountain, students in nose-to-nose dialogue. However, this was a weekday and mid-afternoon, thus teachers and students were supposed to be in class and the campus was supposed to be quieter.

After leaving John Nefastis's house, Oedipa arrived in San Francisco. She kept wandering here and there. On the Broadway street, she came across many teeming aging boys in Roos Atkins suit and a gang of rowdy guided tourist, later she was herded into a The Greek Way bar, full of members of the third sex, male homosexuals. In Chinatown, the streetlight was dim. In a Golden Gate Park, she encountered a circle of children in nightclothes, who told her that they were dreaming the gathering and they thought dream was really not different from being awake. Down at the city beach, she walked through a drifting, dreamy cloud of delinquents in summer-weight gang jackets, smoking, snuffing or injecting something. Somewhere near Fillmore, Oedipa went into a laundromat in a Negro neighborhood with scraps of paper offering cheap ironing and baby sitters. Later, somewhere else she found an uncoordinated boy, using his tongue, kissing his mother goodbye passionately. Among her other encounters as she strolling along the streets, there were: a facially-deformed welder who cherished his ugliness; a child roaming the night who "missed the death before birth" (Pynchon 100); a Negro woman with an marbled scar on her cheek who kept going through rituals of miscarriage; an aging night-watchman nibbling at a bar of soap; a voyeur who hung outside one lighted window for some specific image; an old man with wrecked face, huddled, shaking with grief in the disinfectant-smelling twilight of a rooming house, terror in his eyes. Afterwards, she tailed a mailman of the Tristero mail system and into slums in Oakland, whose landscape is narrated as "lost all variety" (Pynchon 106).

Due to the need to investigate Pierce's assets to execute his will, Oedipa had been constantly moving from one place to another in some of the cities in California in America, the actual story space of the novel. Among the places where Oedipa had traveled, she had viewed all kinds of landscapes and sights and met various kinds of people. But they all had some features in common: the scenes were either chaotic or lifeless with either dim or inappropriately bright light, and the people were behaving themselves hilariously and weirdly, involved in meaningless activities. People seemed to have suffered a lot from the hardships of life. All the above descriptions were to indicate the conditions and the actual environment people lived in in some cities in California, or it can be extended to the entire United States in the 1960s. The portrayal of these actual spaces that Oedipa had traveled to must be a reflection of people's lives throughout the American society at that time.

#### **4.1.3 The relations between the actual spaces and Oedipa's psychological space**

It is quite obvious that the actual story space can influence characters' psychological space and predict their fate or destiny. In the Yoyodyne plant, the following discourse of the actual space Oedipa was in and Oedipa's psychological space depicts what she had experienced then:

As far as she could see in any direction it was white or pastel, men's shirts, papers, drawing boards. All she could think of was to put on her shades for all this light, and wait for somebody to rescue her. But nobody noticed. She began to wander aisles among light blue desks, turning a corner now and then. Heads came up at the sound of her heels, engineers stared until she'd passed, but nobody spoke to her. Five or ten minutes went by this way, panic growing inside her head: there seemed no way out of the area. (Pynchon 66-67)

In the 1960s, the reality was that America was male-dominated. In many fields of social work, women were in a state of being discriminated and treated differently, or they even could not completely find their position in career. Just as in the Yoyodyne company, it was filled with male workers, without any female employees. These men

noticed she was there but no one talked to her, treating her coldly. As a woman, surrounded by the opposite sex, stared and treated indifferently by them, Oedipa, without any doubt, would feel stressed and lonely. However, she was too nervous and horrified to find her way out of this male-dominated space, the male-dominated society.

In novels, it is widely held that characters' state of mind can undoubtedly affect her attitudes and opinions about things around them, while the descriptions of characters' attitudes towards and opinions of the actual space can in turn reflect and predict their psychological state to a large extent. The following two paragraphs of narration are of this kind as well.

She looked around, spooked at the sunlight pouring in all the windows, as if she had been trapped at the center of some intricate crystal, and said, "My God." (Pynchon 74)

Looking down at San Francisco a few minutes later from the high point of the bridge's arc, she saw smog. Haze, she corrected herself, is what it is, haze. How can they have smog in San Francisco? Smog, according to the folklore, did not begin till farther south. It had to be the angle of the sun. (Pynchon 87)

After having collected some information of the complex clues of the ancient Trisetro System, the tangled Pierce's assets, and the close and puzzling relations between the two, she felt as if she was in some intricate crystal, where she got trapped, could not find her way out, meaning that she was very surprised, confused or even horrified in her psychological space. The clues and some facts about the Tristero and Pierce's estate Oedipa had found turned out to be too complicated. She realized that the more she found, the more perplexing the whole thing became. It seemed that the truth would never come to her to answer her doubts. She felt she could not see clearly the facts, like getting blinded and lost in smog. She could not tell whether there was smog or haze around her in the actual scene. The point is that the doubts inside her psychological space was without any uncertainty.

Everything that happens can not be of no reason. In such a society full of wars, violence, discrimination and oppression, people's mental state and living status would



inevitably be affected more or less. People tended to be generally spiritually paralyzed or abnormal. Getting stuck in such an environment, the protagonist certainly would become overwhelmed. Her inner space exactly reflected her emotional loneliness, her helplessness, her spiritual impoverishment and anxiety about the unknown future.

## **4.2 The Complexity of Oedipa's Psychological Space**

The harshness, absurdity, and meaninglessness of the actual space can be reflected in characters' psychological space. It seems all the characters in the novel had psychological problems of one kind or another. There were sharp contrasts and conflicts between their desires and the reality, leading to their psychological distortions and behavioral abnormalities. They generally felt lonely, helpless and desperate. They were to escape and degenerate.

As the plot develops, although Oedipa diligently involved herself in her duty of executing the will, she became more and more confused and frustrated with the proceeding of her investigation of the Trystero system and Pierce's estate. She could not help considering her sensitive as hallucination. She preferred to hope she was mentally ill rather than simply accept the facts she had seen all the way. Facing all these troubles, there was nobody in the world to whom she could turn to for help. Her husband would not talk to her, and her psychotherapist would not listen. People who were related to her were "all on something, mad, possible enemies, dead" (Pynchon 140).

Throughout the novel, Oedipa was in an unbearable loneliness. She was leading a monotonous and spiritless life and can not expect for care and love from his family or friends, or anyone in the world. There were no true love and intimate relationships between them in such a meaningless and materialized postmodern society. For her ignorance of the complexity of the society, she would not know what was waiting for her. Oedipa's efforts for her duty in the worldwide conspiracy was doomed to be fruitless, in vain in the end, for sure.

### **4.2.1 The emotional loneliness and helplessness**

In chapter one, after Oedipa just came back home from a Tupperware party for housewives, completely drunk, and after she was informed the death of Pierce, her ex-boyfriend, there follows her psychological description:

Oedipa stood in the living room...thought of...a whitewashed bust of Jay Gould that Pierce kept over the bed on a shelf so narrow for it she'd always had the hovering fear it would someday topple on them. Was that how he'd died, she wondered, among dreams, crushed by the only ikon in the house? That only made her laugh, out loud and helpless: You're so sick, Oedipa, she told herself, or the room, which knew. (Pynchon 1-2)

After knowing her ex-boyfriend was dead, it was only mentioned that Oedipa thought of Pierce's whitewashed bust of Jay Gould in his room. It was strange that Oedipa thought nothing of Pierce, the person himself, expressing no sorrow or sadness about his death. She even laughed — quite an abnormal reaction that revealed Oedipa had no good or valuable memories together with Pierce, or there was just no true love and close relationship between them. Indeed, in the following chapters of the novel, the discourse does indicate that Oedipa knew little about her late boyfriend and she preferred his credit cards. Oedipa was sensitive and horrified deep in her heart, therefore, she told herself she was sick. Furthermore, she tried to communicate with the room and thought it could understand her, showing that she was very lonely because there was no one to whom she could confide her thoughts and emotions.

In terms of her daily life, she had the feeling of confinement and depression, which made her desperately want to escape:

There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, .... And had also gently conned herself into the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey, let down your hair.... But that all had then gone on between them [Oedipa and Pierce] had really never escaped the confinement of that tower. (Pynchon 10-11)

Pierce did not help her out of the confinement anyway. Back in Kinneret, where her home located then, the days Oedipa spent as a housewife seemed more or less identical

and monotonous: attending some parties hosted for housewives, getting herself drunk; buying some vegetables and condiments for cooking from the market in downtown; reading book reviews in the latest *Scientific American* magazine; getting dinners ready upon her husband Mucho's arrival. When she wanted to talk with her husband Mucho to ask for some help, Mucho seemed always indifferent to her problems that bothered her or he would simply say to her that he was incapable to offer help. But in the opposite Oedipa had to comfort him for his pessimism and melancholy caused by his previous working experiences and terrible interpersonal relationship. Moreover, she suspected that Mucho was in extramarital relationships with some young girls. This kind of lifestyle and her current living status made her feel she was miserable and confined, just like a prisoner, the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl, and thus she looked forward to someone's appearance to help her escape from the tower, Kinneret, where she was encaged. Later, upon her departure for the execution of the will, "Mucho was sad to see her go, but not desperate" (Pynchon 13). Further, through their letters after Oedipa left home, it can be noticed that there was no real emotional communication between the couple. In general, Oedipa felt lonely and helpless in her marriage with Mucho.

Concerning Metzger, co-executor of Pierce's will and the one Oedipa had kept an extramarital relationship with since the first time they met in Echo Courts motel, there were revelations that this relationship was not out of love either. When Oedipa was leaving for another place from him for the will, it was narrated that "as with Mucho when she'd left Kinneret, Metzger did not seem desperate at her going" (Pynchon 80). Later, when she came back, Oedipa was informed by others that Metzger had already run off to get married with some 15-year-old girl, only leaving a note telling her not to worry about the estate, with no word to recall the relationship between them that they had been more than co-executors and that they were lovers. Obviously, the relationship between Oedipa and Metzger had nothing to do with love or responsibility. It was the way how Metzger treated Oedipa, that is, she could not seek spiritual comfort from this man either.

In The Greek Way bar, she confided her puzzle to somebody whose name she

didn't know, and admitted that though she had both husband and psychotherapist, she could not tell them because she believed they didn't know. Then, in the same bar, the discourse goes as follows:

Oedipa sat, feeling as alone as she ever had, now the only woman, she saw, in a room full of drunken male homosexuals. Story of my life, she thought, Mucho won't talk to me, Hilarius won't listen, Clerk Maxwell didn't even look at me, and this group, God knows. Despair came over her. (Pynchon 94)

When she found she was the only woman in the bar full of male homosexuals, she felt lonely and desperate. Likewise, when she participated in the meeting for shareholders in Yoyodyne, she found she was in a world of men, no one would talk to her, she felt lonely. Loneliness has plagued Oedipa, making her vulnerable and sensitive, a kind of psychological state close to paranoia. Facing Pierce's tangled assets and the difficulty of executing the will, she was totally in distress. Unfortunately she had no one to turn to for any help. As a result, Oedipa had been in total loneliness and helplessness every now and then. In such a male-dominated world where women could not find a place in career, in such an indifferent and money-worshiped post-modern society where sincere emotional exchanges were despised and paid no attention to among people, as a stereotypical housewife, loneliness and helplessness would undoubtedly be the normal and common psychological state to Oedipa, to most women, or even to each social being.

#### **4.2.2 The spiritual impoverishment**

In chapter three and chapter six, Pynchon describes the scenes in the Scope bar through Oedipa's observation, involving some workers from Yoyodyne plant and Mike Fallopian, her acquaintance:

Today seemed to be payday, and everyone inside to be drunk already.... Oedipa, checking the bar, grew nervous. There was this *je ne sais quoi*<sup>4</sup> about the Scope crowd: they all wore glasses and stared at you, silent. Except for a couple-three nearer the door, who were engaged in a nose-picking contest, seeing how far they could flick it across the room. (Pynchon 34)

In the bar, workers all got drunk, sitting with silence, except some involving themselves in some stupid games like nose-picking contest. Here she also found Mike Fallopian later, who was then surrounded by girls, “drinking champagne cocktails, and bellowing low songs” (Pynchon 137). Likewise, another bar named The Greek Way was found by Oedipa full of members of the third sex, male homosexuals, looking for fun. Besides, on the streets Oedipa walked along, drunkards, voyeurs, weirdos, and fanatics were here and there, all involved in bizarre and meaningless activities. People’s such abnormal behaviors reflected their emotional and psychological state, that is, spiritual impoverishment or mental numbness and emptiness.

The background of this novel was set in some cities in California, the United States after World War II, during the 1960s. Dating back to the American history at that time, just as Remini wrote in his book *A Short History of the United States*, “On the domestic front the end of the war (WWII) witnessed an explosion of economic demand. Four years of sacrifice had made Americans hungry for all the goods and services that had been denied them for so long” (Remini 247). People at the time were very keen to accumulate their wealth. When the G.I.’s returned home they were eager to resume their civilian lives, but they had trouble finding adequate housing or adequate living conditions. A housing boom resulted in which new communities sprang up (Remini 247-248), reminding us of Pierce Inverarity’s numerous tangled assets of real estate all over America, including Fangoso Lagoons, a new housing development west of San Narciso, a Turkish bath called Hogan’s Seraglio located in downtown San Narciso, the whole shopping center that housed Zapf’s Used Books and Tremaine’s surplus place, the tank Theatre and real estate in Arizona, Texas, New York, Florida and Delaware,

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Notes:

3. French words, meaning “I do not know.”

and many others. It seemed that during Oedipa's investigation, every access route to the Trystero seemed highly relevant to Pierce and could be finally traced back to his estate. It is obvious that Pierce accumulated a large amount of wealth thanks to these social, political and historical factors.

Due to such social conditions and historical and political reasons, like World War II and the Cold War, American people, not just Pierce Inverarity, were more and more keen to pursue the accumulation of wealth and meanwhile indulge themselves in materialized enjoyment, not paying enough attention to or even completely ignoring the emotional needs between each other. It was clearly expressed by an member of IA that love was considered as "the worst addiction at all" (Pynchon 91). The members of Inamorati Anonymous Society were all dating with others without or out of love.

As for the protagonist, Oedipa, she also suffered a lot from spiritual impoverishment, living a monotonous and boring life. She regularly attended Tupperware housewife parties, indulging herself in alcohol and trying to "feel as drunk as possible" (Pynchon 1). She had three relationships altogether as mentioned in the novel, however she failed to seek any comfort or get any care and love from any of them. Her late ex-boyfriend, the dead Pierce Inverarity, would spend much money on her but valued his stamps more than her. He used to spend hours on peering at his stamps, ignoring her. Her newly-met lover and co-executor of the will, Metzger, soon abandoned her and had run away with a 15-year-old girl to get married, leaving a letter showing no care about their relationship. Her husband Mucho was always more concerned with his own matters, his sufferings from previous working experience and poor interpersonal relations, without any interest in her business and would not listen to her. Thus when Mucho's letter arrived, Oedipa would rather look more closely at the outside of the envelope than its inside content because she knew the letter would be newsless. To Mucho, their letters were more dutiful, more or less rambling twice-a-week notes, illustrating that in their marriage the husband and wife lacked the necessary emotional and effective communication.

It the whole story, all the people seemed to be rather cold and aloof to those around them, to their acquaintances, to their lovers and to their husbands and wives, lacking

affective communication and proper intimacy. In such a money-worshiped society caused by historical and political reasons, it was inevitable that love and emotion were treated less important, people getting quite spiritually impoverished.


### **4.2.3 The anxiety for the unknown future**

In the second chapter, about Oedipa's leaving for San Narciso to act as a co-executor of her dead ex-boyfriend's testament, the employment of prolepses narrative informs readers that "She left Kinneret, then, with no idea she was moving toward anything new" (Pynchon 13). It is revealed that something beyond her knowledge and imagination was waiting for her.

Being a housewife, having not executed any wills, Oedipa was completely at a loss about what would confront her and where to begin. Then she asked her family lawyer Roseman for help. Roseman outlined what Oedipa was going to deal with for the execution of Pierce's will: she had to learn some knowledge about law and business and how to go through probating, collecting debts, inventorying assets, appraising estate, paying off claims, squaring away taxes, distributing legacies etc., which was indeed a tough task to a housewife who had no such experience.

Similarly, upon her departure from her home for the sake of the will, the discourse, in prolepses, tells the readers in advance what can be expected:

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. (Pynchon 10)

The narrator tells that during Oedipa's following investigation, something else, not only things about Pierce or Oedipa herself, would be found through all kinds of clues and revelations. Indeed, things did get more and more complex and baffling along with Oedipa's investigation. Ever since she found the initials of WASTE (standing for WE AWAIT SILENT TRISTERO'S EMPIRE), the motto of the ancient mysterious underground post system, the Tristero, and its symbol  on the wall of a ladies' room, each person she met and each event she witnessed or heard were more or less related to

the Tristero. They could be found on a worker's doodling in Yoyodyne company, on a 91-year-man's ring, on the watermark of a U.S. commemorative stamp, on a guide's lapel, on a sign among ideographs, on a sidewalk, on an ancient rolled copy of the anarcho-syndicalist paper, on the jacket of a group of delinquents, on the back of a seat in a bus, on the bulletin board of a laundromat in a Negro neighborhood, on a little balance-book, on an advertisement, on the back of an old sailor's left hand, on a can, and on an old American stamp. Even children in nightclothes on the street, a Mexican girl in a bus or an handicapped boy seemed to know something about Tristero. The origin of the Tristero can be dated back to about 1300. The European mail service even seemed to have something to do with the French Revolution.

What makes it even worse is that everything she saw, smelled, dreamed or remembered were more or less related to the Tristero, and could further be traced also back to Pierce's legacy. Through the whole process of her investigation, the more revelations she got, the more puzzled she became, for she would never think that Pierce seemed to own a world-wide conspiracy, even the whole America. Such an enormous conspiracy was totally out of Oedipa's self-knowledge and imagination. Sometimes she even could not help hoping that the whole labyrinthine plot she had seen was simply based on her own fantasy caused by mental illness, assuming that maybe all the people and events were arranged by Pierce Inverarity just for a joke to embarrass her:

Meaning what? That Bortz, along with Metzger, Cohen, Driblette, Koteks, the tattooed sailor in San Francisco, the W.A.S.T.E. carriers she'd seen—that all of them were Pierce Inverarity's men? Bought? Or loyal, or free, for fun, to some grandiose practical joke he'd cooked up, all for her embarrassment, or terrorizing, or moral improvement? (Pynchon 140)

At last, the stamps that Pierce collected turned to be the key to the explanation of the doubts remained in Oedipa's mind. The stamp collection would be auctioned as lot 49. Oedipa was told that the bidder for Pierce's stamps may be from Tristero. However, the bidder of the stamps was super-secretive: he would attend the auction in person, but nobody in the area had heard of him before, working through an agent. Oedipa then



became eager to figure out who the bidder would be. She was in anxiety again, as always. She could not wait to find out would the secretive bidder help make clear all the questions bothered her all the time. The novel then ended abruptly, Oedipa sitting there, waiting for the appearance of the bidder, anxious for the coming unknown future.

## **Chapter Five**

# **JUXTAPOSITION: THE INTERACTIONS OF TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL NARRATIVE**

Frank proposes in his book *The Idea of Spatial Form* for spatialization in novels that “the time-flow of the narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area. These relationships are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative, and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning” (Frank 17). He further holds that “by this juxtaposition of past and present, history becomes ahistorical. Past and present are apprehended spatially, locked in a timeless unity that, while it may accentuate surface differences, eliminates any feeling of sequence by the very act of juxtaposition” (Frank 63). He also talks about that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing once mentioned that symbols arranged in juxtaposition can only express subjects of which the wholes or parts exist in juxtaposition; while consecutive symbols can only express subjects of which the wholes or parts are themselves consecutive (Frank 7).

In the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, many seemingly separated but related plots are juxtaposed for the sake of Oedipa’s investigation as the will executor along with the development of the whole story. And as is known to all, most of Pynchon’s novels are open-ended, this one being no exception. Through the rich diversified characters and co-occurring overlapped events, people’s actual life status and the real social background of the United States in the 1960s are presented in front of the readers. And by revealing various possibilities of conceivable fruitless outcomes for the protagonist Oedipa, that is, ending juxtaposition, Pynchon succeeds in exposing an indeterminate post-modern American society.

## **5.1 Plot Juxtaposition**

Plot undoubtedly should consist of at least two elements: character and event. Through the depiction of characters and events that they involves in, the plot develops. In Pynchon's novels, there are full of interesting characters and representative events reflecting the actual post-modern American society.

### **5.1.1 The diversification and richness of characters**

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon has portrayed a large number of interesting and distinctive characters, about 50 in total, nearly all of whom are given specific names and are involved in respective events. Besides the main characters such as the protagonist Oedipa Maas, her husband Mucho Maas, her late boyfriend Pierce Inverarity, her new lover and lawyer, Metzger, her psychotherapist Dr. Hitler Hilarius, a lot of other characters, from many walks of life in American society, are introduced to the readers.

To list some, there are Miles, the 16-year-old manager of Echo Courts motel; Miles' friends of his age, Dean, Serge and Leonard and their girlfriends; Manny Di Presso, Metzger's lawyer/actor friend; Mike Fallopian, a frail young man, a member of an organization known as the Peter Pinguid Society, who was writing a book about history of private mail delivery in the U.S.; Peter Penguid, a commanding officer in the War for Southern Independence; De Witt, a fat pale young man who appeared wearing a Yoyodyne badge and carrying a leather mail sack with him; Anthony Giunghierace, alias Tony Jaguar, very powerful and famous in Cosa Nostra; Richard Wharfinger, the writer of *The Courier's Tragedy* which was put on by Tank Players in the Tank theatre; Randolph Driblette, director of *The Courier's Tragedy*, also playing the part of Gennaro the winner in the play; Mr. Clayton Chiclitz, president of the company of Yoyodyne; Stanley Koteks, a worker in the Yoyodyne plant, doodling with a fat felt pencil the sign ☹️ ; John Nefastis, who invented Nefastis machine, living somewhere along Telegraph, Box 573; James Clerk Maxwell, the one with the beard, a sketch on a box, a famous Scotch scientist who had once postulated Maxwell's Demon; a post rider in 1853, the only witness to the massacre of a dozen Wells, Fargo men by a band of mysterious masked marauders in black uniforms; Zapf, the owner of a book stand

named Zapf's Used Books who later set a fire to his own book stand so as to get the insurance from the government; Mr. Thoth, a 91-year-old man in Vesperhaven House, a home for senior citizens; Genghis Cohen, the most eminent philatelist in the L.A. area; Omedio Tassis, banished from Milan, who organized his first couriers in the Bergamo region around 1290; Emory Bortz, a professor now teaching at San Narciso College, San Narciso, California; Bortz's wife named Grace; Arnold Snarb, within a tourist group, a member of IA Oedipa met and talked to in The Greek Way bar; a Yoyodyne executive, above supervisor but below vice-president, automated out of work, thinking of suicide and then founding a society of isolates, the IA; a circle of children in their nightclothes in Golden Gate Park who told her they were dreaming the gathering; Jesús Arrabal, a Mexican in exile, who had met Oedipa and Pierce before in Mazatlán; an uncoordinated boy who kept saying to his mother that he would write by WASTE with her warning that otherwise "the government will open it (the letter) if you use the other" (Pynchon 100); a facially-deformed welder who was said to cherish his ugliness; a child roaming the night, missing the death before birth; a Negro woman with an intricately-marbled scar along the baby-fat of one cheek who kept going through rituals of miscarriage; an aging night-watchman, nibbling at a bar of Ivory Soap; a voyeur, who hung outside one of the lighted windows, searching for some specific image; an ancient driver of a jitney; an old sailor, huddled, shaking with grief, wanting to post a letter to his wife; Ramírez, an arthritic who knew the older sailor; Ray Glozing, Oedipa's second or third collegiate love; some drunks, bums, pedestrians, pederasts, hookers, walking psychotics Oedipa found on the freeway; a handsome dumb young man in Harris tweed coat, who seized Oedipa and waltzed round and round with her in a ballroom; Helga Blamm, Hilarius's sometime assistant; Speer and his ministry of cretins; Caesar Funch, the program director of KCUF radio station, Mucho's colleague who told Oedipa Mucho went crazy; Winthrop Tremaine who sold the swastika armbands which was used by the Nazis in World War II; Robert Scurvham who had founded that a sect of most pure Puritans whose central hangup had to do with predestination during the reign of Charles I; Dr. Diocletian Blobb, writer of the book titled *An Account of the Singular Peregrinations of Dr. Diocletian Blobb among the*

*Italians, Illuminated with Exemplary Tales from True History of That Outlandish And Fantastical Race*; Morris Schrift, an agent, said to be a very reputable, good man; Loren Passerine, the finest auctioneer in the west, who was to cry for the lot of 49, Pierce's stamp collections; and the last, the super-secretive bidder that Oedipa was waiting for.

The above-mentioned characters, with their own features, wills, lifestyles and life circles, constitute the scenes of life, past or present, here and there. Some of the characters knew each other or were more or less related to each other. During Oedipa's investigation, they appeared one after another, once or repeatedly, providing clues for Oedipa's further investigation, pushing forward the development of the plot and the story until the auction of the lot 49, Pierce's stamp collection, till the end of the novel.

The diversification and richness of characters, to some extent, manifests the complexity of Oedipa's task as an executor of Pierce's will, including their tangled relationships between each other and their relations to Pierce or his assets, making the plot a labyrinth, adding the difficulty of reader's comprehension of the novel. It is not hard to notice that characters seem to have something in common, that is, most of them were from the lower classes of the American society. Used-car market, noisy and profligate motel, bar, psychotherapy clinic, plant, nursing home, slum and street were their gathering places or homes. Suffering quite a lot from poverty, wars and all kinds of suppression, they generally led a meaningless and miserable life, mocking and making fun of each other and even themselves, seeking for materialized excitement. In this way, through the novel, Pynchon has pictured a lively and authentic American living status in the 1950s and 1960s for the readers, expressing his sympathy to the common people and his irony and opposition to political suppression, violence and war.

### **5.1.2 The co-occurrence and overlap of events**

Frank mentions that "Aristotle used 'plot' to denote the construction of events. The juxtaposition of disparate images in a cinematic montage automatically creates a synthesis of meaning between them; and this supersedes any sense of temporal discontinuity" (Frank 78). In the novel, through Pynchon's narration, a wide variety of

present and historical events co-occurs and overlaps one another, dispersed here and there, taking no account of temporal sequence, namely timeless. For Oedipa, these events provided elementary and necessary clues for her farther exploration in the course of the execution of the will. While at the same time, due to the overabundant amount of information, it inevitably causes trouble and confusion for the readers. Thus it requires the readers to pay more and enough attention in order not to miss the relevant and essential information and clues of the plot and the story, otherwise, readers are to fail to follow and comprehend Pynchon's novels.

Some major events especially worth mentioning in the novel, either crucial for Oedipa's investigation as a will executor or for reflecting people's everyday social life status, include Oedipa's daily routine as a housewife; Pierce's three-o'clock morning call in the last year; Mucho's torturous previous experience as a used car salesman and present work scenes as a disk jockey; Roseman's advice for executing the will and his flirting with Oedipa; Dr. Hilarius's three-o'clock morning call for his drug experiment on suburb housewives and the guilt for his internship for the Nazi in World War II; Oedipa's infidelity with Metzger in Echo Courts motel and his later abandonment of her; people's mental numbness and meaningless doings in the Scope bar and Greek Way bar; some historical facts of the War for Southern Independence in 1863; the repeated appearance of Tristero, WASTE and its symbol on the surfaces of many objects and in many places; a tragic battle for a handful American troops in 1943 in World War II: who died without a trace or a word, and whose bones in the lake later were used for tourism, sold to a fertilizer enterprise, and then transferred to a company to develop the filter; a revenge play named *The Courier's Tragedy* set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which contained the story of bones of lost battalion in lake, fished up, turned into charcoal; a worker in Yoyodyne plant, Stanley Kotecks's accusation that the company stifled creative engineer by signing away their patent rights; Nefastis Machine's intention of getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion through Maxwell's Demon's mental work, obviously violating Second Law of Thermodynamics; Mr. Thoth's memory of murders by his grandfather to Indians who were later proved to be Tristero employees; the history of Thurn und Taxis, the European mail service company, from about 1300 until

Bismarck bought them out in 1867; the banishment of Omedio Tassis from Milan, who later organized his first couriers around 1290 in the Bergamo region; Oedipa's participation in marches and sit-ins when she was young; John Nefastis's bewildering talking about a technical word called entropy which bothered Oedipa and his boldness of wanting to have sexual intercourse with her; Oedipa's waiting for the Maxwell's Demon to communicate by staring at Clerk Maxwell's enigmatic profile, in vain; a Yoyodyne executive's founding of an organization called Inamorati Anonymous whose members were isolates and believed that love was the worst addiction; Zapf's setting fire to his own book store for the insurance; Winthrop Tremaine's revelation that there was a demand for rifles and government surplus swastika armbands and Schutzstaffel uniforms; the founding of a sect constituted of most pure Puritans whose central hangup had to do with predestination by Robert Scurvham during the reign of Charles I; Diocletian Blobb's encounter with the Trystero brigands, nearly being killed, and his original clues of how this organization began; Tristero employees' opposition towards the Union during Civil War; Cohen's call telling Oedipa that Inverarity's stamp collection, the Tristero "forgeries" were to be sold as lot 49, and a mysterious book bidder would appear for it; and, at last, Oedipa's waiting for the crying of lot 49.

The complexity of these events Oedipa heard or got involved in were more or less related to her duty as Pierce's will executor. In this way, the readers can perceive why the investigation of Pierce's estate bothered Oedipa so much. More importantly, through the above-mentioned and many other co-occurred and overlapped events in the novel, it can be easily noticed and concluded that characters in the novel were talking, doing or being surrounded by events related to World War II, American Civil War, Vietnam War, Korean War, Red Scare, McCarthyism, Women's Liberation Movement, Black people's movement for Civil Rights, rivalry between the US and Soviet Union, the assassination of president Truman. People were engaging in protests, sit-ins, demonstrations, marches, showing their opposition in their own ways. So many events are juxtaposed to the readers, regardless of the time of happening, presenting people's hilarious and miserable life status and their horror and indifference to each other in such a chaotic American society, which were highly affected by wars, violence, inequality, and hatred.

## 5.2 Ending Juxtaposition

Italo Calvino once narrated such a scene: the lion was pouncing on the hunter, the hunter was shooting an arrow at the lion, presenting an absolute moment. After this moment, there were at least two possibilities: the lion bit off the hunter's veins, or the lion was shot to the ground by the arrow. This moment was as if it were a frame in the film, Italo Calvino calling it "Time Zero". Calvino thought that only "Time Zero" was the most crucial and interesting moment. Similarly, in the novel, Pynchon narrated the last two lines as its ending: "The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49" (Pynchon). This is also an absolute moment, an open-ended structure. Various possibilities of the final ending for Oedipa and the novel has been juxtaposed.

The final outcome is quite unsure. But after finishing reading the whole novel and after all the guessing based on the clues Oedipa had found, the readers, surely, can not help coming up with several possible endings for Oedipa by wondering would the mysterious bidder for the stamps appear in person as told? Who he really was? Could he answer all Oedipa's doubts? If he couldn't, what would Oedipa do then? Would she continue to investigate further? How would Oedipa live after the auction? Would she come back to her husband Mucho? Or would she do something else? What then? The novel is open-ended, and "这种开放性的结尾, 给了读者较大的想象空间来思考作品给我们带来的各种意义, 即意义的不确定性" ("such an open ending leaves readers larger imaginary space to reflect on the meanings it brings, namely the indeterminacy of meanings") (Hou, "Open-ended Narrative Structure" 89).

Just as the effects of the above-mentioned scene narrated by Italo Calvino, the ending of this novel was also designed and have been proved to have achieved its aim of arousing readers' interest and curiosity for the ending of both the protagonist and the story. After tracing the whole plot of Oedipa's execution of the will, after witnessing all the happenings around her during the whole process, and after reading the ending lines, is a definite ending the only thing or the most important thing that really matters?



Probably not. By presenting such an American society, other than the eventual ending and the final truth that Oedipa was seeking, Pynchon was more likely to help the readers realize the actual social status and the dilemma people was living in in the 1960s.

### **5.2.1 The possibility of various fruitless outcomes for Oedipa**

From the beginning of the novel, Oedipa was introduced as a common American housewife whose domain mainly include Tupperware parties, food market, garden and kitchen, preparing meals and waiting for her husband to come back from work. The boring daily routine made her have a sense of insulation in a tower like a prisoner, waiting for someone to help her out.

Under such circumstances, Oedipa was supposed to know little about how to execute a will containing tasks as going through probate, collecting debts, inventorying assets, getting appraisal, distributing legacies and so on, just as what she thought to herself: “If only so much didn’t stand in her way: her deep ignorance of law, of investment, of real estate, ultimately of the dead man himself” (Pynchon 64). However, what surprises the readers most as well as Oedipa herself is that she was designated to execute the will of her dead ex-boyfriend with tangled assets, which was later proved to be a world-wide conspiracy with countless clues. Along the way of proceeding her duty, she kept shifting from one place to another, meeting some extremely interesting and pathetic people from all walks of life, mostly of the lower classes, witnessing or hearing their hilarious behaviors and some exaggerating and unbelievable events they engaged in. Progressively the ancient mysterious underground post system Tristero was revealed to her, and she realized that it seemed everything relevant to the mysterious mail system could be further traced back to Pierce’s estate. Because of the considerable amount of information, far beyond her understanding and capacity, Oedipa’s sufferings and bewilderment were more or less doomed for her as she went on investigating. She was always in confusion that Pierce might have written the testament only to harass or make fun of her, a one-time mistress of his.

However, even though it might be a hoax set up by Pierce, and no matter how

difficult the task was, Oedipa always convinced herself to be diligent enough to perform her role. Unfortunately, her efforts were always mocked and despised, just as what Metzger once said in terms of Oedipa's intention to find out something she could not understand about the similarity between the bones in the Inverarity lake and the revenge play:

“Fine,” Metzger said, “and what next, picket the V.A.? March on Washington? God protect me, from the lib, over-educated broads<sup>5</sup> with the soft heads and bleeding hearts. I am 35 years old, and I should know better.” (Pynchon 59)

From his saying, his attitude, not only towards Oedipa, but also to educated women or even women in general was boldly expressed. In the 1960s, it was also a time of women fighting for the rights as equals to men in social life. Women then were considered as soft and irrational, unfit for many professions, cooking and breeding children being their major responsibilities. In addition, Oedipa did frequently encounter with bold sexual harassment by her male acquaintances during her investigation, including Miles, the 16-year-old manager of the Echo Court motel, Roseman, Oedipa's family lawyer, and John Nefastis, the inventor of Nefastis machine. She had an intimate relationship with Metzger since the first time they met in Echo Court, but soon he abandoned her for a 15-year-old girl. Another proof of was Oedipa's experience in the Yoyodyne plant, where Oedipa was surrounded by men and none would talk to her, ignoring her, so she felt desperately lonely, horrified but could not find a way out.

Towards Winthrop's sale for swastika armbands and Schutzstaffel uniforms, Oedipa wished she should have scolded him or just hit him, but she had not. Then she thought that she was chicken-hearted, and said to herself, “This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl” (Pynchon 123). Gradually, she became even more pessimistic towards things that she was curious and full of doubts, just as follows:

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Notes:

5. An offensive way of referring to a woman.

Even a month ago, Oedipa's next question would have been, "Why?" But now she kept a silence, waiting, as if to be illuminated. (Pynchon 125)

She didn't press the argument. Having begun to feel reluctant about following up anything. (Pynchon 137)

These clearly prove American people's desperation and helplessness towards things happening around them in the 1950s and 1960s, that is, people had no power to change anything whether they were positive or negative, good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral. In the end, while Oedipa sat inside the auction room, she tried to guess which one was "her target, her enemy or her proof" (Pynchon 152). Later, the auctioneer cleared his throat; she simply sat there to await the crying of Pierce's stamp collection, the lot 49. Considering the complexity of the plot and revelations given by the author, could she get all the information she wanted after the auction? The answer was highly negative. She could do nothing but sit silently and wait passively.

In such a chaotic American society full of discrimination, inequality, violence, hatred, numbness, madness, indifference and money-worship, as an ordinary housewife, Oedipa was unable to explore the final truth. Troubled so much by the conspiracy, one night, "she sat for hours, too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum" (Pynchon 141). It is interesting to note that can people really survive in a vacuum? Absolutely not. She would be suffocated anyhow. The labyrinthine of Pierce's conspiracy, the mysterious Tristero, and the male-dominated and depressive society, were all exitless for Oedipa. The answer she wanted would never come to her in all likelihood. All her efforts to verify the truth were doomed to fail in the end, to be despised by people around or even became objectives to be joked about. Endings were to be justaposted in front of her, but none would lead her to the final truth, for life was oppressive and indeterminate. This was the predicament that confronted the protagonist Oedipa in the novel. Also, this was the dilemma that confronted most common post-modern American people living in the 1960s.

### **5.2.2 The revelation of an indeterminate post-modern society**


Concerning modern culture, Frank says that "If there is one theme that dominates

the history of modern culture since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it is precisely that of insecurity, instability, the feeling of loose of control over the meaning and purpose of life amidst the continuing triumphs of science and technics” (Frank 58). As a matter of fact, the readers will not find it hard to pick out some scientific vocabulary in the novel, such as atomizing, caroming, green neon sign, oscilloscope tube, Lissajous figures, juke box, crankshaft, flywheel, air molecules, perpetual motion, entropy, thermodynamics, information flow etc., which marks a great deal of the epoch characteristics of modern society in scientific and technological progress. In the same post-WWII society, just as Oedipa sensed that the can might hit them, Oedipa and Metzger, at any moment in the bathroom of Echo Court motel, but had no idea of the complex web of its travel and where it was going, modern society was full of indeterminacy, insecurity, instability, out of control. Thanks to the investigation, Oedipa had had a real and careful observation over the interesting and hilarious social beings and seen the absurdity and chaos of their lives. It seemed that, little by little, she come to realize and could also accept that so many things were unclear in meaning, difficult to define and full of contradictions.

Firstly, the reason why Oedipa Maas was chosen as Pierce’s executor of his will was indeterminate. From her own perspective, she was no more than one of his one-time mistresses, not to be compared with his business. Even the stamps could be her ex-rival. It was revealed that Pierce would spend a lot of money on her, but nothing about his love to Oedipa was ever mentioned. The exact reason why Oedipa left him at last and got married with Mucho was unsure as well. What is more important is that Oedipa was ignorant of law, of investment, of real estate. Everybody around her, including herself, could not help wondering why Pierce appointed her to help execute the will. This doubt, together with the complexity of her task, drove her more and more nervous, close to paranoia. She kept thinking of the possibility that this may be simply a hoax Pierce set up before his death. She hoped that she was simply in mental illness, then all the things were out of her fantasy, and she would relieve herself from such an exitless labyrinth. If so, she would not bother thinking about and dealing with any further investigation of countless clues, none of which really pointing to the truth she

sought for.

Secondly, Pierce Inverarity was full of indeterminacy. He was narrated to be dead and a California real estate mogul from the very beginning of the novel. From various characters' recollection and statement, Pierce was always in relations with various kinds of business or assets. With the progress of Oedipa's investigation, she was shocked to find that the legacy Inverarity had left behind was almost the whole America. How could he accumulate such a big amount of wealth? What on earth was the role he played in the field of business and the American society? The answers were still unknown and was impossible to verify in any sense. In addition to his immense amount of treasure, his personality and behavioral pattern were also vague and mysterious. He was considered as "a rich, obnoxious gringo and an anarchist miracle" (Pynchon 97), and was questioned whether he was real or a spy by Jesús Arrabal, a man who met Pierce and Oedipa when they were together in Mexico. He would also make a three-o'clock morning call to his married ex-girlfriend Oedipa, using various voices and tones without any emergencies. Collecting all the valuable information from the novel about Pierce, his image was still hard to imagine. Such a strange and mysterious character.

Thirdly, the relationship between Pierce and the Tristero was indeterminate. Ever since Oedipa found a notice containing "WASTE" and its symbol  on a latrine wall. The Tristero became Oedipa's focus "until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into The Tristero" (Pynchon 64). Its history was extremely shocking to both the protagonist and the readers. Tristero had been secretly competing with the postal service of the American government for several centuries, with silence and false allegiance. Its signs and symbols appeared here and there, and numerous people Oedipa met seemed rather familiar with it. Its activeness and popularity was quite out of Oedipa's imagination. However, every access route to the mysterious Tristero, the mysterious underground system, could be traced also back to the Pierce's estate. Besides, Oedipa was told that the bidder of his stamp collection may be from the Tristero. Why was Pierce in such an intimate relation with the Tristero? Was he the one that actually in charge of such a conspiracy? In the end of the novel, Oedipa sat and waited for the answers to the questions haunting her. Could she be

answered with certainty? The answer would also be none the less in the air.

In the novel, the society was in a terrible condition, depressive and lifeless; people were materialism-worshippers, pathetic, numb, and spiritually paralyzed. With the unique narrative strategies of temporal and spatial narrative, by juxtaposing diversified interesting characters, numerous present and historical events, and indicating multiple possibilities of the final result with an open ending, Pynchon has presented the readers with a chaotic and meaningless post-modern American society with indeterminacy. “不确定性渗透到了后现代社会人们的所有行动和思想中,并构成人们实际面对的世界的最基本境况” (“Indeterminacy has permeated into all postmodern people’s actions and thoughts, and constitutes the most fundamental circumstances of the world that people actually face”) (Chen 130). The society was an enormous labyrinth, giving no way out to the people living in it. People would get lost sooner or later, and their trying to seek truth would undoubtedly be in vain.

## CONCLUSION

After reading the whole novel, the readers can have a general impression and understanding of the post-modern American society in the 1960s: women were despised and ignored by the ruling and dominated men; black people were living and working in rather terrible conditions compared to the white; people were numb and indifferent to others, including their own family members; beggars, drunkards, voyeurs and drug addicts were scattered here and there; people's human rights, such as patent right, the right of privacy, and the right to vote, can be violated at any time by the government and their employers; people's words and deeds were always expressing and reflecting their hate for and fear of war, violence, oppression and suspicion. In a word, people, especially those from the lower classes, were living a miserable life.

As a stereotypical housewife, the main character Oedipa felt a sense of insulation like a prisoner and waited desperately for someone to help her out of the tower which encaged her. She said, "I'll be a fugitive" (Pynchon 119). Many acquaintances of hers were also trying by all means to escape from the oppression and manipulation of the social machinery and the federal government, the ancient underground postal system, the Tristero, being one of their choices:

For here were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U.S. Mail. ... 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, they had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world. (Pynchon 101)

Obviously, people knew their incapacity to fight against the powerful social machinery and the federal government which manipulated and oppressed their everyday life. They found their own way, just as the one the Tristero employed to counter the government mail system: "their entire emphasis now [is] toward silence, impersonation, opposition masquerading as allegiance" (Pynchon 143).

Throughout the novel, the conspiracy, both the ancient Trisero system or Pierce's estate assets, turned out to be beyond Oedipa's understanding and imagination. Yet she kept devotedly performing her duty as an executor of her late ex-boyfriend's will, traveling to many places and experiencing various characters and events to look for clues. Though she had tried her best, it seemed that other than simply sit there and waited passively for more revelations, guessing which one was her target, enemy, perhaps her proof randomly as in the very end of the story, Oedipa could do nothing to achieve the ultimate meaning and facts. Such hopelessness and helplessness must be the manifestation of people's loss of human rights and oppression of the society.

Another thing worth noting is that Oedipa knew she was unqualified to execute a will from the very beginning. Surprisingly, she still chose to make every effort she could in order to fulfill her tasks. She would probably not achieve the ultimate goal, but she had had a new and better understanding of life, the world, and herself. Similarly, however hard and miserable the life was, just as Oedipa's efforts for her duty, people in the novel were still struggling and striving for their work and goals, diligently and dedicatedly. In this way, Pynchon showed both his sympathy and respect to the common people, revealing that the society may be an exitless labyrinth, the result being unsure and meaningless, but what really mattered should be the process itself of hard work for the mission which was to be accomplished.

Regardless of the traditional temporal and spatial narrative sequence, Pynchon employs a strategic temporal and spatial narrative technique to juxtapose diversified characters and complex relevant events, together with revelation of various possible endings, that is, the open ending and ending juxtaposition. The open narrative structure is embodied both in the open ending and the plot juxtaposition, which constitutes the complexity of the narrative structure of Pynchon's novels (Hou, "Open-ended Narrative Structure" 88). Pynchon's narrative strategy adds the complexity and obscurity of his novel and meanwhile leaves the readers with unlimited space and possibilities to ponder on. In this way, Pynchon has introduced a chaotic, meaningless, and uncertain post-modern society. Only when the readers pay enough close attention to the detailed cues and stop from time to time to speculate the relations between each other can we



fully comprehend the whole novel and Pynchon's true intention. Overall, Pynchon's strategic temporal and spatial narrative plays an important role in shaping characters, expressing and deepening the theme of the novel, which adds the complexity and obscurity of his novels and meanwhile leaving his readers with unlimited space and possibilities to ponder on.

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