Will Barlow

Short Response 3

For this response, I have decided to engage with the prompt on the style of the novel. Holistically, I quite enjoy *The Crying of Lot 49*’s style. When I first began reading it, I was immediately reminded of *Cannery Row*. Now, the last time I read *Cannery Row* was almost ten years ago, but perhaps what I’m relating between these two novels is their ungroundedness. To elaborate on this ungroundedness further, it stems from having a large quantity of shallow characters in addition to the presence of many alternative narratives or vignettes. I call it ungrounded because the style requires the reader to determine what exactly is important, because the narrative is constructed but many sub-narratives that are not explicitly intertwined. In the case of *The Crying of Lot 49*, some of the sub-narratives are false positives in the sense that they present connections that are in reality, quite empty.

In regards to the question of “playfulness” versus performance with *The Crying of Lot 49*, I think that there is a certain purpose with the playfulness of reader’s narrative expectations. That purpose being similar to that of snipe hunting. Where the snipe is the point of the narrative; the idea that all of the clues do in fact link up together, and the narrative itself serves as the grandfather continuously sending the reader, or the child in this metaphor, to search for snipes. So, effectively, this playfulness is a game. But if it is merely a performance is less convincing to me. But, also, perhaps even considering this question; are the games purposeful or mere performance, is in fact an extension of the game. Perhaps the whole point of the novel is to leave the reader so frustrated with finding a point that they give up and resume their lives. And, like the child looking for the snipe, us readers take great pleasure in looking for connections and finding patterns and similitudes; nothing is a coincidence, right? Until of course, we grow up, until that proverbial glass shatters and we realize, there is no such thing as a snipe, grandpa was just pulling our leg!

But alas this is an English class, and I’m an English major. I may now be aware that I was embarked on a foolish journey searching for things that aren’t really there (though I am told they are), but I at least enjoyed myself in my naïveté. I enjoyed the mystery that couldn’t be solved. Though I was frustrated, it was entertaining and when I did in fact come to question the reality of the matter, I laughed. So, though I found no snipes, I enjoyed the journey and I learned, perhaps like Oedipa, that it doesn’t matter whether I chase after these things, what matters is the experience garnered from pursuing them.

I am committed to the idea that the novel has this sort of meta-aspect to it where the disparity between the supposed connections and puzzles with missing pieces is purposeful. I think that the game has a point, that being to evaluate oneself; why am I trying to find snipes? In other words, the novel certainly causes the reader to come to a point of introspection. For many of us, this is uncomfortable, and I think that people are not naturally introspective in this vein. Self examination is difficult and we are terribly biased when we perform the task. I would like to apply this idea further by remarking on the characters of the novel. They are zainy and shallow. They are thin sheets of paper. However, what purpose do they serve? They must have been included as a means to some end. I think the characters serve as mirrors, providing yet another degree of introspection to the novel. They are metaphors for affects of the human condition. For example, Oedipa is how we all think of ourselves, our minds eye ideal of ourselves; innocent, only we know our darkest secrets, yet we are curious and self righteous, and we tend to manipulate situations so that we get our way, but we are justified in this pursuit because we are the protagonists, the world revolves around me. Another example is Pierce as mischief itself, toying and leading the protagonist into uneasy situations with great stealth and suave. Mucho represents overt sensitivity, as he deals with his depression which seems to feed off of everything around him and can be categorized as the condition of blaming oneself and self loathing. He hates himself because of his first job, he hates himself because of his second job, and he hates himself for lusting after young girls. I would expand this to say there is room for reading into Mucho’s character as a criticism of popular culture and the pressure it exerts on individuals to perform in a certain fashion. But, I digress, and I will now wrap this up. I have not necessarily taken into account each and every character in this regard, but I think that it is an interesting position to take. If the characters are in fact introspective mirrors, and the novel itself is a proverbial snipe hunt meant to frustrate the reader into introspection, then I believe the logical conclusion to these premises is that Pynchon really wanted his readers to examine themselves. In conjunction with the context of the novel, I do believe it prudent of me to say that, perhaps it was a goal of his to plant seeds of change in the minds of critical thinkers, those who found themselves looking into a mirror when reading the novel and didn’t like what they saw. Or perhaps this is yet again another snipe hunt.