

Oedipus Never Does What Narcissus Does: Similarities between *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Light in August*

Nari Morimoto

When we read Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (CL, 1966) carefully, we find that he is under the influence of literary works in the past, especially those in the 1920s and 1930s: Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), William Faulkner's *Light in August* (LA, 1932), Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (1933), and so on. Some people might find disparities between those novels written in different times, but critics have pointed out similarities between them. According to Raymond Olderman, a writer in the 1960s is deeply concerned with "his reaction to a waste land world" (Olderman 8). He goes on to say that "*The Great Gatsby* is the first novel to see the potential aptness of the image of the waste land for the novel of modern times" (Olderman 10). As far as *The Crying of Lot 49* is concerned, Thomas Schaub associates it with *The Great Gatsby*, saying, "Most convincing of all, Pynchon directly quotes from Fitzgerald's novel [*The Great Gatsby*]" ("Influence" 139).¹ In the same way, I would like to reveal the relation between Pynchon's work and Faulkner's, in particular similarities between Oedipa Maas and Joe Christmas.

What Oedipa and Joe have in common is their reaction to "a waste land world," or is that each of them, as an individual, fights against society. In this respect, Tony Tanner says, "Oedipa Maas inherited America and came to the edge of madness and despair" (*City* 180). Likewise, Irving Howe says, "In *Light in August* a central concern is with the relation between a man's social role and private being: [. . .] Joe Christmas as a bewildered man struggling toward the rudiments of consciousness" (Howe 201). There are three major similarities between the two characters. First, the world which surrounds them is "a waste land world," a narcissistic closed system without any possibility of redemption. Second, resisting the influence of a closed system on them, they try hard to quest for redemption, or for their real identities. Lastly, they do so, only to find that they have a divided self: that their identities are more complicated than

before.

Though they are closely interwoven, two themes dominate *The Crying of Lot 49*. First, Oedipa Maas tries to find out what she really is, with the help of the unidentified word: Tristero. Just as Maxwell's Demon in the Nefastis Machine sorts "out the fast molecules from the slow ones" (CL 59), so does Oedipa, in San Narciso (i.e. in America), pick out the useful clues from the useless ones.² However, what she finds is the loss of her identity; she is suspended, powerless to decide whether she is "in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero" (CL 126). Second, Oedipa has to travel on her own, without anyone's help. Male characters around her, such as Mucho, Hilarius, Metzger and Driblette, cannot take her away from the tower in which she feels she is confined, because they themselves are trapped within their narcissistic closed systems.

Narcissism plays a primary role in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Pynchon refers to many things reminding us of it. Mucho Maas whistles "I Want to Kiss Your Feet" (CL 14), and in *The Courier's Tragedy* the evil Duke of Squamuglia "murdered the good Duke of adjoining Faggio, by poisoning the feet on an image of Saint Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, in the court chapel, which feet the Duke was in the habit of kissing every Sunday Mass" (CL 44).³ The city around which Oedipa lingers is called San Narciso. There Oedipa stays at Echo Courts, the face of whose nymph "was much like Oedipa's," and the nymph "was smiling a lipsticked and public smile, not quite a hooker's but nowhere near that of any nymph pining away with love either" (CL 16); Oedipa is an Echo, and the fact shows that she cannot appeal to a Narcissus for her rescue.⁴ In Echo Courts, there is a swimming pool "in which Narcissus sees his fatal reflection" (Grant 33). In Berkeley, Oedipa happens to meet an old sailor, and he has a picture of Saint Narcissus, "changing well-water to oil for Jerusalem's Easter lamps" in his little room (CL 88).

Narcissism is privy to the entropic closed system, which results logically in (heat) death.⁵ The good Duke dies by kissing the feet on an image of Saint Narcissus. When she holds him, Oedipa realizes that the sailor, who has a picture of Saint Narcissus in his room, is about to die.

She remembered John Nefastis, talking about his Machine, and massive destructions of information. So when this mattress flared up around the sailor, in his Viking's funeral: the stored coded years of uselessness, early

death, self-harrowing, the sure decay of hope, the set of all men who had slept on it, whatever their lives had been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress burned. She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process. (CL 88)

In fact, she has just discovered the irreversible process, the entropic process of death.

We find some traits of narcissism in male characters around Oedipa: indifference to others, megalomania, an either-or dichotomy and being loved by others. Narcissistic people love themselves so passionately that they are totally indifferent to others, ignorant of real love. They are also megalomaniac, being too self-obsessed to take others into consideration. According to Freud, “[p]atients of this kind [a primary and normal narcissism] [. . .] display two fundamental characteristics: megalomania and diversion of their interest from the external world—from people and things” (Freud 74). Though it is in some measure seen among us all, their exclusion of the external world, and of other possibilities, makes them all the more involved in an either-or dichotomy:

We have, however, not concluded that human beings are divided into two sharply differentiated groups, according as their object-choice conforms to the anaclitic or to the narcissistic type; we assume rather that both kinds of object-choice are open to each individual, though he may show a preference for one or the other. (Freud 88)

They are all the more attractive because of such an exclusion, and they reinforce their narcissism as a result of being loved by others. Freud says, “[. . .] [A]nother person's narcissism has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own narcissism and are in search of object-love” (Freud 89), and “A person who loves has, so to speak, forfeited a part of his narcissism, and it can only be replaced by his being loved” (Freud 98).

These four traits characterize Mucho Maas, Oedipa's husband, as a narcissist. If anything, he is indifferent to others, including his spouse. He complains of his job, before Oedipa asks him for advice, being at a loss where to begin in executing Inverarity's will. After she shows him the letter from Metzger and asks him what she should do, he says, helpless, “Execute a will, there's nothing I can tell you, see Roseman” (CL 9). When she leaves him for San Narciso, he is “sad to see her go, but not desperate” (CL 14).

Mucho has two megalomaniac visions: a vision of “[e]ndless, convoluted incest” as a used car salesman (CL 8), and that of “rich, chocolaty, goodness” as a disk jockey (CL 98). He has been afflicted with his vision of incest since he was a used car salesman. He is so easily upset that he cannot endure the things and words that remind him of the injustice frequently committed by people in the profession. In a used car, he always discovers vestiges of a miserable life lived by its poor owner: “all the bits and pieces coated uniformly, like a salad of despair, in a grey dressing of ash, condensed exhaust, dust, body wastes” (CL 8). He feels it a kind of incest that every customer exchanges his own car for another, each representing exactly what life its owner has led. In the end, he has an entropic nightmare, and in the nightmare the acronym NADA (the National Automobile Dealer’s Association) on a sign turns into the word “nada,” which means nothingness.⁶

Mucho, a disk jockey, has “his vision of consensus” with the aid of LSD (CL 99). Funch, his boss, tells Oedipa that “they’re calling him the Brother’s N. [. . .] Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more generic. [. . .] He’s a walking assembly of man” (CL 97). Mucho believes that he could weave parts into a whole, and could divide a whole into parts, with his imagination. He is so aware of a miracle performed by words that, through them, an infinite diversity of people could turn into oneness. He says:

I noticed it [rich, chocolaty, goodness] the other night hearing Rabbit do a commercial. No matter who’s talking, the different power spectra are the same, give or take a small percentage. So you and Rabbit have something in common now. More than that. Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? But the time is arbitrary. You pick your zero point anywhere you want, that way you can shuffle each person’s time line sideways till they all coincide. Then you’d have this big, God, maybe a couple hundred million chorus saying “rich, chocolaty goodness” together, and it would all be the same voice. (CL 98-9)

Like this, Mucho has either a vision of nothingness or that of oneness; in other words, he is completely controlled by an either-or dichotomy. Before he takes LSD, he attaches too much significance to being a used car salesman, and no significance whatever to being a disk jockey: “[h]e had believed too much in the lot, he believed not at all in the station” (CL 9). After he takes LSD,

however, he is no longer annoyed by the entropic dream, and believes in the miracle from the bottom of his heart: "[t]he bad dream that I used to have all the time, about the car lot, remember that? [. . .] It doesn't bother me any more" (CL 100). At first words bring him the nightmare, but then they spare him a fear of nothingness.

Mucho is loved by girls, just as Narcissus is loved by Echo. Funch complains that Mucho is sexually attractive and that girls listening to him express their lustful desires too openly. "I'm too horny, now. What I should be is a young father, a big brother. These little chicks call in with requests, naked lust, to Funch's ear, throbs in every word I say" (CL 9). Moreover, he easily gets the love of teenage girls for him: "[. . .] a Sharon, Linda or Michele, seventeen and what is known as a hip one, whose velvety eyes ultimately, statistically would meet Mucho's and respond, and the thing would develop then groovy as it could when you found you couldn't get statutory rape really out of the back of your law-abiding head" (CL 30).

Dr Hilarius, Oedipa's psychiatrist, is another Narcissus. His indifference to others leads him to regard people around him as a mere object, as if he shot at them as "a clear target" (CL 91). In Buchenwald he tried hard to make faces that would render Jews incurably mad, and now he is performing an experiment with LSD: "[t]he bridge inward" (CL 10). In the end, he himself goes mad, as a result of his megalomaniac vision of Israelis' coming all of a sudden to accuse him of his crime in the Second World War. His way of thinking is overborne by either-or dichotomies; he either believed in Anti-Jewism, or tries to believe in Freud, or believe "in the literal truth of everything he wrote" as an atonement (CL 93); he either made a face that rendered a Jew totally insane, or makes the "Fu-Manchu" face, with which he claims "to have once cured a case of hysterical blindness" (CL 11). Nevertheless, Helga Blamm, his assistant, takes an affectionate attitude toward him and, confronted with his madness, she chooses not to leave him. She says, "He might need somebody" (CL 92).

Metzger, Oedipa's co-executor, has these narcissistic characteristics as well. After seeing *The Courier's Tragedy*, he won't share with Oedipa what she finds out about Tristero, and even makes a fuss. Like Mucho, he does not seem desperate when Oedipa leaves him for Berkeley. Though he has no particular megalomaniac vision, he acts under a Protestant dichotomy. Mike Fallopian says, "You [Metzger] think like a Bircher [. . .]. Good guys and bad guys. You never get to any of the underlying truth" (CL 33). The Birch Society "gets its name from Captain John Birch, a Baptist missionary" and he had "rigid

fundamentalist beliefs" (Grant 51). Metzger earns a teenage girl's love, and runs away with her. In addition, like Narcissus he has an ideal image of himself that he can love: Baby Igor in *Cashiered*, who drowns himself in the water at the end of the movie.⁷

In spite of his relatively large contribution to Oedipa's awareness of another world, we see a Narcissus in Randolph Driblette, the director of *The Courier's Tragedy*. He draws a clear distinction between the spirit and the word (or the flesh), and believes that the spirit is more important to him than the other. His thinking too highly of the one and nothing at all of the other leads naturally to the denial of his life.⁸ Although there is a female graduate student who seems to love him, he also drowns himself in the sea.⁹

All the narcissistic men are unable, or unwilling, to communicate with others, and refuse to give up their visions.¹⁰ Their entropic closed systems, which lead irreversibly to nothing other than death, make Oedipa feel helpless, feel that she has no hero who will help her out of the tower in which she is imprisoned like Rapunzel. In fact, the more enthusiastic she is about solving the riddle of Tristero, the more isolated she is. While the men are "among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless" she is the only one that struggles to regain the middles excluded by them (CL 125).

Being conscious of affinities between narcissism and death, and of their lack of redemption, Oedipa is escaping from the tower, which is identical with the narcissistic closed system. As she is farther away from the tower, she is more sensitive to a redemptive meaning of the new word, Tristero. After she is informed that she was chosen executor, she goes to San Narciso, and, looking down on the city, she has a moment of divine revelation likely to redeem her: "a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate" (CL 15). When she does Strip Botticelli with Metzger, she puts on as many clothes as she can. Then, seeing herself in the mirror, she laughs so hard that she drops on the floor a can of hair spray. The can flies around in the air in the way that Oedipa feels "God or a digital machine, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel" (CL 24). From this sequence of events she obtains another possibility of redemption, and, in addition, she seems exempt from narcissism; this is because she laughs at herself in the mirror, and because the can breaks the mirror into pieces in order for her not to love herself in it.¹¹ When she sees a symbol of WASTE, a muted post horn, in a ladies' lavatory, she is "thinking: God, hieroglyphics" (CL 34).

Oedipa's meeting bone charcoal by pure chance has a crucial impact on the course of action which she will take. First, she discovers through spot commercials that there are human skeletons in Fangoso Lagoons, and that the filters of Beaconsfield Cigarettes are made from bone charcoal. Then, on Fangoso Lagoons, she is told that both skeletons are American soldiers', salvaged from a lake in Italy, and that much the same story appears in *The Courier's Tragedy*. Finally, in the play, she understands that the accomplishment of a miracle derives from a mixture of bone charcoal ink and the blood of a victim of Tristero, and feels that the word Tristero (or Trystero) hangs "in the dark to puzzle Oedipa Maas" (CL 51), which is her first encounter with Tristero. Like this, chance coincidence makes her more deeply involved in detecting what Tristero is. As a private eye pursuing Tristero, Oedipa happens to meet Koteks, Mr Thoth, a member of the IA (Inamorati Anonymous) and an old sailor; they all have a symbol of WASTE, and moreover Mr Thoth talks about bone charcoal.

Oedipa is an Oedipus in the sense that the more involved they are in the pursuit of the truth, the more complicated their identities are; in the same way that Oedipus turns out to be a husband and son, and a father and brother, Oedipa's identity becomes more and more ambiguous as she pursues Tristero, with the result of our failure to determine who she is.¹² One of the most remarkable facts is that, in addition to her real name, Oedipa comes to have a wide variety of names: Miz Maas, Arnold Snarb, Mrs Edna Mosh and Grace Bortz.¹³ When she is Arnold Snarb, she is regarded as belonging to the third sex, or, to put it in technical terms, as a hermaphrodite. She gives her name as Grace Bortz in order to arrange for an appointment with an obstetrician, when she has menstrual pains; a critic points out that menstruation has ambiguous meanings, both sacred and profane; and therefore the pains seem attributed to her divided self.¹⁴ Furthermore, when she helps an old sailor to return to his own room, she is thought to be Virgin Mary and bitch; her affectionate support of him reminds us of Pietà, but soon she is cursed by him, saying, "Bitch."¹⁵ Again, though she does not have a child, she is mistaken for a mother. By far the most important fact is that she is suspended, unable to decide whether she is normal or abnormal, whether there is a real Tristero or a paranoia induced by the word Tristero.¹⁶ In this situation, she feels that she has been disoriented: "she'd lost her bearings. She turned pivoting on one stacked heel, could find no mountains either" (CL 122).¹⁷

Unlike Narcissus, her reluctance to decide whether there is nothingness or

oneness enables her to share miracles accomplished in order to transcend death. Such a reluctance is inseparable from Tristero, which nobody but Gennaro is willing to name:

It is about this point in the play, in fact, that things really get peculiar, and a gentle chill, an ambiguity, begins to creep in among the words. Heretofore the naming of names has gone on either literally or as metaphor. But now, as the Duke [Angelo] gives his fatal command, a new mode of expression takes over. It can only be called a kind of ritual reluctance. [. . .] Screaming at Vittorio he is explicit enough about who shall *not* pursue Niccolò: his own bodyguard he describes to their faces as vermin, zanies, poltroons. But who then will the pursuers be? Vittorio knows: every flunky in the court, idling around in their Squamuglia livery and exchanging Significant Looks, knows. It is a big in-joke. The audiences of the time knew. Angelo knows, but does not say. (CL 48)

A “kind of ritual reluctance (to name Tristero)” has a potential of transcending the either-or dichotomy (whether a word works “literally or as metaphor”), which we know leads only to death. In fact, Niccolò is killed by Tristero, but it is his death itself that performs a miracle: an untruthful letter written in bone charcoal ink by Angelo turning into a truthful one, as a result of the mixture of ink and blood.

Paradoxically, by putting someone to death, Tristero accomplishes miracles, or transcends death. In such cases, miracles manifest themselves as liquid.¹⁸ In *The Courier's Tragedy*, the mixture of ink and blood achieves the miracle; the ink is made from the bones of the Guards of Faggio. Oedipa regards “some principle of the sea as redemption for Southern California” (CL 37). She feels as if, though their cemetery is demolished, the dead were still alive in Genghis Cohen’s dandelion wine, as if they came to life again: “[a]s if their home cemetery in some way still did exist, in a land where you could somehow walk, and not need the East San Narciso Freeway, and bones still could rest in peace, nourishing ghosts of dandelions, no one to plough them up. As if the dead really do persist, even in a bottle of wine” (CL 68). Moreover, Oedipa senses that the sea is associated with the moon and the tides, and that they have a subtle and significant influence on her; the Pacific ocean is “the hole left by the moon’s tearing-free and monument to her exile; you could not hear or even

smell this but it was there, something tidal began to reach feelers in past eyes and eardrums, perhaps to arouse fractions of brain current your most gossamer microelectrode is yet too gross for finding" (CL 36-7). The influence presents itself as her menstrual pains, and her "(menstrual) periods" transform WASTE into W.A.S.T.E., mere trash into a possibility of redemption.¹⁹

As we have seen, Oedipa is disinclined to decide whether there is redemption or not, while the men around her are ready to. As a result, she gets a chance of redemption, transcendence of death, whereas they get nowhere. However, she does obtain it at the expense of her identity. The higher the possibility is, the more indeterminate her identity becomes. We cannot decide who she is, even whether she is female or male, whether she is sacred or profane, because she, trying to regain excluded middles, is actually both female and male, both sacred and profane; in the same way that Oedipus, laboring to detect his origin, is a husband and son, and a father and brother. In addition, Oedipa is analogous to Samuel Spade in that they both are questing, ignorant whether their objects, though they are in some measure supported by their courses of development, exist or not; Oedipa is looking for Tristero, and Spade the Maltese Falcon.²⁰

A conflict between Joe Christmas and his surroundings, between an individual and society, in *Light in August* has much the same structure as that between Oedipa and the men around her. Like Oedipa, Joe is in essence a quester for truth, for his identity; and he searches for it for about thirty years, only to find that he is still reluctant to decide who he is, or whether he is a white man or a black one. Moreover, the community in *Light in August* presses even more upon an individual than that in *The Crying Lot 49*, which gives Joe all the more tragic ending, and people around Joe have the same narcissistic traits as those around Oedipa.

The world in which Joe finds himself assumes an air of entropy at the beginning of the novel:

All men in the village worked in the mill or for it. It was cutting pine. It had been there seven years and in seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and existed because of and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away. But some of the machinery would be left, since new pieces could always be bought on the installment plan—gaunt,

staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their rusting and unsmoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and bemused upon a stumpocked scene of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, untilled, gutting slowly into red and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumn and the galloping fury of vernal equinoxes. (LA 401-2)

The passage as a whole symbolizes the entropic degeneration into nothingness. People come from somewhere to a land, settle down on it, exploit it as fully as possible, and go away. What remains after they leave is a wasteland, whose barrenness denies us any possibility of redemption. Furthermore, a lot of words in the passage, in particular "motionless," "rubble" and "choked," represent an entropic "closed" system.

This presentation of entropy at the beginning foreshadows what people in Jefferson, and even in the South, are like. Most of the people, like McEachern, Doc Hines, Percy Grimm and Gavin Stevens, believe in their own closed system, and they have narcissistic traits. McEachern (Joe's father-in-law) and Doc Hines (Joe's grandfather) share their lack of love for others, because they both are obsessed with their religion. McEachern's indifference to others causes him to accept his adopted son only as something to be reformed. Doc Hines, who looks on his daughter as cursed, refuses to go for a doctor in the face of her dying, and insists on townspeople's lynching his grandson for violating and killing a white woman. Besides, their religion, which provides them with megalomaniac causes, is obviously dominated by an either-or dichotomy between the spirit and the flesh; McEachern, Doc Hines and even Byron Bunch know that "[i]t's God's abomination of womanflesh!" (LA 675). Percy Grimm and Gavin Stevens are also overborne by a dichotomy between white and black, the most essential dichotomy in Faulkner's Jefferson. Explaining Joe's feelings in his escaping and their influences on his actions, Stevens reveals the convention of the society, the dichotomic idea that a person is either a white or a black. He says, "Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it" (LA 731). People in Jefferson also believe that they all are classified either as a white or as a black, and therefore they get angry at the way Joe acts, neither like a white or like a black.

As a quester for truth, a private eye trying to descry his identity, Joe feels that he has been trapped in a conspiracy: someone is eager to define him as a black person. Just as Oedipa has a moment of divine revelation in her first visit to San Narciso, so, in looking down on Jefferson, Joe obtains a hidden meaning from the landscape.

But he did not look back until he reached the crest of the hill. Then he could see the town, the glare, the individual lights where streets radiated from the square. He could see the street down which he had come, and the other street, the one which had almost betrayed him; and further away and at right angles, the far bright rampart of the town itself, and in the angle between the black pit from which he had fled with drumming heart and glaring lips. No light came from it, from here no breath, no odor. It just lay there, black, impenetrable, in its garland of Augusttremulous lights. It might have been the original quarry, abyss itself. (LA 484)

Joe perceives Freedman Town, the black section from which he has just escaped, as the black abyss, and later he realizes that the abyss is the conspiracy to categorize him as a black man. When he is escaping from pursuers, he puts on "the brogans: the black shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro. [. . .] It seemed to him that he could see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered, bearing now upon his ankles the definite and ineradicable gauge of its upward moving" (LA 643).

Like this, Joe's hunt for his identity is to a large extent connected with his consistent refusal to be classified as a black man: to put it more precisely, either as a white man or as a black one. Though, as an adult, he repeatedly tries talking about his blackness, yet, as a child, he refuses to accept himself as a negro, saying, "I aint a nigger" (LA 683). When he is required to say his prayers by McEachern and Joanna Burden, he won't do so; because following the religion which reinforces and strengthens a conventional dichotomy between white and black implies accepting others' definition of him as a negro. Just as he lives with a black woman, disgusted by her blackness deep down at heart, so he comes near to vomiting in company with a young black prostitute, "enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste" (LA 514). As we have seen, he

escapes from Freedman Town, the black section, afraid. By far the most significant fact is that he tries to escape in public so as not to be accused of killing the white woman in a court of law. If he is judged there, it means he admits he is a black man, because the only evidence of his guilt is Brown's report that Joe says he is probably "part nigger" (LA 470).

The harder Joe tries to find out who he is, to reject his blackness, the more complex his identity becomes. He says: I cannot possibly "deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be" (LA 594). However, in fact, he has never known, and will not know, who he really is, as a negro says, "You are worse than that [a negro]. You dont know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know" (LA 683). Justifiably, when he first introduces Joe to the story, Faulkner depicts him with oxymorons:

He looked like a tramp, yet not like a tramp either. ... He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home. (LA 421)²²

It is extremely difficult for people around him, and even us, to understand who he is, whether he is like a tramp or not. It is just as difficult to judge him as a white man or as a black one only by appearances. This difficulty in finding out his identity makes the people, liable to impress something unchanged and comprehensible upon it, furious at the actions he takes which are not defined as a white's or as a black's. This is why they say, "He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad" (LA 658). In order to avoid being given some meaning comprehensible to others, he tries to escape on the way to a court of law, until at last he is driven into Hightower's house and castrated by Grimm. In his dying, Joe does not have any united self; castrated, he is symbolically both male and female. His death includes a conflict between his refusal to be defined by others and others' conspiracy to define him as a negro, not a white man; at last it is Joe who wins.²³

Some people may conclude that Joe is a negro, on the ground that Faulkner uses the word "black" twice in the following passage:

Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and

from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. (LA 743)

However, we are still unable to determine whether he is a white man or a black one, because he has a divided self, not a united self, and because we have already known that we cannot in any case decide whether the word "black" works literally or as metaphor.²⁴ Like Oedipus or Oedipa, the more involved he is in looking for redemption, the more ambiguous his identity is.²⁵ Even if we read *Light in August* from cover to cover a good many times, we cannot give any answer whatever to the question whether he is a white man or a black one, as Eric Sundquist says:

The plunging, ravaging appropriation of larger and larger blocks of historical material, the summoning of one after another approach toward and withdrawal from the stranglehold of the past, leave Christmas no less mysterious than when he is discovered on the steps of the orphanage and christened with his blasphemous name. (Sundquist 74)

The difficulty in understanding what Joe is is also reflected by his clothes; from beginning to end, he wears a white shirt and a pair of black trousers.²⁶

In conclusion, the extent to which Pynchon has been influenced by Faulkner is extremely large. A quester is eager to obtain a possibility of redemption, in the face of entropy, but the quester finds that he or she cannot tell if redemption is present or absent in the world. Moreover, the private eye discovers a hidden meaning in the landscape of a city: Oedipa's discovery is hieroglyphics, and Joe's is the black abyss. At the same time, however, in this we can detect a difference between Oedipa and Joe. Different findings have different meanings; hieroglyphics are divine revelation, but the black abyss is despair. This difference derives from each writer's attitude toward the relation between an individual and society. Pynchon lays a heavier emphasis on an individual, whereas Faulkner on society. The difference between the two writers may be ascribed to their diverse backgrounds: something of an anarchist in the East and a conservative in the South.

Notes

¹ Schaub also says, "The *Crying of Lot 49* constitutes [. . .] a commentary upon the system of American literary tradition" ("Influence" 143).

² A similarity between Maxwell's Demon and Oedipa is referred to in Mangel's "Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, Information: *The Crying of Lot 49*": "[j]ust as the Demon, by sorting the molecules, gains information about them, so Oedipa shuffles through countless people and places, gathering information about the elusive Tristero" (Mangel 90). Such a similarity is also pointed out in Schaub's *The Voice of Ambiguity*: "what Maxwell's Demon is to the Nefastis Machine, Oedipa is to America" (Schaub 28).

³ Nohrnberg finds the link between Mucho's "I Want to Kiss Your Feet" and Saint Narcissus in *The Courier's Tragedy* (Nohrnberg 151-2).

⁴ Palmeri makes it clear that "Oedipa resembles Ovid's Echo" (Palmeri 987).

⁵ Based on Marshall McLuhan's theory, Schaub explains the link between narcissism and closed systems: "McLuhan's interpretation of the Narcissus myth is readily available for Pynchon's appropriation, for it establishes the identity between closed systems and narcissism" (*Voice* 25-6).

⁶ According to Eddins, the word "nada" reminds us of Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place":

The mere use of the word *nada*, Spanish for "nothing," in an American work of fiction invokes its paradigm gloss in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," where it carries the same burden of existential alienation and dread as it visited upon Mucho. (Eddins 105)

⁷ Hayles writes, "Metzger, playing Narcissus to Oedipa's Echo, finds his reflection in the TV screen" (Hayles 104).

⁸ Mendelson thinks that a conflict between the spirit and the flesh in Driblette encourages him to commit suicide: "the logical culmination of an exclusive devotion to the spirit is the sloughing-off of the flesh. Driblette commits suicide by walking into the sea" (Mendelson 125).

⁹ Hayles points out that "Driblette later disappears into the Pacific Ocean, a fate foreshadowed by his shower water dribbling down the drain" (Hayles 108). Water, which gives Oedipa a strong likelihood of salvation, deprives his life of a Narcissus, as Olderman says: in the waste land "[w]ater, a symbol of fertility in a normal land, is feared, for it causes death by drowning instead of life and growth" (Olderman 11).

¹⁰ Though we have associated the four men with narcissism, we can find more advocates of it. For example, John Nefastis, "the book's fundamentalist," believes fanatically in Maxwell's Demon, which has already been disproved (Mendelson 125-6).

¹¹ Nohrnberg finds Oedipa's freedom from narcissism and her sensitivity to Tristero

in the can's shattering of the mirror: "the bomb of hair-spray that shatters Oedipa's bathroom mirror announces the impending blitz of her self-satisfaction and confidence, and the development in her of a receptivity to a true otherness" (Nohrnberg 152). Schaub says much the same thing ("Influence" 149).

¹² Oedipus turns out to be the husband and son of Iocaste, and the father and brother of his children: "Ah, the net / Of incest, mingling fathers, brothers, sons, / With brides, wives, mothers" (Sophocles 75). There are many critics who point out similarities between Oedipa and Oedipus. Hite says, "Her name [. . .] begins to recall her truth-seeking Sophoclean predecessor" (Hite 74). Mendelson writes, "The name instead refers back to the Sophoclean Oedipus who begins his search for the solution of a problem (a problem, like Oedipa's, involving a dead man) as an almost detached observer, only to discover how deeply implicated he is in what he finds" (Mendelson 118). Palmeri points out that the "parallels run deep between her case and that of Sophocles' Theban detective [. . .]. Oedipus, like Oedipa, tries to solve a mystery about a dead founding father" (Palmeri 994).

¹³ According to Tanner, Oedipa's name itself has ambiguous meanings. Oedipa, her first name, represents activity in that Oedipa is "a female Oedipus," "the solver of the riddle"; Maas, her surname, represents passivity in that "mass" is the term denoting a quantity of inertia in "Newton's second law of motion"; "[s]o the name suggests at once activity and passivity" (*Thomas Pynchon* 60).

¹⁴ In menstruation, blood signifies the beginning and end at the same time: "this [lunar] symbolism is closely linked with the menstrual cycle, the twenty-eight day rhythm in which the blood spilled at the end marks a beginning" (Medoro 77). Then, based on Mircea Eliade, Medoro explains that menstruation is both sacred and profane; it is sacred because "[m]enstruation [. . .] becomes linked to a celestial event, to a sacred order" (Medoro 78), while it is profane because it is God's curse on Eve, who "is marked with a monthly reminder of this loss" when she is expelled from Eden (Medoro 79).

¹⁵ Medoro 80.

¹⁶ It is quite as important to pay attention to the fact that just as Oedipa is divided, so Tristero, for which she is questing, is equivocal: "[i]n political history, Tristero is revolutionary and reactionary; in economic history, it is sinister and saddening; in the religious realm, it includes both the miraculous and the demonic" (Palmeri 991).

¹⁷ Kermode says much the same thing: "Oedipa is poised on the slash between meaning and unmeaning, as she is between smog and sun" (Kermode 164).

¹⁸ Our view of liquid as redemptive corresponds to Olderman's opinion that water is "a symbol of fertility in a normal land" (Olderman 11).

¹⁹ Medoro 80.

²⁰ Tanner points out that Pynchon's work has the same pattern as Raymond Chandler's, Ross MacDonald's and Eric Stanley Gardner's: "[t]he model for the story would seem to be the Californian detective story" (*Thomas Pynchon* 56).

²¹ Bleikasten points out that people in Jefferson are within their closed system, supported by puritanic dichotomies, and that such a system excludes those unable to be classified into their established categories. He says, "A society founded on rigid divisions and arbitrary exclusions can only be a *closed society* [. . .]. To have a clear-cut identity is a social imperative. *Either/or*: male or female, white or black, elect or non-elect. Above or below" ("The Closed Society" 96-7).

²² Bleikasten writes, "To have an identity: to be one; to have two identities: to be no one. Christmas is a walking oxymoron and its negation: both white and black, and neither" (Bleikasten "The Closed Society" 83).

²³ Snead finds disagreements between Joe's doubleness and the society's failure to accept it: "Faulkner [. . .] presents in *Light in August* a man both masculine and feminine, both black and white, a 'tragic mulatto,' an American double-being who breaks all the semiotic codes of society" (Snead 117).

²⁴ Snead 132.

²⁵ Kartiganer points out that Joe is "crucified into the black-white man—and therefore beyond the separation on which that poor phrase of dualism rests" (Kartiganer 20).

²⁶ According to Bleikasten, Joe's name itself reflects his doubleness. Joe Christmas is a father and son because Joseph, called by Doc Hines, is "the name of Christ's father" and Christ(-mas) is "the name of Joseph's son" (Bleikasten "Fathers" 53).

²⁷ In addition to the relation between Oedipa and Joe, there are some other similarities between *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Light in August*. People confined in towers are too isolated to make themselves heard; Oedipa is imprisoned in a tower like Rapunzel; Hightower "in a 'high tower' of thought can communicate with few in the outside world" (Snead 129). Oedipa looks on the bright and dark sides of America; we find the bright side of the South in Lena and its dark side in Joe.

Works Cited

- Bleikasten, André. "Fathers in Faulkner and *Light in August*." *William Faulkner's Light in August*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1988. 43-55.
- . "*Light in August*: The Closed Society and Its Subjects." *New Essays on Light in August*. Ed. Michael Millgate. New York: Cambridge UP, 1987. 81-99.
- Eddins, Dwight. *The Gnostic Pynchon*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.
- Faulkner, William. *Light in August*. *William Faulkner. Novels 1939-1935*. Ed. Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk. New York: Library of America, 1985.
- Freud, Sigmund. *On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement; Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1957.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. "A Metaphor of God Knew How Many Parts': The Engine that

- Drives *The Crying of Lot 49*." *New Essays on "The Crying of Lot 49."* Ed. Patrick O'Donnell. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991. 97-125.
- Hite, Molly. *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983.
- Howe, Irving. *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*. New York: Random, 1962.
- Grant, J. Kerry. *A Companion to "The Crying of Lot 49."* Athens: U of Georgia P, 1994.
- Kartiganer, Donald M. "The Meaning of Form in *Light in August*." *William Faulkner's Light in August*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1988. 9-41.
- Kermode, Frank. "Decoding the Trystero." *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978. 162-6.
- Mangel, Anne. "Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, Information: *The Crying of Lot 49*." *Mindful Pleasures : Essays on Thomas Pynchon*. Ed. George Levine and David Leverenz. Boston: Little, Brown, 1976. 87-100.
- Medoro, Dana. "Menstruation and Melancholy: *The Crying of Lot 49*." *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*. Ed. Niran Abbas. London: Associated UP, 2003. 71-90.
- Mendelson, Edward. "The Sacred, the Profane, and *The Crying of Lot 49*." *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978. 112-146.
- Nohrnberg, James. "Pynchon's Paraclete." *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978. 147-61.
- Olderman, Raymond M. *Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-sixties*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1972.
- Palmeri, Frank. "Neither Literally nor as Metaphor: Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and the Structure of Scientific Revolutions." *ELH* 54 (1987): 979-99.
- Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- Schaub, Thomas H. "Influence and Incest: Relations between *The Crying of Lot 49* and *The Great Gatsby*." *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*. Ed. Niran Abbas. London: Associated UP, 2003. 139-53.
- . *Pynchon, the Voice of Ambiguity*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1981.
- Snead, James A. "Figures of Division: *Light in August*." *William Faulkner's Light in August*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1988. 117-33.
- Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex. The Oedipus Cycle*. Trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald. San Diego: Harcourt, 1977. 3-81.
- Sundquist, Eric J. *Faulkner : the House Divided*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983.
- Tanner, Tony. *City of Words*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971.
- . *Thomas Pynchon*. London: Methuen, 1982.