

Written information as a better means of communication



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Before the telephone was invented, people wrote letters to each other to stay in touch. Soldiers would write letters to their wives and families conveying their love and, even today, people write letters to better communicate. Writing is a way of expressing yourself, a way to think about what you are feeling and communicate that to other people. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Thomas Pynchon has his characters write letters in order for them to better understand each other and also to communicate to the reader what is happening in the novel. Indirectly, Pynchon is also satirizing the importance of letters and written communication because, in the novel, the letters confuse the plot instead of clarifying it. As the novel begins, Oedipa receives a letter that is seemingly clear, yet it is the beginning of a mystery that complicates the story and complicated Oedipa's ability to think clearly. As she finds out more about the mystery of the Tristero, she comes across the W. A. S. T. E. system of mail. This system forces people to write letters even when they have nothing to say and mocks the United States Postal Service. Although this novel seems like an ordinary mystery, its underlying tones of satire, through malfunctioning communication, are prevalent within Oedipa and in the letters that are written between characters and the W. A. S. T. E postal system.

Oedipa Maas receives a letter that states that she is the legal executor of her ex-boyfriends estate. It contains pertinent information about what happened and what her duties are. To the reader, this is a point of clarification.

Although the letters seems to be concise and to the point, it is the beginning of a big conspiracy that Oedipa will eventually uncover. After she receives the letter, she starts to see weird images that do not seem to be related. She

talks about Rapunzel, magic, and Pierce. Its hard to understand why she would have such mysterious images from one letter, but what seems like a clear letter to the reader, is confusing to Oedipa. She reminisces about Pierce in her mind and then goes off on a tangent, not acknowledging the fact that she is confused over nothing. Pynchon is satirizing communication through letters and causes Oedipa to react unconventionally because 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? (p10). It seems normal to think about the good times she had with Pierce, but she takes it a step further.

What follows her reminiscing thoughts is stories about her days with Pierce that turn into a revelation about herself. She is deluding herself into believing that Pierce had no effect on her, yet she thinks about him a great deal and does not even realize how much she thinks about him. She is having communication problems within herself because she is not being true to herself and her feelings. As she imagines Rapunzel in the tower she thinks, Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all? (p12). If she believes that she is the captive maiden, then she feels that she is somehow trapped and cannot get out, not because of her physical surroundings, but because something beyond her control is trapping her there. The only thing she could be trapped into at this point is going to sort out Pierce's affairs. For some reason she feels that she is bind into doing this by magic. Obviously, she cannot

understand why Pierce has chosen her as executor, which is why she thinks the magic visited her for no reason at all.

The reader is also struggling with communication because Pynchon is not clearly communicating his thoughts. The story, at first, seems simple, but Oedipa's reaction to the letter complicates what the reader originally thought about the letter. In this way, Pynchon may be making a statement about how hard it is to communicate or that communicating effectively is impossible because we can never really know what someone else is thinking. He may be satirizing the way people communicate through literature and/or letters. Detective stories usually have the same ending where the detective solves the crime and clues are given all along. With this mystery, the clues are inconclusive and do not lead to the solution to the crime. Oedipa's understanding of every situation is just beyond her reach, just like Pynchon keeps the readers understanding out of reach. Whenever we think we know what is happened, the book takes a turn in a different direction.

As the plot progresses and the mystery unfolds, Oedipa and the reader know less and less about what is going on. When Oedipa goes to San Francisco to find out more about the Tristero and W. A. S. T. E., she meets with John Nefastis to find out if she is sensitive, but they end up discussing entropy and communication. To be a sensitive she must communicate with the Demon so he tells her, Communication is the key. The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind? (p84). To the reader, the whole idea of the machine and the theory of a sensitive seems a little ludicrous, yet the novel suggests that it is a serious concept to be considered. The idea that communication is the key is the key but not to <https://assignbuster.com/written-information-as-a-better-means-of-communication/>

entropy. This statement can be taken more broadly to mean the Pynchon stresses the importance of communication in every aspect of life. If communication is not handled properly, mistakes and miscommunications happen just like with the machine. If a person cannot communicate properly, the machine will not work. Oedipa is not sure if Nefastis is serious or if he is putting her on. Oedipa is, again, confused about what to believe because what is going on is not clear to her. She is dealing with the idea of entropy, which is new to her, and talking to people she has never met, which would put a doubt in her mind on what to believe because Nefastis has no credibility with her. Communication is something that takes hard work, yet even with hard work, it may not be attained. It is very hard to get your point across, especially with something like entropy. Oedipa tries to communicate with the Demon while Pynchon is trying to communicate with us.

Letters are the old fashion way of communicating, yet it is the only way to communicate according to the novel. People can listen to telephone conversations and even open US mail, but they can communicate safely through W. A. S. T. E. Oedipa overhears a mother telling her son, Write by W. A. S. T. E., remember, the government will open it if you use the other? (p100). Communication through this new system seems to be the only way to go. Pynchon is stressing the importance written communication and is mocking everything else. Using W. A. S. T. E. instead of the US postal system is a satire of the way he believes the postal system is run and since writing is so important, we should not leave it up to the government.

When everything is almost figured out, Oedipa begins to doubt herself and her findings, like in the beginning of the book. The Tristero is still a mystery
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but Pynchon leads us to believe that everything will eventually be sorted out. We believe like Oedipa, that the clues all point to the answer, but with further analysis of the clues, they may point to nothing. He confuses us and says, Did she know why Driblette had put in those two extra lines that night? Had he even known why? No one could begin to trace it? (p133). The more Oedipa communicates and learns about the Tristero, the less she is in tune with reality. Communication, in general, clarifies things, yet Oedipa is more confused, along with the reader. Pynchon is making another statement about communication or over-communication. If clues are over-analyzed, it can lead to more confusion, rather than clarification.

At the end of the novel things are so confused that, in a way, there is no closure. Oedipa and the reader start to doubt every clue that has been fed to them by Pynchon. His point of clarity through communication is a satire of communication. He tells us every little detail about the mystery, yet there is never a solution and we never find out who the bidder is. Of course this is not really relevant because he has already made his point by the end of the novel. Oedipa may be trapped in her imaginative tower, but it is not magic that is keeping her there. In a way, if communication worked functionally, she would be able to solve the mystery by communicating properly and asking the right questions. It is her ego that keeps her in that tower because if she surrenders and stops pursuing the mystery of the Tristero, her life would be given back to her and she would not be so isolated from the world.

Pynchon has brilliantly written a novel that delves deep into the depths of the inner soul. Is it possible to really communicate with people or are people doomed to never really be understood? Are letters and writing the key to <https://assignbuster.com/written-information-as-a-better-means-of-communication/>

clear communication? He is trying to communicate to his audience that letters are a beginning, but without them, there is nothing. It is books and literature that keep legends alive and his novel will be read for many years to come. The first step of communication is to be able to communicate with yourself. Oedipa has problems understanding her own thoughts, so it is impossible for her to understand and analyze what is going on around her. It is important to know what you are trying to communicate before you can communicate anything. Pynchon satirizes the way people communicate in his novel in order to show the effects of miscommunication. The ending is the epitome of communication because Pynchon proves that the facts of the letter or idea are more important than the outcome. The fact that Oedipa was able to work through her inner problems and work with other people, is more important than if she solves the mystery or not. If we had been told the ending, it may have put too much emphasis on the end result and his point may not have been made.