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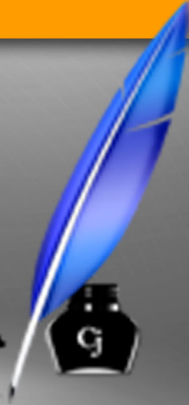
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The Role of Science and Technology as a Metaphor in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

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This paper is concerned about the analysis of the use of science and technology as metaphors in Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49*. In the novel Pynchon uses the theory of thermodynamics that elucidate that in a certain point the energies of the world disintegrate causing disorder. Pynchon uses this theory to explain the chaotic situation in the life of the protagonist Oedipa Mass who ultimately becomes a paranoid in her search for her former lover's property. The novel, in which the chain of mysterious events creates much confusion in Oedipa is woven in the pattern of detective novels. There is a reference to the rivalry between two mail companies in which Oedipa unintentionally becomes a part of. Interestingly, the novelist uses scientific theories like entropy, fractal geometry and probability to delineate the happenings of the novel. In this way, he not only emphasises the interdisciplinary nuances in postmodern literature but also warns us against excessive dependence on technology that can create havoc in our life. The novel in a sense is a tragic depiction of the pathetic situation in modern life wherein men feel perplexed in the midst of excessive flow of technologies. Thus, Pynchon uses scientific background to probe deep into postmodern condition and to give a philosophical explanation of it.

Postmodern novel as a genre is mainly intertextual because it often goes beyond the paradigm of literature and borrows its material from different fields of study like science, geography, history, astronomy and so on to make a collage of different theories and citations for shaping a literary text in a new dimension. Thomas Pynchon was a student of Engineering Physics at Cornell University. It is therefore not surprising that he uses science as a background for the interpretation of literature. His main aim is to interpret the postmodern condition where life has taken a new dimension in the midst of enormous influence of science and technology. Man is so much guided by technologies that it too some extent ruins the natural flow of life. Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* makes the uses of science to such a large amount that novel becomes very complicated to be decoded by the readers. In *The Crying of Lot 49* he uses the branches of science like new physics, fractal geometry, thermodynamics, and chaos theory to give a metaphysical shape to the novel and also to question the validity to the claim of scientific objectivity and absolute truth as science itself fails to give a an ultimate objective truth as it is seen in the case of Oedipa Mass in the novel. In this way, the novelist does a unique job to combine science with philosophy to grasp the complex situation of the novel. This paper aims to show how science is used as a metaphor in this novel to give a new interpretation to this work.

Traditional discourse of science generally talks about the world of order, poise and rationality whereas the basic premises of the postmodern novel are disorder, confusion and chaos. Then the question arises how Pynchon combines the genre of postmodern novel with science. Actually Pynchon here concerned not with the epistemic violence of traditional science that always tries to impose its dominant order on other things that are considered as unscientific but with comparatively new branches of science like thermodynamics which

propounds that at a certain level all the energies of the world are disintegrated and reaches to a chaotic situation, causing disorder and confusion. This is known as 'law of entropy'. The maximum disorder is known as 'entropic equilibrium' or 'heat death' (Rifkinnd Howard 1980, 36). *The Crying of the Lot 49* exemplifies this theory. The world of Oedipa Mass is that of extreme disorder and bewilderment. She suffers from paranoia, a psychological disorder as she tries to connect everything going around her and fears that a conspiracy is hatching against her which prevents her from discovering an important truth. She engages all her energies to the utmost level but this excessive accumulation of energies for a single task causes certain confusion in her. She instead of solving the mystery entangles herself in it without finding any solution. Her situation corresponds to the theory of entropy as all her endeavours ultimately progress towards thermodynamic equilibrium or heat death that is the state of maximum disorder. Another interpretation of this thermodynamic explains that energies create disorder of a system because of the lack of knowledge of the system and the constant change in information from the beginning to the end. Oedipa's confusion also is created from the fact that she is influenced by many people who often misguide her and she lacks the proper direction to find the right way as her information changes one after another. She for example goes to Metzger, the lawyer for collecting information about the properties of Pierce Inverarity and discovers a symbol of 'The Tristero'. She keeps going on to different persons to inquire about it. She is sometimes guided and misguided by them. This unnecessary search for knowledge proves the futile hankering of modern men after meaning caused by their belief in rationality and science.

Pynchon also makes references to the theory of fractal geometry which tends to seek form and pattern beneath a fragmented situation. This theory as developed by Mandelbrot talks about self- similarity that is every part of a structure has relation to the whole and they are self-identical. These parts are in fact the reduced copy of the whole. Critic like Carmen Perez Llantada Auria tells that Oedipa's attempt to figure out every small incident out of a larger structure of meaning may be interpreted with this theory of fractal geometry. This is also true to universal phenomena as every human tries to impose an Order on the apparently disorganised and scattered pattern of life. It is as if she is in a digitalised world where there is an enormous sea of meaning, "For it was now walking among matrices of a great digitalised computer, the zeros and one twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, may be endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendental meaning or only the earth." [Pynchon,181]. She also hears several voices from the world of the dead, finds different reflections, fantasies in which she tries to find meaning. She sometimes doubts whether Tristero exists or not. She hallucinates the symbol of Tristero in everywhere. As she is too busy in searching meaning out of disjointed incidents she falls into utter doubts. She loses all certainty about life. Carmen Perez Llantada Auria comments that Oedipa's haunts for meaning to bring integration into disintegration and to find some pattern into the disjointed realities of her external existence.

The novel gives the reference to James Clerk Maxwell's demon that can operate a machine which is in perpetual motion. It violates the second law of thermodynamics. Nefastis, a character in the novel makes a machine that too some extent resemble Maxwell's demon. This machine can separate the slow moving molecule from the fast moving ones. Maxwell description goes for a hypothetical situation where a container of gas molecules at equilibrium is divided into a wall with a door that can be operated by that demon. The demon allows the faster molecules to go to the one side of the wall allowing it to be heated up and the other side into which the slower molecules go remain cooler. Oedipa has to work like the demon. She has plethora of information in front of her. She has to choose the beneficial ones and let the unnecessary ones to go. Again, for the operation of the machine a person needs

sensitivity which according to Nefastis Oedipa does not have. This shows the lack of sensitivity in people in the postmodern age of science when people are too much governed by technology.

Science talks of the law of probability which is a branch of mathematics which believes randomness of events. This adds uncertainty in human knowledge as a incident may be true or false. This is applicable in Oedipa's case. Her belief that Tristero, the mailing company survives in the underground may be true or may be false as she herself says that she hallucinates. It may also possible that she is being duped by Inverarity, her former lover. Even it is also possible that some other people probably the employees of Inverarity play trick on her so that she engages her attention to solve the mystery of Tristero and fails to sort out the details of all the property of Inverarity estate. The readers are not sure about that. They are also in dilemma like Oedipa. This scope of probability opens up different interpretation of the text possible. Oedipa is lost in the network of technology where she is open to many information which confuses her as she cannot decide which one to follow. This is typical to postmodern situation where overflow of information often misguides us. If we for example open internet there will be many web pages for a single topic but each of them is not genuine and we have to select the right ones from them. Oedipa often chooses the wrong messages and she cannot reach to the fact. The novelists comments, "Oedipa wonders whether . . . she to might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations but never the central truth itself which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly." This flood of information blurs the distinction between subjective and objective knowledge. No knowledge is objective in postmodern era as everyone has his or her version of the same knowledge. This plurality of knowledge subverts the claim of traditional science about impartial and objective facts. It is the bent of human mind to seek a plot or pattern in everything as Oedipa does in the story and as the readers do while reading a piece of art. This tendency is criticised by the author.

The novel is to some extent a study of semantics that is the study of meanings. Oedipa's desperate search for meaning proves to be futile. There is always a deferment of meaning as Derrida has shown in *Of Grammatology* in the sense that capacity of the sign to postpone meaning, resulting the inadequacy of the sign. As meaning of a word opens up the possibilities of various interpretations, Oedipa cannot obtain a single meaning out of the quest of Tristero.

The novel can be studied in the light of Foucault's theory of surveillance or gaze in the postmodern world of technology where people are open to the gaze of the network of power through the devices like CCTV, mobile phones, hidden cameras. In the novel Oedipa is in doubt that she is under the observation of some secret agents of power through cameras and phones. Even Metzger doubts if they are under the lenses of camera while going to the lake of Inverarity.

The experiment of doctor Hilarious of LSD on house wives exposes the cruel aspect of science which is not bothered about humane sense and can go to any extent to achieve success in any experiments.

In this way, the novel can be read with the help of scientific metaphors which implies that in the age of cybernetics literature can no longer be isolated from science and science can provide a background for studying postmodern novels.

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