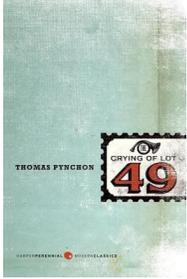


# Books by the Stack



## *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon

The highly original satire about Oedipa Maas, a woman who finds herself enmeshed in a worldwide conspiracy, meets some extremely interesting characters, and attains a not inconsiderable amount of self-knowledge.

**Why you'll like it:** *Postmodern, stylistically complex, dark humor.*

**About the Author:** Thomas Pynchon was born in Glen Cove, New York on May 8, 1937. In 1959 he graduated with a B.A. in English from Cornell, where he had taken Vladimir Nabokov's famous course in modern literature after studying engineering physics and serving in the U.S. Navy for two years. Pynchon won the Faulkner First Novel Award for *V.* in 1963, and in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), again his symbolism and commentary on the United States and human isolation have been praised as intricate and masterly, though some reviewers found it to be maddeningly dense. Pynchon has also written numerous essays, reviews, and introductions, plus the fictional works *Slow Learner*, *Vineland*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, and *Inherent Vice*. His title *Bleeding Edge* made *The New York Times* Best Seller List for 2013. He is famous for his reclusive nature, although he has made several animated appearances on *The Simpsons* television series.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Oedipa's search for The Tristero takes her through several labyrinths--the search itself, several buildings, night-time San Francisco, the Los Angeles freeway system. To what extent are we aware of the layout and purpose of each labyrinth? Is Oedipa's progress through each determined by her own choices? What does she discover in each?
2. How may we interpret Oedipa's endeavors as an attempt to impose order on a chaotic universe? What potential world-ordering systems and ideologies, including Inverarity's estate, must she contend with in the course of her quest? What potential systems and ideologies would she contend with today?
3. What does Oedipa learn about The Tristero through her own observations, and what through her own and others' conjecture? What conclusions does she draw? What do you think The Tristero represents? What are the implications of the acronym, W.A.S.T.E.?
4. Why does Pynchon leave Oedipa's quest unresolved? What more might she learn at the crying of lot 49?
5. What does Pierce Inverarity--with all his voices and all his possessions (while alive)--come to represent?
6. What societal outcasts, derelicts, and renegades appear in the novel, and to what purpose? What are the conditions of their lives? Do you think Pynchon would present the same examples in the same way today?

7. How are the Nefastis Machine and what it represents related to the "two distinct kinds" of entropy--the entropy posited by the Second Law of Thermodynamics (the inevitable deterioration of any system to a state of disorder and zero energy or meaning) and that of information systems (a tendency to discard excess meanings and approach certainty and predictability)? How, in turn, are the two kinds of entropy related to Oedipa's search?
8. What conclusions can we draw from Pynchon's exploration of the various technologies in American culture--television, radio, the telephone, electronics, the automobile, and others? What impact do these technologies have on the lives of Oedipa and others?
9. Pynchon writes that "Oedipa had believed, long before leaving Kinneret, in some principle of the sea as redemption for Southern California." Does she maintain that belief? Does she find other principles or sources of belief in redemption? What religious images and concepts does Pynchon present, and to what purpose?
10. After speaking with Driblette's mother and with the neo-fascist "Winner" Tremaine, the troubled Oedipa thinks, "This is America, you live in it, you let it happen." What are the implications of that thought?  
(Questions by ReadingGroupGuides.com)

