

HUMOR

Thomas Pynchon

(1937-)

from *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)

The auction was duly held, on a Sunday afternoon, in perhaps the oldest building in San Narcisco, dating from before World War II. Oedipa arrived a few minutes early, alone, and in a cold lobby of gleaming redwood floorboards and the smell of wax and paper, she met Genghis Cohen, who looked genuinely embarrassed.

"Please don't call it a conflict of interests," he drawled earnestly. "There were some lovely Mozambique triangles I couldn't quite resist. May I ask if you've come to bid, Miz Maas."

"No," said Oedipa. "I'm only being a busybody."

"We're in luck. Loren Passerine, the finest auctioneer in the West, will be crying today."

"Will be what?"

"We say an auctioneer 'cries' a sale," Cohen said.

"Your fly is open," whispered Oedipa. She was not sure what she'd do when the bidder revealed himself.

[The "fly" is a punning reference to "I heard a Fly buzz when I died" by Emily Dickinson.]