

To Keep It Bouncing: Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and a Paranoid Chaotics¹

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Abstract

Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) is an artistically convoluted narrative in which parallel, alternative worlds interpenetrate consistently and continuously, providing a fine instance of what, in Chaos Theory, is called an open system. The discovery of the chaotic connections in this narrative is in harmony with effecting a sense of indeterminacy, plurality and uncertainty which prevails all through the story and keeps flustering Pynchon's protagonist, Oedipa Maas. Oedipa, engulfed by the chaotic flux of information which most tenaciously and purposefully resists any linear, causative ordering, struggles to fabricate, against all odds, an orderly nexus among the bizarre set of incidents that she encounters through resorting to paranoia. Paranoia, in Oedipa's case, becomes therapeutic and constructive since fantasizing a conspiracy would warrant an escape from insanity which is an intrinsic attribute of chaos. The two consequential determinants in this narrative, therefore, are chaos and paranoia the convoluted interactions of which create an intriguing, chaotic, postmodern tale. Unlike the dominant trend of considering paranoia merely as a prevalent thematic concern in Pynchon, this study seeks to provide a new reading of the mentioned narrative in the light of the dynamic interplay of chaos and paranoia and its function in portraying Oedipa as the one who

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projects, author-like, a world of her own which, though still governed by the regulations and principles of chaotic, open systems, guarantees sanity, existence and authority.

Keywords: Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, Chaos Theory, Open Systems, Paranoia.

I. Introduction

I.1. The Magic of Alphabet

The physical act of penning ... the physical act of breathing. The one comes as naturally as the other. (Barth, 1995, p.192)

For Thomas Pynchon as well as the inquisitive protagonist of *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Mass, it is not hard to imagine that storytelling, the age-old attempt to fabricate an underlying narrative connection that is necessitated by the paranoid implications of existence, and breathing are of equal congeniality to the soul and a means of survival, as well. The world that Pynchon creates and in which Oedipa resides, even if it is on the verge of destruction and about to end, deserves to be translated into words [whatever there is, there is always “the word, or whatever it is there, buffering, to protect us from” (Pynchon, 1965, p.105)], to be rendered into the verbal medium of a story as the story serves to connect, in an arbitrary, yet consoling fashion, the incomprehensible events of being. Octavio Paz believes that in the present era, “what is undergoing crisis is not art but time, our idea of time” (as cited in Barth, 1995, p.296). This warped view of time, the escape from linearity and causality, the confusion of past, present and future is what motivates Oedipa to create a narrative that might save her from insanity and being immersed in an overwhelmingly unintelligible chaos.

... Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where
And I cannot say how long, for that is to place it in time.
(Eliot, 1943, p.1297)

The view of time held by Eliot in these lines from the *Four Quartet* is very similar to the representation of time in *Crying of Lot 49*; *there is only the dance*, the dance of words upon the consciousness of the unnerved protagonist when it is “only through time” that “time is conquered” (Eliot, 1943, p.1297). There is a void beyond the existential boundaries of any artistic creation, a statue, a painting, a music piece, a story. It is this void that Pynchon’s protagonist, Oedipa, strives to fill as she tries, rather desperately, to construct a universe which is inevitably porous and permeable, and thus the essences of the alternative worlds penetrate into each other. This is how she tries to defy the gravitational pull of the time that may steal her sanity through its very discursive, nonlinear nature. Time as such is stripped of its devouring nature; it is still there, yet it no

longer maintains the certainty which hitherto has legitimized the sphere of human functions functions (Hayles, 1990 cited in Barth, 1995). The attempt in connecting the dots and explicating the nexus of the events, this continuum of hopeless measure that she takes in writing/reading meaning into things, defies the end that time has always predestined through fabricating a timeless universe into the void in which time is itself a construct. Oedipa's story is, in essence as much a search for the secret history of the enigmatic Tristero as a quest for "that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word" (Pynchon, 1965, p.149).

A book of astounding originality, befuddling depth and mesmerizing complexity, *The Crying of Lot 49*, is engineered very much similar to the intriguing and complicated circuits and roads that are described within the narrative, yielding suspense, enigma and ontological indecision. The novel starts as the protagonist, Oedipa Maas, receives a letter in which she is named as the co-executrix of her ex-lover's will. In her perseverant, self-conscious, and suspiciously confusing attempts to execute the will, she finds herself involved in a labyrinthine retracing of the history of two postal systems, the real-life Thurn and Taxis and the underground Tristero. Oedipa's quest in search of the true nexus of people and incidents as well as the mysterious existence of the Tristero system metamorphoses into an equivocal wavering between believing and unbelieving. The relative, uncertain and multi-layered realities that surround Oedipa place her in a constant state of doubt regarding both the shadowy organization of Tristero and her own connection to all the signs and symbols that she sees and all the eccentric people that she meets. Whether all that she sees and reads into things are actual and real or they are the hallucinations of her confused imagination is never completely clear to her. She struggles to find the conspiracies that are at work, following every loose end that she stumbles upon, hoping that this will guarantee her integrity and sanity in a postmodern universe which is on the verge of disintegration.

The essence of postmodern ethos, in Kohn's (2009) words, is "the repudiation of modernity's unconditional faith in the inevitability of human betterment through scientific, technological, moral, and cultural advancement" (p.1). Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* (1965) is a postmodern narrative written in a time in which apocryphal history (the history of Thurn and Taxis blended with history of Tristero), transworld identity of characters (e.g. Hernando Joaquin de Tristero y Calavara), anachronism, nonlinearity, schizophrenic depiction of the world, paranoid search for connection and meaning, conspiracy theory, heterotopia, alternative worlds and alternative visions of reality, "loss of integrity" (Matz, 2004, p.51), metafictionality and intertextuality abound. These features are the representation of a world in which uncertainty, inconsistency, pluralism, contingency and provisionality are the norm. In "Getting Oriented," John Barth (1984) (Pynchon's fellow postmodernist) states that "many of the wandering heroes of mythology reach an impasse at some crucial point in their journey, from which they can proceed only by a laborious retracing of their

steps" (p.132). This spiraling back into the past and heading forward into the future could be a metaphor for Oedipa's labyrinthine path as she is on a quest for defying the end and reaching a semblance of meaning (quite similar to her classic namesake). Entrapped by a complicated and labyrinthine historical mystery regarding two postal systems, Oedipa initiates her journey in order to bring a meaningful, rather logical explication to the engulfing chaos that surrounds her and pushes her toward insanity. In her attempt to unearth this enigma, she assumes an authorial presence as she endeavors to find linearity and causality in the very incoherent and schizophrenically plotted events and incidents that befall her. She senses a "revelation" that trembles "just the threshold of her understanding." It is "as if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken of" (Pynchon, 1965, p. 14).

The studies on Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* very often linger upon the prevalent theme of paranoia as primarily an inevitable, ontological condition which affects the protagonist and informs her status in the world as a mere piece in a spiriform game of chess played by conspiring hands that cannot be fathomed. The present study, however, aims at providing a new reading of this labyrinthine-structured narrative in the light of the dynamic, conscious, and gainful interaction of the forces of chaos and paranoia. Such productive, though unsettling, interplay of these two shaping powers projects an image of Oedipa as an author-like presence, intentionally and self-consciously spinning a narrative yarn throughout the course of the novel. This is done, primarily through drawing theories both from the Freudian texts on paranoia (focusing on paranoia as strategic technique of survival) as well as the science of Chaos theory and the study of fractals as discussed in Gordon Slethaug's text.

The two consequential and functioning determinants in this narrative are chaos and paranoia, and it is the interactions between these polarities that dominate Oedipa's life. It is in making sense of the chaotic universe by resorting in paranoia that Oedipa narrates her existence and the mystery that so intrigues her that could push her towards insanity. Assuming authority in this endeavor, as an author does while creating a fictional universe in a void, Oedipa manages to maintain her sense of self and to keep level-headed amid all the events that could or could not mean something though a wide assortment of complications occur which almost manages to push her toward losing her mind and even committing suicide. In his *Friday Book*, John Barth (1984) writes of the narrative of life as well the fictional narratives, "the story is not done yet: Who knows what plot-reversals the Author may have up His / Her sleeve for the denouement?" (p. 219) Oedipa's search for an underlying meaning for all that she encounters that might be linked with the shadowy organization of Tristero and its underground operations points to the same never-ending process of narration; that story is not finished yet; the end is not reached and that she will keep the end one step away by each connection that she makes in continuing the story of her life and its convoluted nexus to Tristero. Oedipa's self-conscious narrative struggle in putting the pieces of the puzzle together is an attempt to evade the end through narration as Sukenick puts it, "the truth of the

page is that there's a writer sitting there writing the page" (as cited in McHale, 1988, p. 198). The alternate worlds of the novel initially seem to be worlds of ones and zeroes, of excluded middles; "they were bad shit, to be avoided" (Pynchon, 1965, p.150). Yet, it is in the very zone of these excluded middles that Oedipa finally manages to survive, to live through the engulfing, unintelligible chaos by "an alien, unforrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia" (Pynchon, 1965, p.151).

II. Discussion

II.1. A Pynchonesque Chaotics

In general usage, the term chaotics is often used to refer to the "implications of chaos theory in the broad cultural context" (Slethaug, 2000, p. vii). The binary of chaos and order has always been a controversial issue and whether chaos arises from order and is born within it or there is order within chaos is the central concern of quantum mechanics and chaos theory. That they are inherent within each other, inextricably and inseparably enframed, echoes the self-referentiality and reiterative mode of the contemporary artistic productions. Order and chaos are, therefore, co-dependent and it takes an ingenuous, artistic imagination to be able to activate, render and enhance the complicated interactions of them. The discovery of the chaotic connections is in harmony with the effecting the sense of indeterminacy and uncertainty and the verbalizing of the free play of meanings in literature. In the quantum world, uncertainty, relativity, multiplicity and provisionality are considered as normative modes of being. In such a universe, the most suitable and the closest representation of reality would be the one that embraces and includes the multiplicity of the versions of reality and the complementarity of such parallel and alternative concepts.

Chaos theory, also known as stability theory, studies "stability as implicit in disorder and instability" (Slethaug, 2000, p. xxiii). One of the principles of the chaos theory is that the initial conditions within an open system [an opposite of an orderly system in which "movements can be explained in the kind of cause-and-effect scheme represented by a linear, differential equation" (Briggs & Peat, as cited in Slethaug, 2000, p. xvii)] are oftentimes "likely to be out of all proportions to the consequences" (Slethaug, 2000, p. xxiii). Thus, the consequences are unpredictable, unknowable and seemingly random. In an orderly, closed system the energy balance is quite predictable, and, therefore, small changes will bring about small consequences and big changes will lead to big consequences. But, as Edward Lorenz suggests, in the definition of the term Butterfly Effect, in open systems "an extremely minor and remote act causes disruptions of a huge magnitude" (Slethaug, 2000, p. xxiii). The open systems are permeable, porous and interpenetrable, allowing for the free and uncontrolled exchange of energy from the systems around. They are not the circular and finite space of the closed systems; they are open, interactive, and capable of self-sustainability. The apparently random conditions in such stochastic systems might lead to the disruptions of equilibrium and discontinuity and turbulence.

The implications of it all can be observed in the fictional ontology of *The Crying of Lot 49* in which parallel, interpenetrating ontological levels coexist and, thus, disrupt the existence of one, knowable version of reality. The actual, historical world of Thurn and Taxis (whether history is knowable and capable of being objectively and meticulously recorded and rendered itself is a controversial issue), the textual universe of Pynchon's narrative, the narrative that Oedipa retraces regarding Tristero, the varied and assorted stamps in Inverarity's controversial stamp collection ("thousands of little colored windows into deep vistas of space and time" (Pynchon, 1965, p.33), the very mystifying Jacobean play, Wharfinger's *Courier's Tragedy* (which intrigues and confuses Oedipa as she tries to unravel the story of Tristero), and also the multiple, televisual scenes that collapse into one to the point of absolute confusion and chaos are among the parallel and colliding ontological spheres that Pynchon has constructed. Jacob T. Watson (2017) believes, "the novel is rife with moments in which the world inside the television screen interacts and interweaves with the world beyond it in ways that range from ridiculous to uncanny" (p.1). A seemingly simple act of receiving a letter in which Oedipa is named as the co-executrix of an ex-boyfriend, Pierce Inverarity, initiates the cataclysmic events of the story as Oedipa is drawn in a multi-layered, web-like assortment of incidents, accidents and signs regarding the Tristero conspiracy. The novel, therefore, could be considered mimetic if mimesis is the true representation of reality. And the twentieth century has radically changed the view of reality; it is distorted, multiple, turbulent, unknowable, and chaotic. The mutual relationship and the interaction between fiction and the world around are of a reciprocal influence, thus leading to and adding up the possibility of chaos, confusion and disjunctive incidents.

In spite of all her endeavors to retrace order and connection in the enigmatic history of Tristero and the conspiracies that surround it, Oedipa Maas is caught up in an open system of loose ends, disconnected patterns, and disproportionate repercussions in which "random happenstance," "the failure of orderly systems," (Slethaug, 2000, p.6) disproportionate initial conditions and catastrophic consequences, and narrative patterns that deal with "stochastic processes, turbulence, catastrophe, blockage, and other non-linear phenomena," (Slethaug, 2000, p. xiii) are found in plenty. In fact, they serve as the basic structural patterns for this fictional chaos. Postmodernism is, in essence, "potentially revalidated-refreshed, reinforced, [and] replenished- by contemporary chaos theory" (Barth, 1995, p.288-9). This is the entropic and anarchic sense of chaos that prevails in such a narrative in which the juxtaposition of disparate and contradictory functions abounds. Yet, the ensemble is structured and beautiful. This is the multiplicity, pluralism and the turbulence characteristics of postmodern fiction. The postmodern tradition aims at reflecting the flaws and the imperfections inherent in the rhythms of the universe. As Thompson puts it, in literary tradition, this methodological approach came to signify "deliberate inconsistencies in the handling of narrative frames and ... intricate relationships among many tales within a frame or a series of nested frames" (as cited in Barth, 1995, p.318). Oedipa's universe could best exemplify this attrib-

ute and through such purposeful blend of the incongruities, and in the face of the seeming chaos of the fictional worlds, Oedipa strives to draw the attention to the narrativity of the unrelatable incidents and the process of discovery as well as the ultimate open-endedness as the points of inducing order. Such narrativity is strengthened and also made more baffling as multiple framed narratives are included.

Every single character that Oedipa meets has a story to tell, a history to unfold and, thus, a new link is added to the already perplex patterns. It all starts with Pierce Inverarity and his properties and investments which run throughout the entire story, with Pierce himself, though dead, at times functioning as Maxwell's Demon, and then moves on the story of Oedipa's husband, Mucho Maas and how he gets addicted to LSD, taking it because it induces the feeling that "the world is abundant. No end to it, baby. You're an antenna, sending your own pattern out across a million lives a night, and they're your lives too" (Pynchon, 1965, p.118). Oedipa's co-executor and lover also has a story of his own which shapes the beginning parts of the story and includes, embedded in it, an old movie which overlaps the events outside the movie, "an endless repetition" (Pynchon, 1965, p.22) which can "make time itself slow down" (Pynchon, 1965, p.29). Oedipa's shrink, Dr. Hilarius, also has a story of his own which starts with his 3 am phone call to Oedipa (Pynchon, 1965, p.7) and finishes when he starts shooting at those who, he thinks, are after him because of his crimes against the Jews during WWII, and chooses to "remain in relative paranoia, where at least I know who I am and who the others are" (Pynchon, 1965, p.111).

There is Genghis Cohen who points to the mysterious sign of the muted post horn in Inverarity's stamp collection and keeps providing more and more clues regarding Tristero. Oedipa meets the Paranoids, a music band and their stories which follow. There is Fallopian and his story of the Peter Penguid Society; there is Driblette, the director of *Courier's Tragedy* and his mysterious interpolations within the text of the play; there are Stanley Kotek of the Yoyodyne company and his story of Maxwell's Demon and John Nefastis; there is Zapf of the Zapf's Used Books store and the IA (Inamorati Anonymous) member each with a story of their own. There is the old sailor with a Tristero sign tattoo and Professor Emory Bortz and Dr. Diocletian Blobb and their respective stories. There is also Jesus Arabel and his famous definition of a miracle as "another world's intrusion into this one. Most of the time we coexist peacefully, but when we do touch there's cataclysm" (Pynchon, 1965, p.97). There is also the narrative of Thurn and Taxis and their collision with the shadowy Tristero which becomes Oedipa's main concern. It is within such chaotic *mélange* of loose ends that Oedipa struggles to comprehend revelations and connections and retrace "a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate" (Pynchon, 1965, p.14).

In such a world, the one who manages to impose rational connections amongst the seemingly random happenings could resume authority and transmute into a creator who fabricates the universe of which she is a part and also bond herself with the world parallel to the text, an all-encompassing void. The

binary of illusion and reality is thus ruptured and the arbitrary line that separates the world of the within-the-text writing author, namely the character who discerns order and connection, and the world of the written text, that is the un-earthed labyrinthine patterns of causative connections, is distorted and thus made interpenetrable. Oedipa can thus avoid the insanity that is encouraged by the absence of the consequential nexus of events even though her own status is still problematic since in postmodern fiction the author is part of the text as well as the creator of the text as is Oedipa a functioning constituent of the very same paranoid text that she envisages.

As such, Pynchon's fictional narrative of the enigmatic history of Tristero and its dubious and undecided existence and the (possibly connected) images prove to be a chaotic system in which uncertain incidents recur, shaping up a fractal structure. This principle of self-resemblance points to a narrative construct of irregularities and turbulences reiterated in various scales. Oedipa's constant moving back and forth in time in search of some logical explanation for the recurrent images, symbols and signs that might lead to some sort of truth regarding the existence and history of Tristero pictures a series of self-similar patterns, fractals that continue to the very unconcluded ending of the narrative. Fractals, as Gordon Slethaug (2000) puts it, indicate "traces of dynamic activity" and at the same time, refer to "fractional portions, fracture and fragmentation, and irregularity," and thus "break with the Euclidean tradition of ideal forms and show an infinite nesting of pattern within pattern, repetition across scales (i.e., from larger to smaller forms), and an area devoid of fixed coordinates" (p.110). As much as Oedipa longs for a conclusive result concerning the history of the postal system intrinsic to the orderly, closed systems, it is the continuous fractal recurrences (repeated narrative patterns interconnected with each other) that spring on her way. The fractal repetitions, in the case of Oedipa's narrative, are in fact the recurrent motif of encountering a mystery to be solved regarding Tristero and meeting a new character with a narrative of their own, one leading to another, in a spiriform pattern, always moving inward and outward, simultaneously, "turning the novel's mirror upon itself, producing an endless regression of barbershop self-portraits," (Stonehill, 1988, p. 8) a *mise en abyme*.

These repeated patterns are aimed at reaching infinity. And the infinity is unreachable and unattainable; the end is always postponed, always one step away. The fiction does not end when the book ends, and the storytelling is not done yet. It is amidst such narrative frenzy that Oedipa tries to read/write logic and rationality into the events and incidents that occur and, thus, maintains an authorial supremacy even though she is enframèd within the very constructed narrative that she has managed to construct. In detecting and uncovering of the potential connections between the real world (and reality itself has an equivocal entity) and the underground, parallel world of the Tristero (similarly doubtful and uncertain), Oedipa resides both on the ontology of the text in which she is the protagonist and the ontology of the text that she attempts to write, a truly metafictional existence; the parallel worlds do exist, yet for the one to exist, the other is needed for the idea to be conceived: "the marvelous possibility" (Pyn-

chon, 1965, p.79). It is in this metafictional stance that she tries to take part in meaning-making process, filling in the gaps and connecting the dots, reading/writing between the lines to reach, eventually and inevitably, an indeterminate end, a “separate, silent, unsuspected world” (Pynchon, 1965, p.101). Not very surprising is it, however, that as Sukenick states, in the contemporary era, “our reality lacks the sanction of a creator,” (as cited in Hassan, 1973, p. 94) hence the eternal waiting of Oedipa: “the auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49” (Pynchon, 1965, p. 152).

II.2. A Paranoid Fantasy

About paranoia There is nothing remarkable.... it is nothing less than the onset, the leading edge, of the discovery that *everything is connected*, everything in the Creation, a secondary illumination – not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a route in for those ... who are held at the edge (Pynchon, 1973, p. 820)

Paranoia is often attributed to the psychological and mental disorders and affects one’s “objective grasp of things” (Freud, 1938, p.105). In *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Sigmund Freud (1920) discusses various classifications of paranoia, “according to their content” as “megalomania, the mania of persecution, erotomania, [and] mania of jealousy” (p.366). Each one is given a concise definition, and the one that can best be applied in the case of the novel in discussion is paranoia as mania of persecution. “In cases of mania of persecution”, he writes “we have noticed a few things that lead us to follow a definite track” (Freud, 1920, p.366). As such, paranoia can effect “subtle combinations” (Freud, 1920, p.379). In certain cases, Freud believes, paranoiac conduct might be justified; for instance, when the paranoid “perceives something that escapes the normal person; he sees clearer than one of normal intellectual capacity” (Freud, 1938, p. 163).

Late in the nineteenth century, paranoia was primarily used to describe “delusions in general” and “persecutory delusions” in specific (Quindoz & Alcorn, 2005, p.104). Freud relates paranoia to a homosexual phobia. In his *Totem and Taboo*, he states that the desire to demand interconnection from events of life in general is a natural and “intellectual” function of an individual’s mind. If for some reasons, or as a result of certain circumstances, a “true connection” cannot be traced and established, this intellectual function constructs an arbitrary one, either in the form of “dreams”, “phobias”, or “delusions”. If such process of fabrication moves beyond the logical extremes, it changes into what is normally defined as paranoia (as cited in Moore, 1987, p.76). Paranoia, as such, is an effort to spot an invisible order behind the visible pattern of events. The paranoid often undergoes a condition of delusional “grandeur” or suffers from the feeling of being persecuted, or both, as Timothy Melley (2000) suggests (p.17).

Pynchon is the prophet of paranoid fiction. A critic even goes so far as to believe that an entity called Pynchon is a paranoid subject, who, through avoiding interviews and social encounters and maintaining a low profile manages to “es-

cape into and through his texts". He is, in other words, the fabricator of the "ultimate paranoid fantasy" (Mackey, 1986, p. 62). In his first three novels, *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), and the epic *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Thomas Pynchon portrays a solitary figure in an ontological maze, left forlorn with thousands of seemingly and logically disconnected and irresolvable clues, making a rather desperate, at times pathetic, though arresting, attempt to make meanings out of thin air. It seems as if Pynchon enjoys depicting sarcastic pictures of his contemporary human beings as they endeavor to bring some sense into an otherwise chaotic cosmos. *The Crying of Lot 49* is an instance of postmodernist concern with "contemporary problems of epistemology", and "indeterminacy of meaning and interpretation" (Hall, 1991, p.63). Oedipa, in a sense, is the postmodern prototype reader/writer. Confronted with a set of "clues, intimations, cryptic allusions, references, [and] seeming symbols" (Hall, 1991, p.63), she embarks on a journey, literally and symbolically, to reconstruct the history of the enigmatic organization called Tristero.

From the very beginning of the story, Oedipa is presented as a highly perceptive character inclined to trace back various events in search of some shrouded implication and significance. Despite latent proclivity for finding the hidden connections of events and incidents, she tried to ignore certain suspicious events and words when she was Inverarity's girlfriend (Pynchon, 1965, p.3). Yet, the need in her to figure out the underlying patterns motivates her throughout the story to reach the truth, if possible. She sees revelations in ordinary things that she comes across such as the printed circuit of a transistor radio or the freeways of San Narciso (Pynchon, 1965, p.14) or even a hair spray can that by some accident propels around the bathroom in her hotel (Pynchon, 1965, p.25). She feels lost, disoriented, and alienated as she is supposedly led on by a chain of signs the most noteworthy of them is the muted post horn icon that she first sees on a restroom door (Pynchon, 1965, p.38). Her undertaking to reconstruct a textual framework for the Tristero organization is intermingled with her attending the performance of Wharfinger's play called *The Courier's Tragedy* in some interpolated versions of which the name Tristero is mentioned. Her futile attempt to find the correct version of the text of the play (there are the Paperback, the Hardcover, the 1678 Canto, the White Chapel, and the Vatican version) along with her similarly vain attempt to relate all the incidental locations in which she finds the logo for the Tristero is a desire on her part to create an orderly world out of the chaos of her life and the real world which, as it is mentioned in the novel, is moving toward an entropic apocalypse. Thus, she employs "mechanisms of projection" (Freud, 1918, p.153) to construct a narrative of conspiracy and connections regarding the history of Tristero. She lives in an "age of conspiracy [...] the age of connections, links, secret relationships" (De Lillo, as cited in Melley, 2000, p.7), and in this age, paranoia is primarily a functional and therapeutic strategy of interpretation against the issues of control, manipulation and absurdity.

The need to fantasize within the existing void a master plan, even if it implicates admitting the fact that there might be larger conspiracies at hand is what Pynchon views as the therapeutic paranoia which he implicitly advocates in his

novels as a means of survival; a defense strategy against acknowledging the fact that one has most probably gone crazy. Dr. Hillarius, Oedipa's paranoid psychiatrist, advises Oedipa to cherish her paranoid fantasies, "whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be" (Pynchon, 1965, p.113). Paranoia, therefore, in Pynchon's chaotic ontology can be associated with what Freud acknowledges as a "psychosis of defense" (as cited in Quindoz & Alcorn, 2005, p. 33). This is indeed the inevitable outcome of living a life of uncertainty where "the governing metaphor is entropy, a figure for the exhaustion of closed systems and the overwhelming chaos of information overload" (Adams, 2007, p.1). Pynchon puts Oedipa in the limelight merely by naming her *Oedipa*; Chris Hall refers to this cunning choice in his article and Edward Mendelson, similarly, views the relationship between Oedipa's name and her Sophoclean predecessor as a parallel one. Oedipa's name "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" (as cited in Hall, 1991, p.1). It is worth mentioning, however, that "merely trying to demonstrate mythic correlations greatly oversimplifies Pynchon" (Stark, as cited in Modellmog, 2014, p.1). Oedipa's problem is a post-modern dilemma. She is far from the classical version of solver of riddles. Yet she resembles her classical namesake in that the general pattern of their quest is very much alike; "during their investigations, both characters move from absolute positivism to relative indeterminacy" (Modellmog, 2014, p.1). Hall (1991) believes that in a "'classically' ordered world, riddles are posed and have solutions; for Oedipa, however, riddles are only posed in fragmentary and indeterminate terms, and any solution is probably unattainable" (67). Oedipa's universe is an open system in which certainty is a lost luxury and Oedipa's attempt in writing/reading a pattern to the historical conspiracy regarding Tristero is primarily an attempt at seeking solace and a confirmation of her own being. "Keep it bouncing", Inverarity told Oedipa once, "that's all the secret, keep it bouncing" (Pynchon, 1965, p.148).

In the *Crying of Lot 49*, it is Oedipa who wishes to fabricate a story behind what she sees and hallucinates about. She inhabits a space where, as Albert Camus describes, there is a "divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints" (as cited in Safer, 1990, p.107). Her impulse to find an answer is aroused most definitely by certain incidents, yet it is she herself who feels the urge to accomplish the task since finding an underlying storyline for the various incidents that she sees would mean that she had maintained her sanity. "Yet she knew, head down, stumbling over the cinder bed and its old sleepers, there was still that other chance. That it was all true" (Pynchon, 1965, p.148). Her paranoiac proclivity to fabricate/unearth the hidden series of connections regarding Tristero and the recurrent patterns that she sees in various locations can be deemed as "a positive state of mind, an intelligent and fruitful form of suspicion, rather than a psychosis" (Melley, 2000, p.18). She has the desire for patterns and plans at the very beginning of the novel when she is looking at the pattern of houses and remembers a printed circuit she had once

seen: “though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate” (Pynchon, 1965, p.14). The detective in her, the novel is a parody of the detective novel genre, reads too much into everything that she sees as the permeable entities of the parallel universes that she tries to associate with each other interpenetrate. She undergoes “a cumulative sense of disorientation, of unease, of lostness and alienation, in short, a radical decentering of ego” (Hall, 1991, p.1). Tristero may or may not exist. W. A. S. T. E. may have an external reality or may not. Pierce Inverarity may have had something in mind when he appointed Oedipa as coexecutrix of his will or may not. All that she encounters is uncertain, inconsistent and provisional. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon (1973) writes of anti-paranoia: “If there is something comforting – religious, if you want – about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long.” And this feels “roofless, vulnerable, uncentered” (p. 506). And this is how Oedipa feels eventually. She cannot bear the state in which nothing is connected to anything. There is a sense of menace, and she feels intimidated by such absence of connective signs and cues; she searches the latrine walls in the Scope for Tristero's logo, the muted post horn, and she finds nothing: “all the walls, surprisingly, were blank. She could not say why, exactly, but felt threatened by this absence of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for” (Pynchon, 1965, p.53). Fallopian asks Oedipa, “has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody's putting you on? That this is all a hoax, maybe something Inverarity set up before he died?” Yet Oedipa chooses to dismiss such idea, “it had occurred to her. But like the thought that some day she would have to die, Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility directly, or in any but the most accidental of lights. ‘No’ she said, ‘that's ridiculous’” (Pynchon, 1965, p.138).

Paranoia, in this narrative, could be the collective paranoia shared by almost all the characters with whom Oedipa meets; there is always the question of *We* and *They*, as if there is a large, underlying conspiracy aimed at every one. It could be what Timothy Melley (2000) calls “agency panic” which implicates that the individuals fear that they are “personally manipulated by powerful external controls” (p.12). Oedipa occasionally wonders if someone is putting her on (Pynchon, 1965, p.17, p.61, p.85, p.138). It could be in the shape of a vicious joke on Oedipa alone set by Inverarity and in which all characters are agents of Inverarity; “every access to the Tristero could be traced also back to the Inverarity estate.” All that she has encountered could be “some grandiose practical joke he'd cooked up, all for her embarrassment, or terrorizing, or moral improvement” (Pynchon, 1965, p.140). Oedipa attempts, nevertheless, to create a world of her own, “transforming the apparently blank givens of existence ‘in the smithy of his [her] soul’ to something ordered and fine and pregnant with human significance” (Barth, 1984, p.21). The Heteroglossia that Pynchon has created is an open interface in which the multiple narrative layers co-exist and thus undermine the possibility of any stable, intelligible and unified pattern. Even though Oedipa experiences “a typically postmodern sense of dis-location

with regard to the text, or her location in the text, or the world that is the text, or the text that composes the world”, writes Hall (1991), “she makes an attempt – albeit a highly positivistic one – to figure it out” (p.1). As there is no whole, un-fragmented version of reality, then it is better to create one’s own narrative of reality, and that is what Oedipa strives to do, to “hurry up with words, words” (Pynchon, 1965, p.62). Pynchon’s narrative as well the narrative that Oedipa fashions, therefore, can be categorized as instances of “conspiracy-based narrative” (Melley, 2000, p.10). As Heidegger puts it, the end is “never more than this instant, than you in this instant, than you, fighting it out, and acting, so. If there is any obstacle, it is never more than this one, you, this instant, in action” (as cited in Waugh, 1992, p.19). Pynchon’s protagonist, in defying the instant of the end, aims at creating an alternative mode of being and existence, simultaneously immersing in it and detaching oneself from it. The fictional enterprise of narrating, the writing of order and causality in the seemingly irrelevant and pastiche-like incidents, becomes a self-conscious project of self-creation and self-protection. In the postmodern fiction, “it is no longer official reality which is coercive” and such fictions “instead of resisting the official *unreality*, acquiesce in it, or even *celebrate* it” (McHale, 1988, p. 219). The ontological levels of existence in Pynchon are open systems in which seemingly minor incidents, such as receiving a will, sending and receiving of a postal package or simply watching a play could trigger disruptive catastrophes of unforeseen magnitude. Within such a chaotic context, Oedipa (in her willful quest for a conspiracy) can possess a voice and the voice necessitates an active and effective presence. As long as there is a narrative account to tell for all that has transpired regarding Tristero, Oedipa has a voice that might be heard; there is a presence to be felt within the absence that lies around. Oedipa’s story is a determined resistance to the absence. “Words and a yarn” (Pynchon, 1965, p.63) are provided; it is Oedipa who bestows upon them, as well as upon herself, life.

III. Conclusion

Bordando el Manto Terrestre

In *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) Pynchon gives a description of a painting by “the beautiful Spanish exile Remedios Varo” titled “Bordando el Manto Terrestre” in which:

a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void; for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships, and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world. (p.11)

The Spanish-Mexican surrealist and anarchist painter Remedios Varo Uranga (1908- 1963) is highly praised for the unique blend of the mythic and the actual, the sacred and the profane in her paintings. The characters in her paintings, which are mainly inspired by her self-discovery journeys to the depth of her own consciousness, are depicted as solitary, somber figures in-

volved in highly symbolic acts. Magic, mysticism, Jungian psychoanalysis, and probing into the depth of one's soul and an artistic and symbolic engagement with the world are characteristic of her paintings. Puzzle-like, enigmatic and narrative-like, Varo's paintings very often possess cosmic significance in the treatment of the status and connection of the individual with the world around and within. *Bordando el Manto Terrestre*, translated into English as *Embroidering the Earth's Mantle* was painted in 1961.

Though not often called a postmodern painting, Varo's *Bordando el Manto Terrestre* might beautifully present the paradoxical status of Pynchon's protagonist. The veiled and enigmatic figure in the painting who fabricates the yarns out of which the world is woven could be the most actualistic rendering of the status of Oedipa in search of truth in the postmodern time. "Shall I project a world?" Oedipa wonders (Pynchon, 1965, p.65). The ontological paradox which is portrayed in this ekphrastic digression is the best rendition of the controversial position she possesses as the seeker of truth and linear narratives; the tower where the hooded figure, the storyteller/ the seeker, stands is part of the very same tapestry which she weaves. She is part of the world that she wants to project in the chaotic, empty void. It is a strange loop; both inside and outside the universe she creates she stands, both the creator and the creature of the world she constructs. Oedipus-like, she gets entangled, driven by an existential need on her part, in the very patterns that she sees and strives to connect rationally. The different and alternative levels of reality, the parallel ontological levels that are juxtaposed seem to be logically impossible. Yet, in all impossibility, there it exists. The world around can and cannot be deciphered. It can and cannot be fathomed and comprehended. It might be that the story never ends and that the connections would always seem uncertain and unresolved, yet the role that she assumes, that of the one who has the authority to seek and to write, makes her the *axis mundi*, the very center of the universe that she wishes to create. She is a part of her own creation, simultaneously partaking of and distanced from the threads of meaning that she fabricates. *The Crying of Lot 49* is a confrontation of a chaotic universe and a paranoid mind. Oedipa's attempt in finding an underlying narrative that might explain the nexus of the signs and patterns is a self-conscious process of self-survival and self-narration. It is a narrative of the "astonishing feat of pulling-oneself-up-by-one's-own-ontological-boot-straps" (McHale, 1988, p.13).

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