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The Quest for Truth and Identity in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

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Candidate

Mohammed Taha Abdelalim

Board of Examiners:

Prof. Mohamed Afkir	University Amar Telidji- Laghouat	Chairperson
Dr. Mohammed Seghir Halimi	University Kasdi Merbah- Ouargla	Supervisor
Dr. Nassima Kaid	University Amar Telidji- Laghouat	Examiner

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to MY FAMILY.

To the light and sight of my life , MY PARENTS . Thank you for always supporting and being there for me whenever I needed anything . I can't thank you enough for everything you do for me. I am blessed to be your son.

To my Great BROTHERS and My Joyful SISTER.

To ALL my Relatives and my Friends.

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Abstract

The two concepts of truth and identity have been a major subject for debate among critics and writers. This research seeks to explore the two concepts in postmodern thinking through the novel of Thomas Pynchon: *The Crying of Lot 49*. The two concepts are discussed through the quest of Oedipa, the protagonist of Pynchon's novel, and her journey to execute her friend's will. In addition, this study focuses on the absence of meaning in Oedipa's world and her inability of making sense of it. Her mission is made harder by the obstacles that she faces along the way; this hinders the process of acquiring the truth and executing the will. Eventually, Oedipa seems to be suffering from identity problems. This study reveals that the uncertainty and absence of truth around Oedipa contribute to her disillusionment about her life; everything she encountered during her quest for meaning seemed to more confusing than revealing. This research points out the relationship between the prevalence of uncertainty and Oedipa's identity disorders. It argues that Oedipa's incapability of making sense of the world causes her suffering with distinguishing between reality and fiction. Eventually, Oedipa's puzzlement leads to paranoia and schizophrenia where she doubts that she is a victim of a conspiracy.

Résumé

La postmodernité est l'un des courants qui ont modifié la vision du monde et ont apporté des changements dans plusieurs domaines. Elle se caractérise principalement par l'absence de toutes formes de croyances dans des principes et des valeurs sur lesquels les gens peuvent se mettre d'accord. Pour François Lyotard, ces principes constituent ce qu'il appelle les grands récits. Le monde, se caractériserait, selon la postmodernité, par un non-sens et par l'absence d'objectif ou de téléologie. Le roman de Thomas Pynchon '' *Vente à la Criée du Lot 49*'' est l'une des œuvres littéraires les plus importantes de la postmodernité. Notre recherche vise l'étude de ce roman en se focalisant sur deux concepts principaux : la réalité et l'identité. Ces deux concepts seront mis en valeur à travers l'aventure d'Oedipa, l'héroïne de ce roman, dans sa quête de la réalité et dans la réalisation du testament de son ami. Elle erre ainsi dans un monde d'incertitude qui la laisse perplexe, incapable de faire la différence entre la réalité et la fiction. Nous avons montré dans cette étude, la façon dont lutte Oedipa pour retrouver un sens à tout ce qu'elle affronte. Comment les difficultés et les déceptions auxquelles elle s'expose la conduisent à des problèmes psychologiques et identitaires au point où elle suspecte l'existence d'un complot dirigé contre elle. Elle découvre ainsi que la vie est pleine de contradictions et de faussetés qui mènent l'homme dans des directions erronées dans la vie.

ملخص

تعتبر ما بعد الحداثة من بين أهم الحركات التي غيرت منظور الناس للعالم وجاءت بتغييرات كبيرة في العديد من المجالات. من بين أهم المعتقدات التي ميزت هذه المرحلة هي عدم التصديق وعدم الثقة في أي ثوابت ومبادئ توحد الناس ، هذه المبادئ التي يسميها فرونسوا ليوتارد الروايات الكبرى ، حيث تميزت برؤية العالم على أنه بدون معنى أو غاية . من أهم الأعمال الأدبية في ما بعد الحداثة رواية توماس بيكون « بيع الحصة 49 في المزاد العلني » . يهدف بحثنا هذا إلى استكشاف هذه الرواية مع التركيز على مفهومي مهمين وهما : الحقيقة والهوية . هذين المفهومين اللذان سيتم مناقشتهم عبر رحلة أوديبا بطلة هذه الرواية في البحث عن الحقيقة وحول تنفيذها لوصية صديقها . تتجول أوديبا في عالم حيث عدم اليقين يطغى على العالم مما يجعلها في حيرة حيث لا تستطيع التفريق بين الواقع والخيال . وقد أظهرنا في هذه الدراسة تظهر كيف أن أوديبا تصارع لأجل أن تجد معنى لما تواجهه في رحلتها وكيف أن الصعوبات وخيبات الأمل التي تتعرض لها في مهمتها تسبب لها عدة مشاكل في نفسياتها وهويتها إلى أن تشك في الأخير أنها ضحية مؤامرة حيكّت ضدها. وهكذا تكتشف أوديبا أن الحياة مليئة بالمتناقضات والمغالطات التي تقود الإنسان أحيانا إلى وجهات خاطئة في حياته.

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General Introduction

The two concepts of truth and identity have been an increasingly important object of research, especially in postmodern thought; Questions and arguments have been raised about both concepts. writers have put forward their theories and claims regarding the existence of truth in the world and about people's ability to reach it. Postmodern writers hold a sceptic attitudes towards the capability of individuals of accessing to truth and making sense of their world. Novelists, like Thomas Pynchon, have expressed the The scepticism and loss of meaning in the postmodern world. They stressed people's longing for making sense of their world in which reality seemed not easy to reach. In his novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon portrayed the protagonist's will to find the truth about the world around her. The postmodern world is seen as a place where it is not easy to differentiate between reality and fiction. As it is explored in Pynchon's novel, the protagonist's quest to reach any truth is faced with many obstacles that keep her away from any revelations. This leads to an overarching uncertainty towards everything as it is shown in this work where there are multiple possibilities to a certain fact.

In addition to truth, identity is another major concept in postmodernism that is explored in this dissertation. Since truth is hard to obtain then there will be a problem in the identity of the seeker. For example, the protagonist of Pynchon's *The Crying of lot 49* started to doubt everything that she came across and thought that she has been a victim of a conspiracy. This uncertainty caused her later to doubt her own identity and sanity.

Several studies have been conducted investigating the concepts of truth and identity in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. For example, Eva Carda's study *The Quest in Postmodern Literature: An Analysis of the Quest in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 and Paul Auster's City of Glass* explores the concept of quest in literature and

specifically in postmodern writings; it discusses how it was different from the traditional quest. Carda then provides an overall idea about the circumstances of people living in the post Second World War world. After that, she analyzes the concept of quest in the two novels where she discusses how this quest pattern of postmodernism is different from the classic concept of quest.

In addition, Hassan Rezaei's *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty: Challenge of the Grand Narratives in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49* explores uncertainty in the postmodern world through Pynchon's novel. Rezaei argues that uncertainty, that is the absence of truth in the world and especially in the postmodern age, is manifested through Oedipa's journey in Pynchon's novel. The overlapping uncertainty in Pynchon's novel, as Rezaei argues, stems from the inability of the individuals to decipher signs and the nature of their world which seems to have no meaning.

Similar to Rezaei, Sima Farshid and Hanieh Motlagh, in their *Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49: A Hyperreal Apocalypse*, describe the postmodern world as a place of entropy and disorder that prevail in Pynchon's novel. Farshid and Hanieh state that the entropic nature of Oedipa's world is due to the huge amount of information and data that the protagonist could not sort out which added to her puzzlement and disappointment. Eventually, the increasing rate of uncertainty and absence of meaning led to problems within the protagonist's self and mind.

Similarly, Eduardo Barros and María Bobadilla's *Narrative Schizophrenia in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49* examines the entropy and schizophrenia as characteristics of Oedipa's environment. Entropy is regarded as an inevitable state that characterizes the postmodern age; the entropic nature of the events that surround the protagonist is due to her incapacity of changing or even understanding the events that

caused her to fall into a schizophrenic state of being. The schizophrenic aspects are presented as the medium of the environment in which Oedipa wanders. Unable to decipher what she receives, she is not capable of escaping this confusion and bewilderment.

When considering the aforementioned studies, there seems to be little focus on some important points. Some works seem to be limited to the idea of uncertainty which overlaps in Pynchon's novel with less focus on the reasons of such uncertainty and its effects on individuals. Others only deal with the entropic nature of the postmodern world and the psychological problems within the protagonist. This study, therefore, attempts to identify the causes of uncertainty and then explores its destructive consequences on the individual's identity through Pynchon's novel.

This work aims at exploring the concept of truth in postmodern world through the study of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, stressing its inaccessibility. It also seeks to identify the causes of the entropy and disorder that characterize the postmodern age. Finally, it attempts to analyze the effects of uncertainty, entropy, and disorder on the self and mind of Pynchon's protagonist.

This dissertation seeks to answer three major questions. Firstly, to what extent is truth attainable in the postmodern age? Secondly, what are the causes of entropy and disorder in Pynchon's *The Crying of lot 49* ? Thirdly, how do entropy, uncertainty, and absence of meaning cause problems in identity and eventually lead to paranoia and schizophrenia ?

Two methods are used in this study. First, the descriptive method was employed to give definitions and narrate the happenings of the novel. The same method is used also to

depict and portray the conditions that surround the protagonist's world to give an overall image of the setting of the novel being studied. Second, the analytical method is used in order to investigate the relationship between the key concepts, such as truth and identity and their significance in Pynchon's novel.

This dissertation builds upon several theories of postmodernism: Jean Baudrillard's theory of Simulacra and Simulation, the pragmatic theory of truth, and Erik Erikson's theory of identity development. Baudrillard sees the postmodern world as a place where it is hard to differentiate between the images that we see and their representations. He argues that the great amount of images, or what he calls 'Simulacra', masks reality and hinder the process of acquiring it. The pragmatic theory of truth focuses on the subjectivity and fluidity of truth; accordingly, what can be considered as truth is only what can be used effectively. Thus, truth shifts from one person to another. lastly, Erikson's theory stresses the fluid and subjective nature of identity.

This work is divided into three chapters. The first one begins with a discussion of the concepts of truth and identity. It then accounts for the main theories that this study utilizes. Truth and identity are discussed with reference to the postmodern world where the perception of both is different from the perceptions of previous periods in history. This chapter also sheds light on the distrust in the function of language in the postmodern fiction as manifested in Pynchon's novel and explores how this disruption in language leads to problems in understanding.

The second chapter explores the concept of truth in the general context of postmodernism, and then in Pynchon's novel. It deals with the concept of quest for truth in postmodernism, and shows how it is different from similar previous quests. It also examines the prevailing entropy and disorder and their causes. The chapter then explores

the obstacles that hinder the process of acquiring the truth, while also tackling the absence of communication and the huge number of signs that complicate Oedipa's investigation for the ultimate truth. The chapter concludes by pointing out the difference between the role of the detective in both detective, and anti-detective fiction through Pynchon's novel .

The third and final chapter deals with the concept of identity. It starts by showing the destructive effects of uncertainty and epistemological bewilderment on the identity and psyche of characters, especially Oedipa. It shows how the protagonist's inability of reaching the truth that she seeks eventually causes her to feel paranoid as she could not differentiate between reality and fantasy. The chapter reveals how this absence of truth will develop into a state of schizophrenia. Eventually, she questions her own sanity and suspects she is a victim of a conspiracy meant to keep her in a vicious cycle leading to nowhere.

Chapter one

The Postmodern Perception of Truth and Identity

Introduction

The two concepts of truth and identity have sparked a great debate among critics and writers, especially with reference to postmodernism, which is seen as a break and a reaction to all conventions in the world. In this chapter, the two concepts will be discussed with reference to postmodernism, and based on some theories of both truth and identity. These theories include Jean Baudrillard views regarding the absence of meaning in the postmodern age through his theory of *Simulacra and Similation*. In addition to Baudrillard's theory, other arguments regarding truth will be discussed in this chapter such as, the pragmatic theory. Besides truth, identity will be reviewed by discussing Erik Erikson viewpoints about its nature in the postmodern world. In addition to theories of truth and identity, this chapter will shed light on role of language in holding and conveying meaning. The study of the above mentioned concepts (truth, identity, language) will be examined with a subtle reference to Pynchon novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* and its protagonist, Oedipa Mass.

1.1 Towards a Postmodern Thinking

Postmodernism is one of the most controversial and ambiguous terms in the history. Thus, There is no precise time of its use however this term has appeared with *Federico de Onís*, a Spanish critic and writer, in his "*Antologia de la poesia espanola e hispanoamericana*"(Hassan, 1981,p. 31). It was argued that such cultural and literary terms as *Modernism* and *Postmodernism* did not start in the United States or England, but were manifested in Hispanic writings (Anderson, 1998, p. 4). Then that terms were more widely used in many fields at the second half of the twentieth

century, mainly to refer to a reaction to modernism that was gradually being doubted and dismissed .

There has been an essential question about this new movement in the world and about its inclusiveness. Hassan introduced the argument about the impact of postmodernism movement on different fields, more than being just a literary movement in his work *The Question of Postmodernism*,(1981). He asked “Is postmodernism only a literary tendency or is also a cultural phenomenon”(p.33) .He went on answering this question as he sees this term “postmodern” as being more and more used in multiple fields such as music, literature, art ...(Ibid, p. 31). So, according to him postmodernism is a vast term that embraces a new principles and ideas in different disciplines including. It is a new way of perceiving to the world; it was marked by a break from the modernist tendencies. According to many writers and critics, the term postmodern alludes to a shift from the modern conventions of unity , coherence , reason , and other principles that were celebrated by modern thinkers. This vital shift was not only superficial , but also in beliefs ; thus it was a radical transformation from believing in reason and logic to a whole world of thorough chaos.

This shift in the way of thinking is characterized by skeptic tendencies towards life in general and especially about the possibility of making sense of the world. For Lyotard, postmodernism is “incredulity towards metanarratives¹” (Lyotard,1984,Introduction); When people dismiss those narratives, they no longer have any unifying beliefs that could bind them together. Lyotard notes that theses narrative are no longer useful in

¹ Metanarratives , according to the Oxford Dictionary, is An overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people’s beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences :traditional religions provide stories that deliver a metanarrative about how we should live our lives.

facilitating life and conveying knowledge; thus, the postmodern age is characterized by absence of meaning in the world (Ibid, p. 26). Best and Kellner hold similar views to Lyotard's. They do not believe in a fixed truth in the world; rather they believe in its multiplicity and stress the importance of every individual's perception in acquiring it (Best, Kellner, 1997, p. 28).

1.2 Simulacra and Absence of the Real

In addition to Lyotard's views about the rejection of the grand narratives in the postmodern age, there is another interesting description of the postmodern world by Jean Baudrillard. He had an influential argument about the absence of a single reality in a world that is full of images and representations that prevent people from reaching to the reality of things. In his work *Simulacra and Simulations* (1983), Baudrillard introduced his theory of the representation of images. He argued that in the postmodern world where people are bombarded with a huge amount of advertisements and images of various objects, it is hard, or rather impossible, to differentiate between what is real and what is not. He sees that "the simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth - it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (1983, p. 2). According to Baudrillard, there is no truth in the postmodern world and what is seen are just mere images or simulacra. The only truth out there in the world according to Baudrillard's is that there is no absolute truth which can work as unifying concept that bounds people together. The images or as he put it simulacra mask the reality and hinder any attempts to reaching it. The images we see can be tricky in a way that they hold no real meaning. Baudrillard's accounts for three historical stages of the development of simulacra (qtd. in Hegarty, 2004, p. 50):

1. The first one is related to the premodern world. This stage of simulacra starts with the premodern era where images or the representations are a pure synthetic imitation of the real. Here there is no authentic relationship between the image and the real.
2. Modern world (mass media): this second stage parallels with modernism. Because of the immense representations and mass production, the barriers between the real and image demolish. The representation is an exact copy of the real object, which makes it hard to differentiate between reality and its correspondent images mainly due to extensive advertisements and mass production in the modern age.
3. Postmodern world (absence of reality): this third stage is linked to the postmodern world. The representation here is even more common than reality, in other words; we see artificial images of objects rather than the objects themselves. For Baudrillard, in this era of simulacrum, there is no such reality or truth. The real is inaccessible because it does not even exist (Ibid).

The third and final stage of the development of simulacra or the representation of images, is manifested in postmodern works by writers like Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo¹, and Paul Auster². Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is an example of the absence of the real in the world. The world in Pynchon's novel was full of signs and representations that the protagonist was trying to make sense of. Pynchon's protagonist Oedipa had to go on a journey to unravel the mysteries that surrounded her, despite of the hardships that she faced along her way.

¹ A prominent postmodern American essayist and novelist. His famous novel *White Noise* (1985) is considered as a major postmodern work.

² Born in 1947, Auster is a famous American novelist and writer. He is notable for his mysterious works such as *City of Glass* (1985) in which the protagonist plays the role of a detective.

The rejection of such unifying beliefs is a distinctive mark of postmodern writers , where they tend to celebrate the absence of meaning and coherence in the world. The world as described in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* seemed vague and meaningless. Steven Connor accounts for Baudrillard's views about such postmodern age, by saying that "We live in an age, says Baudrillard, in which signs are no longer required to have any verifiable contact with the world they allegedly represent" (Connor,1990, p. 55).

Baudrillard sees that in the postmodern world a huge number of copies of images prevail , which prevents us from accessing to the real world . what we see are copies of copies that are being continuously generated and they ultimately deliver any reality but rather they mask it which leads to uncertainty and illusion . This absence of reality is for Baudrillard where the simulacrum takes over , leaving no space to pure reality . Adam Roberts described Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum which is related to the postmodern world by saying:

Baudrillard, another critic to emerge from the Marxist tradition, argues that Western capitalism has moved from being based on the production of things to the production of images of things, of copies of 'simulacra'. Today we live in a world where the difference between 'real life' and 'simulated life' (or 'simulacrum') has degraded to a point where it becomes hard to tell one from the other
(2007. p. 127)

Baudrillard differentiated between certain types or stages of simulacra, he argued that the signs or representations go through four stages before reaching the last stage. In The first stage the image or the representation is the reflection of reality , the simulacrum

gives a true meaning of what it represents. The second stage the image tends to prevent us from reaching the reality that it supposedly represents and the image masks rather than reflect reality. The third stage which is related to the modern world , the image masks the reality, in this stage people believe in the presence of an absolute truth but are unable to reach it because it is being masked by certain images. Baudrillard's fourth and final stage of the development of the simulacrum is related to the postmodern age where the images and the representations that prevail in the world hold no real relationship to the real world. In this stage the world is full of simulacra that instead of representing or revealing a certain reality (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 5). So, according to Baudrillard, in the postmodern world truth is being masked rather than conveyed by whatever means (Ibid).

Linda Hutcheon illustrated the stages that Baudrillard suggested regarding the absence of truth in the postmodern world. She ascribes the absence of truth to media which tend to mask reality and then mask even "the absence of reality", (Hutcheon,2005 ,p. 223).

Similar to Baudrillard views about the absence of reality, Lyotard blames the roles of technological advances and information age in the changing of the postmodern age. For him, the huge amount information that characterize the contemporary world contribute to the masking of the real by that abundance of representations and images. For Lyotard , the post-industrial world of postmodernity is a manifestation of the absence of meaning, yet this absence according to him is due the neglecting of the globalism and universality which he calls the grand narratives by postmodernists. These narratives are replaced by individualism and subjectivity in the world where the notion of truth becomes subjected to each person's perspective rather than being an inclusive concept that bounds people together (Qtd. in Featherstone, 2007, p.3). Lyotard's attitudes towards

the notion of truth and its multiplicity, is similar to Baudrillard's views. Baudrillard too, sees the world as a constructed by multiple narratives or images that are supposed to represent the reality, but unfortunately this is not always true, as these images or representations tend to be elusive and hinder rather than convey their messages.

1.3 Theories of Truth

Truth has been a very contentious subject among critics and thinkers, and in an attempt to explain it, various theories have been put forward. The oldest of these theories is correspondence theory. In this theory, truth is viewed as being related or dependent on the outer world. Advocates of this theory believe in the relationship between what they call truth bearer and its significance. Simply put, "a proposition is true just in case it corresponds to facts or the world" (Schmitt, 1995, p.145). According to this theory, what makes a statement true or false is whether or not it relates to the actual world.

Another theory is coherence theory which links truth to a set of beliefs and principles of signifiers and signified. This theory differs from the previous one in its focus on the established norms and beliefs of a given community. According to Schmitt (1995), in coherence theory of truth, "a true proposition is one that belongs to some designated coherent set of propositions." (Ibid, p. 103). Proponents of this theory see truth as a system of signifiers and signified. Therefore, truth is reached through an established system of words and their connotations (signifiers and signified). Both correspondence and coherence theories seem to believe in the objectivity of truth; however, there have been other views of truth that differed from the above mentioned ones.

1.4 Pragmatic Theory (subjective view of truth)

Yet another theory trying to explain truth is the Pragmatic theory. Unlike the aforementioned theories, this theory does not see truth as objective but as a property of every individual rather than being a shared entity. In addition to the belief in the subjectivity of truth, the pragmatic theory focuses on the usefulness of any proposition as a determiner of its truthfulness. According to William James, truth is not static but fluid; moreover, it is relative and ever-changing. For him, therefore, "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons." (Qtd. in Castell, 1959, p.155). In other words, any statement is true only if it is functional and can be used to reach a meaningful and useful result. Similar to James, Nietzsche believed that what is good and bad depends on each person's perception, thereby stressing the relativity of truthfulness and falsehood in the world (Nietzsche, Qtd. in UYL, Anthony, 2017, p. 19).

This theory of truth can be seen from a postmodern perspective, particularly in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, where the protagonist Oedipa is pointed as the executrix of her friend's will. When she embarks on her journey, Oedipa tries to reach meaningful revelations about her deceased friend to fulfill her mission. According to pragmatic theory, the propositions, or clues in Oedipa's case, are true if only they are workable. The protagonist is faced with difficulties in her quest which stem from her inability to put the clues she finds to work. Oedipa's incapability to effectively use the data that she collects hinders the process of her understanding of the world around her.

1.5 The Perception of Truth and Postmodernity

The postmodern age was characterized by a break from the previously established norms in society including in all fields, social, cultural, and aesthetic. The changes in people's beliefs and their new ways of looking to the world around them were revolutionary. Most writers in the world after the second world war had one thing in common which is a "deep mistrust of modernist aesthetics" (Bertens, 2005, p. 31). This mistrust in the established doctrines paved the way for postmodern writers such as Thomas Pynchon to experiment with their writings to express their concerns of the postmodern era. People living in this age questioned the validity of their beliefs and principles such as the notion of truth in the world. The belief in an absolute truth and the existence of a fixed reality of things were dismissed; postmodernists rejected the belief in an objective truth in the world. According to them, "truth is a matter of perspective or context rather than being something universal" (Stokes, p. 369).

Theorists argue that the contemporary world which is characterized by continuous changes in society required new ways of thinking as well as writing. Thus, the postmodern believes of neglecting the modern conventions were a reaction to the change in people's lives. It is a new formation of the human mind as people started to doubt the previously established order, and tried to come up with their own way of thinking, writing, and interpreting the world (Best, Kellner 1991, p. 3).

Truth in the postmodern age is regarded as a relative and not fixed. They relate it to each individual's own perception and own interpretation rather than being global. This belief in the relativity and multiplicity of truth is what makes it elusive. Best and Kellner see the postmodern age as a break from the belief in a true and authentic representation between theory and reality. Thus, They emphasize the multiplicity and relativity of

reality in the world. According to them the truth is not over there in the world for people to get, but rather it is a matter of perspective as each individual has their own way and version of it(Ibid, p. 4).

Before Baudrillard and Lyotard, Fredric Jameson had expressed his arguments regarding the concept of truth. His views on the postmodern age are somewhat similar to his counterparts in regarding the contemporary world as a shift from the conventions and aesthetics of modern culture. Jameson sees postmodernism as “a stage in the development of capitalist society”(Best, Kellner,1991, p. 186), a stage that is marked by the distrust in the previously predominant beliefs such as the universality of truth. The scepticism towards these beliefs paved the way for an establishment of a new world order that is characterised by the loss of meaning. The absence of a universal truth is due to the postmodern disbelief in any foundation that can give sense and coherence to the world.

Jameson’s views about postmodernism has many similarities with that of theorists before him like Baudrillard and Lyotard. He perceives the postmodern age a time that is marked by “a number of cultural shifts”(Best, Kellner, 1991, p. 184) in all fields including the art , literature, architecture. These shifts in people’s lives and especially in their view towards the notion of truth and its elusiveness along with the sense of skepticism towards the metanarratives as stated by Lyotard (1991), are the essential manifestations of the postmodern culture.

Many Postmodern thinkers stress the relativity in people’s understanding of the world. According to Paul Copan, Postmodern theorists emphasize the multiplicity of perspectives regarding the world around them. They exclude any unifying principles or norms that might help in reaching the truth , furthermore they even distrust any belief in its universality (Copan, n.d). Similar to Copan’s views , Jameson also believes in the

breakdown of the inclusivity of the conventions of rationality and coherence. They both focus on the subjectivity and multiplicity of truth.

Best and Kellner (1991) illustrated the interconnections among Jameson's views regarding the postmodern culture and other theorists such as Michel Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard and others :

like Foucault, Jameson attempts to resist presentism and to recover the historical past; like Deleuze and Guattari, he analyzes the schizophrenic breakdown of the subject and the colonization of the unconscious by capitalism; like Baudrillard he holds that postmodernism is a culture of images and simulacra that projects a vast hyperreality; and like Baudrillard and Lyotard, he emphasizes the fragmentary character of post- modern culture (p. 184) .

It can be argued that Jameson's arguments about the postmodern culture share some understandings with several other theorists. His views are similar to Foucault's in that he sees the postmodern world as a rupture in world history rather than a continuation from modern times, his views are similar also to Deleuze and Guattari in the way they regard the destroying effects of capitalism on individuals, as he sees the age of postmodernism as a late stage of capitalism in society where people are being controlled by higher authorities that influence their lives at many levels. Concerning the relationship between Jameson and Baudrillard's views they both see the postmodern age as world that is saturated by images, or as Baudrillard put it *Simulacra*, these images hold no truthful representations to the reality of the world, rather they mask the truth which makes it almost impossible to reach for a single, absolute reality. Lyotard's arguments have also a lot in common with Jameson's as they both mistrust the universality and integrality of

the postmodern culture; they emphasize the individuality and subjectivity in the world via their distrust in the grand narratives(Ibid).

The shift in the ways of interpreting the world in the postmodern age allowed for a different writings which expressed that change in thought and beliefs. Postmodernist fiction, according to McHale, shifted in its subject matter moving from epistemological questions into ontological ones (2004, p. xii). Thus the goal in postmodern fiction as in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* shifted from the desire to find the truth in the world by the protagonist Oedipa , to the desire to know her place in the world as she struggles to find her own identity.

McHale continues to assert the relationship between epistemological and ontological questions. He notes, "A philosopher might object that we cannot raise epistemological questions without immediately raising ontological questions, and vice versa, and of course he or she would be right" (Ibid, p. 11). As stated by McHale, in the postmodern world the questions raised shifted from the desire to know more to the desire to locate one's role and place in the world . We can apply this relationship between the epistemological and ontological questions in Oedipa's quest as she started her journey in a desire to know more about the world that surrounds her via executing her deceased friend's will. in order to do that she had to follow the clues and ask different people that she encounters throughout her way. As the novel progresses Oedipa's interest shifted into questions of being, or as McHale put it, ontological questions which are exemplified in her desire to figure out whether or not those secret organization known as the Tristero exist or not . Eventually, Oedipa's epistemological and ontological questions caused developed into disorders with her own identity as she struggles to identify herself within the world where she wanders.

Baudrillard and Lyotard see the postmodern culture as being different from various angles, but they both emphasize the significance of the notion of reality in postmodern society. From the one hand Lyotard seems to be interested more in his mistrust of the grand narratives and the rationality in the postmodern era. Baudrillard from the other hand focuses more on the idea of representation as he came up with his theory of *simulacra* and *simulation* in which he argues that there is no definite representation and reality. But there are just mere images that represent other images which indicates the absence of an absolute truth (Best, Kellner, 1991, 281).

It can be said that both Baudrillard and Lyotard gave much significance to the notion of truth in the world. Whether via the neglect of the belief in the grand narratives that people used to believe in as a way of making sense of the world as Lyotard argued, or by the distrust in the authenticity of the representation of images or simulacra as suggested by Baudrillard.

Postmodern theorists believe in the elusiveness of knowledge as a merit of their age. Baudrillard, Lyotard and other thinkers see the postmodern world as an age characterised by the absence of an objective knowledge that can be reached via logical reasoning. “there are fundamental obstacles to human knowing” (Elias, 2003, p. 294). These obstacles, according to Elias, hinder the process of obtaining the truth in the world. We can take the example of Oedipa in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, where she struggles to understand the events around her as she tries to follow the clues in order to make sense of the world. Oedipa’s constant attempts to make further progress in her quest are faced with the nature of the world as she was not supported by people whom she asked for help, but rather every one around her seemed to make her mission even more complicated as they provided her with nothing that could facilitate her journey. Every person Oedipa “meets is viewed as a potential information source” (Copestake, 2003, p.

25). But her inability to make a meaningful conversation with them and their resistance to provide her with any revelations prevents Oedipa from extracting useful information from the people she met.

Oedipa's search for meaning required her to follow the data that she collects in order to make sense of the world. However, this mission is not as linear as it looks because the signs that she encounters like the muted post horn did not seem to lead her anywhere but to other signs. Oedipa's continuous encounter with signs hinders her quest for meaning as they put her in a cycle of repetitive signs that lead to nowhere. The idea of the absence of meaning and truth can be seen clearly in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* with its protagonist Oedipa. For instance, she has encountered many signs and symbols which she could not make sense of, and she struggled to reach the truth about everything she saw around her. But, her world, as noted above, seems full of mere images that hold no meaning.

1.6 The Confusion Between Reality and Fiction in Pynchon's Writings

Thomas Pynchon is regarded as one of the pioneers writers of postmodernism; he is known for his inclination to employ fields into his writings. His major works including *V* (1963), *The Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) *Mason & Dixon* (1997) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), ably show his capacities as a postmodernist. Martin Paul Eve (2014) believes that "The writings of Thomas Pynchon have spawned more critical commentary than almost any other American author of the last fifty years" (Eve, 2014, p. 1). Pynchon's novels dealt with diverse topics, and are known for their mystery due to his mixing of genres and to the overlapping events that are not readily deciphered. As writers of fiction do, Pynchon's works mirror society and present it from different dimensions.

example, society is portrayed as a place where people urge to locate themselves and make sense of world around them. Compared to any other writer, Pynchon seems to rely heavily on diversity in his use of various fields in his writings including pop culture, philosophy, and science. He has a talent of mixing different genres into a one literary work to give a complete image of society that he is addressing; however, this mixing of various disciplines participates to the ambiguity of his works.

The works of Pynchon reflected the conditions of the postwar world conditions that were full of distrust and disillusionment towards life. It was marked also by the rise of notion of conspiracy theory where people feel as if they are been monitored by higher authorities, and thus suspect that their life is being controlled and they have no freedom of choice (Apter, 2005, p. 368). These feelings of conspiracy and delusion is evident with Pynchon's protagonist Oedipa where she feels paranoid. She eventually distrusts everyone around her because of the lack of meaning in her life. Oedipa is also is disillusioned due to other people's withdrawal from her life.

Pynchon's reliance on diverse disciplines in his writing like science and history can sometimes confuse the reader when distinguishing between reality and fiction. For example in his novel *The Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon mentioned some historical facts about World War II as he mentioned the missiles and bombings that took place during that war. This process of referring to the actual world in literary works is a feature of postmodernist novels and especially in Pynchon's fiction as Richard Poirier confirms that in the works of Thomas Pynchon we are put into a world of fiction that is always corresponding to the "real one" (1975, p. 156). According to Bran Nicol Pynchon has a special capacity for employing real events into his fiction. He tends to depend on various disciplines in his writings, for instances the use of science, politics, and other fields in order to vary between the ways of transmitting messages via his works (2009 ,

p.91). *The Crying of Lot 49* is an example of Pynchon's utilization of science, history, and psychiatry. The use of various domains in writing is evident in many of his writings, this tendency of blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction is one of the features of Pynchon as one of the pioneers of postmodernism.

The interrelation between reality and fiction is evident in Pynchon's works such as *The Crying of Lot 49*. The protagonist Oedipa is faced with a continuous dilemma in her attempts to decipher the events that happen around her. In her mission as an executrix of her friend Pierce's will she longs for revelations that could facilitate her journey and help her make sense of the world in which she wanders. There are many noticeable incidents that show the confusion of fictitious and real events in Pynchon's *The Crying of lot 49*. For example, the use of names like Pierce Inverarity who is Oedipa's deceased friend who owns a huge collection of stamps and whose will is going to be executed by her, his name might refer to Pierce, a real-life stamp collector(Ibid).

Another reference to the use of events that refer to real facts in Pynchon's novel is the Maxwell's Demon machine. It was operated by an engineer, named John Nefastis, who believes that he has experimented and made a machine that can violate the second law of thermodynamics¹. This same experiment has been done by a real man, a physicist named James Clerk Maxwell. It appeared first in his book *Theory of Heat* (1871). When Oedipa met with Nefastis she was curious and eager to know how the machine is run but. He told her that it can only be run by people who have certain abilities and that she must be the sensitive in order to be able to operate it, Oedipa Then wondered "Would I make a good sensitive, do think?" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 26) . Oedipa sees the picture of Clerk Maxwell on Nefastis's machine and wonders about the relationship between the two men. Pynchon has mentioned also in his novel a real postal organization, that is Thurn and

¹ In physics, its third law (of thermodynamics) states that the world is moving into an inevitable state of chaos and disorder(all about science, n.d).

Taxis¹. Oedipa suspected that the tristero organization she is uncovering which was represented by a muted post horn is somehow similar to the Thurn and Taxis monopoly. Bloom affirms that Pynchon's reference to real events and issues in his writings, "blends authentic history with novelistic fantasy" (Bloom, 2003, 18).

The confusion that prevail in Oedipa's journey is a typical example of the absence of truth in the postmodern age. For Steven Connor, the mysterious events that surround the protagonist Oedipa and her inability to differentiate between reality and fiction is similar to what could happen to any person in the contemporary world. Where the lines between fact and fiction are being blurred. That puts people in a state of confusion and adds to their sense of disillusionment (Best, Connor, 2012, p. 171) .Pynchon's characters are not communicating with one another , they seem discontent with their own lives, for example Metzger ,who is supposed to be Oedipa's co-executrix did not help her with her search and seemed to try to seduce her rather than facilitate her mission, and eventually he abandons her as he left with a teen girl.

Oedipa's Psychiatrist, Dr Hilarius, was also supposed to monitor her behaviour and help her with any mental problems, however she started to distrust him and refused to take the pills that he provided her with. Hilarius himself appeared to be suffering from psychological disorders and had committed suicide. These interwoven incidents around Oedipa and the other characters's withdrawal from her life indicates that these people around her are themselves as lost as her . They are attempting to find their own place in the world ; they are themselves trying to " discern what is going on around them " (Nicol, 2009, p. 92) .

The reader of Pynchon's novels as Nicol stated is faced with a difficulty in following the sequence of events. This problem as he confirms is due to " The absence of

¹ A real German postal monopoly that operated in Europe in the 16th century.

a reliable external perspective ” (Ibid). The reader is unable to follow the stream of the narrative because of the multiplicity of voices who tell the story from different perspectives, these characters who Pynchon depends on in narrating the events are themselves suffering and are trying to make sense of the world . It is the absence of a reliable narrator that makes Pynchon’s works “ extraordinarily difficult to follow at the basic level of plot ” (Nicol, 2009, p. 92).

Most of Pynchon’s novels are share the notion of quest in their form and meaning. This quest form is manifested on two levels, one is on the basis of the narrative itself where the reader is introduced to a form of quest wherein the plot moves from a questions to attempts to answer these questions by the questing protagonist. The second level of the manifestation of quest is on sphere of the reader who has to figure out the events of the novel and plays a similar role to that of the protagonist(Ibid).

1.7 Fluidity of Identity

As mentioned above, the characters in postmodern fiction, focus on the characters’s search for their identity in the process of making sense of the world. To start with, we start by defining the term identity in general and then in a postmodern context. According to the Oxford dictionary, in its simplest form, identity is defined as “The fact of being who or what a person or thing is.” It is the individual’s inner feelings of consistency and belonging. These feelings give individuals a sense of harmony and keep a consistent connection among them in a given society. Eric Erikson stresses the subjectivity of identity; he calls for the individual's distinctive identity that stems from his/her own self. Erikson’s views regarding identity focus on the two subjective feelings of sameness and continuity (Erikson, 1970). When these two feelings (sameness and

continuity) are being challenged or disturbed, then there will be a problem within the identity of the individual.

One of the traits of postmodern perception of identity is that it is seen as fluid; it changes according to the circumstances surrounding the individual. The individual's self is marked by its constant alteration through time. According to Stuart Hall, it can be argued that identity in postmodern thinking is not permanent or fixed, but is characterized by various traits; thus, it becomes like a "moveable feast" (2011, p. 598). Hall and other postmodern theorists don't believe in a fixed identity of a single individual; for them, a single and unified identity is a "fantasy" (Ibid).

Some thinkers ascribe this constant change in the identity of the individual to his/her interaction with the outer world. Identity is seen as product of certain circumstances that surround people's lives. Hall asserts that the individual can grasp his/her identity only if his/her identity is compared to other people. That is to say, one must know his/her place and role in the world in order to fully grasp their identity (Ibid, p.4). Since it is every individual's duty, as Hall argued, to find a role in society for realizing their identity, when an individual fails to locate his/her self in a certain society there will be a problem or disorder in the identity of the individual.

1.8 Identity Disorder

The nature of the postmodern identity, which is characterized by its alteration from one state to another, can cause problems within the individual's self. The identity disorder happens when the individual is faced with various identities that could shape his/her self, but he/she is not certain about what to embrace as the real identity. As Mecer

confirms, it is the uncertainty that overlaps the individual's self which causes the "crisis" in identity; this crisis is due to the unstable and unfixed nature of identity itself (Mercer, 1990, p. 43).

The change in the identity poses a challenge to Erikson views mentioned before that focus on the principles of sameness and continuity of the individual's identity. When these two principles are being disturbed by external factors, the individual will be faced with uncertainty about his role in society. The uncertainty that overlaps as a result of the disruption within the individual will lead to crisis or disorder in the identity.

In postmodern fiction, characters are typically put in a quest to find their place in the world. For example, in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, the protagonist found out that she was appointed as the executrix of her deceased friend's will. She was ready to embark on her journey to fulfill this mission. This mission required her to move from one place to another in search of new information that could facilitate her task; she attempted to gather clues from the different locations that she visited and from the people that she met. Her attempts to find meaning would not only bring her closer to executing the will, but also to realizing her role in society. Should she be able to maintain a consistent identity throughout her quest, she would probably succeed in her mission; however, if she fails to maintain that identity, she would inevitably suffer from disorders.

1.10 The Instability of Language Function and Reality

In addition to the identity disorder, postmodernists seem to stress the dysfunctionality of language as a cause for truth and identity problems. Language is not believed to facilitate the process of acquiring information or reaching to revelations. In contrast to structuralism, which sees language as a whole system of communication that

allows for the understanding of the world, poststructuralism, which is used interchangeably with postmodernism, doubts the functionality of such a system. Structuralism is associated with Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and his views about the wholeness of language as a system that all people have in common, this system is composed of signifiers and signifieds. The signifiers are the words and the signifieds are the meanings or the connotations that are represented by those words. According to structuralists, the relationship between the word and the meaning that it holds is fixed, thus each signifier has one single signified.

De Saussure sees language as a system of signs, and each sign has two parts like a coin with two faces, one is the spoken or written form which he calls the signifier and the other part is the indication or the meaning of that sign (Selden, 1989, p. 63). This system of signs according to De Saussure and structuralists represent reality and enables people to establish a mode communication among them. Besides, it gives sense and significance to the world.

Poststructuralists tend to dismiss the trust in language as a tool that gives meaning to the world. Like postmodernist thinkers they distrust the language's capability of holding stable signs that people use to communicate. They reject "the empirical idea that language can represent reality" (Bertens, 2005, p. 6). Their distrust in fixed representation of language stems from the belief that language builds rather than only represents meaning which allows for the changing on the level of the representation, thus a single signifier might have more than one signified, for this reason language misrepresents rather than reflects meaning (Ibid). Hoffman defines postmodern fiction as a "self-reflexive art-form, with a keen suspicion of the referential function of language and therefore without any stable relationship to external reality or previously accepted codes of production." (2005, p. 25). from this definition we can see the postmodern

writers's doubts about the referentiality of language, language is no longer seen as way of representation of reality that is composed of certain signifiers which in turn allude to fixed signifieds. Language in postmodern fiction hinders rather than reflects meaning. The relationship between the signifiers and their meanings in the postmodern fiction is not fixed which complicates the process of making sense of the world. It was believed that the nature of language in postmodern fiction changes dramatically, and language also was regarded as as a dynamic means of representation; that supposedly establishes communication between people, and help them give meaning to the world. However the dynamic nature of the language "disrupts" rather than reflect the world (qtd. in Selden, 1989, p. 40).

The disbelief in the stability of language and its capability of holding meaning is shared by a number of critics. Hans Bertens holds a similar view about the functionality of language in postmodern thinking as he suggests, "not everybody subscribes to the view that language constitutes, rather than represents, reality; that the autonomous and stable subject of modernity has been replaced by a postmodern agent whose identity is largely other-determined and always in process" (2005, p.9). Bertens assertion that language constitutes rather than reflects or represents reality shows the scepticism of postmodern thinkers, who stress the deficiency of language and its incapability of providing people with fixed and stable meanings, due to dynamicity of those meanings that are not ruled by the system of language.

We can find an example of the instability of language and texts in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. When Oedipa went to see *The Courier's Tragedy*¹ which she believes it has something to do with the Trystero organization. As soon as the play began, Oedipa noticed a difference in the acting of the play from its text, and she wanted to verify the

¹ A fictional play that Oedipa goes to see with her co-executor, Metzger. She went to see it when she heard that the word trystero is mentioned by one of the characters in the play.

actual text from the play's producer Driblette because she heard the word trystero during the play. But that word was not mentioned in the text that she found with the play's producer. As Lang stated " Oedipa tries futilely to locate a version of the text which will verify her suspicions about the operations of the Trystero network " (qtd .Copestake, 2003, p. 30). She is eager to find a concrete connection between the play and the trystero through trying to find the actual text of play, but the multiple versions of the same play confused her as she could not decide which one is the right text.

The play's producer provides the readers with a hint about Oedipa's inability to locate a single text of the play. Everything around the protagonist hinders her from reaching any revelation in her search , for example the bookstore which was burned down and producer who disappeared to the version of the play that Oedipa learns that it was locked away in the Vatican Library. All that events made the protagonist journey harder and kept her both her and the reader in a state of bewilderment towards the whole story (Ibid).

Conclusion

There has been various viewpoints regarding the concepts of truth and identity in the postmodern age; From a postmodern perspective, truth is believed to be fluid and subjective. Some theorists went even further like Baudrillard who argued that truth is not attainable due to the prevalence of what he calls Simulacra which masks reality. The belief in the multiplicity of truth is also approved by the pragmatic theory that calls for the subjectivity of truth; what is true ,according to this theory, is whatever can be used practically and usefully. In Pynchon's novel, the protagonist Oedipa, is constantly faced with multiple choices, and sometimes is puzzled, due to her inability to find a fixed truth. Identity is another important concept in this chapter; it was discussed based on Erikson

standpoints. He emphasizes its instability and fluidity; the individual's is believed to be altered by his/her outside world. This shifts in the identity will lead to disorders if the individual is not able to locate his/herself in the world. This was Oedipa's case where she was eager to find her role by executing her friend's will, but she was disillusioned because of the multiplicity of possibilities around her. The fluidity of both truth and identity in the postmodern age are believed to be the causes of the individual's sufferance.

Chapter Two

Oedipa's Quest for the Elusive Truth

Introduction

The postmodern age is regarded as an age of complete uncertainty and disorder that kept people wondering about their ability to make sense of it. This idea will be explored in this chapter, discussing in the process several important concepts such as quest, entropy and communication and their manifestations in Pynchon's novel, particularly through the journey of the protagonist Oedipa. The chapter represents a discussion of the quest undertaken by Oedipa and the lack of coherence and meaning characteristic of the postmodern view of life. Specifically, the chapter examines the uncertainty that engulfs Oedipa's world and her desperate attempts to arrive at meaningful conclusions about the events she goes through and the characters she meets.

2.1 Oedipa's Quest for Meaning

In reality, the concept of quest could not be precisely defined, for it takes different connotations; in literature it is seen as a kind of action towards the discovery of something or fact related to an individual. This thing or fact is covered, ignored and most of the time denied such as meaning, identity, self-identity, to mention just a few. This state of fact requires eventually a re/definition and/or clarification with reference to reality. In literature, it is seen as the individual's/ character's process of seeking truth related to his very existence as a human being. The truth and realities which are occulted. The Literary character, in some literary works appears as a detective owing to his very curious nagging questioning actions for truth. This process of detection makes the detective-like literary character move constantly from one place to another, In Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, the character Oedipa's quest for meaning behind the events requires her to move through different locations following the clues (Shiloh, 2002, p. 1). It is the protagonist who undertakes the mission of quest as she is put in a continuous state

of movement in order to gather clues that could lead to her destination, and ultimately achieve her goal of making sense of the events that happen around her in order to find the truth she is eager to find.

Oedipa, the heroine of the story, works as a detective who embarks on a mission to execute her friend Pierce Inverarity's will. Throughout her journey, she meets up with people whom she asks for help to accomplish her mission successfully. One of the characters she meets early in the novel is a lawyer called Metzger who signed the will of her friend Pierce. Metzger is supposed to help her in executing her deceased friend's will. As soon as Oedipa knew that she was appointed by Pierce to execute his will, she decided to go through the journey to execute the will although she seemed to have neither the tools nor the qualifications to perform that mission. She had "no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 12). Nevertheless, nothing stopped her from taking the risks to delve into an adventure in order to fulfil the task and find the truth about her dead friend.

Oedipa's life, before she sets about her quest, was mundane and routine. The execution of Pierce's will is some kind of an escape from routine day to day life, as well as from the lack of a real family affiliation. In the first pages of the book, the reader is introduced to Oedipa's daily life:

into the mixing of the twilight's whiskey sours against the arrival of her husband, Wendell ("Mucho") Maas from work, she wondered, wondered, shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed... more or less identical, or all pointing the same way subtly like a conjurer's deck, any odd one readily clear to a trained eye (1966, p. 1)

One of the reasons that encouraged Oedipa to undertake that mission of discovery could be the desire to change the routine and sameness in her days by going into something different and new. Her journey was not as easy and simple as she might have thought; rather from the first steps in her new experience, she started to find difficulty in understanding what was happening around her. Oedipa's role as a detective was made even harder by the events that happened to her. When she started her journey, she met with several people and came across some symbols which she was not able to sort out. The more she progresses with her mission, the more complicated things become. In Pynchon's novel, Bloom states that "the more we learn the more mysterious everything becomes. The more we think we know, the less we know we know" (2003, p. 42). As the happenings of the novel go on, the protagonist tries to collect clues that lead to the reality of her mysterious friend. Yet things are getting more complicated for her because she feels as if she were learning nothing new. The clues Oedipa gathers do not seem to lead anywhere nor provide any single meaning; on the contrary, they seem to blur and complicate things around her. Randolph Driblette, the director of a play that Oedipa goes to see with Metzger, confirms that whatever clues and information she succeeds to collect will not succeed in coming close to the truth that she is searching for (Pynchon, 1966, p.32). He asserts that Oedipa will not find the meaning of any event she encounters, and that she is just wasting her time wandering from one place to another. He told Oedipa, "You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Tristero the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth." (Ibid)

The reader of Pynchon's novel is faced with several signs that Oedipa thought will help her find the truth she is seeking, but these signs neither lead her to the reality about

her friend nor did they appear to hold any real meaning. The problem does not appear just in her inability to decipher signs but also appears at the level of the chain of signs formed by each sign that she sees; each sign leads her to another sign forming a circle of interrelated signs (O'Donnell, 1991 p. 47). What makes Oedipa even more confused is that the signs and clues which she finds do not lead to truths or meanings; rather they lead her to other signs making her float spirally in an endless net of insignificant signs. This continuous reproduction of signs is what makes Oedipa's mission more complicated as they make a huge and an endless network of signs that lead to other signs instead of any truths, and this is a main feature in Pynchon's novel (ibid). The protagonist feels as if the signs and events that surround her were meant to keep her moving and wandering from one place to another, moving through a series of signs that lead to nothing but to other signs leaving her in state of puzzlement and disillusionment (Herzogenrath, 1997, p. 107).

2.2 The Absurd Quest

It is argued that what makes a character's quest more challenging is not the character's attitude but outside forces beyond his/her control. James Miller argues that there are two types of quest, 'quest surd' and 'quest absurd'. In the quest surd, the illogicality is located for the most part within the character who seeks the truth, whereas in quest absurd that illogicality is located in the outer environment in which the character carries out his/her quest. The problem in the latter type of quest is in the meaningless world that surrounds the protagonist (1967, p. 20). The heroine In Pynchon's novel delves into a world of interwoven incidents where she looks for answers. Her quest keeps her always moving through various locations; nevertheless, the truth she seeks is not on the surface. Oedipa had to go to multiple places and ask different people who made her

feel lost and lonely as she could not always find answers to her questions. So the irrationality here, as Miller confirms, lies in the exterior world where the seeker, who is the protagonist, is wandering (Ibid). The irrationality and absence of meaningful findings make Oedipa's quest a living nightmare. Again Miller explains that irrationality lies in the world where the protagonist is looking for truth; the quest here is "a rational quest in an irrational (or absurd) world". Due to this illogicality in the world, the protagonist's mission gets more complex and the truth he is looking for, using his rational reasoning, becomes more elusive.

2.2 The Entropic World of Oedipa

Oedipa feels trapped in a closed community and seeks to escape from her prison to find the reality of the Tristero. She wants to escape the "the confinement of [a] tower" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 20), which hinders her process of making use of the data she collects in her journey. Oedipa's state of imprisonment is similar to entropy¹. According to Patrick O'Donnell, Oedipa's world which is full of ambiguous signs puzzles her and makes her move in vicious circles in her quest. Oedipa's life that is characterized by disorder and lack of meaningful revelations is similar to the "physical reality" meaning of entropy in the second law of thermodynamics which states that the world is moving fast to "dissolution and chaos" (O'Donnell, 1991, p. 13). Similarly Oedipa's journey seems to lack any meaningful revelation which causes chaos in her life.

The sense of entrapment prevails with Oedipa as she cannot make sense of the events that she comes across because they do not help in finding what she is looking for

¹ In Physics, the second law of thermodynamics the world as a closed system moving rapidly towards sameness and chaos. The Second Law also states that there is a natural tendency of any isolated system to degenerate into a more disordered state. So entropy, which the degree of disorder will always increase. Lucas, J. (2015, May 22). What is the Second Law of Thermodynamics? Retrieved April 01, 2018, from <https://www.livescience.com/50941-second-law-thermodynamics.html>.

about the reality of the Tristero. Oedipa believed that knowing about the reality of the Tristero could “bring to an end her encapsulation in her tower” (Pynchon, 1966, p. 44). The problem that she is facing continually is that the clues she encounters do not lead her to any truth or findings, but keep her moving in a never-ending circle of fast-moving events. Her inability to make any further progress or to link between the clues is what annoys her and is what makes her sense of imprisonment worse. Although she is being accompanied by people who sought to help her solve the mystery of her deceased friend, Oedipa feels that she is alone in a maze of overlapping incidents and images that do nothing but make her more and more puzzled, as they neither hold meaning, nor lead to any findings.

The more Oedipa tries to gather information and clues, the more things and events get complicated. Whenever she finds something that she thinks will help her in her journey, she realizes it was just an illusion. “it is one of the main ironies of Lot 49 that the more sensitive Oedipa becomes to information the more chaotic that information becomes.” (Seed, 1922, p. 146) Bukowski Argues that the reasons why Oedipa is unable to link between the clues and make sense of them is due to her use of what he calls “modern sensibility”. For him, Oedipa failure is a result of her misunderstanding of the postmodern world where she lives which is characterised by uncertainty and disorder (2014, p. 9).

Oedipa’s encounter with John Nefastis machine illustrates the sense of entropy and chaos that overlaps her world. Nefastis is a scientist whom Oedipa meets in her quest. He told her that he has developed a machine that can defeat the second law of thermodynamics by sorting out cold and hot molecules in two different boxes. Thus decreasing the amount of entropy and disorder. Nefastis’s machine consists of two boxes

containing fast and slow moving molecules, and his aim is to have the ability to sort the two types of molecules through what he called the 'sensitive' (Pynchon, 1966, p. 2). Nefastis stated that "Entropy is a figure of speech, then," sighed Nefastis, "a metaphor. It connects the world of thermo-dynamics to the world of information flow." (Ibid.p. 32). Oedipa's life seems similar to Nefastis machine as her job of looking for evidences and sorting out the huge amount of information that she collects, her job is similar to the work of the sensitive in that machine. Nefastis is concerned with entropy in his machine the same way Oedipa is concerned with it in her quest.

He began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy.

The word bothered him as much as "Trystero" bothered Oedipa. But it was too technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. (Ibid)

The state of entropy in Nefastis's machine which means the continuous movement of the molecules parallels with a state entropy in Oedipa's life. The mission that she aims to accomplish keeps her constantly moving similar the molecules in that machine. Oedipa is required to sort the clues to solve the mystery about the Trystero, in the way the sensitive in the same machine aims at sorting out hot and cold molecules. Thomas Schaub illustrates this relationship between entropy in physics which is demonstrated in Nefastis machine and that in Oedipa's life through her quest by saying:

As entropy increases, the universe, and all closed systems in the universe, tend naturally to deteriorate and lose their distinctiveness, to move from the least to the most probable state, from a state of

*organization and differentiation in which distinctions and forms exist,
to state of chaos and sameness (1981)*

Entropy is in both physical as in Nefastis's machine and Oedipa's world. Entropy "connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow" (Pynchon, 1966; p. 32). This statement shows the connection between the flow of information that Oedipa had to sort out, and the fast-moving molecules in the machine presented by Nefastis. Both Oedipa and the sensitive in the machine have to do the job of sorting. Oedipa has to sort out the clues and huge amount of information, whereas the sensitive is supposed to sort out the two types of molecules. Oedipa's mission to execute Pierce's will requires her to understand and classify the information that she collects just like the sensitive in Maxwell's machine which separates different types of molecules. Her mission as an executrix of Pierce's will is similar to the work of the sensitive in that machine (Bloom, 2003, p. 52).

Oedipa's desire to complete her mission and face the world on her own aims at establishing order and meaning to the chaotic events around her. William Dampier describes the entropy that overlaps the world by saying that it "is analogous to shuffling a pack of cards, originally in order of number and suits, by a mechanical shuffler. The shuffling can never be undone, save by a conscious sorting, or by the indescribably remote chance of the cards to fall again into their original order again." (1961, p. 487). Dampier's words compare the growing expansion of entropy and chaos in the world to the process of the shuffling of the cards, in both cases the results are not guaranteed. As the shuffling cannot be undone or stopped, Oedipa's quest does not seem to give her any significant findings. In order for Oedipa to succeed in her mission, she must work as the sensitive in Nefastis's machine and have the ability to classify the huge amount of information. Slade asserts that the growth of entropy and confusion in the world or in a

system can be balanced by “greater information about the system” (1974, p. 125) or by “conscious sorting”(*ibid*). However , neither the huge amount of information that Oedipa gathered about the system nor her conscious reasoning of the clues could help in reducing the state of entropy and disorder about the system. The signs of muted post horns Oedipa sees everywhere, instead of leading her to any revelations , they rather add more puzzlement to her state of mind .The excessive flow of the post horn signs around Oedipa was extremely confusing as they kept her wondering about their significance, which was not intelligible to her at many points in the novel (Pynchon, 1966, p. 38). The heroine was immobilized because of her inability to sort out the clues and make sense of the symbols. Like the symbols that confused Pynchon’s protagonist because of her incapability of understanding their significance, the people whom Oedipa encountered did not seem to assist her in her journey.

2.2 The Characters’s Resistance to Oedipa’s Mission

The characters whom Oedipa meets throughout the course of the narration make her mission even more complicated. Metzger, the co-executor who is supposed to help her execute Pierce’s will, does not seem to be interested in Oedipa’s mission, as Bloom confirms, “One character who drops away from Oedipa ... is her coexecutor, the lawyer Metzger, who goes off ... Metzger, who never takes the slightest interest in the other characters’ preoccupations” (2003, p. 42).

Oedipa is left alone wandering through the streets of California and feels disappointed by those who were supposed to help her. The characters she encounters do not provide her with something that could facilitate her mission or bring her closer to finding the truth she is looking for. Bloom notes that Oedipa started to develop a sense of distrust and disappointment with the other characters who could help her. Her relationship

with them begun to dissolve gradually one by one (ibid). Bloom accounts for the characters's withdrawal from Oedipa's life, " Hilarius flips out, Mucho trips out, Metzger runs off, Driblette checks out"(Bloom, 2003,p. 243). With no help from the other characters , Oedipa began to lose hope in finding the reality about her deceased friend and eventually about the Trystero system . She is being abandoned by the people whom she met , first Metzger who starts the journey with her accompanied her to several stations in her quest, tried to seduce her , then disappeared in the middle of the narration. Another character who the protagonist relied on is Dr.Hilarius, who is her psychiatrist. She went to visit him asking for help and found out that he has gone crazy himself. When Oedipa approached his clinic, Dr.Hilarius tried to shoot her with a rifle, he thought that someone was after him. He suspected that he was being followed by someone because they knew about his suspicious activities on people using drugs and other psychological treatments to harm patients rather than help them. As soon as Oedipa entered the clinic she learned that Helga Blamm who is Hilarius's assistant' is also there struggling for her own life.

"Hurry," she chattered, as Oedipa slipped inside. The woman was close to hysterical.

"What's happening?" Oedipa said.

"He's gone crazy. I tried to call the police, but he took a chair and smashed the switchboard with it." (ibid)

Oedipa learns that her psychiatrist Dr.Hilarius was making experiments on patients to make them suffer even more using drugs. He began doing these experiments where he used to work as a Nazi doctor (Bloom, 2003, p. 22). It is ironic how a doctor who is supposed to help people cure of illnesses and mental problems is himself suffering from a psychological disorder. This revelation that Oedipa came across only makes her even farther away from executing the will.

Oedipa's husband Mucho Maas, who has worked as a used car salesman and then as a Disk jockey, does not seem to be satisfied with his job. He worked as a "used car salesman and so hyperaware of what that profession had come to mean that working hours were exquisite torture to him." (Pynchon, 1966, p. 2). Mucho does not appear frequently in the novel as he did not accompany his wife in her mission nor did he provide her with any sort of information that she was looking for. He is concerned more with his own life rather than his wife's mission. When Oedipa goes with Metzger to see a play entitled *The Courier's Tragedy*, she meets up with Driblette the play's director from whom she tries to find more information that could help her search. She wanted to ask him about the reality of the Tristero which was mentioned in the play, because she believed that knowing about that would unravel the reality about her friend as well as the Trystero system. When she first met Driblette , Oedipa decided to ask him about the word Tristero which appeared in the play, but as soon as she mentioned that word he disappeared "[a]t the word, Driblette's face abruptly vanished, back into the steam. As if switched off" (ibid, p. 24). Oedipa' goal of getting more clues from the play's director was not easy or even attainable as Driblette stated, "You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth."(ibid, p. 32). This statement is a clear evidence that the characters in the novel whom Oedipa asks for help are not likely to help her reach the truth she seeks, but prove to be obstacles that hinder her from attaining any further information or making advancement in her quest. What makes Oedipa's dreams of extracting clues from Driblette is when the latter committed suicide by walking into the Pacific "If I were to dissolve in here," speculated the voice out of the drifting steam, "be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too." (ibid). After Driblette's suicide, Oedipa has lost a main source of information, his death meant for Oedipa that everything he knows about the Tristero or, anything she wanted to know

from him has vanished too. This adds more hopelessness to her psychological state but this loss did not prevent her from continuing her mission.

When in San Narciso, Oedipa met with another man in a rooming house whom she suspects knows something about the W.A.S.T.E.¹. The man appears to be a sailor. He has tattoos of muted post horn on his hand, and he asks her to help him mail a letter to his wife through the WASTE mail organization. Oedipa decided to help the man but he asked her to leave. The sailor showed no disposition to cooperate with Oedipa which disappointed her more because she thought he is related to the Tristero system. The various people that appeared during Oedipa's quest were not likely to facilitate her mission. It is noticeable that the protagonist is unable to communicate meaningfully with any of them.

2.3 Uncertainty and Absence of Communication

In addition to Oedipa's suffering to find clues that lead her to the truth she seeks, she found difficulty in communicating with the other characters. She could not get information from the people she meets, her co-executor Metzger did not provide her with any sort of information about Peirce's estate. Oedipa failed to extract clues from the other people through the course of her quest, her failure to achieve her goals indicates the problem of communication between the characters in the novel. This lack of communication adds to her suffering and makes the heroine's mission more and more complex and hard to accomplish, besides the communication between the characters, Oedipa's mission requires her to resolve a group of signs which she comes across during

¹ Oedipa learns in the novel that it is an acronym that stands for : We await silent tristero empire. She doubts that this is an acronym for a secret mail organization named the Tristero. She believes also that knowing the reality of this organization will facilitate her quest for truth of her friend Pierce.

her search , she believes that finding more about these signs will get her closer to the reality of her friend's estate and eventually she will be able to fulfil her task.

For Oedipa to know the reality of the Tristero and execute her friend's will requires her to understand the significance of the symbols that she encounters. However these symbols do not always seem easy to decipher. Bloom notes that *The crying of Lot 49* displays the role of communication through the use of symbols and signs, Oedipa's search for the reality of the Tristero requires her to understand the reality of the signs that she finds everywhere. It is about Oedipa's ability to communicate with others to explicate the significance of a group of signs and symbols (Bloom, 2003, p. 24). The need for communication is noticeable when Oedipa meets John Nefastis , a scientist who aims to make a machine that creates perpetual motion. Nefastis states to Oedipa that if she wants to run his machine, she needs to know how to communicate mentally with it "Communication is the key," cried Nefastis...." (Pynchon, p. 105). It seems that Oedipa is suffering from this lack of communication in her life, starting from the day she knew that her Pierce had named her as the executrix of his will. Oedipa felt lost and lonely as she did not know how to do the work that her deceased friend has left for her to do after his death. Her acceptance to execute his will was a challenge to Oedipa, a challenge that she was willing to win, despite all the hardships which she may encounter. Oedipa's feeling of isolation from the world may be. She was disillusioned and felt let down by many people including her husband Mucho, who is totally incurious about his wife.

Her task as an executrix was a big challenge for her as it was the first time she tries to execute a will, that's why she was highly confused about where to start her mission. Oedipa has never been in such a situation where she must face society and execute a will on her own. Her life before she started her quest used to be mundane and

was characterized by sameness; she used to go to parties, and do usual activities. Oedipa was living her life as an ordinary housewife whose days ‘were more or less identical’ (*ibid*) . Throughout her quest, Oedipa was trying to gather information leading to the reality of her friend Pierce by having conversations with the different people she meets. However, not everyone seems to have a meaningful exchange of speech, not even the her co-executor Metzger.

“What then?” Metzger challenged...

“I don’t know”, she said, a little desperate.

“Metzger, don’t harass me. Be on my side.”

“Against whom?” inquired Metzger...

“I want to see if there is a connection. I’m curious”

“Yes, you’re curious”, Metzger said.” (Pynchon, p. 23)

The above conversation with Metzger did not provide Oedipa with what she wanted to know from him. When Oedipa stated that she wants to know if there is a relevance between the events that happen around her, he confirms her state of curiosity rather than giving her any insights or clues, or at least help find the connection she is seeking. In some stages in the novel the protagonist seems to be mocked by others, as with the following conversation with her husband Mucho when she asked him about what he thinks about this terrible thing , oedipal said “Terrible”, said Oedipa. “Wonderful”, said Mucho.”(Pynchon, p. 43). Oedipa and her husband Mucho seem unable to communicate with one another. This is noticeable in her inability to express herself and say what she wants to him "You're too sensitive." Yeah, there was so much else she ought to be saying also, but this was what came out. It was true, anyway.”(*ibid*, 2). She wanted

to say other things to Mucho as the above quote indicates, but she is unable to say them because of their “Their inabilities to communicate” (Pynchon, p. 13) .

Mucho’s ironic reply indicates his indifference to his wife, which adds to her feeling of disappointment and loneliness, due to the void between her and the others. Oedipa encounters this attitude of indifference also by Stanly Kotex, whom she asked about the W.A.S.T.E that she sees in multiple places; he said, “It’s W.A.S.T.E., lady”, he told her, and “an acronym, not 'waste', and we had best not go into it any further. I saw it in a ladies’ john”, she confessed. But Koteks was no longer about to be sweet-talked." (ibid, 24) Kotex told Oedipa that the word waste is an acronym which she learns later it represents the Tristero organization, but he was not willing to add any information about it that could facilitate her mission. However, neither Oedipa nor the reader knows if Stanley Kotex, and the other characters , knows more about the reality of the W.A.S.T.E. But what is apparent is that neither of the characters whom Oedipa meets show some support or cooperation with her. Seed sees that Oedipa’s response to the flow of information that she collects makes her mission even more complex, Her inability of processing and interpreting the clues illustrates the dysfunction of communication in the novel which leads to the absence of meaning and increasing uncertainty (Seed, 1988, p. 146).

The sign of the muted horn is also an indication of the loss of communication. The sign, according to Richwell, “signifies silence rather than speech or writing” (2010, p. 50) . Oedipa encounters the sign everywhere which made her believe that it is connected to her friend Pierce’s estate. It is as if the muted horn abstains from conveying or revealing anything.

The lack of communication in the novel is further illustrated in phone calls between Oedipa and the other characters. Dr Hilarius called Oedipa at three in the morning saying,

"I didn't wake you up, did I," he began, dry. "You sound so frightened. How are the pills, not working?"

"I'm not taking them," she said.

"You feel threatened by them?"

"I don't know what's inside them."

"You don't believe that they're only tranquiliz-ers."

"Do I trust you?" (Pynchon,p. 3)

Dr.Hilaruis gave Oedipa pills to take, but she was not likely to trust him. She said that she is not taking them because she suspects his intentions. Her suspicions were confirmed when he stated later in the conversation that he is making an experiment on a "large sample of surburban housewives"(ibid). Dr. Hilarius's words annoyed Oedipa as she refused to be part of his experiment, then the conversation got meaningless when he said "Well. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about." "Did I call you?" (Pynchon, p. 4). Oedipa was disappointed and eventually hangs up the phone ending the conversation from which she could not learn anything new that might facilitate her mission. Oedipa has encountered another failure of communication when she attempted to make a phone call to Randolph Driblette. When she tried to call him "The phone buzzed on and on, into hollowness"(ibid) preventing her from communicating to him, after several attempts she was answered by an elderly lady who turned out to be

Driblette 's mother saying that "I'm sorry, we've nothing to say." (Pynchon, p. 4). Oedipa has tried another phone calls to learn more about journey, however the lack of meaningful feedbacks from the people whom she speaks with on the phone, indicates the recurrent uselessness of communication. This is evident when Oedipa called the 'Inamorati Anonymous' asking about the reality of her quest ,and explaining her sense of disillusionment with ;due to her failure to come to meaningful revelations about the reality of her friend's estate. But even this time her attempts to find meaning fail as she was told by a member of the Inamorati Anonymous that : "It's too late" "For me." Before she could ask what he meant, he'd hung up" (ibid, p. 55) She tried to know the meaning of his words but she he did not gave her the chance to do that by disconnecting the call phone leaving her in a state of puzzlement and disappointment. The phone calls were incomplete, vague, and absurd. They are useless to her, because of of their emptiness of any significant interaction which denotes the dysfunction of communication in the novel.

Another example of Oedipa's problem of communication is her encounter with John Nefastis and his Maxwell's Demon machine. When Oedipa was with Stanley Koteks's at his office , he mentions a scientist named John Nefastis who is working on a machine that can create perpetual motion and violets the second law of thermodynamics .“ Koteks looked to both sides, then rolled his chair closer...You know the Nefastis Machine?” Oedipa only widened her eyes. “ Well this was invented by John Nefastis, who's up at Berkeley now. John's somebody who still invents things ”(Pynchon, p. 25). Feeling amazed and curious to learn more about Nefastis's machine, Oedipa decided to visit him. The machine that Nefastis is working on is supposed to be the one of its kind, thus , it can be operated only mentally , and by people who have certain abilities. He told Oedipa that it the machine can be run just

mentally without any physical action. "It's mental work," Koteks said (ibid. 26). Oedipa sees a picture of a man on top of the machine and asks, "Who's that with the beard?" asked Oedipa. Then she was answered by Koteks,

James Clerk Maxwell, explained Koteks, a famous Scotch scientist who had once postulated a tiny intelligence, known as Maxwell's Demon. The Demon could sit in a box among air molecules that were moving at all different random speeds, and sort out the fast molecules from the slow ones. Fast molecules have more energy than slow ones. (Pynchon, p. 26)

Oedipa wanted to know whether or not she can operate Nefastis's machine and make sense of it. The machine was another challenge to her like the previous signs of the post horn that she came across and could not make use of. She was afraid that everything she finds do not seem to assist her in finding any meaning. Oedipa was disappointed to know that she is not capable of running Nefastis's machine because she does not possess the abilities as Nefastis calls it, to do that. He stated that "Not everybody can work it, of course," Koteks, having warmed to his subject, was telling her. "Only people with the gift. 'Sensitives,' John calls them"(Ibid). Oedipa is afraid that she does not have those abilities. She was willing to know if she can operate the machine "Oedipa rested her shades on her nose and batted her eyelashes, figuring to coquette her way off this conversational hook: "Would I make a good sensitive, do think?"(ibid). The absence of communication in Oedipa's journey contributed greatly to her inability to progress in her search.

2.4 The Postmodern Shift from Detective to Anti-detective Story

Oedipa was like a detective in her attempts to gather clues and find more about Pierce; however, her role seems to be somewhat different from the traditional detective in some ways. The plot of Pynchon's novel is manifested in a quest form of the protagonist Oedipa who is in a detective-like mission to find the truth about Peirce's estate. This job undertaken by the heroine of the novel relates Pynchon's novel to the detective story fiction, in which the protagonist aims at discovering hidden facts and solving mysterious events. It "reveals traces of the detective-story genre which underlies the novel," (Seed, 1988, p. 129) . Pynchon's novel has characteristics that make it read as a detective fiction story in which there is a something hidden to be discovered by a character who is usually the protagonist, that plays the role of the detective.

Oedipa was not able to reach any further advancement in her search, nor decipher the clues that she finds. The more she delves into her quest, the more things get complicated and offer no further revelations neither to her nor to the reader. In detective fiction stories, the plot moves from complex to simple; thus, as the story progresses things become clearer to both the protagonist and to the reader. Harold Bloom argues that, "Where the object of a detective story is to reduce a complex and disordered situation to simplicity and clarity, and in doing so to isolate in a named locus the disruptive element in the story's world."(Bloom, 2003, p. 21) In classical detective stories the events move to simplicity and clarity as Bloom stated, and this is a main element that characterizes this type of fiction. Geoffrey Lord stated, "With a detective story you start with a mystery and move towards a final clarification, all the apparently desperate, suggestive bites of evidence finally being bound together in one illuminating pattern" (Qtd. in Tanner, 1982, p. 56). As the above quote suggest, the incidents in

detective stories promise to get clearer. After the seeker, or the detective gathers clues and evidences , eventually they will solve the mystery. In Pynchon's novel, the events do not seem to get any clearer, and the heroine does not reach a meaningful findings. Her quest keeps her moving around several locations like a detective who follows the clues and makes use of the collected data.

For Oedipa, the world is not getting any clearer which is not the case in detective stories .*The Crying of Lot 49* moves from the simple to the complex. What seemed to be a simple execution of a will turned to be a gruelling journey as the Oedipa is eventually incapable of making sense of the interwoven happenings (Bloom, 2003, p. 21).What characterises Pynchon's novel is that as we progress through the events , the world gets more and more complicated to the protagonist. "Things then did not delay in turning curious" (Pynchon, 1966). Before receiving the will, Oedipa's life was simple and ordinary; however from the moment she accepted to execute her friend's will her life was changed immensely.

Although she accepted to undertake that mission, Oedipa had no idea how to do it. "She had never executed a will in her life, didn't know where to begin, didn't know how to tell the law firm in L.A. that she didn't know where to begin."(Pynchon, p. 2). Pynchon indicates Oedipa's feeling of hesitation because it is the first time she was put in such a situation, because to execute the will meant that she must delve into a world that looksvague and hard to understand . A world of secret organizations as the Tristero, she had also met with new people which she asked for help. Oedipa was about to live a completely new experience away from her routine and ordinary life.

Although Pynchon employs Oedipa as a detective, she is different from the classical detective in some ways. One of the most significant features of Pynchon's

novel, and unlike other detective stories is that it does not provide the reader with a clear revelations or solutions at the end of the narrative. But rather the events get more vague and ambiguous throughout the entire story, as the protagonist is unable to uncover the mysterious events which she encounters. David Seed states that in detective fiction stories the detective interpret the happenings in order to find something hidden which helps him solve the case, however in Pynchon's novel there is no revelation behind the happenings of the narrative, but rather the events get more ambiguous through the course of the narrative. That causes the reader to doubt whether or not there is something hidden behind the events (1988, p . 129).

Uncertainty in the novel, according to Seed, follows the protagonist from the beginning of her quest until the end of the novel. The uncertainty will only increase as Oedipa strives to comprehend the world in which she wanders, along with the co-executor Metzger (ibid). For example, she wanted to know the reality of the Tristero organization which she suspects is related to her friend Peirce. But every clue she thought will help her learn more about it like the signs of the muted post horn did not lead her to any results. Because Oedipa's continuous attempts to find the reality concerning the Tristero or the signs always fall short, she eventually doubts even the existence of such organization.

In the novel, the story moves from the simple to the complex. Oedipa's life was an ordinary one; she used to go to Tupperware parties, live as a housewife and her days were "more or less identical"(Pynchon, p. 2) .What makes this novel regarded as an anti-detective story is that unlike the detective fiction stories in which the aim is to "reduce a complex and disordered situation to simplicity and clarity"(Bloom, 2003, p. 24). In Pynchon's novel, however, the events do not get any clearer or simpler. The more we

progress with the story, the more complex the events get. The more Oedipa moves on with her quest, the more ambiguous things become. This state of increasing uncertainty that follows the protagonist throughout the story is what characterizes and differentiates Pynchon's novel from classical detective stories. Tanner confirms this feature in *The Crying of Lot 49* by arguing that in Pynchon's book the transition is made from an ordinary state like Oedipa's before starting her quest, to an ever increasing state of complexity (1982, p. 56).

In anti-detective fiction, the role of the detective changes from that of classic detective fiction. The detective's mission is much more complicated, because unlike classical detective fiction in which the protagonist follows a series of clues and evidences to solve a case, the detective in anti-detective stories has to solve more ambiguous mysteries, and find the ultimate truth about his/her surroundings. An instance of that is Oedipa's role whose mission gets broader and more complicated. The detective search becomes "a quest for truth in a reality far more complex and ambiguous " (Stefano, 1984, p. 23) . What makes the detective 's mission in postmodern works such as Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is that the clues which the detective gathers do not lead him to any meaningful results. They do not provide the protagonist with any sort of revelations that could facilitate his mission. O'Donnell illustrates the elusiveness of the anti-detective's mission, by saying that the "postmodern detective, radical rationality becomes not an enabling discovery, but a crippling handicap" (1991, p. 30). For him , the clues that is gathered by the detective make the his mission even more complicated by hindering his mission of discovery rather than revealing or leading to any findings (ibid). The use of the rational mind and logical reasoning is dismissed in the postmodern detective stories, as it does not help the detective in his mission. We see this uselessness of the rational mind in

Oedipa's quest in her inability to come to any results from her rational work of sorting out the clues. Stefano Tani illustrates this different role of the detective in postmodernism.

The detective is no longer a logical mind in a positivistic world as he was in Poe's tales. His attempts to unravel the mystery often clash against his own impulses and against a "reality" which is no longer explained and constricted within the optimism and rationality of nineteenth-century positivism but rather has been reinterpreted in a questioning fashion by the recent theories about relativism and the unconscious. (1984, p. 23)

The role of the postmodern detective becomes more complex due to many reasons. The absence of 'simple truths' or 'neat solutions', as Tani notes, is one reason the detective's mission is harder if not impossible to accomplish. In anti-detective stories, the mission of the detective is no longer a mere gathering of concrete evidences and going through simple steps and stages to reach simple results. The quest of truth in postmodern fiction is a lot more complicated as it becomes "moral, if not metaphysical quest" (Landrum, Browne, 1976, p. 84).

Oedipa's quest is an example of this moral and metaphysical quest in that her mission of discovery was simply to execute the will of her deceased friend, but her journey was not that simple. She comes across secret organizations such as the Tristero and meets with alcoholic people like the sailor; she also encounters the Nefastis's machine which she could not make sense of. William Spanos notes that the postmodern detective novel, and unlike classic detective stories, dislocates the simple and rational interpretation of the events and clues which complicates the understanding of the story by the audience (1976, p. 157). An example of this puzzlement and absence of one simple truth is Oedipa's suffering to find the original text of *The Courier's Tragedy*, a play that she

watched with Metzger. Her attempts to find a single text fail as she comes across several different texts of the same play.

The postmodern detective novel is unique in that the clues gathered by the detective are not related to one another. The detective finds plenty of evidences, but the problem he faces is that they lead him nowhere. The clues as he argues are “real, but strangely insubstantial” (O’Donnell, 1991, p. 30). This causes the detective like Oedipa to struggle to find the connection between the clues and the signs, for instance she wanted to know the relevance between the muted post horn that she sees everywhere to her friend Pierce , and the relationship of *The Courier’s Tragedy* to the Tristero organization and many other relations between the events that happened to her .

2.5 Symbols Holding or Hindering Meaning

Oedipa’s search for truth puts her in a net of symbols that she tries to decipher in order to complete her mission. One of the recurrent and key symbols in the novel is the muted post horn, which Oedipa encounters in several locations. For her, knowing the reality of this symbol could facilitate her mission to learn more about her friend Pierce because she finds it almost everywhere she goes. This sign represents an underground mail system called the ‘Trystero’ that people used to communicate secretly. Oedipa suspects that Peirce has some relations to this secret organization so that she seeks to learn more about it.

Almost all of the characters seem to have a relationship with the Tristero as well. The symbol of the post horn is shown as muted which indicates silence and does not promise to provide any clues to Oedipa. “As the logotype of WASTE, a major facet of the Tristero, the muted post horn signifies silence rather than speech or writing” (Richwell, 2010,

p. 50). The protagonist came across this sign in countless incidents with different people in different locations. One of her first encounters with the that symbol is when she goes with the co-executor Metzger to a bar called the Scope, and meets with Mike Fallopian who is a member of an organization named the “ Peter Penguid Society ” (Pynchon, p. 14) when at the bathroom, Oedipa sees the symbol of the muted post horn at the wall.

As Oedipa moves on with her journey, she encounters the same sign again at the Yoyodyne company where she meets with Stanley Koteks at his office. She realizes that he is drawing the symbol of the muted horn on a piece of paper. This makes Oedipa even more curious and willing to learn more about the significance of the sign and try to extract clues from Koteks whom she believed knows something about that sign. However, Koteks, like the rest of other characters whom Oedipa meets, does not seem to provide her with revelations about the the Tristero or her friend Peirce.

Oedipa tried to relate the symbol of the muted post horn to Pierce. She hires Genghis Cohen, a stamp expert to help her analyse the collection of stamps that was left to her by her friend Pierce; he informed her that there are some stamps contain the mark of the muted horn on them. This revelation by Cohen made her believe that Peirce might have been a part of the Tristero organization, however she could not make sure of anything about him yet.

Further puzzling to Oedipa is the acronym W.A.S.T.E that stands for “We Await Silent Tristero’s Empire”. This phrase is the slogan of the Tristero organization that she is investigating; however, her attempts to know anything about this organization fail. For instance, when she asked Kotex about the significance of the W.A.S.T.E, he was not interested in her desire to know the truth. "Forget it," he advised; opened a book and proceeded to ignore her (ibid, p. 26).

Conclusion

Pynchon shows through Oedipa the elusiveness and even the absence of truth in the postmodern world. It is the *nature* of truth itself, being characterized by multiplicity and mobility, that complicates Oedipa's quest for making sense of the world. The events of the novel seemed almost meaningless to her, for they provided no revelations that would facilitate her mission. In addition, the characters in the novel hinder rather than assist Oedipa in her quest, further increasing her bafflement. Pynchon showed the protagonist as being alone and helpless in a world that seemed impossible to understand despite all her weary attempts to make sense of it. The reader concludes from Oedipa's journey that truth in the postmodern world is not attainable, and life, therefore, is essentially a meaningless and possibly miserable experience.

Chapter one

The Postmodern Perception of Truth and Identity

Chapter Two

Oedipa's Quest for the Elusive Truth

Chapter Three

Uncertainty, Paranoia, and the Problem of Identity

Introduction

Uncertainty is a crucial notion in Pynchon's novel, and its prevalence in the protagonist's world seems to have serious effects on her identity. This chapter will consider the prevalence of uncertainty in Oedipa's quest and its consequences. It will demonstrate how the protagonist's uncertainty about everything around her will lead to problems with her own identity. The consequences of such uncertainty will be examined through Oedipa's quest and her continuous attempts to find meaning. Her uncertainty about whether or not symbols hold any meaning causes her to doubt everything. This chapter ends with an account of the different stages that Oedipa goes through that stem from her bewilderment and doubts.

3.1 Oedipa's Uncertainty and Epistemological Bewilderment

Uncertainty is believed to be an essential concept in Pynchon's novel; it was manifested in a variety of ways throughout the course of the narration. For example, Oedipa's state of uncertainty stems from her inability to differentiate between reality and fiction. Her continuous attempts to unravel the mystery and find the truth about Pierce's estate always fall short; this causes her to feel puzzled over the world in general, and particularly towards the events related to her quest. Oedipa's encounter with *'The Courier's Tragedy'*, added to her state of confusion and uncertainty as she struggles to find one single text of the play. When she has heard about the play, Oedipa decided to go and see it with Metzger wishing to find any connection between the play and her friend Pierce. At the theater the word *tristero* was mentioned in the play; this made Oedipa feel very curious about it and wanted to speak to the producer, Driblette. When Oedipa

checked the script, she did not find the word in the paperback copy of the play; (Seed, 1988, p. 122/123) Instead, she found different copies of the text of the same play, none of which contained the word *tristero*. Even from the beginning of the story Oedipa was faced with various possibilities and had to take decisions that could change her life. First, when she knew that she has been named the executrix of her dead friend's will she had to decide whether to accept to do this job or not, eventually she decided to do this mission. Despite she had nothing to help her do that mission she had only "gut fear and female cunning," (Pynchon, 1966, 22) Oedipa made the decision to find answers about the estate of her friend, Pierce. Her mission is somewhat seen as an liberating experience that will get her out of the entapement of her tower(Pynchon, 1966, p. 20).

Oedipa's journey was centered upon the interpretation of different signs and words that may or may not hold meaning. One of the recurrent signs is the muted post horn. In addition, the protagonist is faced with the W.A.S.T.E acronym, and the word *tristero*. All these encounters keep her moving in a circle of interpretation in search for the meaning of each word and sign, but what makes Oedipa's mission more complicated is her uncertainty about the world surrounding her; her inability to find the exact meaning of the signs that she encounters tend to "keep her and the reader guessing. On the one hand we can certainly not dismiss them as fiction; on the other we cannot finally resolve their accuracy" (Seed:1988, 124). The unknownability of Oedipa's world, or as Seed stated, the "epistemologic uncertainty, and narrative possibilities" (Qtd. in Copestake, 2003, p. 106) that surround the protagonist are prevalent in many aspects in Pynchon's novel where Oedipa is continually faced with different possibilities and had to make several decisions throughout her quest for finding answers .

The state of uncertainty which characterizes Pynchon's novel affects both the characters and the reader. On the one hand they troubled

Oedipa, who was put into a net of signs and symbols that she had to sort out and make use of to come to meaningful revelations, and on the other hand they confuse the reader of the novel as he is faced also with multiple possibilities. So, the reader according to O'Donnell, and similar to the protagonist's role, has to play the role of a detective or an 'interpreter' (1991, p. 52). However, this process of interpretation and analyzing which is taken by both the protagonist and the reader is not an easy one, Oedipa's quest was getting more and more complicated as she was delving into a world full of ambiguous signs and events that she had to understand.

The word *tristero* became the center of Oedipa's world, she encounters the word in several places and she believes that knowing the truth behind this word is her only way of finding the truth about her friend's estate. Her world seemed to gravitate around the *tristero* which can lead her to Pierce's estate (Pynchon, 1966, p. 170). Pierce appeared to be related to the underground mail system known as the *tristero*, because whenever she followed the clues to execute his will, she encounters the muted post horns that are the symbols which stand for the *tristero*. It seemed like all the clues that she collected and the people she asked lead to this mysterious mail system. But Oedipa is not even certain whether it existed or not, nor is she able to figure out what her deceased friend Pierce has to do with this organization. Nevertheless her quest appeared to be swirling around the *tristero* "everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into the *Tristero*" (Ibid, p. 58).

Oedipa felt as if she was trapped into what seemed to be a maze of events that she must sort on her own, she was surrounded by mysterious incidents that grew more and more complicated as she progressed with her quest. For Oedipa, things always "grew less

and less clear”(Ibid, p. 10). Her role as an interpreter and a detective implies that she had to find a way through the tangled web of signs and data. However, being left alone to do this mission made her journey more intractable, as she had to sort out the great amount of clues that she gathered along the quest. At some point in the novel, Oedipa felt that she was “walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and the ones twinned above”.(Ibid, 56). The zeroes and the ones that Pynchon referred to are the labyrinth of data that Oedipa was living in that she had to figure out a way of understanding, ordering, and giving sense to.

Oedipa is depicted as having more than one identity. Through the course of the narration she seemed to move from one state to another. First she is described as prisoner in her tower where she is waiting for someone to help her escape. She is “Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey, let down your hair” (Pynchon, p. 20). She is having problems with her identity as she feels trapped and isolated from the world. As soon as she receives the will of her deceased friend Pierce, this was her hope for escaping the routine day to day life as an ordinary housewife and be the executrix of his will.

Oedipa’s mission was not a simple one, her quest for the reality of the Tristero kept her moving from one place to another trying to understand the clues that she gathers. Oedipa believed that her entire quest is centred around the word Tristero and that if she wanted to know about the estate of Pierce she must first find the reality of that word. “Her work is to sift and sort through half-glimpsed signs and clues, to piece together scattered fragments so that, finally, everything can fit together in “clear plot” which comes to be named Tristero” (O’Donnell, 1991, p.139). She encountered that word in many incidents but all roads leading to its reality did not seem to lead her anywhere. Her inability to

locate the origin of the word and its relationship to her friend puzzles and frustrates her more and more. In spite of her continuous failures to come to helpful results in her quest, Oedipa was not willing to give up her mission as an executrix.

3.2 The Prevalence of Paranoia

Oedipa's persistence to continue her way regardless of the potential jeopardies that hovered around her caused her to suffer from various inconveniences both in the world around her, and even problems with her own identity. Her failure to reach the truth about her friend's estate led to her to develop a sense of paranoia and to doubt that Pierce intended to put her in a maze to keep her searching for nothing. The following is a definition of Paranoia as stated by Timothy Melley:

Paranoia is an interpretive disorder that revolves around questions of control and manipulation. It is often defined as a condition in which one has delusions of grandeur or an unfounded feeling of persecution, or both. Understood less judgmentally, it is a condition in which one's interpretations seem unfounded or abnormal to an interpretive community
(2000, p. 16)

as Melley argued, paranoia is a state of uncertainty and absence of an absolute truth about the world. It is the feeling of being unable to determine what is real and what is not. It is then characterized by continuous doubts surrounding the world. This state of paranoia is often accompanied by suspicions towards the external world as for Oedipa who doubts the existence of an organization; she is looking for the reality of the word *tristero* which she finds its traces everywhere she goes. Despite her continuous attempts, she was

unable to realize the reality of such organization. Oedipa has started to feel paranoid as she could not manage to come to any meaningful findings that would help her in the quest for truth. In some instances she thinks that this whole world of muted post horns and her detection mission is just a dream which has no reality. She doubts that she is just hallucinating and the tristero does not exist at all.

There are different kinds of paranoia that can occur within an individual's identity. Amy J. Elias differentiates between two types and sources of paranoia, one is psychological and the other is sociological. The former is about the search for identity and the truth whereas the second is related to the conspiracy theories that characterize the postmodern American world (1991, p. 283). Oedipa seemed to suffer from both types of paranoia, psychological and sociological. At First, she attempted to make sense of the world by gathering the clues from different places, and tried to link them together to reach a meaningful revelations. But her attempts to do so were falling short and she was making no progress in her quest. This absence of meaning that characterized Oedipa's quest became a source of psychological paranoia. The second type or source of paranoia according to Elias, sociological paranoia, is related more to the theories that governed the postmodern world, like the conspiracy theories which marked the postmodern age. Oedipa suspected that she is a victim of a conspiracy that was set by her friend Pierce before his death.

Paranoia can be seen as an ordinary condition of the postmodern age. Jameson does not see the postmodern sense of paranoia as a pathological condition but as "a cultural symptom that can usefully uncover real social relations." (Elias, 1991, p. 287). It is a cultural characteristic of postmodernism where people are keen to make sense of the world. Similarly, Oedipa's state of paranoia is her way of looking to her world. Her hopes that there is something beyond the events that happen to her and the signs that she

encounters everywhere. She believes in presence of a hidden truth behind the events that she goes through. But in the postmodern world which is full of images and signs that may or may not lead to something meaningful, Oedipa had not only to collect clues and gather as much information as she could about the Tristero, but had also to sort and decipher the collected data in order to differentiate between what is real and what is mere fiction. Elias notes that the postmodern tendency towards finding the truth of the world like Oedipa's attempts to find answers to all of her questions that shape her mission to execute her friend's will, is what Jameson called "cognitive mapping". This process is characterized by the individual's constant attempts to making sense of the world and his/her endeavour to find their place within the postmodern world (2003, p. 288).

Pynchon's protagonist is constantly faced with multiple possibilities where she struggles to distinguish the real one. This process required her to make a sense of the world amidst the multiplicity of choices and possibilities that she encounters. Bloom differentiates between four possibilities about Oedipa's world, however neither the protagonist nor the reader can tell which of them is the real one. This multiplicity of choices that Pynchon provides in his novel opens up the reader's sight to different scenarios to the story. Bloom (2003) differentiates between four possibilities in Pynchon's novel :

Good critics can and do assume that Pynchon is (a) paranoid or (b) mocking the traditional structures that imply paranoia; that he is (a) asserting the inevitable heat-death of the world and the futility of resisting it, even in its local manifestations, or (b) suggesting that life, in its extraordinary capacity to produce surprises, constantly resists the heat-death, as must we all; that there is nothing to be done, or that there is everything to be done; that he is on the side of the elect, or that he is on the

side of the preterite; that he is asserting disorder, or that he is implying some kind of transcendent order; (p. 67)

Oedipa is bombarded with huge amount of clues and information that she had to sort out. The process of sorting out and the absense of a definite truth led to her state of paranoia. However, as Bloom argued, the reader of Pynchon's works is not certain about the causes of the heroine's sense of paranoia (ibid). He suggested that the cause of Oedipa's paranoia is her suspicions that the entire world of Pierce's estate is just a fantasy or a joke set by him, and this idea is displayed in her inability of make any meaningful progress in finding the truth that she seeks about the tristero (Bloom, 2003, p. 40). This absense of findings strengthens her doubts about being a victim of plot done by her friend Pierce. Nevertheless, she did not give up and she was determined to do complete her mission and execute the will even if the world around seemed hostile. Oedipa felt lonely and abandoned by everyone surrounding her, especially those who were supposed to help her in her quest like Metzger, who leaves her in the middle of her search; her husband also who was suffering from psychological disorders. Even her doctor, Hilarius, did not make her mission any easier, rather he wanted to do an experiment on her by giving her pills which she refused to take because shed did not trust him. Oedipa was left alone to analyze and investigate a huge amount of information and clues on her own, which made her fell helpless and frustrated.

What makes Oedipa's life even more complicated and meaningless is her inability to find a link between the clues and signs that she comes across in her quest. An example of these signs is the muted post horn that she encounters in many occasions. According to Johnston, Oedipa's detective mission pivots around her desire to know whether or not the symbols and signs she sees everywhere have any relationship to the

tristero organization (O'Donnell, 1991, p. 51). Eventually, she questions the identity of Peirce and doubts that he has deliberately put her into a maze of interwoven events just to keep her wandering through various locations, but unable to reach any revelations. Seed sees that along Oedipa's journey of detection, she started to feel horrified as she doubts that she might be the center of a deception plot set by Pierce (Seed, 1988, p. 21). She felt so because wherever she goes she encounters the symbols of the muted post horns; this sign was seen for the first time in Pierce's stamps collection, and the same sign occurred recurrently during her journey.

Another reason for Oedipa's state of paranoia and uncertainty is the deceitful nature of her world. The things she sees do not seem to represent what they suppose to, they are almost always hard or even impossible to interpret (Ibid, p. 119). None of the people whom Oedipa meet promise to know the reality of that signs or about the tristero; she is not sure whether they have nothing to tell her about the signs or they intend not to help her find anything. Jon Simons argues that the unknowability of the world and the absense of an attainable truth is the reason for Oedipa's dissilusionment, and in order to find the truth that she was seeking, she had to make sense of the signs of the muted post horn that were seen eveywhere. Furthermore, Simons went on saying that her inability to know how she was going to reach a meaningful revelation of the signs and of the world in general led Oedipa to a state of "paralyzing uncertainty"(2000, p. 214).

The Uncertainilty that prevails in Oedipa's life becomes an entrapment force. The entrapment parallels with a feeling of uncertainty that prevails in Pynchon's novel, this uncertainty which in turn sparks the charatcter's strong inclination towards desperate attempts to understand the world. However, the protagonist is yet unable to make sure whether or not her state of paranoia will lead to any revelations, That's why there is always more than one possibility about the reality of the world which the Oedipa is trying

to make sense of. The doubts that come to Oedipa's mind about whether she is really untangling a secret organization known as the tristero, which will answer her questions about Pierce's estate, or that events are not really happening in real life, but in her imagination.

There are many possibilities for the reality of the world surrounding Oedipa in her quest. O'Donnell accounts for four possibilities for her uncertainty towards the events that she goes through. First she is about to uncover an underground system that is the tristero which is thought to be a secret way by which people used to communicate, this system Oedipa thinks is related to Pierce's estate and finding its roots and true identity will help her reach the reality about her friend. The second possibility that Oedipa is faced with is that there is no such organization such tristero and this whole events and signs about its existence are just her own imagination which do not exist in real life which means she is psychologically disordered, the next possibility of Oedipa's quest is that she is really a victim of hoax or a deception plot done by her friend Pierce just to make her remember him after his death. The fourth and last possibility suggests that Oedipa is just hallucinating that hoax due to her doubts that Pierce wanted to make her wandering aimlessly from one place to another without finding anything real about him, or about the tristero (O'Donnell, 1991 , p. 51).

Even to the last page of Pynchon's novel neither the reader nor Oedipa is given the truth about the tristero. When Oedipa heard that there is mysterious auctioneer who has a collection of stamps that contain the muted post horn, she wanted to meet him and thought that he could give her some clues to help her in her quest, but the book closes even before the reader could figure out whether Oedipa has met him or not " The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await *The Crying of Lot 49*" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 152). There is no clear and certain answer at the end of the novel which

gives more than one possibility to the ending of the story as Geddes confirms “Pynchon need not supply the reader his any definite answers” (Geddes, 2002) . Oedipa’s world that is overwhelmed by uncertainty is refereed to by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as a rhizome, it is like she lives in a maze where the signs and that she sees refer to other signs rather than lead to a any revelation (1987, p. 9)

When Oedipa saw the acronym the W.A.S.T.E at The Scope, she was not certain of its significance. She felt “as if she had been trapped at the centre of some intricate crystal”(Pynchon, 1966, p. 28). The state of entarpement is very recurrent in Pynchon’s novel, it is the feeling that the world that surround the protagonist’s quest was set to paralyze Oedipa, preventing her from making any further progress to find the truth. Bernard Duyfhuizen suggests that what hinders Oedipa’s quest for meaning is the absense of any revelation behind the signs that she encounters. Throughout her mission she has been trying to look beyond the surface of the objects in an attempt to figure out the meaning of the world . but this mission got more and more complex as Duyfhuizen argue “Meaning, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, is never simple. From the very outset, when Oedipa discovers that she has to execute Pierce Inverarity's will, questions proliferate faster than answers” (Qtd. in O’Donnell, 1991, p. 81).

The questions that the protagonist asks lead to other questions rather than to a certain meaning. This made her feel as if she was moving in a vicious cycle where questions are continually being generated, and where signs lead to other signs making a net of interwoven signs; which she had to sort out on her own.

The absense of the center that characterize the postmodern world is what made the protagonist as if she was delving into a labyrinth that lead to nowhere. The Maze of te characters is depicted as a “a perpetual struggle between lines that are caught up in a moment of signification and lines that flee the attempt to make them signify according to

a unified idea”(Drake, 2012, p. 233). The labyrinth of Pynchon’s protagonist is unescapeable, Oedipa felt trapped and unable to follow the clues that she collected because they are meaningless and lead to nowhere, her world has no center, no boundaries, and no clear destination. Eventually she seemed so desperate to find a way out of her entrapment (William, 1983, p. 95) .

Each time the protagonist Oedipa followed clues to find the truth, she was faced with a turning point in the events that prevented her from reaching it. For instance, when she went with her co-executor Metzger to see the *The Courier’s Tragedy* in which she was told that the word tristero was mentioned . She heard the word in the play, and after the show was over, Oedipa went to the director Driblette to ask him about the reality of the tristero and she wanted to see the printed version of the text to make sure that it contains that word in it. Her attempts to extract anything useful from Driblette failed, because Oedipa learned that he had committed suicide leaving her with no clues about the tristero. Earlier in the novel, Driblette said to Oedipa that she will not find the truth that she seeks, he asserted that she could not even come close to it “You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trysterio possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth” (Pynchon, 1966, p. 24). Driblette’s assertion to Oedipa that she will never even come close to finding the reality of the tristero indicates that she had to face the world on her own and to find her way through Pierce’s tangled estate.

3.3 Paranoia and Conspiracy Suspicion

The hardships that faced the protagonist in her quest made her suspect that she was a victim of a conspiracy plot set on her by her deceased friend. Her failure to make a meaningful progress in her quest to find the true identity of the tristero led her to doubt that she is a part of something bigger, a plan set by her friend Pierce. Oedipa's suspicions about being a victim started with her co-executor Metzger when she went with him to see a movie in which he claimed he had a role in as a kid. As soon as they sat the television turned on, that left Oedipa surprised and added to her doubts that everything happening to her is "all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction plot." (Pynchon, 1966, p. 18). Lois Tyson explains that Oedipa suspects that she is being a victim of a conspiracy plot because of the "synchronicity" of the incidents that occur seem to be related to each other or to be planned by someone. However, she was yet unable to neither make sure if there is a connection between them or to nor was she able to understand that connection :

there are no guarantees: anything can happen. Her suspicion that Metzger arranged some how to have his old movie shown in her motel room the night they meet as part of a seduction plot inaugurates what will become her increasing awareness of the synchronicity that marks all the narrative events and her attempt to rationally order and explain the connections she sees (1991, p. 11)

Oedipa was not certain whether or not she is uncovering a secret mail system that is the tristero which could lead her to Pierce's estate. She asked herself "Shall I project a world" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 24). Brian McHale notes that neither the protagonist nor the reader is sure if the whole idea of the tristero exists only in Oedipa's head and that she is

just hallucinating or she is truly uncovering a secret organization (1987, p. 23). She wonders about several possibilities:

have stumbled indeed...onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even onto a real alternative to the emptiness, to the absence of surprise to life..... Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate...so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull (Pynchon, 1966, p. 10/11)

What bothers Oedipa most is her uncertainty of the world around her, she is faced with several possibilities that she could not tell which one is the real one. Oedipa's inability to figure out what is the true identity of the Tristero and whether it really exists or not, in addition to her doubts about being deliberately put into a maze of ambiguous events that did not seem to make any sense to her by Pierce and Metzger . all that doubts add to her sense of puzzlement and disillusionment towards the world (O'Donnell, 1991, p. 139)

At the beginning of her journey, the protagonist encounters the symbol of the muted post horn in several places. When she was with Metzger at a bar called The Scope, she noticed that symbol on the wall with the following words written above it "Get in touch...through WASTE only" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 15). The sign of the muted post horn that Oedipa sees for the first time at *The Scope* supposedly represents an underground mail

system which people used to communicate with secretly. The post horn is mute which indicates secrecy and the reticence of the mail system that it stands for.

Oedipa's mission required her to dissolve the boundaries between the outer aspects of the objects around her and their reality. She had to differentiate between what is real and what is not, because not everything that surrounds the protagonist's world is meant to help her with her mission. As Mc Hale confirms she had to "to bridge the gap between appearances and reality; she must question the reliability of every piece of information, every source" (2004, p. 22) .

The process of making a meaningful connection between the clues and the pieces of information that surround the protagonist's world, in addition to being able to see beyond the appearances to find the real world is not an easy task in the postmodern world of Pynchon's novel. As noted above, McHale suggests that the protagonist had to "question the reliability of every piece of information, every source" (Ibid). This process of questioning the truth representation of the clues and the signs that encountered Oedipa in her quest developed into a continuous doubts that accompanied her throughout her journey causing her to become paranoid. Oedipa came across the sign of the muted post horn in some other occasions, but she is yet unable to reach the whole reality and the true reality of the system that is supposedly represented by a muted post horn which is the *trsiteiro*. This word became the center of Oedipa's world, she believes that knowing the reality of this word will help her find the reality of her dead friend's estate. Oedipa's mission as an executor of Pierce's will requires her to analyze the data and the clues that she gathers from the various locations she visits and the different people she meets. Then she had to link between them in order to reach some revelations that could help her understand the world around her. By doing that she had also to distinguish between what is real and what is not. McHale noted that Oedipa had to "bridge the gap between

appearances and reality ” (2004, p. 22). But this mission of understanding the reality of the signs which Oedipa encounters was not an easy task, she struggles to make any progress in her quest and to make sense of the clues that she gathers; thus, she had to look beyond the appearances in order to find the truth of the world around her that made her mission even more complicated. Her incapability to find meaning in her life caused her to feel paranoid, as Seed confirms “Oedipa similarly tries to see through appearances and becomes seized with a panic that mounts towards paranoia later in the novel” (1988 ,p.119) .

Oedipa’s constant failing attempts to come to the reality of the tristero made her suspect its existence. Tyson Lois suggests that there is no such secret organization as the tristero which Oedipa is trying to reach its reality, and that Oedipa is not also hallucinating those signs of the muted post horns and .W.A.S.T.E acronym .She is not a victim of a conspiracy or a plot by her Pierce, he believes that the signs of “ mute alienation, waste, and death that are, in one sense, the signs of America's underclass” (1991, p. 7). Tyson goes on saying that those signs represent the senses of entropy and paralysis that governed postmodern American society and culture (Ibid, p.8). According to Tyson, America as depicted in Pynchon’s novel is characterized by a desire to escape and survive the emptiness of life. The emptiness that stems from the absence of communication that Oedipa suffered from is symbolized by the signs of the muted post horns and the W.A.S.T.E acronym (Ibid).

The state of paranoia and loss of a definite truth of the world that Oedipa suffered from caused her to struggle with her own identity. She was abandoned by almost everyone who was supposed to help her, including her husband who was suffering from

his addiction to LSD grugs ¹, and her co-executor Metzger who ran away with a teen girl. Her psychiatrist Hilarius also suffered from psychooogical problems later in the novel, after being let down by all those people, Oedipa felt very dissapointed and disillusioned as she suffered from problems with her own self beacuse she lost trust in everyone around her .

Eventually, The enigmatic world around her and the uncertainty that prevailed in her quest made it almost impossible to Oedipa differentiate between reality and fantasy. At some points in the novel she was not sure of the things that she was looking at, and whether or not they realy existed. When she was wandering in the streets of San Narciso she thought that she saw “a man, perhaps a man, in a black suit, was standing in a doorway half a block away, watching her” (Pynchon, 1966, p. 171). Oedipa is not certain if the man was really there watching her or she was just imagining. Teresa Brennan suggested that the sense of paranoia might be originated from the desire to understand and control the external world:

The need to control is part of the paranoia of the ego's era; it results from the subject's belief that the object, the objectified one, is out to get it, but this paranoia originates in the subject's own projected aggressive desires towards the other. Nonetheless its paranoia makes the ego anxious, and its anxiety makes it want to control. The objectification ofThis content downloaded from knowledge is also paranoid; it is knowledge based on a

¹ LSD is one of the most potent, mood-changing chemicals. It is manufactured from lysergic acid, which is found in the ergot fungus that grows on rye and other grains. It is produced in crystal form in illegal laboratories, mainly in the United States. These crystals are converted to a liquid for distribution. It is odorless, colorless, and has a slightly bitter taste. (Foundation fo a Drug- free World. nd)

need for control. It is knowledge tied to a 'positivist' world view in which what is seen, or what can be tested or proved to exist (Brennan, 1991, p. 28)

Brennan's view about the source of paranoia in the self can be applied to Pynchon's protagonist Oedipa. Her will to comprehend the connotations of the signs of the muted post horns that are supposed to be the symbol of a secret organization. The desire to make sense of the world and execute her friend's will is from the one hand the impetus behind her persistence and continuation, but from the other hand is also a source of paranoia and disturbance. Steven Connor sees that the world in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is similar to our postmodern world where people feel as being constantly paralyzed by their inability to differentiate between reality and fiction. Likewise, Oedipa's major concern is her great will to set boundaries between the reality and the falsehood in her life (Connor, 1990, p. 171). The postmodern fiction as in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* invites the readers and the characters within their texts to become paranoid in an attempt to understand the reality of things. By using paranoia as a way of giving sense to the world, means that postmodern texts often include conspiracy plots within them (Nicol, 1999, p. 45).

Oedipa's sufferance with her own self and identity is manifested in her inability to comprehend the events that happen around her. For example, when she was at a bathroom at the Echo Courts she looked at the mirror to see her image "tried to find her image in the mirror and couldn't. She had a moment of nearly pure terror. Then remembered that the mirror had broken and fallen in sink" (Pynchon, 1966, p.10). She was terrified not to see her own reflection on the mirror, but then realizes that the mirror was not even there and that it has already broken and fallen down. Tyson argues that

Oedipa's desire to see and identify her own reflection in the mirror stems from her desire to understand and make sense of her own identity which she seemed to be lost in her quest for the truth of the world around her (1991, p. 19).

The falling mirror at the Echo Courts and Oedipa's inability to see her own image in the mirror suggests that she has missed a lot in her journey. From the beginning of her quest, Oedipa had a continuous feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity due to the absence of a meaningful revelation beyond the clues that she gathered which left her with nothing helpful that she could build on to find the truth. The state of uncertainty in the world that Oedipa suffered from moved from the external world into her own self, which causes her to question even her own sanity. Oedipa's bewilderment and the absence of a definite answer to Oedipa's multiple questions that marked the world in which she wandered disturbed Oedipa and caused her to suffer from psychological disorders.

The signs that the Pynchon's protagonist sees everywhere can have double indications. From the one hand they promise to guide Oedipa through her quest for meaning because she believed that they are related to Pierce's estate, and from the other hand they represent silence and the absence of communication like the muted post horn. Anyway, Oedipa's only way of getting out of her entrapment in her world lies in her ability, as Seed argues to "to communicate meaningfully" (1988, p. 136), she was required to dissolve the mystery about the Tristero via understanding the nature of the muted post horns that indicate it. Furthermore, Seed suggested that if there would be no such secret organization as the Tristero, and if Oedipa has been a victim of a conspiracy plot, that work of decoding and making sense of the signs would be just "another malevolent act" (Ibid).

In another incidence when Oedipa was looking at her self in the mirror she was clearly having psychological problems. When she saw her own reflection in the mirror she

said to her self “Change your name to Miles, Dean, Serge, and/or Leonard, baby, she advised her reflection in the half-light of that afternoon’s vanity mirror. Either way, they’ll call it paranoia” (Pynchon, 1966, p.53). She seemed to try to identify herself after feeling lost due to the lack of meaning in the world around her. Oedipa was not only unable to make sense of the external world her through logical reasoning, but also found difficulties with her own self that has been effected by the external word that is characterized by pranoia and uncertainty. Johnston noted that the “price of her search for meaning will be her own increasing alienation and solitude.” (O’Donnell, 1991, p. 67)

In addition to that, the absense of answers sparked Oedipa’s suspecions of being a victim of a conspiracy. She was constantly confronted with questions about the meaning of the words and the signs around her which had a great impact on her self. Oedipa’s self has changed dramatically from the first day she left her house and undertook her quest to execute Pierce’s will. She shifted from an ordinary housewife to a heroine detective that had not only to make sense of the clues that she gathered but also to do a “sensitizing” process to the incongruous distortions that she was faced with (Tololyan, 1997, 45) . Her mission required her to decode the signs, and this strenuous task led to her paranoied self (Ibid). The reality of the tristero has been Oedipa’s goal, however, this word became a threat to her own self as she started to get disappointed due to her failure to reach the truth about it. Eventually, she seemed to suffer more after being deserted by eveyone around her.

The hostility and sufferance of Oedipa were two reasons. Firstly, because they are a result of the abandance of the people whom she resorted to for help, and secondly due to the lack of meaningful revelations behind the clues that she gathered. The people even closest to Oedipa like her husband Mucho and her co-executor Metzger did not make her quest any easier, but rather both of them gave up on her. Despite of being left alone to

execute Pierce's will , Oedipa was determined to continue her journey. However, the events that surround her quest tend to make her feel as if she has been put in a ambiguous world that is difficult to comprehend. Her doubts developed to suspicions of being manipulated by forces beyond her control . Oedipa's actions "are always haunted by paradigms of submission to forces beyond her control, forces perhaps set up by Inverarity, Forces that always reorder the plot away from a teleology that will resolve itself into order" (O'Donnell, 1991, 92).

The continuous breakdown and the neglect of the people who were supposed to help Oedipa made her very disappointed with the quest. at some point, she thought that "she was mentally ill; that that's all it was" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 171). Oedipa hoped that she was living a dream and everything around her is just inside her head, however what adds to her puzzlement is her inability to realize whether she was living a dream or she was put inside a net of meaningless events and incidents that may or may not lead her to the truth that she seeks. Oedipa's feelings of loss, despair, and puzzlement were increasing as she delved into her quest, those feelings had a great impact on her own self. Eventually she felt like she was "fluttering out over an abyss" (Ibid, p. 48) and asked herself the same question that is "What was Trystero?" (Ibid) .

Oedipa's journey had a great impact on her identity, making her question everything that she encounters. From the beginning of her quest her goal was to execute her Pierce's will , this mission was not an easy task to do as found that the things around her do not seem to hold any meaning, and the people who were supposed to facilitate her work did not provide Oedipa with any meaningful revelations that she could build in to reach the truth. Oedipa's doubts that there is no truth in the world in which she wanders and she was put inside a labyrinth of signs and symbols that refer to nothing but to other signs making a network of signs that lead to nowhere.

The inability of Oedipa to decipher the signs around her had a destructive impact on her quest for meaning. Mc Hale sees that Oedipa's journey has transformed from "problems of knowing to problems of modes of being" (2004, p. 10). As Oedipa progressed in her quest, her interests moved from the desire to know the reality of the external world, to her will to find her own identity that has been affected by her continuous failure to reach the reality of the world around her. The quest, as Mc Hale stated, moved from "epistemological dominant to an ontological one" (Ibid). Oedipa's concerns shifted from the desire to comprehend and make sense of the events that surround her quest to her desire to reidentify her self that was troubled by the uncertainty of the world. The lack of epistemological certainty and meaning in Oedipa's world led her disorders with her own identity as she was desperate to get back to her normal daily life, but that seems almost impossible for her to do, because she was already lost and troubled as she was unable to blur the distinction between reality and fiction.

For Pynchon, paranoia is a kind of logical desire, an attempt to make order out of chaos, to make or see connections, and then to resist mimetically the discourse of mastery. In each instance, however, the form resistance takes to the system that represses otherness merely replicates that system (O'Donnell, 1992). As O'Donnell stated above, the characters in postmodern fiction, as Oedipa in Pynchon's novel, resort to paranoia as a way of giving order to the disorder and giving shape to their shapeless world. In order for the characters to reach the truth and establish order, they have to make connections between the events that surround them and they must be able to resist the ambiguity that predominates in their world. Pynchon's protagonist Oedipa had to do the job of "sorting it all out" (Pynchon, 1966, p. 2), it is her role as an executrix of Pierce's Inverarity will that required her to be the detective and unravel the mysteries that faced her in order to establish meaning.

3.4 The Shift from Paranoia to Schizophrenia in Oedipa's Quest

the continuous breakdowns and the difficulties that the protagonist faced throughout her entire journey made her job more and more complicated; furthermore, it caused her to suffer from paranoia and moreover from schizophrenia. The lack of a definite truth and Oedipa's state of paranoia towards the world, affected her Identity and led to more suffering with her identity. Her psychological conditions worsened as she delved into the mysterious quest for truth. The lack of logical connections between the signs and the representations around her in addition to the absence of meaningful revelations behind the clues that she gathers along her journey, added to Oedipa's disappointment and puzzlement, which in turn developed into a state of madness and schizophrenia. Michel Foucault stated that such madness "begins where the relation of man to truth is disturbed and darkened" (Foucault, 1989, p. 104). Oedipa's madness resulted from her inability to make connections between the data that she gathers in search of the reality about the tristero, she was being constantly let down by everyone around her including Metzger. None of the people whom she encountered provided her with any sort of help with her mission. That's why the world for Oedipa looked dark and vague preventing her from making any meaningful progress.

Schizophrenia became an inevitable condition in the meaningful quest of Oedipa. Jameson noted that for Lacan, the state of Schizophrenia is a result of "a breakdown in the signifying chain" (1991, p. 25). This is similar to Oedipa's case she became schizophrenic due to her failure to connect between the events that happen to her, in addition to her inability to see beyond the appearances to understand the reality of things. The difficulty that Oedipa faced in making sense of the world resulted from the absence of a definite truth behind the signs, for most of the time the signs that she saw and followed led her to

other signs rather than to definite meaning which indicates the “breakdown in the signifying chain”(ibid), as noted above by Lacan.

Oedipa's struggling experience and her failure to reach the truth that she seeks is due to the absence of concrete findings in her quest. It is, as Jameson argued, due to discontinuity on the level of the signifying sequence that she followed. The signs that surround the protagonist journey did not lead her to any meaningful revelations that could facilitate her quest. Jameson calls this lack of linkage among the signifiers and between the signifier and the signified “schizophrenic experience” (1991, p. 119). He sees that the schizophrenic state of the individual as being alienated, and disconnected from the world because of his/ her inability to figure out the surrounding world. The schizophrenic's incapability to make sense of world and find the truth about it will cause problems with his identity (Ibid). This same problem that Oedipa suffered from as she was extremely disappointed where all her attempts to understand the reality of the muted post horns and the Tristero organization doomed to failure. Moreover, she suspects that she was deliberately put into a maze or a vicious circle where the difference between reality and fiction seems to be blurred. Pynchon's protagonist is seen as a victim of a chaotic world that surrounds her. Similarly, this case was described as being “a celebration of Pynchon's horror” (Eduardo, Bobadilla, 2014).

Oedipa's sufferance with her self and her identity grew along the journey which seemed to have no clear destination. In addition, the hardships that the protagonist faced had a great impact on her self, starting from paranoia to the doubts about her own sanity to a state of schizophrenia and self destabilization. As stated in *Diagnostic and Statistical manual*, The schizophrenic responses that a person suffers from are :

characterized by fundamental disturbances in reality relationships and concept formations, with associated affective, behavioural, and intellectual disturbances, marked by a tendency to retreat from reality, by regressive trends, by bizarre behaviour, by disturbances in stream of thought, and by formation of delusions and hallucinations (Diagnostic and Statistical manual; Mental disorders American Psychiatric Association Mental Hospital Service 1952, p. 12)

As the above quote indicates the schizophrenic symptoms that appear on the disturbed person's inner self are a result of the hostility and absence of meaning in the external world. Likewise, Oedipa's problems within her self resulted from the sufferance with understanding the world around her. As a reaction to these problems, the schizophrenic is very likely to face difficulties in making sense of everything that surrounds them. Eventually, the person who suffers from schizophrenia might feel the desire to escape their reality and find better life opportunities. But this was not the exact case for Oedipa; she never gave up, but rather she wanted to complete her search and find the truth, and that's what increased her sufferance. The schizophrenia that Oedipa suffered from was accompanied with her incapability of controlling anything around her, she could not differentiate between reality and fiction as she doubts that she was hallucinating many events. Being unsure of anything surrounding her and unable to control her self and differentiate between the reality and fantasy drove Oedipa into a labyrinth of incomprehensible mysteries that prevailed in her journey.

In several occasions in Pynchon's novel, the protagonist continued to face odd incidents which indicate her psychological disorders and the loss of her self. For example,

when she could not see her own reflection in the mirror “at some point she went into the bathroom, tried to find her image in the mirror and couldn’t”(Pynchon, 1966,p. 27).

Conclusion

The overwhelming uncertainty in the novel had destructive effects on the identity of Oedipa. Her inability to understand her world and make sense of the interwoven events that surrounded her makes her question her sanity and suspect that she is a victim of a conspiracy. Eventually, Oedipa’s constant disappointments regarding her great desire to make sense of the clues that she collects in order to reach the truth lead her to doubt even the existence of such truth. After that, she even doubts her own sanity as she suspects that she is just hallucinating the whole story, and that the events happened just in her mind, not in the external world .

General Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the concepts of truth and identity in the postmodern age through the novel of Thomas Pynchon *The Crying of Lot 49*. It sought to show to what extent is truth accessible through the Oedipa in her quest for meaning. She was faced with many obstacles that hindered the process of acquiring any information that could bring to end her puzzlement. The study also sought to investigate the causes of the absence of meaning and uncertainty that prevailed in Oedipa's world. In addition, the absence of meaning and the prevailing uncertainty were examined as being causes of her identity disorder that she suffered from.

This research revealed that truth was not accessible in Oedipa's quest as she suffered from uncertainty and disorder. Oedipa's journey for reaching the truth was full of obstacles that hindered her from reaching any meaningful results. Despite all the overwhelming hardships in her quest, she was willing to continue her search for reality and do her job as an executrix of her deceased friend. Oedipa's continuous attempts to finish her mission led her to suffer more due to her inability to make any progress as she delves into her quest for meaning.

The study showed that the uncertainty and puzzlement that prevailed in Oedipa's quest was due to many reasons. For example, she failed to gather any meaningful clues from the other characters that she came across along the way. She also was let down by people who were supposed to help her execute the will like her co-executor Metzger. Despite all the hardships the protagonist faced in her quest, she attempted to find the ultimate truth in her life. One of the reasons of the prevailing uncertainty in her life stemmed from her inability to decipher the sign of the muted post horn that she

encountered almost everywhere she goes. This sign supposedly represented a secret mail system, but she did not seem to get any closer to its reality. As mentioned earlier, another reason for Oedipa's uncertainty is her incapability to get any sort of help from the other characters in her quest because she was not able to communicate meaningfully with any of them.

This study revealed the destructive effects of Oedipa's inability to fulfill her goals of executing her friend's will, and finding the truth about everything she encounters. She suffered from mental and psychological disorders; Oedipa suffered from paranoia as she could not differentiate between reality and fiction in her world that seemed to have no meaning.

Oedipa's state of paranoia developed into schizophrenia where she suspected that she was the victim of a conspiracy done by her friend to keep her moving in an endless net of signs that have no meaning. Oedipa's suspicion of being put intentionally in a maze just to keep her wandering from one place to another depressed her and caused her to question her own sanity and lose trust in everyone around her because they provided her with no clues that could facilitate her mission nor did they give her any meaningful revelations about the reality that she seeks. The continuous disappointments that she faced along her quest and her inability to make any progress in her quest for truth led to Oedipa's distrust towards everyone and withdrawal from everything in life.

This study draws some conclusions about the concepts of truth and identity in Pynchon's novel. This uncertainty was exemplified in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, when Oedipa is wandering in search of the true identity of her friend through the execution of his will that he left for her when he died. It is this very journey in which Oedipa is searching for the reality that is full of hardships and uncertainty in almost every

instance of it. It is the inability to locate a single truth that made the protagonist suffer from many disorders throughout her quest. The absence of a coherence in the world caused her to feel paranoid and unable to find the meaning behind what she encounters in her quest.

The findings of this study can provide an understanding of the two concepts of truth and identity in the postmodern age. In addition, The findings of this research may the causes of the uncertainty and absence of meaning in *The Crying of Lot 49*. They can also demonstrate the effects of such uncertainty on the identity of the individual as they can lead to mental and psychological disorders such as paranoia and schizophrenia

Concerning the limitations of this study, only one novel was discussed. Thus, more research can be done on the causes of this uncertainty and absence of truth in the postmodern world by studying more literary works besides Pynchon's novel, in order to arrive at conclusions that can offer a more credible analysis of the concepts of truth and identity in the postmodern world.

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