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**TITLE: Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, a Journey towards
Empathy**

STUDENT'S NAME: Sara García Chemhar

TUTOR'S NAME: Cristina Alsina Rísquez

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ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this project is to provide a reading of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* through the perspective of empathy: the plot will be analyzed as the protagonist's journey towards realizing the existence of the social Other, the *preterite* characters that inhabit the social periphery and are not granted visibility because of a reality structuring that perpetuates the binary opposition between approved and non-approved forms of subjectivity, a realization that will lead her to empathizing with them and achieving a sense of union between social universes apparently distant.

Keywords: empathy, preterite, subjectivity, visibility

RESUMEN: El principal propósito de este proyecto es el de ofrecer una lectura de *La subasta del lote 49* de Thomas Pynchon desde la perspectiva de la empatía: el argumento de la novela se estudiará como el recorrido de la protagonista hacia el descubrimiento de la existencia del Otro social, los personajes *pretéritos* que habitan la periferia social y a quienes no se les concede visibilidad por causa de una estructuración de la realidad que perpetúa la oposición binaria entre formas de subjetividad aceptadas y no aceptadas, un descubrimiento que la llevará a sentir empatía hacia ellos y a experimentar un sentido de unión entre universos sociales aparentemente distantes.

Palabras clave: empatía, pretérito, subjetividad, visibilidad

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this project is to provide an analysis of *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon from the perspective of empathy and affect theory. For that purpose, the novel will be studied as the protagonist's journey towards a representation of the world that makes visible the characters that are condemned to remain at the social periphery of the United States, and for that reason, this analysis will try to justify the plot of the novel as an evolution on the protagonist's part towards the development of a sense of empathy for those characters that inhabit the invisible America. In addition, this evolution towards empathizing with social outcasts is also going to be explained in relation to language and the way it arranges society through discourses that grant visibility only to some sections of society while concurrently hiding other factions, a binary social structuring that perpetuates the visibility of only some forms of subjectivity and not others.

Having established the thesis and the main aims of this project, in order to bring about the proposed objectives, it has been deemed necessary, first of all, to do a first reading exercise of the novel in order to extract the ideas and passages that would make it possible to justify a reading from the perspective of empathy, so as to create a structure with the scenes of the novel that converge in the theme of empathy. Secondly, the next step that has been pursued for the fulfillment of the project's intention is the gathering of a corpus of secondary sources, other analysis of *The Crying of Lot 49* that would aid in the reading of the novel through the perspective of empathy and that, at the same time, would also help provide and clarify some of the concepts that have been nuclear for this project, like for example establishing a clear definition of empathy, the concept that is at the core of this analysis, and other notions that have been useful to give name to some of the phenomena that are related to love, empathy and emotions, as Sara Ahmed's concepts taken from her work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Finally, the last phase of the methodology has consisted of doing further readings of Pynchon's novel so as to link the passages from the novel that would substantiate the thesis and the secondary sources gathered in the previous step with the intention to generate a final analysis that would justify the thesis of the project.

2. EMPATHY AND OTHER CONCEPTS

2.1. Empathy

For the purpose of analyzing the heroine's quest as a germinating evolution towards empathy for the marginalized and suppressed forms of subjectivity in the US, it is perhaps necessary to narrow down, in the first hand, a definition of what empathy means and the processes it involves. In "Understanding Empathy: Its features and Effects", Amy Coplan distinguishes two types of perspectives around empathy: *self-oriented*, which corresponds to the picturing of one's reaction to a particular scenario that someone else is undergoing, from the point of view of the self, (2011, p. 9) and *other-oriented*, which is described as the representation of other's situation from that other person's point of view in an attempt to recreate his or her experiences as though the subject were that target individual (2011, p. 10). The viewpoint that is going to be used for the analysis of *The Crying of Lot 49* is the *other-oriented* perspective, which is a process that implies a willing, motivated and controlled effort of empathizing with the other that is never automatic nor involuntary (Coplan, 2011, p. 14). In addition, for *other-oriented* empathy to come about, other requirements need to be met. One of them is denominated *self-other differentiation*, which produces the necessary distance between the self and the other for empathy to be successful:

Without clear self-other differentiation, we are almost certain to fail in our attempts to empathize. We either lose our sense of self and become enmeshed or [...] we let our imaginative process become contaminated by our self-perspective and thus end up engaged in a simulation that fails to replicate the experience for the other. Self-other differentiation allows for the optimal level of distance from the other for successful empathy. (Coplan, 2011, p. 16)

Moreover, another pre-requisite that is necessary for empathy to occur is receiving a narrative about the other and recounted by the other, a relation of events that will make it possible for the self to imaginatively reproduce the circumstances that are being narrated and, therefore, catalyze the exercise of empathy (Goldie, 2000, p. 95, as cited in Matravers, 2011, p. 19). These are the three requirements that are going to be taken into account for the interpretation of *Lot 49*'s protagonist developing exercise of empathy and compassion towards the Other.

2.2. *The Preterite or Disinherited*

The characters towards which Oedipa is going to develop a feeling of empathy and love are denominated, by Pynchon, the *preterites*¹. The state of *preterition* is defined by being cast out from society, by “being disinherited or past over [...] the forgotten refuse of society [...] (Lacey, 2010).” As a consequence, they inhabit the social periphery, areas that are relegated to social invisibility; these characters are deprived from a referent that gathers them in a symbol, and in *Lot 49* they will find in the Tristero, the hidden postal system that will lead Oedipa towards a discovery of their existence, their own means of communication:

[...] the shadow is also symbolized in Tristero, as representative of the historical reject, a repressed collective social force that uses W.A.S.T.E. as their acronym. [...] The task will cost her so much effort that Oedipa will doubt her own mental condition but what started as a personal quest ultimately becomes a collective search for social meaning (Collado-Rodríguez, 2015, p. 263).

Even in its historical roots, as Oedipa discovers, the Tristero system was characterized by the themes of disinheritance and exile, forms of social exclusion or separation:

It may have been some vision of the continent-wide power structure Hinckart could have taken over, now momentarily weakened and tottering, that inspired Tristero to set up his own system. [...] His constant theme, disinheritance. The postal monopoly belonged to Ohain by right of conquest, and Ohain belonged to Tristero by right of blood. He styled himself El Desheredado, The Disinherited, and fashioned a livery of black for his followers, black to symbolize the only thing that truly belonged to them in their exile: the night (Pynchon, 2000, p. 123).

Even though preterition might be the only possibility of freedom from a system that encapsulates people in certain systematic role expectations that they have to act out, there are consequences that the preterites have to undergo, for example, having an indeterminate identity (Lacey, 2010). Moreover, despite the fact that they are not subject to a life based on the limiting experience of a social obligation to fill in certain molds, they still face, aside from the lack of representation, the process of being used as a mercantiled residue that society lives off from. It is also in this sense that Oedipa

¹The origin of this concept is Calvinism, and it describes those who, in opposition to the *elect*, are passed over by God (Lacey, 2010).

will experience a feeling of compassion and understanding for them at the end of the novel. As Mandic comments on, Pynchon expresses this caring for the preterite in his novels: “He expresses, in numerous ways, a profound empathy with what he calls the preterite, the left out, the passed over in every form of election (spiritual, economic, racial, cultural) (Cowart, 1980, p. 4, as cited in Mandic, 2014, p. 145).” The reader can find an allusion to them at the beginning of the novel, when an introduction to Oedipa’s and her husband Mucho’s lives is found, and Mucho’s previous job is described:

[...] how could he not, seeing people poorer than him come in, Negro, Mexican, cracker, a parade seven days a week, bringing the most godawful of trade-ins: motorized, metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like, out there so naked for anybody, a stranger like himself, to look at [...] and when the cars were swept out you had to look at the actual residue of these lives, and there was no way of telling what things had been truly refused (when so little he supposed came by that out of fear most of it had to be taken and kept) and what had simply (perhaps tragically) been lost [...] he could still never accept the way each owner, each shadow, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else's life. As if it were the most natural thing. To Mucho it was horrible. Endless, convoluted incest (Pynchon, 2000, p. 4).

As it is being portrayed in the previous passage of the novel, the *preterites* are not exempt from experiencing the consequences of a society that poses its foundation in consumerism and dehumanizing automatization, as Henkle has argued: “[...] California’s sub-culture made up of derelicts who have been discarded like many used cars (1978, p. 104);” in addition, Lacey has also emphasized the inanimate state towards which this phenomenon is directing its individuals:

Havel is particularly insightful on the role that technology plays in our conditioning. The automatism he observes in post-totalitarian regimes points to a larger crisis, plaguing contemporary technological society. [...] While the post-totalitarian system may be an “extreme version of the global automatism of technological civilization,” it also reflects a “general failure of modern humanity (Lacey, 2010).

2.3. Entropy

One of the most intriguing concepts that is introduced throughout the novel is the notion of *entropy*. Even though Pynchon provides a scientific definition of this phenomenon in its two different aspects, that is, entropy as both the loss of energy and loss of information, it could be said that there is an undercurrent behind this process that has both linguistic and social implications, and in the present analysis of the novel both are going to be employed to assist in the interpretation of Oedipa Mass' journey towards love and empathy for the preterite.

On the one hand, some critics have argued that entropy understood as the loss of available energy is connected to the W.A.S.T.E. system in *Lot 49*, the alternative and hidden system that the cast out members of society use as a means of communicating. What this perspective suggests is that there is a correlation between the entropic loss of energy and the exploitation of the non visibilized members of society by the economic system, as Kolodny and Peters comment on: “[...] collections of society’s waste and refuse, the abandoned matter of a highly efficient and organized technology” (Kolodny and Peters, 1973, p. 81). On the other hand, *entropy* has also been linked with the linguistic failure to procure transparent meaning and also represents the questioning of its representational ability, as Drake mentions: “*Lot 49*, rather than representing a world, severs the link between the signifier and the signified as a mode of experimentation that calls into question the way language structures our experience of the world (2010, p. 234).” This could be observed, for example, in Oedipa’s attempts to uncover the meaning of the Tristero system: in the novel, the Tristero appears attached to many events, places and characters that have no connection between them, which reveals the arbitrariness of those attachments and points to the novel’s reflection on the arbitrariness of language and the discourses it weaves; in fact, the more diverse these associations with the Tristero are, the less meaningful information about it is found by Oedipa: “At the level of cognition, such a state is entropic; despite the fact that the communication itself might be packed with data, little is communicated (Leland, 1974, p. 52).”

How is, however, this linguistic deficiency linked to the exclusion of one segment of society? Kolodny and Peters have already pointed out this association: “But betrayal is not merely “corporate” or “political” or “social”, it is linguistic (1973, p. 82).” If one fraction of the social net is concealed so that the other portion can be visible, what this implies is that reality is constructed around a binary arrangement, a structuring that is constantly discriminating and choosing between one in detriment of the other; it has categorized the social dynamics in a way that only some forms of subjectivity are accepted and given an opportunity of representation, while the other remains invisible because it does not align with what has been selected as the only subjectivity worthy of visibilization (heterosexuality, upper-middle class, etc.). This has already been pointed out by Collado-Rodríguez in relation to Oedipa’s impossibility to communicate with Maxwell’s Demon in the fifth chapter of the novel:

Oedipa cannot communicate with this scientific representation of the Jungian demonic shadow, and she remains, the same as the reader, still longing for meaningful revelation. In addition, to sort out hot from cold particles is an activity that echoes the sorting out of true from false information. It is binary thinking, the human superstructure that reduces God’s Last Judgement to only one possibility: to discriminate the elect from the preterite. Similarly, the digital machine can only combine ones and zeroes, and Oedipa in her quest can only try to sort the true from the false because she does not understand yet that, as Jung also contends, opposites should reconcile [...] (Collado-Rodríguez, 2015, p. 264).

Language, therefore, becomes an instrument that reproduces or is correlative to an economic system that chooses to visibilize only those forms of subjectivity that harmonize with a social scheme that is based on consumerism, that is, individuals belonging to a specific social standing that will enable them to actively participate in permanent state of consuming goods. What Oedipa will realize is that, even though she adjusts to the parameters of visibilized subjectivity, she is also victim of a social pattern that keeps her entrapped in certain molds of social conduct, which will, in the end, lead her to an empathization towards individuals that are equally subjugated:

The Frankfurt School thinkers argue that human beings have ceased to be free in any meaningful sense of the term because their goals, and means of achieving

them, have been prescribed for them by a powerful 'culture industry.' Without being aware of it, the 'culture industry' manufactures demand for goods and services they do not need and conditions them to be individualistic and conditional passive consumers (Lacey, 2010).

3. READING OF THE NOVEL

3.1. *Conventional Life of a Republican Woman. Crisis Narratives*

In order to locate the starting point of the heroine's journey towards inclusiveness, it is necessary to address some historical aspects that surrounded the writing of the novel. If the by-product of Oedipa's journey is the concern for people who are excluded from central visibility in America's society, it is only obvious that the first stage of the journey should be situated on its opposite side. The postmodern crisis of representation and meaning experimented during the 60s, a shift in worldview that implied the relativization of values and emergence of cultural pluralism (Shoop, 2012, p. 58) was met with a political opposition from the most conservative sectors of American society (Shoop, 2012, p. 59), which offered a counterdiscourse to that relativization that attempted to fortify a binary representation of the world ("us" and "them") (Shoop, 2012, p. 65). This reaction could be explained by Sara Ahmed's concept of "narratives of crisis", whereby a return of values and traditions that are perceived as being under threat is justified (Ahmed, 2015, p. 76). As Shoop notices, Oedipa declares in the third chapter of the novel that she is a Young Republican (2012, p. 65):

'Fine,' Metzger said, 'and what next, picket the VA.? March on Washington? God protect me,' he addressed the ceiling of the little theatre, causing a few heads among those leaving to swivel, 'from these lib, overeducated broads with the soft heads and bleeding hearts. I am 35 years old, and I should know better.'

'Metzger,' Oedipa whispered, embarrassed, 'I'm a Young Republican.'
(Pynchon, 2000, p. 55)

Being aligned with this manner of perceiving the world, therefore, it could be said that Oedipa starts off her journey from a compartmentalizing discourse, a discourse that has promoted her proximity to solely certain sections of society, the *elect* (white, middle-class, heterosexual) and an alienation towards other forms of subjectivity who do not take part in the centrality of the mainstream American subject, the *preterite*: "Among them they had managed to turn the young Oedipa into a rare creature indeed, unfit perhaps for marches and sit-ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean

texts (Pynchon, 2000, p. 78).” This alignment with certain subjects and not others constitutes what Sara Ahmed conceptualizes as “hard” or “tough nation”, a social body that seals itself from the inclusion of other types of subjectivity that are perceived as a threat:

To be a ‘soft nation’ is to be taken in by the bogus: to ‘take in’ is to be ‘taken in’. The demand is that the nation should seal itself from others, if it is to act on behalf of its citizens, rather than react to the claims of immigrants and other others. The implicit demand is for a nation that is less emotional, less open, less easily moved, on that is ‘hard’, or ‘tough’. [...] (2015, p. 2).

3.2. Escaping Discourses

Oedipa’s quest starts after she realizes her life is deprived of meaning; she adheres to the prototype of the middle-class American woman who, after coming back from a Tupperware party, “the classic symbol of fifties’ complacency and suburban malaise (Shoop, 2012, pp. 65-66)” comes to the realization of her life being a vacuous repetition of days as a homemaker that makes her yearn for a sense of meaning outside of the encapsulation of gender-role patterns: “She stands in her living-room before a blank television set (communication system without message) and considers the randomness she projects on the world (Kermode, 1978, p. 162).” This can already be perceived in the first pages of the novel:

Through the rest of the afternoon, through her trip to the market in downtown Kinneret-Among-The-Pines to buy ricotta and listen to the Muzak (today she came through the bead-curtained entrance around bar 4 of the Fort Wayne Settecento Ensemble's variorum recording of the Vivaldi Kazoo Concerto, Boyd Beaver, soloist); [...] she wondered, wondered, shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be first to admit it?) 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. (Pynchon, 2000, p. 2)

This lack of meaning, though, is not merely a cause of her longing for adventurousness and freedom from the fixity of gender dynamics, but also to America’s loss of

established truths in the 60s: “[...] Pynchon’s novel might be described as a work of mourning by its protagonist, Oedipa Maas, for precisely those verities that no longer keep her world on the side of the real (Shoop, 2012, p. 52).” This sense of being trapped is clearly reflected early in the novel when she recalls her trip to Mexico City with Inverarity and the ekphrastic moment of identification with the characters of Remedios Varo’s painting (Shoop, 2012, p. 53) and shows her consciousness-raising of her imprisoned position and lack of satisfaction with her conventional middle-class woman life (Collardo-Rodríguez, 2015, p. 260): “What did she so desire to escape from? Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all. (Pynchon, 2000, p. 11).”

However, how does this questioning of the discursive truths that have been compartmentalizing the world and human relationships lead the novel’s protagonist to a position of inclusiveness towards characters that inhabit the social periphery of the United States in the 60s? This rising of consciousness of her being captured inside a net of gender social discourses that limit subject expansiveness will, alongside the inability of language to communicate, point to a discursive incapacity to rearrange reality for it to allow a more diversified and plural *national body*², a social body that is not constructed by oppositions or binary relations (either/or):

Oedipa remains trapped in her allegorical tower in the sense that mere knowledge about the social construction of reality –and her complicity in it –does not give her the keys to the castle of representation. But she is fast becoming ‘sensitized’ to the political and economic forces that underwrite those representations and foreclose on the possibility of others (Shoop, 2012, p.81).

3.3. *San Narciso: Narcissism, Mirroring and Mise en Abyme*

The beginning of Oedipa’s quest leads her to San Narciso, where she travels to meet her lawyer, Metzger, also co-executor of Inverarity’s will. In this episode, the names of the places where she will move about already suggest an initial stage of her mission characterized by a certain tenor of solipsism and constant self-reference; the chapter is

²The concept *national body* is taken from Sara Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2015, p. 2)

plagued by instances of *mise en abymic* scenes that are recurrently referring to Metzger and his double career as a former actor and now lawyer, as Collado-Rodríguez has pointed out:

[...] in her role as executrix, Oedipa will attempt to embroider also a way out of her previous life, for which she will encounter a first lover [sic], Metzger, the co-executor of Inverarity's will. As a lawyer who was a former actor, he is the first personage to suggest that California has become the land of a new American dream that never comes true [...] to start her job as executrix Oedipa has driven a rented car into San Narciso Valley and gotten a room in a motel called Echo Courts; these indications of specular and hearing infinity add to the successive number of visual appearances and fake, empty people that the protagonist has to face to get any substantial clues about the job to be done (Collado-Rodríguez, 2015, p.261).

This reoccurrence can be illustrated in many passages of the second chapter of the novel, for example when Oedipa and Metzger meet at the Echo motel, where they switch on the television and coincidentally, a movie where Metzger was the protagonist is being played; it can also be perceived when Metzger mentions Manny Di Presso, a former lawyer who is presently an actor and is going to interpret Metzger's life in a series, which is precisely mirroring Metzger's career, that is, a former actor who is now a lawyer:

'But our beauty lies,' explained Metzger, 'in this extended capacity for convolution. A lawyer in a courtroom, in front of any jury, becomes an actor, right? [...] Me, I'm a former actor who became a lawyer. They've done the pilot film of a TV series, in fact, based loosely on my career, starring my friend Manny Di Presso, a one-time lawyer who quit his firm to become an actor. Who in this pilot plays me, an actor become a lawyer reverting periodically to being an actor. (Pynchon, 2000, p. 20)

This mirroring process and *mise en abymic* tendency throughout the novel is one of the obstacles that prevents Oedipa from finding meaning, for there cannot be any form of transcendental meaning if the elements of the novel are repetitively self-referential instead of serving as linguistic symbols or representations that evoke a reality outside of themselves: "the structural use of the *mise en abyme* in the novel jeopardizes the possibility of ever reaching any sound knowledge or, in Jungian terms, assimilating the

archetype of meaning (Collado-Rodríguez, 2015, p. 260).” However, as Mendelson argues, Oedipa will “progress away from modes of narcissism (Mendelson, 1978, p. 135)”, which could point to the possibility of escaping the repetitive references to the self and to reaching an understanding of other individual’s realities and circumstances. The identification she experimented as she saw her own condition of social discursive imprisonment reflected on Remedios Varo’s painting could be understood as another way of self-reference, replicating the *mise en abyme* pattern that has also been observed in Metzger and that will, subsequently, in the representation of *The Courier’s Tragedy*, also be employed by the appearance of reverberations between the events that take place in the physical reality of the novel and the episodes that are staged in the play, as can be noticed in the following passage, which replicates the reference to the soldiers who died at Lago di Pietà:

The act ends with Gennaro's forces drawn up by the shores of the lake. An enlisted man comes on to report that a body, identified as Niccoló by the usual amulet placed round his neck as a child, has been found in a condition too awful to talk about. Again there is silence and everybody looks at everybody else. The soldier hands Gennaro a roll of parchment, stained with blood, which was found on the body. From its seal we can see it's the letter from Angelo that Niccoló was carrying [...] a long confession by Angelo of all his crimes, closing with the revelation of what really happened to the Lost Guard of Faggio. They were—surprise—every one massacred by Angelo and thrown in the lake. Later on their bones were fished up again and made into charcoal, and the charcoal into ink, which Angelo, having a dark sense of humor, used in all his subsequent communications with Faggio, the present document included. (Pynchon, 2000, pp. 53-54)

However, the progression of the novel’s plot will provoke a withdrawal from self-referential reality and direct her towards noticing that, as Mendelson points out, there is a continuity outside of the tower and San Narciso that has always existed, although hidden from her sensitivity (Mendelson, 1978, p. 136); therefore, that continuity could possibly refer to the realization that the binary organization of the world does not only affect her, but also those who are banished from any form of representation: “she realizes that the visible ‘America coded in Inverarity’s testament’ (*Crying*, 124) was not

the complete picture, and she remembers all the attempts at communication she has encountered from the hidden Other of America (Collado-Rodríguez, 2015, p. 266).”

3.4. *W.A.S.T.E, Residues and Mercantilism*

The episode where Oedipa finds out about Lago di Pietà, where soldiers’ bones who died in a battle are extracted and their bones turned to charcoal for commercial purposes, is possibly one of the clearest passages where the commercialization of human bodies makes its appearance in the novel. The American elite is sustained upon the condemnation to residuation of the invisible America, the lives of multiple people who are outside of representation because they do not conform to the forms of subjectivity that are approved:

‘No bribes, no freeways,’ Di Presso shaking his head. ‘These bones came from Italy. A straight sale. Some of them,’ waving out at the lake, ‘are down there, to decorate the bottom for the Scuba nuts. That’s what I’ve been doing today, examining the goods in dispute. Till Tony started chasing, anyway. The rest of the bones were used in the R&D phase of the filter program, back around the early ‘50’s, way before cancer. Tony Jaguar says he harvested them all from the bottom of Lago di Pietà. (Pynchon, 2000, p. 43)

As Sara Ahmed has pointed out, this hierarchical power dynamics re-organizes the space that subjects inhabit in society, which could be applied in the discussion around the privileged few, who occupy a higher position in the hierarchy, and the disinherited, ostracized to the periphery: “Bodies are disorganized and re-organized as they face others who are already recognized as ‘the hated’. It reforms the social space through reforming the apartness of a certain body (2015, p. 54)”, and it is so because the bodies of the individuals that are aligned with modes of representation that are accepted and fostered by social discourse are identified with the national or collective body, while others are denied such identification: “Some bodies occupy more space through the identification with the collective body [...] (Ahmed, 2015, p. 74)”; as a consequence, a hierarchy of death is established, whereupon some forms of subjectivity, those who inhabit the discursive nucleus of capitalistic America, are grieved, while others are not,

(Ahmed, 2015, pp. 156-157) and remain ignored and treated as a mere object of merchandising, which is precisely what can be illustrated by the Lago di Pietà episode.

This invisible America, the America of the social outcasts gathers, according to some critics, under the symbol of the Tristero: “The formal structure of *Lot 49* reproduces the very binary system it attempts to subvert when the multiplicity that Oedipa encounters becomes re-organized under the sign ‘Tristero’ (Drake, 2015, p. 224)”, and perhaps it is not coincidental that previously in the same chapter of the novel (chapter 3), Oedipa Maas is exposed for the first time to the W.A.S.T.E. mail system. As some critics have argued, the acronym that gives name to the alternative mail system, associated with the Tristero, might stand for a representation of all the subjects who represent “an excess and need to be removed from the system in order to perpetuate new production. (Drake, 2015, p. 235)” and are, consequently, relegated to the residuary position of society that the capitalistic system feeds off: “W.A.S.T.E. is simultaneously an underground mail route and the refuse of capitalist America [...] this does not prevent us from reading the people associated with the W.A.S.T.E. postal system as disinherited and without social value within dominant capitalist structure (Drake, 2015, p. 235).” This is the dynamic on which the power structures of America is based in the novel, a power relationship that is constructed on the foundation of either/or relationships, where only one of the two America’s makes it to representation, the elite, whilst the other, the preterite America, remains without a signifier:

A tendency to privilege one term over the other, in this view, is a form of power that constructs a system in a way that selects to erase what it stands upon, but faces the impossibility of doing so because the structure needs the other as a foundation [...] [which] exposes a power relation necessary for the maintenance of American consumer capitalism. (Drake, 2015, 236)

However, this social structuring based on polarization will be questioned later on in the novel, when the two social spheres of America will experience an encounter that will pave the way towards empathizing with the Other, with the America that gathers those who are excluded by the system; some critics have argued that this contact is made possible by the heterogeneity of the Tristero, which is not only the emblem that unifies the isolated subjects of society, but it is also polyvalent and circulates through all the social spheres: “Even though W.A.S.T.E. comes together as a tangible postal system

[...] it connects different realms of the social field. [...] W.A.S.T.E. has no political vision, only heterogeneity that refuses to be completely controlled. It circulates through disgruntled Yoyodyne engineers and exiled anarchists (Drake, 2015, p. 234).” This phenomenon can be noted in the following passage of the third chapter, where the W.A.S.T.E. system is used not only by preterite characters, but also by Yoyodyne engineers, when Oedipa and Metzger are at the Scope:

‘Mail call,’ people were yelling. [...] Metzger had taken out a pair of glasses and was squinting through them at the kid on the bar. ‘He’s wearing a Yoyodyne badge. What do you make of that?’

‘Some inter-office mail run,’ Oedipa said. [...] WASTE? Oedipa wondered. (Pynchon, 2000, p.35).

3.5. *The Miracle*

The climax of *Lot 49* is reached in the fifth chapter, where the meeting of the two ends of the social spectrum takes place. After wandering through the streets of San Francisco at night, Oedipa comes across Jesús Arrabal, an exiled Mexican anarchist, for a second time in her life. He is the character that stands at the gateway of Oedipa’s direct and empathic convergence into the universe of the *disinherited* or *preterite*, for it is Jesús Arrabal who introduces the subsequent meeting point in the novel, and, as Mendelson notes, will make Oedipa be conscious of the “hidden relationships in the world, relations effected through and manifested in the Trystero (1978, p. 124)”, that is, the interconnections between individuals from the two spheres that were not evident to her at the beginning of the novel, but that will now become manifest because of the Trystero’s heterogeneity and role as the junction of universes that, although apparently miles apart, are both affected and shaped by social discourse:

You know what a miracle is. Not what Bakunin said. But another world's intrusion into this one. Most of the time we coexist peacefully, but when we do touch there's cataclysm. Like the church we hate, anarchists also believe in another world. Where revolutions break out spontaneous and leaderless, and the soul's talent for consensus

allows the masses to work together without effort, automatic as the body itself. And yet, señá, if any of it should ever really happen that perfectly, I would also have to cry miracle. An anarchist miracle (Pynchon, 2000, p. 91).

Later on in the same chapter, while Oedipa is still roaming through the nighttime streets of San Francisco, she starts noticing the diverse individuals that incarnate the world of the *preterite*, as Collado-Rodríguez has noticed (2015, p. 265), which can be seen in the following passage:

So it went. Oedipa played the voyeur and listener. Among her other encounters were a facially-deformed welder, who cherished his ugliness; a child roaming the night who missed the death before birth as certain outcasts do the dear lulling blankness of the community; a Negro woman with an intricately-marbled scar along the baby-fat of one cheek who kept going through rituals of miscarriage each for a different reason, deliberately as others might the ritual of birth, dedicated not to continuity but to some kind of interregnum; an aging night-watchman, nibbling at a bar of Ivory Soap, who had trained his virtuoso stomach to accept also lotions, air-fresheners, fabrics, tobaccos and waxes in a hopeless attempt to assimilate it all, all the promise, productivity, betrayal, ulcers, before it was too late; and even another voyeur, who hung outside one of the city's still-lighted windows, searching for who knew what specific image (Pynchon, 2000, pp. 93-94).

This new awareness on Oedipa's part reaches its zenith when she sees the old sailor, listens to him and feels the pull to reach out to him and embrace him. What differentiates this encounter with the previous realization of the *preterite*'s existence is that, this time, Oedipa is not merely an observer of the lives of the *disinherited*, but she involves herself in the old sailor's life by approaching him and listening to him; the exercise of empathy here is, therefore, complete according to Goldie and Coplan's definition of empathizing, for all the requirements are met: there is a clear and conscious effort to understand the other by Oedipa, the boundaries between the Self and the Other are still defined, that is, a distinction between the Self and what is external to the Self is clear, and, moreover, she listens to his story:

'Can I help?' She was shaking, tired.

‘My wife's in Fresno,’ he said. He wore an old double-breasted suit, frayed gray shirt, wide tie, no hat. ‘I left her. So long ago, I don't remember. Now this is for her.’ He gave Oedipa a letter that looked like he'd been carrying it around for years. ‘Drop it in the,’ and he held up the tattoo and stared into her eyes, ‘you know. I can't go out there. It's too far now, I had a bad night.’ (Pynchon, 2000, p. 95)

In opposition to this processing of empathic feelings towards the Other, there is Mucho's final state during his last encounter with Oedipa in the same chapter. For empathy to arise, a distinction between the Self and what is external to the Self is necessary, but in the case of Mucho, this distinction is blurry because he has, instead, incorporated other lives in his own perception of his ego, without boundaries or differentiation between his Self and Other peoples' sense of self, resulting in the incorporation of multiple selves in one, which consequently nullifies the possibility of empathy, given that defined borders between the Self and the Other is precisely what makes it possible to desire an understanding of the Other's circumstances. This unsettling experience of multiplicity within one body can be noted in the following fragment:

‘Oed,’ looking at her puzzled, ‘you don't get addicted. It's not like you're some hophead. You take it because it's good. Because you hear and see things, even smell them, taste like you never could. Because the world is so abundant. No end to it, baby. You're an antenna, sending your pattern out across a million lives a night, and they're your lives too’ (Pynchon, 2000, p. 110).

Alternatively, what Oedipa achieves is what Collado-Rodríguez describes with the jungian term “*coincidentia oppositorum*”, a path that rejects the choice between ones and zeroes, that is, between one of the two ends of binary thinking by making the marginalized represented and visible through the means of empathy and compassion: “Accordingly, Jung's understanding of life in his theory of the archetypes celebrates the union of opposites or *coincidentia oppositorum*, an anti-categorical belief that will be welcomed by a disconcerted Oedipa Maas, who finally realizes that excluded middles ‘were bad shit’ (Collado-Rodríguez, 2015, p. 259).”

Moreover, not only does Oedipa's journey culminate in an exercise of empathy towards the other after realizing the disparity with people who inhabit the social margins, the “differences and distances between members of an otherwise atomized universe

(Nohrnberg, 1978, p. 153)”, but her quest also leads her to the discovery of a more transparent means of communication than words: emotions. The word, therefore, is dethroned of its position of communicative authority, and emotions, a phenomenon rendered as primitive, pre-historical and gendered feminine, as Sara Ahmed has pointed out (2015, p. 3) will arise as a more effective and diaphanous form of communication, for language has already been proved inefficient by its inability to encompass a more heterogeneous subjectivity that does not leave any individual out of its circle of representation. The following passage from the novel illustrates this process through the sailor’s mourning, which, as Collado-Rodríguez argues, points to that means of communication that is more transparent than words: “the term “crying” offers an indication of that communicative act that may go beyond the power of the Word, therefore escaping from the hierarchies created by binary thinking (2015, p. 266).”

She was overcome all at once by a need to touch him, as if she could not believe in him, or would not remember him, without it. Exhausted, hardly knowing what she was doing, she came the last three steps and sat, took the man in her arms, actually held him, gazing out of her smudged eyes down the stairs, back into the morning. She felt wetness against her breast and saw that he was crying again. He hardly breathed but tears came as if being pumped. ‘I can't help,’ she whispered, rocking him, ‘I can't help.’ It was already too many miles to Fresno (Pynchon, 2000, p. 96).

In addition, Oedipa’s reflection on the consequences of the sailor’s death illustrates how his loss, the loss of a preterite character, is as relevant and grievable as the deaths of people who are part of the *elect*, as Mendelson argues (1978, p. 141). Sara Ahmed’s concept of *hierarchy of death* is, therefore, demolished, and this implies that the barriers between what is deemed representable and what is not (either/or binary thinking) are dissolved, giving hope for a more inclusive society.

Moreover, this could also be connected to the concept of entropy and loss of information, for now there is value in the soldier’s perspective on the world and the possibilities and experiences contained in his life, and also in the multiple imaginable realities that result from the sailor’s condition of *delirium tremens*, invaluable information that would be lost with his death. All the losses are grievable, and this is shown in the following paragraph, where Oedipa thinks about the deaths of people who have lain in the mattress:

It is a recognition on her part of the value of possibilities that might be contained in his warped visions of the world; it is a recognition, simultaneously, of all the possibilities of experience which are lost to us because our language has lost its multiplicity of reference [...] for 'dt' here is a metaphor, and one recognized as such, it is an unfurrowing, an expanded consciousness from which there is no return (Kolodny and Peters, 1973, p. 83).

The fact that the possibility of the sailor's death implies such an important loss to Oedipa can be observed in the following fragment, where Oedipa considers all the people that may have lain on the mattress where she is now with the sailor, and all the memories, feelings, thoughts and life events that had accompanied all those people and that are engraved in the mattress' memory, information that will be forever lost when the mattress is destroyed:

She remembered John Nefastis, talking about his Machine, and massive destructions of information. So when this mattress flared up around the sailor, in his Viking's funeral: the stored, coded years of uselessness, early death, self-harrowing, the sure decay of hope, the set of all men who had slept on it, whatever their lives had been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress burned. She stared at it in wonder (Pynchon, 2000, p. 97).

3.6. Memory and Love

The only way to avoid entropy, either the loss of information or energy through death or lack of representation of individuals who are denied a signifier by the capitalistic system, is the use of memory. Later on in the chapter, after feeling an overwhelming confusion and a desire that anything related with the Trystero and W.A.S.T.E. is just a fantasy, Oedipa decides to visit Dr. Hilarius in a scene where the theme of memory in relation to love and empathy is axial. After Oedipa's painful realization of the suffering of the Other, she wishes she could make the memories of the Tristero and her encounter with the preterite universe disappear, but Dr. Hilarius advises her to do otherwise: "Cherish it!" cried Hilarius, fiercely. 'What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of

you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be.’ (Pynchon, 2000, p. 106).”

Through this intervention, Dr. Hilarius raises a reflection on the nature of remembrance and grief, especially the grieving for those who had been relegated to the non-visibility sections of society; the memories of the experiments he had conducted in the past with Jewish people, dehumanizing experiments that treated them as disposable objects and that classified them from more to less human individuals, are memories that haunt him and that he has tried to eliminate with no success:

‘I worked,’ Hilarius told her, ‘on experimentally-induced insanity. A catatonic Jew was as good as a dead one. Liberal SS circles felt it would be more humane.’ So they had gone at their subjects with metronomes, serpents, Brechtian vignettes at midnight, surgical removal of certain glands, magic-lantern hallucinations, new drugs, threats recited over hidden loudspeakers, hypnotism, clocks that ran backward, and faces. Hilarius had been put in charge of faces. ‘The Allied liberators,’ he reminisced, “arrived, unfortunately, before we could gather enough data. Apart from the spectacular successes, like Zvi, there wasn't much we could point to in a statistical way.’ He smiled at the expression on her face. ‘Yes, you hate me. But didn't I try to atone? If I'd been a real Nazi I'd have chosen Jung, nicht wahr? But I chose Freud instead, the Jew. [...] I slept three hours a night trying not to dream, and spent the other 21 at the forcible acquisition of faith. And yet my penance hasn't been enough. They've come like angels of death to get me, despite all I tried to do’ (Pynchon, 2000, p. 105).

It is precisely this remembering of the Other what makes it possible to take active part in the creation of an alternative system that is all encompassing and inclusive: “It is the remembering of others, and especially remembering the dead, which seems to be the important unselfish love in *Lot 49* (Nohrenberg, 1978, p. 152).”

3.7. Hope for an Alternative

The ending of the novel, even though it does not reveal the action needed in order to achieve a state of inclusiveness among all social signifieds, does point to an optimistic tinge towards the future, for the first step for change is realizing the deficiencies of the

social assemblage that Oedipa has experienced: “The crying of the lot as the manifestation of the sacred; it can only be believed in, but never proved beyond doubt (Mendelson, 1978, p. 135).” Even though the ending of the novel does not reveal any consolidation of an alternative, both Oedipa and the reader have at least taken consciousness of the constructed nature of social arrangements and of a social structuring that is based on marginalizing or empowering certain sectors of society: “What Pynchon has done here is to turn his initial ‘either/or’ construction into a statement of ‘both/and’. [...] Instead of ‘either A or B,’ we now have ‘if B, then A’ because each implies the other in a world of infinite possibilities, ‘either/or’ is a meaningless construct (Kolodny and Peters, 1973, pp. 85-86).” This realization on Oedipa’s part is exemplified in the following passage of the last chapter of the novel:

The waiting above all; if not for another set of possibilities to replace those that had conditioned the land to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or a cry, then at least, at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to break down, to go skew. She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless (Pynchon, 2000, p. 140).

Finally, even though the nature of the Tristero is never revealed, the by-product of its presence is made clear in the end: to extend the domain of signification, that is, to widen the focus of social representation by including and making perceivable all of the social spheres: “No wonder Oedipa’s fantasy of the redistributed legacy of America and her lament about the end of diversity resound together in the same manic meditation. The Tristero names the absent transcendental signifier that, in Derridean terms, extends the domain of signification infinitely (Shoop, 2012 p. 80).”

4. CONCLUSIONS

Pynchon's novel can be considered hermetic and somehow dark and inaccessible for readers, but underneath the complexities that are present in its style and the very diverse topics that it tackles it is evident that one of its themes is the feelings of empathy and love that Oedipa develops for its *preterite* characters. Having put in relationship both the novel and the secondary sources used for the analysis from the perspective of affect theory and empathy, it could be said that, even though an abolishment of the social structuring that is exposed in the novel –based on binary thinking and visibilizing just some forms of subjectivity– is not abolished, it is, at least, revealed and brought to consciousness on Oedipa's part. Moreover, what is also brought up is that both the *elect* and the *preterite* are part of the discourses that perpetuate binary thinking; even though the entitled are not relegated to being the residues through which society is sustained, they are trapped into subject narratives that they need to fulfill for them to have a determinate identity, unlike the preterite, which, conclusively, means that both sections of society are part of the machinery that has been designed by language, its arbitrary discourses and the economic system, a network that fosters the compartmentalization of the world into 'us' and 'them'. What Oedipa achieves at the end of her journey is to transform that struggle between 'us' and 'them' or either/or thinking into 'both/and', expanding the possibilities of signification by incorporating the preterite to the realm of visibility and recognition, rejecting, therefore, the obligation to choose between one or the other, between ones and zeroes.

Also, even though the meaning of the Tristero is never revealed, what has been more relevant regarding the protagonist's quest is perhaps not so much the discovery of the transcendental signifier that might be hidden behind the Tristero as its byproduct. Given the fact that the Tristero is continuously associated not only with the preterite but also with other sections of society, like Yoyodyne's engineers, and many other situations and characters that appear to have no connection, the exercise of empathy is perhaps much more valuable than uncovering the truth of the Tristero: the opening up to acknowledging the existence of the preterite and an attempt of approximation between the two sides that comprise the fabrics of social discourse, the represented *elect* and the invisible *preterite*, tending bridges between the two universes and making understanding, love and empathy possible.

Also, given the fact that the linguistic sign and the word are shown to undergo a representative crisis, reflected on the impossibility to find out what Tristero really is, its transcendental signifier, despite Oedipa's efforts, what is also significant is that other means of communication, like emotions, end up offering a much more transparent meaning than the linguistic sign.

Finally, what has also been noticed is the difference between what empathy is and what it is not. Through Oedipa's involvement with the preterite, mainly during her encounter with the sailor, the exercise of empathy is possible precisely because the difference between the two identities, that is, Oedipa and the sailor, is maintained: in order to experience empathy for someone else, the other person has to be recognized as something which is external to the self, with a different ego and different circumstances, otherwise the picturing in one's mind of what someone else is undergoing is impossible and totally unfathomable.

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