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**EPISODIC CHARACTERS: CONSTRUCTING OEDIPA'S FRACTURED
PERCEPTION OF REALITY IN THOMAS PYNCHON'S *THE CRYING
OF LOT 49***

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the secondary characters and the means by which they influence the main character, Oedipa, in Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49*.

The thesis is composed of four main parts: the introduction, the literature review, the empirical analysis and the conclusion. The introduction gives a brief overview of postmodernist novels and of Pynchon's works in particular. It also features a short overview of the thesis.

The literature overview discusses the research that has already been done on Pynchon and focuses on the topics that are important for this thesis: entropy, paranoia and characterization.

The empirical chapter analyses the secondary characters, discusses their influence on the protagonist and suggests the techniques used to achieve the effect.

The conclusion summarises the main findings of the thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature has been one of the main fields for postmodern experimentation.

Postmodernist literature is often characterized by intertextuality, that is, it often contains references to other texts. Its other features are irony, paranoia, and maximalism. We can also see metafiction, the feature of often reminding a reader that they are reading a fictional work, but also, hyperreality, that is, inability to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality and fragmentation. The narrative is usually not linear: the events are often told in a random order, jumping from one point in time to another. As opposed to modernism that chose poetry as one of its preferred genres (by its representative poets like Yeats, Eliot, Stevens and Pound), postmodernist literature tends to focus on narrative fiction, presuming that literature in itself is rather intrinsically narrative, in direct contrast to modernism's assumption that literature approaches the condition of poetry (Connor 2004: 63). The "postmodernist attitude" is sometimes defined as "suspensive irony", – a term coined by Alan Wilde in 1981 – in contrast with the "disjunctive irony" of modernism that aimed at mastering the world's messy contingency from a position above and outside it. Modernist irony recognizes the breach between a need for order and the complete absence of it in the real world, yet desires for this order. Postmodernists, in turn, take the immanence of the world for granted and accept the disorder by turning down the "rage for order" instead of trying to master it, which would be considered a senseless undertaking by any postmodernist (McHale 1988: 547-548).

Postmodernist narrative works in time as opposed to on time. This makes the postmodernist narrative "a question of position rather than of event" (Connor 2004: 63): it is

more important how the event is perceived by different characters and from their points of view, rather than the mere fact of the event happening. The narration is always being pushed beyond the limits of what the common reader is used to by applying certain techniques, like, for example, yielding unexpected results from an otherwise usual situation. This can be seen in a quote from Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961: 10): "The Texan turned out to be good-natured, generous and likeable. In three days, no one could stand him."

The example shows the contradiction and the contrast between what one expects from a "good-natured, generous and likeable" man and the way he is perceived by the characters or the narrator, which is usually the direct opposite of how the reader thinks a man of such qualities should be regarded. Postmodernist literature breaks the already established frames of previous literary movements and thus complicates the process of perspective and reading itself. A common feature of postmodernism is disruption of linearity of time that makes the narrative irregular and, at times, random, illustrated in Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) where the concept of time is skewed.

The early years of postmodernist literature saw a visible "linguistic turn", setting to match not the plenitude of things, but the plenitude of words (Connor 2004: 69). James Joyce's *Ulysses* can be considered one of the main precursors of postmodernist novels: the world in the novel is reduced; yet the stylistic forms and structures that are used throughout the narration include whole another world in them, allowing the multiplicity of the world to reside in the multiplicity of words (Connor 2004: 69). Postmodernist works assert that the

world is known and shown to be made up of words. Postmodernist authors are not worried about the fact that language is limited; instead, they are excited by unknowable, unspeakable and incomprehensible (Connor 2004: 70).

Thomas Pynchon novels have been frequently named as core examples of postmodernist works. One of his greatest novels – *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) – has been featured on best seller list and numerous selections of the Book of the Month Club. It ranks with *Ulysses* and *Moby Dick* in its complexity (Poirier 1975: 151), as reading the novel requires a lot of knowledge in fields like physics, biology and popular culture (Poirier 1975: 155). Pynchon has simultaneously been a literary classic and regarded as a popular author. Such praise has previously been given only to Twain, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald in their time (Poirier 1975: 151).

Pynchon's novels, such as *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *V.* (1953), *Vineland* (1990), *Mason & Dixon* (1997) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1996) – that will be the main topic of this thesis – contain recurring postmodern topics and techniques: almost all of them include references to other works of art/real events, they contain some of Pynchon's subtle irony, paranoia is one of the recurring topics, as well as the fragmentation of reality. Pynchon's characters are created as extremes with antithetical approaches to living (Newman 1986: 6). They either must choose between “protecting an unchanging environment” or indulging themselves into the senseless chaos that is regarded as the outside world (Newman 1986: 6).

The Crying of Lot 49, first published in 1966, is Pynchon's second novel. The novel tells the story of Oedipa Maas – a housewife who becomes the executor of her ex-lover's will and gets tangled up in a historical conflict between two mail-distribution companies. The main objective of Oedipa as the main character in the novel is to complete a quest, whose initial objectives are first given to her by her ex-lover, Pierce Inverarity. The purpose of the quest only becomes increasingly unclear and vague as the novel progresses (Newman 1986: 68), creating new and new questions to which Oedipa has no answers, but desperately wishes to find them. Oedipa's choices seem to be either "solipsism or assimilation, both of which are dead ends" (Newman 1986: 72).

Although much research has been written on Pynchon (e.g., McKenna 2000: 29-42; Davidson 1977: 38-50; Watson 2017: 146-166), certain narrative mechanisms do not seem to have received much attention this far, to my knowledge. In this thesis, I will focus on the secondary characters that actively contribute to bringing Oedipa to the state of mind she is in in the second half of the novel. The aim of my thesis is to research secondary characters of the novel as a narrative means of constructing Oedipa's fractured perception of reality, feeling of uncertainty and fear.

1. THE CRYING OF LOT 49: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Postmodernist Features of *The Crying of Lot 49*

The research conducted this far has focused on the following main themes in *The Crying of Lot 49*: entropy, irony, intertextuality, paranoia, technological paradigms and technovisuality.

One of the main topics of the novel is paranoia about entropy (E. Hinds 2000: 26) that is constantly felt and pondered upon by Oedipa. Entropy, an issue recurring in postmodernist fiction, is a measure of unavailable energy in any system. The fear of uncertainty and insanity, which is a direct effect of entropy on a living human being, is constantly brought up and reinforced by the events happening in the novel. The novel uses third-person narration, yet Pynchon deliberately chooses to keep the reader away from understanding the meaning of the events happening in it. With each day, Oedipa is drawn into insanity more and more – relentlessly pursuing to solve an ancient mystery, whose whole existence could well be nothing but a mere product of her imagination.

As Poirier (1975: 156) mentions, “he [Pynchon] masterfully and feelingly reveals the destructive powers of all systematic enterprise”. Yet, he insists that the general, as well as the academic, readers of our time are too literary to read Pynchon the way he is supposed to be read. Contemporary readers always look at the text like a puzzle, gathering clues and trying to fit them together to make a whole picture – or construct a whole meaning, in case of texts. However, reading Pynchon in this way would be very wrong, as Poirier (1975: 154) suggests,

as “each (element) is a clue not to meaning so much as to chaos of meaning, an evidence of the impossibility of stabilization”: there is too much information. The information is in excess to the extent that it is impossible to somehow make sense of it and stabilize it. The natural human response to something that does not seemingly have meaning is to find it; to solve the mystery. It is sensible to ask oneself at times: “Do I really want to know the truth? Does the truth exist and what do I do with it?”.

Every ‘clue’ that suggests the meaning behind what is happening in the novel could mean a myriad of things, so that it is quite fruitless and senseless to even begin finding it, as one would never be completely satisfied with results that are so uncertain and could fall apart under further investigation. Pynchon accents the chaos of what is happening not only in his novels, but in the real world, too, and reflects the inherent abundance of meaning, or complete absence of it, in life and work of arts. He indicates that classifying experience no longer bears any results, which means that (Poirier 1975: 154) “the rage to order ... is merely a symptom of accelerating disorder”.

Pynchon’s novels present us a fictional world that constantly refers us back to the real one. Reality often disguises itself as fiction, placating readers and characters. The “Others” – the enemies, perhaps created by the paranoia of main characters in the novel – manipulate with facts in order to make the characters believe that nothing that happens to them is real (Poirier 1975: 156). Many very important plot points of *The Crying of Lot 49* that at first glance seem to have no connection to reality have existed and/or taken place in the real world. The crazy

experiment conducted by John Nefastis, the mad scientist character in the novel, is an analogy of Maxwell's Demon – an actual physical thought experiment. A company named Thurn and Taxis has actually existed and was of some historical importance: almost all the facts mentioned about it in the novel are historically verifiable (Poirier 1975: 157). Pynchon's fiction is often "seamlessly woven into the factuality of history" (Poirier 1975: 157).

1.2. Maxwell's Demon

Maxwell's Demon – a thought experiment created by the physicist James Clerk Maxwell in 1867 – plays a big role in the narrative of *The Crying of Lot 49*. In the novel, it is introduced as an experiment of a crazy scientist, John Nefastis, whose ideas seem to be as crazy as he is, at first glance.

Maxwell's Demon is usually depicted as a supernatural being that is placed before a vessel. The vessel is divided into two portions, between which there is a shutter. The Demon's powers allow him to close and open the shutter in a way that would allow only the swifter molecules to pass from the left portion of the vessel to the other and only the slower ones from the right portion of the vessel to the left one. According to Maxwell this being "will thus, without expenditure of work, raise the temperature of B and lower that of A, in contradiction to the second law of thermodynamics" (Poirier 1975: 159).

Oedipa is, in a sense, a part of the Maxwell's Demon machine, sorting the vast arrays of data endlessly coming at her out of the inheritance from Inverarity (Poirier 1975: 159). She wishes to turn all that data into something that would have meaning, which in turn would

increase order and decrease entropy – a measure of unavailable energy in any system – forestalling death as the ultimate state of life (Poirier, 1975: 159). This, however, turns out to be impossible, just like the Maxwell’s Demon experiment. As one of the commentators on Maxwell, Leon Brillouin (1943), wrote, an intelligent being operating the machine, being unable to sort the molecules – or information in case of *The Crying of Lot 49* – would only increase the entropy, stating that reduction of entropy in these conditions is practically impossible. Another essayist on Maxwell, Werner Ehrenberg (1967) stated that "Similar calculations appear to be applicable whenever intelligent beings propose to act as sorting demon" (cited in Poirier 1975: 160). If their calculations are true, then any attempt Oedipa makes to resolve the chaos she experiences everywhere would not only be senseless, but also yield a diametrically opposite result – an increase of both entropy and chaos. As a result of this experiment, Oedipa is left in a state of exasperation and restlessness, unable to make sense of what is happening and having no control over the mysteries and questions constantly revolving around her.

Additionally, Pynchon may have a strongly negative attitude towards entropy – the “inert” and the “inanimate” – and dehumanization, as an excerpt from *The Crying of Lot 49* (1996), where a salesman describes people bringing in their old cars, suggests (Hausdorff 1966: 261):

... the most godawful 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. ... 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 shadowy life. (Pynchon, 1966: 5)

From this excerpt it could be suggested that Pynchon feels the need to stop the constant depletion of energy and “liveliness” in the world and yet realizes how fruitless and futureless the attempts to do that are. The hopelessness of reducing entropy is often reflected in his characters, both in actions and their perception of the world.

1.3. Characterization in Novels

Characterization is considered to be an indispensable constituent of any literary work by many authors and critics (e.g., Doloykaya 2017: 1000). Although in, for example, the Middle Ages, literature was quite detached from real-life experience and focused mostly on religious values, in later periods, one of the main characteristics of literature has been to represent human experience, successfully passing on the habits, characteristics and values of peoples of relevant ages and places (Dolovkaya 2017: 1003). As stated by Aleid Fokkema (1991: 57), the novel genre brought along the portrayal of characters who “behave[...], think[...], dress[...], and function[...] roughly according to ways that are present in the culture in which the realist text originates” (cited in Doloykaya 2017: 1003-1004).

However, characterization in postmodernist fiction is very different from that in literature that preceded it. Instead of exploring “the ways of how to know the world we live in and how to represent it” (Fokkema 1997: 20), as it was the case in all previous literary movements, postmodernist fiction questions both the possibility of fairly representing the world, as well as the means that are used to do that (Doloykaya 2017: 1004). According to Hassan (1988: 428), the self “has become an essentially contested category, continually

revised, devised, supervised, or denied”. In contrast to the self in fiction of previous centuries that was always singular, centered, static and orderly, the postmodernist self is not unitary, but diverse, polysemous and disseminated. These selves co-exist with one another and contradict each other quite often (Doloyaka 2017: 1006). To put it more precisely, “... [the] self no longer creates the images; rather, it becomes the images that create and construct the self” (Doloyaka 2017: 1006).

Many researchers and critics of modern literature (e.g., Cixous 2009; Phillips 2004) have mentioned that there does not seem to be a character that one can identify with: “[w]hile character remains essential to any idea of fictional narrative, and involvement in character remains the signature pleasure of fiction, still, when one opens the contemporary novel, character is not precisely one finds” (Phillips 2004: 636). Postmodern characters do not have the ability to mirror the individual (Doloyaka 2017: 1005), meaning that one does not see a reflection of oneself in a postmodern character. What one sees in them is mostly a combination of different individualities that shift from one to another, making incoherent and sometimes contradictory statements and actions. This, in turn, makes these characters much less reliable and therefore less understandable for a general reader.

A postmodernist character often fluctuates between different names, roles, identities and selves (Doloyaka 2017: 1007). Its identity proves to be “largely other-determined, multiple, and always in process” (Bertens 12): a postmodern character is always easily influenced by other characters – it does not have any unbreakable truth foundations and

therefore any knowledge that it may have is always uncertain and subject to doubt. As a good example of this, one can give the incident of Washington Irving in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961): first used as a made-up name to anonymously forge letters of the officers, the identity of Washington Irving (who, of course, does not really exist) is then adopted by numerous people throughout the novel and also causes a lot of troubles and misfortunes for the chaplain – a man who has never heard about Washington Irving, but was constantly accused of being him and who started questioning that maybe he even was the man everyone thought him to be. Though the given example is of literal identity multiplicity, it also illustrates the easiness with which the characters in postmodernist novels are influenced by others.

As stated in the review by Barone (1993: 391) of research conducted by Aleide Fokkema (1991: 57) that aimed to “establish the conventions of characterization in a range of different postmodern novels”, it was concluded that there is no unified concept of the postmodern character, though the characters seem to always be changing and doubting about what they may or may not know at the moment.

To sum up, a postmodern character is doubtful not only about others, but about himself or herself; it is often paranoid to an extent and suspects others to plan something against it; its identity changes a lot as the narration goes on, which does not exclude its transformation into a diametrically opposite person; a postmodern character often contradicts itself and is unpredictable.

2. THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The Crying of Lot 49 – in comparison to other Pynchon’s works, a relatively short novel of approximately 140 pages – includes a vast cast of characters. The novel’s protagonist, Oedipa Maas, who can also be considered the only key character, as the narration revolves around her, meets them when looking for clues and answers to the constant questions and mysteries that endlessly appear before her, complicating the quest she is trying to complete. Most of the people she meets only make a brief appearance throughout the novel (e.g. Helga Blamm, Winthrop Tremaine, Funch).

To make the analysis more precise, the characters that have little to no significance in the narration will not be discussed. There is a total of 9 secondary characters (counting ‘The Paranoids’ as one) that have considerable influence on Oedipa:

- Wendell “Mucho” Maas
- Pierce Inverarity
- Metzger
- The Paranoids (Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard)
- Mike Fallopian
- Dr. Hilarius
- John Nefastis
- Randolph Driblette

- Genghis Cohen

To make the analytical process clearer, every character's relation to Oedipa will be shortly described in the introductory part of each separate analysis. Additionally, possible interpretations of the characters' names and meanings behind them will be discussed.

2.1 Oedipa Maas

Oedipa is the protagonist of the novel and, coincidentally, the only person who tries to solve the mysteries of Trystero, while also making sense of what is happening to her along the way. Her name, as most characters' names in the novel, seems to have an implicit meaning, suggesting that certain characteristics are intrinsic to its owner. The name [Oedipa] is most probably designed to resemble a female version of the name Oedipus, the notorious hero of Greek mythology who was destined to kill his own father and marry his mother and whose character had significant influence on Western philosophy and psychology.

Oedipa certainly resembles Oedipus in some respects: she is, in a sense, blind, like Oedipus at the end of his journey, as she is unable to see the truth behind the numerous enigmas of Pierce Inverarity. At the beginning of the novel, she is “having a hallucination” (Pynchon, 1966: 8), which can also suggest that her perception of reality is not the true one, but is merely a reflection of something else, perhaps her own inner doubts and fears. Additionally, Oedipa commits adultery with Metzger, – an act widely considered to be immoral – again, suggesting a parallel to Oedipus, who is known for committing far worse crimes. Yet, it is impossible to say that Oedipa is a 20th century Oedipus: in contrast to him, she does not meet a bad fate, does not commit any murders or incest and does not get to know the meaning behind the mysteries she was so desperately trying to solve.

Instead, the novel suggests that meaning does not inhere in an action or an object but is instead a projection of the interpreter, and this projection changes as the interpreter changes

his point of view on the facts and how he views them (Moddelmog 1993: 84). Some of the critics (Moddelmog, Caesar) suggest that the names of characters are a part of Pynchon's play with his readers and have no inherent meaning in them. As Caesar states, the name Oedipa Maas can be voiced as "Oedipa my ass", meaning that "Oedipa is no Oedipus, or only one at the earnest reader's peril" (Caesar 1981).

Oedipa is very paranoid throughout the novel: she fears that somebody – be it Pierce or any other person of great power and influence – is playing a game with her, a game she can never win. Oedipa is afraid that she is being followed and suspects that people around her intentionally withhold the truth from her. Her fears are reinforced by her close friends turning away from her, going crazy or being killed. She constantly feels alone and being drawn into obscurity.

2.2 Wendell "Mucho" Maas

Mucho, the husband of Oedipa, is the first secondary character the reader is thoroughly introduced to in the novel. Immediately with the introduction comes the first mention of entropy, embodied in Mucho's fears of senselessness of his job: first a used cars salesman and then a DJ, Mucho has problems taking his professions easily. He does not believe in being a disc jockey and has nightmares about selling cars, an activity that for him was filled with existential dread to the extent that it has been haunting him for 5 years already, even after leaving the sales lot. The revelation of Wendell's fears sets the tone for the novel – he, just as many other characters, is filled with feelings of uncertainty.

Though Mucho is Oedipa's husband, it seems that they are not as close as an ordinary family should be: Mucho seems to pay very little attention to what Oedipa is doing; he refuses to help her with executing Inverarity's will; Oedipa has an affair with another man; while Oedipa is on her duty executing the will, they have very little communication.

Throughout the novel, Wendell goes through considerable changes: after taking part in Dr. Hilarius' LSD experiment, Mucho is relieved of his nightmares and remains in a catatonic state of happiness, being addicted to hallucination inducing substances. It seems that Wendell either truly overcame the entropy with help of drugs or just tries to fool himself by accepting the sweet illusion of happiness. As Funch, his boss, says, Mucho is losing his singular identity – suggesting that he is becoming someone else, which is a feature of postmodern narration.

When Oedipa meets her husband after coming back home, he does not seem to be the person she knew before, so extreme are the changes. The sudden transformation scares her away and she feels that she has lost yet another friend and ally to the mysteries revolving around her. The loss influences Oedipa drastically – now, she has even less to lose in pursuit of truth, yet she feels that more alone in doing it.

The name Mucho Maas directly corresponds with Spanish “mucho más”, which is translated as “much more”. This can be seen in Mucho's desire to have more meaning in life expressed in his dissatisfaction with his job. After taking part in Hilarius' experiment, it seems that Mucho finally found that excess and meaning he was looking for and therefore feels himself much better. Mucho's fears in the beginning of the novel reinforce the fear of

entropy and uncertainty, the transformation that happens in the second part of the novel makes Oedipa feel lonelier and more lost.

2.3 Pierce Inverarity

Pierce, Oedipa's ex-lover and the person behind all her adventures in the book, as he had practically forced her to be the executrix of his will, is the owner of multiple corporations and lands, an immensely rich man with a peculiar sense of humour. His estate is so tremendous that it seems to Oedipa that Inverarity really owns everything. At the very beginning of narration, Pierce is already a dead man and his character is recollected through Oedipa's memories of him, as well as through his estates.

The very name of the character, as it turns out to be, consists of a wordplay. It is a compound of a real stamp collector named Pierce and of the fact that if one should go to Mr. Pierce for the kind of unusual stamps so important in *The Crying of Lot 49* you would ask him for an "inverse rarity" (Poirier 1975: 156-157). Such wordplay could also suggest it being a part of Pierce's character, pointing at his desire to play some kind of a game with Oedipa – exactly what he is doing all throughout the novel.

Another way to look at Pierce's name is to divide it into two words: 'inverity' (British for untrue) and 'in variety', signalling that Pierce has got a lot of lies prepared for Oedipa. The first name 'Pierce' suggests some kind of piercing, perhaps piercing Oedipa's mind with all the mysteries he had left her to solve.

Pierce holds a lot of secrets, answers to which seem to torment Oedipa, to the point that she starts thinking that he is playing an elaborate joke on her. Before passing away, Pierce also had a conversation with Metzger, his lawyer, where he bet that the two of them will have a sexual intercourse but stating that it “won’t be easy”. The character is the force behind all what is happening in the novel: without him and his death there would be no story to tell. The name of Pierce gradually becomes more and more ominous as the novel progresses with the increasing suspicions that what is happening to Oedipa was planned by him from the very beginning, taking into account the close connection of his estates to Trystero.

2.4 Metzger

Currently a lawyer, Metzger acts as a co-executor of Pierce’s will. He is one of the people that spends the most time with Oedipa throughout the novel and from the very beginning acts as the only person ready to help Oedipa with the assignment she has to do yet knows little to nothing about – executing Pierce Inverarity’s will.

Their acquaintance begins with Metzger’s successful seduction of Oedipa. She, though she has a husband, commits adultery. As Metzger is a lawyer, one would expect him to help Oedipa with executing the will as much as he can. Instead, it seems that what interests him the most is sex. Metzger never really helps Oedipa throughout the novel, but only sarcastically reflects on her thoughts and doubts, not giving her any emotional support and exploiting her to satisfy his needs. Later, Metzger runs off with one of the girls of The Paranoids, leaving

Oedipa alone. Metzger's attitude towards Oedipa can be shown by a small dialogue the two of them have:

'What did Inverarity tell you about me?' she asked finally.

'That you wouldn't be easy.'

She began to cry. (Pynchon 1966: 28)

The dialogue happens right after they have sex, so it is fair to assume that Metzger's comment on being 'not easy' is referred to him convincing Oedipa to sleep with him – something he had spent relatively a lot of time on.

The name Metzger is directly translated as 'butcher' from German. The way Metzger treats Oedipa is very fitting for the name – he does not care about her, exploits her for sex and leaves the town in an unknown direction with another woman. His influence on Oedipa is clearly negative: she is left alone, filled with doubts and, perhaps, a feeling of worthlessness, as she seemingly was not good enough for Metzger to be around with.

2.5 The Paranoids

The Paranoids is the band that Oedipa and Metzger meet shortly after beginning her quest with the numerous estates of Inverarity. The name of the band speaks for itself; it is one of the first signs of the theme that will be relevant all throughout the novel. The members of the band are all made specifically to mock the hippy culture of the 60s and The Beatles specifically: all of them sing with British accents, even though they are American and wear bangs, the fact that almost caused a car accident when Serge could not see through his hair when driving an automobile.

Oedipa's first encounter with The Paranoids is also marked with the feeling of paranoia; this time not from Oedipa's side:

Miles closed the door behind them and started in with the shifty eye. 'In return for what?' Moving in on her, 'Do you want what I think you want? ...' (Pynchon 1966: 16)

To which Oedipa soon replies: "You are a paranoid" (Pynchon 1966:16). The phrase could also be seen as Oedipa's first sign of being paranoid herself, settling the fear of others having suspicions about her. Later that day, as well as the other days Oedipa and Metzger stay at the motel The Paranoids work at, the band members constantly check in on the couple to see if they are doing anything sexual together. Surveillance of this kind could certainly provoke a feeling of being constantly watched, the first symptom of paranoia.

2.6 Mike Fallopian

Mike Fallopian is the president of a radical right wing group called 'Peter Pinguid Society'. Peter Pinguid himself did not do much: he tried to open a second front during the American Civil War, but retreated shortly afterwards getting scared by Russians. The fact that a whole society has been founded to celebrate a person with accomplishments this insignificant is quite ironic and indicates Pynchon's sense of humour.

The 'Peter Pinguid Society' stands against any kind of communism. In doing that they also reject anything industrial, including industrial capitalism, as it inevitably leads to Marxism (Pynchon 1966: 34). Mike Fallopian and his society embody and mock the American right wing of the time, making references to the John Brick Society, a radical conservative

group active from 1950s to this day, and stating that it looks “left leaning” (Pynchon 1966: 34) in comparison to them.

Oedipa and Metzger meet Fallopian in a bar. Shortly after meeting them, Mike tells them about a postal company that the members of Peter Penguid Society use to avoid using anything related to industrial capitalism. Yet, a certain sense of mistrust and paranoia is also present when they first meet:

‘You one of these right-wing nut outfits?’ Inquired the diplomatic Metzger.

Fallopian twinkled. ‘They accuse us of being paranoids.’

‘They?’ Inquired Metzger twinkling also.

‘Us?’ Asked Oedipa. (Pynchon 1966: 32)

Mike serves as the first person who introduces Oedipa to Trystero. Coincidentally, Fallopian is writing a “history of private mail delivery in the US” (Pynchon, 1966: 37), the fact that will make Oedipa come back to him several times, hoping that Mike will help her in her pursuit of answers. Yet, every time she comes to him, Mike not only does not give her any intelligible answers or clues, but discourages her from pursuing them, which could as well increase Oedipa’s doubts in truthfulness of her conjectures and her beliefs.

The surname of Mike Fallopian is a clear reference to fallopian tubes, a part of female reproductive system. Such a surname could indicate this character’s fertile imagination. Additionally, it is quite ironic for such a masculine and conservative character as Mike to have this feminine surname.

2.7 Dr. Hilarius

Dr. Hilarius, the personal psychiatrist of Oedipa, must seemingly be her main psychological support. Yet, in the novel, the psychiatrist is the first person whom Oedipa does not trust and refuses his treatment (which consists of taking LSD) and one of the first ones to lose his mind. Since the very beginning of the novel, the healing methods of Dr. Hilarius are very questionable: one of his main methods of curing illnesses is to make weird faces at his patients.

Later in the novel, after losing his mind, Hilarius reveals that he used to be a scientist at a German concentration camp, conducting experiments to induce insanity on prisoners. When he meets Oedipa in person in the second part of the novel, Hilarius is obsessed with paranoia: he does not want to let Oedipa in, as he fears that she will karate-chop him in the spine. Before eventually letting Oedipa in and taking her hostage he confesses to her:

‘Yes, I hear them [the policemen],’ Hilarius said. ‘Do you think anyone can protect me from these fanatics? They walk through walls. They replicate: you flee them, turn a corner, and there they are, coming for you again.’ (Pynchon 1966: 103)

Instead of getting help from her psychiatrist who would relieve her of fears of losing her mind, Oedipa only finds more paranoia and insanity that she is trying to escape. The encounter with Hilarius reinforces her fears and doubts. Later, as Oedipa comes to her husband, Mucho, to find the relief she is looking for, but she only finds a completely unfamiliar person, changed by the LSD that Hilarius had prescribed. Not only did Hilarius not provide Oedipa any psychological help, he also ‘stole’ another source of familiarity, comfort and relief for Oedipa.

The name of Dr. Hilarius is very suggestive of the character, as he himself, as well as the methods he prescribes to treat his patients are, indeed, hilarious. No psychiatrist would treat anxiety with making faces and no psychiatrist would try to conduct experiments with a drug strictly prohibited throughout the country. The fact that such a person is in the position he is, is not congruent with the readers' expectations of an adequate psychiatrist and of an adequate society that would accept and appoint somebody that crazy to treat other people's mental problems.

2.8 John Nefastis

John Nefastis is the mad scientist Oedipa meets out of sheer curiosity to see if the rumours of a scientist who has built a perpetual motion machine are true. Meeting Nefastis introduces both Oedipa and the reader to the concept of entropy, a key topic of the novel. Nefastis briefly describes his version of the Maxwell's Demon, a machine that must theoretically decrease the entropy by being able to sort out fast and slow molecules. The concept of Maxwell Demon is described in more detail in the section 1.2. "The word [entropy] bothered him [Nefastis] as much as 'Trystero' bothered Oedipa." (Pynchon 1966: 79)

When comparing Oedipa and Nefastis, it is evident that both of them are obsessed with trying to prove and justify their beliefs: Oedipa – the existence and evil schemes of Trystero, a corporation she knows very little about – and Nefastis – the possibility of the machine that goes against all known concepts of physics and moreover, the fact that he has already built it. In fact, in the novel, Oedipa is directly compared to Nefastis:

For John Nefastis two kinds of entropy, ... thermodynamic and informational, happened ... to look alike, when you wrote them down as equations. Yet he had made his mere coincidence respectable, with the help of Maxwell's Demon.

Now here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of God how many parts; more than two anyway. With coincidences blossoming these wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Trystero, to hold them together. (Pynchon 1966: 82)

The excerpt is signalling Oedipa's doubts of her rightfulness in thinking that Trystero, its plans and far-reaching powers, exist. Indeed, she has many more variables, parts that do not seem to make sense separately, and far less knowledge and facts that she could sew together to make the Trystero that she has in her mind feasible, than Nefastis who, even though his idea is virtually impossible, has much more ground to stand on in thinking that he is right.

Nefastis persuades Oedipa to take part in the experiment and to act as a sensitive: to be a medium for the Demon who will pass the set of energy to the sensitive. The sensitive will in turn somehow pass the same quantity of information to keep the cycle happening and that way making the machine perpetual. The connection is supposed to happen by Oedipa looking at the picture of James Clerk Maxwell and sorting fast and slow molecules with her mind. Even though Oedipa tries her best, the magic does not happen and she almost cries. Nefastis tries to comfort her and offers to have sex while listening to news about China: "You think about those Chinese. Teeming. That profusion of life. It makes it sexier, right?" (Pynchon 1966: 81). Shortly after refusing Nefastis's invitation, Oedipa leaves.

The name of John Nefastis suggests something negative to the researchers, like a connection to words such as 'nefarious', or 'nefas', a Latin word for 'wickedness'. Nefastis, as well as his intentions, are usually seen as "someone evil or impious" or as a person "unspeakable and displeasing to the Gods" (Grant 1994: 67). Nefastis, alike most other

secondary characters, leaves Oedipa with an increasing sense of doubt and fears of entropy, a concept Oedipa does not understand completely, but experiences thoroughly.

2.9 Randolph Driblette

Randolph Driblette is the director of *The Courier's Tragedy*, a play that is very significant for Oedipa's understanding of Trystero. Oedipa decides to see the play after one of The Paranoids' girls mentions the fact that the play features bones turned into charcoal, the same thing that happened at one of the properties of Inverarity. After seeing the play with Metzger, Oedipa visits Driblette and asks him about the references to Trystero in it, mentioning that she would like to see the text version of the play, too. Driblette replies that he added some parts to the original text and that the play is made only to entertain people and has no real significance.

After Oedipa insists on getting the original, Driblette tells her the possible location of the text and adds that "You can waste your life that way [looking for clues and hidden meanings] and never touch the truth" (Pynchon 1966: 59). The phrase is very indicative of the overall mood of the novel: both reader and Oedipa have a lot of clues and suspicions as to what is going on, yet never get to know the ultimate truth behind all the events and predictions.

Later, when Oedipa tries to find Driblette to clarify some of the clues she got from reading the original play, she is informed that he is already dead: Driblette killed himself by walking into the ocean. The suicide was foretold by Driblette himself during his first

conversation with Oedipa: “If I were to dissolve in here, ... be washed down the drain into Pacific, what you saw tonight [the play] would vanish too” (Pynchon 1966: 58).

As Driblette gives Oedipa some clues he most probably has answers to and then kills himself, making it impossible to retrieve any information from him, it can be concluded that Oedipa is left with only a driblet of unclear facts with no indications as to what to do next. The way that Driblette chose to get away from Oedipa is not a usual one too: a death of a man who is seemingly closely related to Trystero and its mysteries must have left Oedipa in a sense of fear both for her own life as well as the lives of others.

2.10 Genghis Cohen

Genghis Cohen is the philatelist who helps Oedipa to inventory the stamp collection of Pierce. He is the first one to contact Oedipa, stating that he has found some “irregularities” (Pynchon 1966: 71) with the stamps. When they meet, Cohen suggests that some of the stamps have been forged by Trystero and also explains her the meaning of the Trystero sign, revealing that it is the muted horn of Thurn and Taxis.

Cohen is practically the only person who is on Oedipa’s side, taking her thoughts about Trystero seriously, and who wants to get to the bottom of this investigation just as much as she does. He is constantly fuelling her suspicions about the Trystero conspiracy, even when Oedipa herself is doubting its existence. Cohen plays a vital role at the end of the novel – the event that gave the novel its name. One day he tells Oedipa about a person who wants to place a bid on the Trystero forgeries that go under the lot 49. Cohen suggests that it is one of

Trystero members who wants to erase the evidence of the organisation's existence. The novel ends with the two of them awaiting the crying of lot 49 at the auction – a very ambiguous ending that does not provide any answers to the reader, but only leaves one wondering what will happen to Oedipa when the dreaded lot is cried.

The name Genghis Cohen is a clear reference to Genghis Khan, the Mongol conqueror and emperor. However, Genghis Cohen is very far from being someone as powerful and fear-evoking as Genghis Khan. The first time Oedipa meets him, he evokes motherly feelings in her: with a fly half open, wearing a silly sweatshirt and sick with flu, Cohen looks more like a child to be looked after than a person to trust and follow. Yet, ironically, he is the one who becomes the main support for Oedipa and always remains on her side, unlike other characters. Genghis Cohan, in a sense, can be considered as powerful of an ally for Oedipa as Genghis Khan of a conqueror.

CONCLUSION

The Crying of Lot 49 is a many-layered satirical novel. There are numerous ways to read it: as a simple detective story, as a satirical work or as a philosophical text on the meaninglessness and impossibility of making sense of our human existence. All through the novel, the reader along with the main character are kept hanging in the air, unsure what to make of what is happening and what the events will lead to in the end. In accordance with the novel's atmosphere, the pleas of getting behind the truth are not answered: nobody but Pynchon knows what happened to Oedipa at the auction, behind the closed doors.

One of the main tools used by Pynchon to create the novel's atmosphere are secondary characters. At first glance, they seem to be like common people and one would expect them to be of help and comfort to Oedipa who is in constant distress. Yet all of them, except for Genghis Cohen, turn out to be constantly changing: altering their life values, experiencing sudden mood changes, losing their minds and even dying. They escape, abandon and avoid Oedipa, leaving her no other choice but to either concede and never get to know what the mysterious Trystero holds or to continue on her path alone and broken.

Every secondary character's name in the novel seems to hold some kind of meaning, be it a pun or an indication of the character's hidden or visible values or traits. When reading Pynchon, it is important to hold in mind that he is a skillful satirist – all of the names could be used specifically to confuse a reader looking for clues. Just as the novel does not seem to offer

any clear and profound meaning, the names, too, could be nothing more than a joke, a mockery of those who tend to look for sense behind a simple and plain scenery.

As the analysis has shown, the secondary characters are a great influence on Oedipa and the way she perceives her surroundings, as well as the idea of Trystero's existence in general. They tend to treat Oedipa negatively, some by first giving hope for help and then taking it away, others by giving her fears of paranoia and entropy. Even though most of them leave the reader with a bad impression, it is impossible to say that they serve as negative characters or villains, as each of them has their own reasons to not help Oedipa and they do not wish to harm her directly.

The dark and sarcastically humorous tone of the novel fits the common mood of postmodern literature. The secondary characters – who unlike real people never struggle to find meaning in things that surround them – follow the common characteristics of postmodern characterization: they are not stable, undergo significant changes of character in a matter of seconds, are paranoid about people that surround them, at the same time inducing similar fears in others, and contradict themselves. Their names are a parody of real-life names, inviting readers to decode them. Even though the protagonist, Oedipa, shares some of the qualities the secondary characters have, she never quits looking for meaning, making it her main purpose of her literary life.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Fjodor Tšebakov

Episodic Characters: Constructing Oedipa's Fractured Perception of Reality in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

Episoodilised tegelased: Oedipa reaalsuse taju konstrueerimine Thomas Pynchon'i romaanis *The Crying of Lot 49*

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Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva töö eesmärgiks on analüüsida Pynchon'i romaani *The Crying of Lot 49* episoodilisi tegelasi ja nende mõju peategelasele Oedipa'le.

Sissejuhatuses annab lühikese ülevaate Thomas Pynchon'ist ja tema loomingust ning tähtsusest ameerika- ja maailmakirjanduses. Samuti tutvustatakse postmodernismi põhijooni, ning erinevusi postmodernismi ja modernismi vahel. Esimene peatükk esitab ülevaate Pynchon'i kohta tehtud uurimustest, entropiast ja selle seosest Pynchon'i romaani tegelastega. Lõpuks tutvustatakse posmodernistlike tegelaste iseloomujooni. Teine peatükk analüüsib romaanis kujutatud episoodilisi- ja peategelasi. Antakse lühike ülevaade tegelaste rollist teoses ning tuuakse välja nende seosed Oedipa'ga.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et romaanis leiduvad postmodernismile omased jooned, nagu paranoia, tegelaste heitlikkus ja ebakindlus. Peategelane on ainus inimene, kes tahab, et tema elul oleks mõte ja tähendus. Analüüs näitas, et episoodilistel tegelastel on väga suur roll narratiivis ning tunduv mõju Oedipa'le: nende mõju tõttu hakkab Oedipa kartma tulevikku ja kahtlema Trystero eksisteerimist. Samuti mõjutavad episoodilised tegelased ka lugejat, kes ei saa kunagi kindel olla kas räägitakse tõtt.

Märksõnad: Ameerika kirjandus, postmodernism, Thomas Pynchon, kõrvaltegelased

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