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Gender and paranoia in thomas pynchon's fiction Genre Et paranoïa dans la fiction de thomas pynchon

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Abstract : *This paper provides an interdisciplinary feminist and postmodernist reading of Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow. The main purpose is to explore the connection between L'écriture féminine and paranoia. This involves offering an outlining of both feminism and postmodernism in relation to the context of paranoia. In advocating for a revision of the traditional Western thought, Thomas Pynchon engages the concept of paranoia as a practice of mental liberation. We suggest that the contrast between the journeys undertaken by the female characters against that of the male characters reveals an appreciation for the female's ability at resistance and the power of paranoia. The experience of the male characters demonstrates the price of anti-paranoia and succumbing to the authoritarian systems.*

Keywords: *Gravity's Rainbow, L'écriture féminine, Paranoia, Postmodernism, The Crying of Lot 49, Thomas Pynchon*

Résumé : *Cet article propose une lecture interdisciplinaire, féministe et postmoderne de The Crying of Lot 49 et Gravity's Rainbow de Thomas Pynchon. L'objectif principal est d'explorer la relation entre L'écriture féminine et la paranoïa. Il s'agit d'offrir une explication à la fois du féminisme et du postmodernisme en relation avec le contexte de la paranoïa. En appelant à une révision de la pensée occidentale traditionnelle, Thomas Pynchon propose le concept de paranoïa comme pratique de libération mentale. Nous suggérons que le contraste entre les voyages effectués par les personnages féminins et ceux des personnages masculins montre une appréciation de résistance de la femme par la paranoïa. L'expérience des personnages masculins démontre le prix de l'anti-paranoïa et de succomber aux systèmes autoritaires.*

Mots-clés : *Gravity's Rainbow, L'écriture féminine, Paranoïa, Postmodernisme, The Crying of Lot 49, Thomas Pynchon*



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Not least among the prevalent postmodern literary pieces are the novels of Thomas Pynchon which are considered along with William Burroughs' and Ishmael Reed's as the "paradigm of the postmodern writings" (Jameson, 1991: 54).² In *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Pynchon's vision communicates the human existence in a chaotic epoch, in which life is characterized by passivity and absurdity. Pynchon describes an incurable world that drives even the wisest of Man into madness.³ Yet, he exemplifies through the paranoid disorder a means of escape from the postmodern meaninglessness. In the novels at hand, the author's treatment of paranoia reveals a difference between men and women, as he implies the significance of mental strength through the female psyche. The journeys designed for the novel's protagonists enlighten a great parallel between the interpretive mechanisms of paranoia and the debate about the feminist theory and gender equation at the time the novels were released. Oedipa Maas and Tyron Slothrop are caught in the conflict between asserting one's individuality against the authoritarian systems, and the postwar discovery that there is no more individuality (Sherard, 1993: 60).

Numerous critics have discussed Pynchon's two selected novels from different standpoints, but none has provided a paranoid-feminist reading of them. Some of them have especially heeded the main concern of this article - Pynchon and the female persona, yet they have mostly focused on the transformations of the feminine representation from the traditional to a postmodern one in Pynchon's novels. By doing so, they have dealt with the theme of a powerful feminist presence in a seemingly ending world. For instance, in *The Birth of the Female Subject in The Crying of Lot 49* (1992), Tracey Sherard trails the growth of Oedipa as a "character"; a female character whose journey toward truth is mirroring the feminist theory between essentialism and constructivism. Emma V. Miller provides a feminist reading to the novella in terms of the linguistic choices made by the author. Her article "The Naming of Oedipa Maas" (2012) emphasizes the link between the name of the characters and the role they play in the storyline as being highly kaleidoscopic and feminist in essence. In a more recent study, Rachid Neji presented in his article "The Transcendence of Masculinity in Thomas Pynchon's Fiction" (2017) a deconstructive reading of the novels, arguing that Pynchon's deconstruction of the metanarrative of masculinity is meant to empower the "female selfhood". Al-Khatib presents an explanation of the way in which "the heroin's internal struggles are translated into the outside world in the framework of the postmodern world" in "Unfolding the Female Journey in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Alameddine's *An Unnecessary Woman*" (2019).

While these works clarify a great deal of the discussion on Pynchon's treatment of the female character, they disregard the fundamental theme in the author's writing; paranoia. Pynchon's characters reveal the potency of a feminism-inspired paranoid journey, and an anti-authoritarian triumph that can be seized from simply being a female. Accordingly, tackling what seems to be a paranoid search for individuality from a feminist perspective reveals on one side the way in which the inherited systems of representation have outlined the female identity. On the other side, it demonstrates the way in which the bond

² Articles by Louis Mackey, Scott Sanders, Leo Bersani, and Morris Dickstein among many others, assumed in common the relevance of Pynchon's writings to the postmodern age of paranoia, with its daring endeavors to confront the psychological confusion of the time.

³ In *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties*, Dickstein explains that "Pynchon's sensibility, like that of some earlier Beat figures (...) strikingly foreshadowed the mood of young people in the late sixties". In Pynchon's novels "paranoia, like radicalism, drug-taking, and communal life, was both a rejection of the official culture and a form of group solidarity, promising a more fully authentic life-possibility" (p. 124).

between feminism and postmodernism as theoretical frameworks have shifted and continue to shift this outline.

1. The Alliance Between Feminism and Postmodernism

Jane Flax suggests that “Despite an understandable attraction to the logical, orderly world of the Enlightenment, the feminist theory more properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy” (Flax, 1987: 625). Feminism is above all a social and political dynamism that envisioned reshuffling the power pyramid between women and men. The 1970s feminist movement, or what can be branded as the introduction of the “second wave” feminism witnessed a number of political demands and campaigns varying from abortion laws to financial and employment egalitarianism. This tendency was shadowed in the theoretical arena to investigate and criticize the existing systems of representation. In *The Power of Image* (1985), Annette Kuhn claims that “from its beginnings, feminism has regarded ideas, language and image as crucial in shaping women’s (and men’s) lives” (Kuhn, 1985: 2). Thus feminism undertook the mission of constructing new knowledge, that is in essence, inclusive to all genders and adherent to the specificities of the female character. Regarded as such, feminism occurs as a derivative of the “emancipatory metanarratives” of the Enlightenment and Modernism (Thornham, 2001: 41-42).

As for Postmodernism, the nearest that we can get to describe the ideology of the movement is through the use of the term skepticism.⁴ A powerful desire at breaking from the traditional value systems manifested in a suspicious attitude towards socio-cultural norms, political establishments, religious codes, and all the criteria that governed human behavior once and for centuries. Postmodernism is an “antifoundational philosophy” that aims at dismantling the conventional value systems by denying their ability at illuminating the ultimate truths. This antifoundational style ties profoundly with the ideas of the nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche as he calls for “*a revaluation of all values*”, which means questioning the legitimacy of analyzing discourses following the conformist metanarratives. Reflecting upon what seems to be the first seed of skepticism in history, the idea of doubting the validity of communal rubrics has never -and is still not quite- received with much public enthusiasm; hence the general disapproval of the postmodern model (Sheehan, 2004: 20).

In his explanation of postmodern philosophy, Jean-Francois Lyotard provides one of the most challenging accounts about the loss of certainty in the traditional value systems. Knowledge is presently the most treasured and scarce product, he argues in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979); of which the more the individual possesses, the larger his share grows in the authoritarian arena. This accommodation is communicated through the world by means of grand narratives: theories and schemes that claim the faculty to illuminate every act and consideration, and resist all attempts at deviation from the unified mainstream thinking (Sim, 2001: 3). One universal belief is not welcomed under the postmodern condition and “we no longer have recourse to the grand narratives”, Lyotard declares, with the primary demand being to look for what lays beyond the traditional lines

⁴ Perhaps the most difficult trait of postmodernism is its resistance to definition as Ihab Hassan argues that the term “suffers from a certain semantic instability”. Considering terminology, it is the Post that seems to bother most theoreticians and critics about the term. The endeavors carried out by Hassan and subsequently by Brian McHale to clarify the term recapitulate that postmodernism comes as a reaction to the mindset and propensities of a previous movement; modernism. This reaction is revealed in the break-away from grand-narratives and established value systems that prove impotent in the contemporary chaos.

of thought (Lyotard, 1984: 60).

The ideological shift that the feminist theory experienced during the postmodern phase is far more settled than its Enlightenment beginnings. This is due to the major challenges faced upon theorization. Simone De Beauvoir explained in *The Second Sex* (1949) that simply the inclusion of women in the patriarchal discourses is not enough to redeem a female identity, since the existence of the Self/Other binary is hardly compromised. She writes:

The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself, Man has assigned to himself the category of self, and constructed woman as Other: she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other. (De Beauvoir, 1997: 13)⁵

In addition to that, if feminism could aim at occupying a position within the existing systems of representation, this position would prove to be one of uniformity, not uniqueness. The patriarchal discourses would only provide a tight scope of pre-structured interpretations that could generate no other than sympathetic masculinity. Hence, the postmodern anti-authoritarian theory echoes the feminist standpoint of rejecting the Enlightenment metanarratives, which both theories recommend, have lost their supremacy in legitimating knowledge and representation (Thorman, 2001: 47).

2. The Therapeutic Nature of Paranoia

The connection between postmodernism and skepticism as translated into the feeling of paranoia has been the theme of interest for many theorists.⁶ Earlier studies emphasized the notion of psychosis to illustrate the postmodern philosophy (Nicol, 1999: 49). The process involves investigating the impact of the post-industrial culture on the individual's behavior. What is deemed a postindustrial culture in this context is the unusual life condition that encourages the rise of rambling consumerism and the enslavement to electronic media; a situation under which open collective interaction has been banned. The subjugated individual breathing through division and miscommunication finds himself subsequently driven into a state of psychosis where the identity is equally divided, with no shelter of purpose. The crisis of identity is further amplified by 'technological pursuit' or 'public surveillance', which is a defining characteristic of postwar society. The new psychological attitude is to sense an unseen eye that is constantly gazing at humanity in every spot of the world accumulating data and evidence about every social subject. This eye in the context of postmodernism is the Capital, and it functions as "a chimeric apparition which, although it can nowhere be spotted as a positive, clearly delimited entity, nonetheless, functions as the ultimate thing governing our lives" (Nicol, 1999: 51). Reflecting on the confusion of the postwar and the attitude of distrust and panic that outweighed the Cold War period, paranoia happens to be a natural human reaction.⁷ As

⁵ Note that de Beauvoir is not establishing the differentiation on the basis of biology. She explains in *The Second Sex* the gap between gender and sex as "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 301).

⁶ Mainly Sigmund Freud (1911), Daniel Paul Schreber (1903), Jacques Marie Emile Lacan (1932), and John Farrell (1996).

⁷ The conversation about the postmodern loss of certainty applies to every authoritarian structure the human being has ever celebrated and subscribed to. Regardless of the controversy that the matter may convey, the postmodern mentality left a bold mark in the post-world-wars writings. The second half of the Twentieth century, marked by the Cold War and the peak of political and social skepticism, supported a wide range of fiction the subject of which has been paranoia about the indefinite. John W. Aldridge phrases these similarities in *The American Novel and the Way We Live Now* (1983) as follows: "In the fiction of (postmodernist writers) ... virtually everything and everyone exists in such a radical state of distortion and aberration that there is no way of determining from which conditions in the real world they have been derived or from what standard of

Tony Tanner explains, paranoia originated from the “dread that someone else is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action, that conditioning is ubiquitous” (Lewis, 2001: 129).

The postmodern literature emphasizes paranoia in a variety of thematical means that range from the simple cynicism about the social institutions to questioning one’s own character and even fabricating a number of beliefs that defies the certainties. This feeling of anxiety is produced by the probability that the individual’s understanding of life is partly or totally inappropriate, which drives him to re-investigate the given historical occasions and information for more adequate clarifications. The aim then is to reach psychological freedom and break from the limitations imposed by external forces (Lewis, 2001: 130). The American novelist Thomas Pynchon transcends the mere exemplification of the postwar chaos through his writings. Instead of focusing merely on mocking “Their” authoritarianism like the majority of the postmodern accounts, Pynchon’s works demonstrate paranoia itself as the new language of the minority: the anti-authoritarian counterculture of the late sixties. Remarkably, the articulation of this new language is boosted by the feminist endeavor at individuality.

3. Rapunzel’s Tower and the Female Defiance

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the protagonist Oedipa Maas is not simply a character in the traditional sense, but a representation of the feminist identity. Since the opening lines of the novel, Oedipa is referred to by a number of linguistic codes which categorize her as a female and a subordination: “One summer afternoon Mrs. Oedipa Maas came from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity; (emphasis added)” (Pynchon, 1966: 9). First, it would not take a long while for the average reader to presume that the name Oedipa is a female adaptation of “Oedipus” as “executrix” is of “executor” (Sherard, 1993: 62). She is then identified as a woman, which is an an-Other-to-man identity. This statement of the other is further emphasized along the narrative as for instance in Oedipa’s immediate reaction to the news with the television staring at her and not the opposite.

Prior to her encounter with the Tristero plot, Oedipa Maas is “an eviscerated Californian falling into the cavity of herself, finding in the floating debris around her nothing solid enough to hold her up” (McLester-Greenfield, 1978: 363). An average suburban housewife with a past of no more than “a fat deckful of days which seemed ... more or less identical, or all pointing the same way subtly like a conjuror’s deck” (Pynchon, 1966: 10), she is the archetype of the human life in the postwar vista. This character is violently shaken to cast off the dust of the Californian routine only upon receiving the request to execute the legacy of Inverarity. It should be noticed that at first, Oedipa had no clue about her situation and was confined to the idea that executing the will would be her way out of the mundane life she had with her husband. The crashed individuality as a byproduct to the postmodern reality of 1960s America, the thought that a triggering inquiry would compensate for the psychological emptiness is utterly normal. However, she was allowed

sanity they may be said to depart. The conventions of verisimilitude and sanity have been nullified. Characters inhabit a dimension of structureless being in which their behavior becomes inexplicably arbitrary and unjudgeable because the fiction itself stands as a metaphor of a derangement that is seemingly without provocation and beyond measurement.” (p. 123)

to enter the world of self-discovery only when her paranoid visions provided an alternative preferable to desolation and meaninglessness. The novel follows the transformation of Oedipa through her journey towards paranoia. What was originally a spontaneous interest in a random inheritance, morphs into a mindful determination to assert her identity and understand the manifold layers of social inequality.

The unique nature of the Tristero as a disenfranchised, deliberately silent and secretive entity is in great parallel with the objective of the feminist theory. Oedipa's journey is defined by her endeavor to "see" the hidden clues related to the Tristero, and more than that to frequently "create" her own ones. About femininity and l'écriture féminine Helene Cixous argues that "Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. that is writing" (Gould, 1990: 13). By formulating her personal paranoid connections, Oedipa attempts to centralize the Tristero in the place of Inverarity's legacy. The subjective space is created through her own paranoia just like the feminine is through l'écriture féminine. Oedipa creates her own individuality which has been banned by her culture's system of representation. She writes a new text to replace the man's will, and being the paranoid female that she is, continues to challenge the pre-calculated patriarchal estimations.

The purpose of Oedipa in her journey then reflects that of Cixous as to enunciate a feminine voice (Sherard, 1993: 60). This is not to say, however, that paranoia and l'écriture féminine are hypothetically indistinguishable. One may think of the connection between paranoia and l'écriture féminine in this regard as in the pen and the writing; the former is the medium that facilitates the creation of the latter, but is not the only instrument. It is in the postmodern era that humanity grew thirsty for individuality and self-assertion, which feminist battles have already chased for centuries afore. Prescribed by Pynchon as the antidote to the post-war's thought suppression, paranoia in this context empowers the female subject to establish a unique feminine voice the male seems to fail.

Oedipa repeatedly associates her experience with that of Rapunzel, "a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey, let down your hair" (Pynchon, 1966: 10). With Pierce Inverarity appearing in the picture, Oedipa trusted him to be the caballero who would deliver her to liberty. Entrapment within the boundaries of the American standard and the meaninglessness of life, Oedipa relates to a Remedios Varo painting in which a number of girls, imprisoned in a tower, embroidering a tapestry which "spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world" (Pynchon, 1966: 11). In portraying the meaninglessness of the world then, Pynchon refers to Varo's *Bordando el Manto Terrestre*⁸ which ironically displays the effort of the females to fill the void of the outer world. The quest of the Rapunzel-like girls - from which Oedipa proves no difference - is to weave meaning into the outside of the tower (McLester-Greenfield, 1978: 365).

One crucial and very clichéd element that should be noted about the story of Rapunzel is that the savior is a male hero for whom she waited a lifetime. Oedipa relates to the tale as she initially saw in Inverarity her personalized male hero. As the novel progresses, however, the attempt does not prove as fertile as expected for "Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape" (Pynchon, 1966: 11). The choice to embrace

⁸ Translated as "Embroidering the Earth's Mantle": a Surrealist symbolic painting by Remedios Varo (1961).

her own paranoid thoughts of freedom and subjectivity seems to be terrifying but only logical:

Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its filed strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey. If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic, what else? (Pynchon, 1966: 21 - 22)

The female character then begins to “see” the existence of an underworld called the Tristero, which in this regard, stands for the innovative system of representation that echoes l’écriture féminine. She eventually does all of the above and falls paranoid about what evidence resides outside of Inverarity’s pre-designed box. Her suspicions are inaugurated with the secretive mail delivery and muted posthorn pictograms, to encompass the behaviors of all male characters she encounters: her husband Mucho, her lawyer and new lover Metzger, her psychiatrist Dr Hilarius, the stamp expert Genghis Cohen, Randolph Driblette, Mike Fallopian, Koteks, John Nefastis and surely, Pierce Inverarity. In that, she supposes their involvement one way or another in hiding the Tristero. Oedipa grows aware of the representative systems that have molded her identity as a female, a step towards forming her own subjectivity. As the Tristero continuously symbolizes details of her own experiences, she even suspects being the Tristero herself. If the Tristero is a secret history of the silenced and overpowered on which minor clues can flow to the sight of the paranoid, the female character appears to appreciate the paranoid behavior so as to make it a “herstory” instead of a “history”.

Paranoia subsequently, eases the protagonist’s anxiety and, seductive as it is, it nurtures a sort of comfort within her psyche for it pledges an idiosyncratic feminine voice. Hendrik Hertzberg and David McClelland state that the condition proposes “the comfort of a universe ordered about oneself, a comfort that many people are willing to pay for in the currency of anguish. Paranoia is the very opposite of meaninglessness; indeed, paranoia drenches every detail of the world in meaning” (Hertzberg and McClelland, 1974: 60). The mental mania that Oedipa experiences enables her to grab into focus the haphazard minutiae that the patriarchal systems of representation cancel. Thereafter, she enters a journey that will warrant her a secure remoteness from Rapunzel’s tower, while still proving independent from the masculine metanarrative. David Cowart maintains that:

the Tristero may or may not exist, but whether delusion or discovery it is Oedipa’s salvation, the trampa she embroiders to escape a world of conventional and deadly reality into a world of richer personal reality. That the Tristero and the whole tapestry of *The Crying of Lot 49* are being embroidered in Oedipa’s head hardly matters: the important consideration is that she is now becoming responsible for her own mental tapestry. (Cowart, 1977: 23)

If the Tristero is a personification of l’écriture féminine, it is vital for Oedipa’s mental health. Her mind remains immune to all attempts at deviating her from the quest, and when Mike Fallopian asks her: “has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody’s putting you on? That this is all a hoax, maybe something Inverarity set up before he died?”, she confesses that “it had occurred to her. But like the thought that someday she would have to die, Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility directly, or in any but the most accidental of lights” (Pynchon, 1966). Impregnated with the Tristero, Oedipa rejects the infeasibility of her mission. Paranoia about the Tristero is redeeming only insofar as it offers the opportunity for self-discovery. Ultimately, Oedipa centralizes the Tristero over of the will, her own representation of self over the traditional Otherness, and femininity over the mainstream via paranoia. Although the novel ends exactly where the protagonist begins to speak up for what she sees, the crying of the lot 49 auction is

only the entrance to herstory, for the course of writing is still ongoing.

4. The Case of a Non-feminist Paranoia

Evident is the competence of Oedipa's mind in her indissoluble willpower to unearth the unknown and challenge the patriarchal mainstream. If paranoia presents the means by which the emptiness is filled, futility is escaped, and disintegration is circumvented, it nevertheless raises a bill of personal torment. In the words of Hertzberg and McClelland, "the paranoid view of reality can make everyday life terrifying and social intercourse problematical. And paranoia is tiring. It requires exhausting mental effort to construct trains of thought demonstrating that random events or details 'prove' a wholly unconnected premise" (Hertzberg and McClelland, 1974: 52).

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tyrone Slothrop, the American lieutenant positioned in London during the Second World War, maintains initially an eccentric "Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia" (Pynchon, 1975: 188). In times of the Blitz and the muddle it creates, Slothrop grows irrationally obsessed "with the idea of a rocket with his name written on it" and he suspects the presence of "Them": a transcontinental conglomerate beyond Nazi Germany running after him. It is these paranoid visions that compel him to search across Europe for meaning to his mysterious existence, which enables Slothrop to dodge "Their" attempts at subjugating him. The sudden disappearance of his best friend along with the discovery of a top-secret manuscript regarding an Imipolex insulation device leaves him with a robust resolve to escape the system. Tracked by the English, the Germans, the Russians, and the exiled Africans among some stealthy others, Slothrop assumes different camouflages and fake identities with the aim of uncovering the truth behind the Rocket and ultimately claims an identity.

Oedipa and Slothrop's experiences with paranoia each fall on the opposite sides of the spectrum. The purpose of this discussion is less about comparing and contrasting these experiences as much as it is about foregrounding the significance of a feminist context for a successful therapeutic paranoia. The Tristero in Slothrop's case is the Rocket, to which he seems to respond with bizarre sexual erections. He learns that since infancy, he was subject to scientific experimentation and psychological manipulation by an unidentified party to display such reactions. He then grows insanely paranoid about the Rocket, which for Pynchon is the sane counterattack to the postmodern anti-individuality. At this point, the subjective discourse possessed through paranoia, becomes a necessity for the feminine and the masculine alike under such an authoritarian structure.

As the novel progresses, and soon after arriving at the Zone, Slothrop grows distanced from his initial determination and becomes "less anxious about betraying those who trust him. He feels obligations less immediately. There is, in fact, a general loss of emotion, a numbness he ought to be alarmed at, but can't quite" (Pynchon, 1975: 490). The journey preserved by means of paranoia and the desire to challenge "Them" and create his own *écriture*, is suddenly converted into its opposite: an anti-paranoia "where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (Pynchon, 1975: 434). The fear of the system recedes and the quest dissolves into a directionless existence. Unless sporadically, the male mentality as demonstrated by Pynchon does not persist on the hunt and Slothrop prefers to give up the mission and retreat to social conformism and objectivity waiting for an average nominated death to take its natural shot:

Yeah! yeah what happened to Imipolex G, all that Jamf a-and that S-Gerät, s'posed to be a

hardboiled private eye here, gonna go out all alone and beat the odds, avenge my friend that They killed, get my ID back and find that piece of mystery hardware but now aw it's JUST LIKE—LOOK-IN' FAWR A NEEDLE IN A HAAAAAY-STACK! (Pynchon, 1975: 561).

By the end of the narrative, Pynchon exaggerates the price of passive conformity as he draws the final image of his hero. Psychologically orphaned, with paranoid thinking worn-out, identity lost, and past experiences completely forgotten, Slothrop becomes indifferent about himself, and even "They" lose all interest in him. Slothrop's breakdown at the end of the novel is not the translation of the efforts of those who counter or deceive him but is the after-effect of his own unfaithfulness to himself, his own loss of interest in the battle, and his own neglect to connectedness. At a time when he arrived at the Zone, his sense of obsession started to diminish. He unwrites the voice that supplied his exultance of meaning and responsibility. What was once an escape to freedom and self-actualization faded gradually into weakness and disintegration. And as his "temporal bandwidth" - the degree to which he dwell(s) in the past and in the future - diminishes, so must all his relations to the world" (McLester-Greenfield, 1978: 423).

Although the protagonist meets an unfortunate end, Pynchon shares the possibilities of redemption yet again through the image of a female character Leni Pökler. As an activist in the overpowered Communist Revolution, Leni is open to "the impossibility of any rest ... needing to trust strangers who may be working for the police, if not right now then a little later, when the street has grown for them more desolate than they can bear" (Pynchon, 1975: 158). The feminist discourse once again boosts the power of paranoia at differing the patriarchal systems of representation symbolized by the character of the coward husband. Leni Pöker proves unique as she seizes her chance for action. Determined to carve her own *écriture*, she fancies the threats that accompany the decision for independence, commitment, and self-appreciation. Through an active journey of resistance, Leni realizes a measure of purposeful existence in the wasteland.

It is in the characters of Slothrop on one side and Leni and Oedipa on the other, that the differentiation between life and death, activity and passivity, power and weakness, freedom and imprisonment, femininity and masculinity are communicated by Pynchon. Able to forsake the relentless fight for independence and self-affirmation and wither away the responsibility demanded subjectivity, the passive male hero resorts to self-alienation, false security, and psychological death in existence. Slothrop, along with the other male characters, prefers the coziness of the patriarchal systems with a rather detrimental paranoia and an insignificant existence. Ultimately, the principle of postmodern paranoia and the feminist agenda is tied together to create a new domain welcoming subjectivity and resisting universality. If paranoia provides means to a personalized writing-back to the established grand systems, it is valuable to *l'écriture féminine*. It comes to no surprise then, that the essence of Pynchon's paranoia is echoed in Cixous' powerful demand: "if there's no earth, invent it, if the earth doesn't go fast enough leave it behind, take off, if there's no road, make one, invent it with feet, hands, arms, passion, necessity" (Sellers, 1992: 131).

It should be outspoken, however, that this call - if personified by the female character - does not necessarily imply that the female is superior, nor that the mental healing formula opts for a specific gender, ethnicity or color. Whether intentional or accidental, Pynchon's deployment of feminism in this regard is double-sided. On the one hand, the female journey suggests the power that the female character attracted from the history of oppression, not in relation to gender, but to domination. The skill of resistance became

innate in her nature as a byproduct of the long history of burden and agony survived against the discriminatory discourses. The world now has only grown to dictate a prewritten, equally discriminatory discourse on the male and the female alike. Paranoia subsequently, allows for the supposition of mischievous and made-up schemes which render the world thoroughly fathomable. On the other hand, Pynchon sets the exemplar of a healing self through complete involvement and commitment through the female psychology only to invite - not the opposite gender - but every oppressed, to jump on the bandwagon.

Conclusion

Thomas Pynchon demonstrates that through the paranoid frenzy constructed in his two masterpieces, life is to be lived, not controlled. The aim of this study was not to set the feminine voice apart from the masculine as is the case with the classical feminist undertakings on narratives, but to dwell on the female's willpower to persist through the postmodern chaos by means of the paranoid écriture. As optimistic readers, we anticipate the paranoid characters to continue the process of writing their own discourse through paranoia, against the mainstream discourse of authoritarianism and conspiracy. Ironically, Randolph Driblette warns Oedipa about the mental jeopardies that she might inherit from the endeavor; "you can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several ... you could waste your life that way and never touch the truth" (Pynchon, 1966: 56), luckily, turns out to be the case. Similarly, in time when the prospects for human action are little; all are dreadful and the best is a sham, the male is equally invited to learn how to form an écriture of his own against the severe discourses of the age, not for the sake of opposing l'écriture feminine, but for the sake of mental freedom and human individuality.

By underscoring the female subjectivity - symbolized in the Tristero - the target of both feminism and postmodernism at challenging the mainstream is met with success. Paranoia proposes the option of inscribing a firsthand discourse of the self, and as the auctioneer clears his throat, we hope for the crying of lot 49 only to be the introduction of a new challenge against the mainstream discourse of conformity.

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