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THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PARODY IN POSTMODERN LITERATURE: THE CASE OF THOMAS PYNCHON'S *THE CRYING OF LOT 49**

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***Abstract**: The paper examines Thomas Pynchon's* The Crying of Lot 49 *through the prism of postmodern literary parody and the social processes that produced parodic language in postmodern literature. The paper investigates the ways in which technological and cultural progress in globalized societies resulted in the problem of inauthentic perception of reality and its articulation, which are the reasons why parody, with its ability to revive old texts in a new context, became one of the chief discursive strategies that provide critique in postmodern literature.*
***Keywords**: postmodernism, parody, society, culture, language*

1. Introduction

Critical allusiveness in literature always implies a dynamic relationship with the socio-historical circumstances of the era in which the work is produced, a relationship similar to that established between the parodic text, which parodies, and the precursor (previous) text, which is parodied. These relationships exist to open questions that are, at a given historical moment, still insufficiently or unwillingly raised due to the dominance of the ruling discourses. The modern problem of the inauthenticity of language or, rather, the inauthentic experience of reality resulting in the problem of expression, is deeply rooted in the socio-historical circumstances of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These have seen the culmination of the imperative of progress that began in the nineteenth century and brought enormous progress to the USA in all spheres of society. Invention and technological progress led to democratization – the consumerist availability of things to broad masses – the possession and use of which in earlier periods was unattainable for the majority of people. In the eyes of the bearers of these changes, which took on a global character during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the most efficient (and most profitable) use of time in the production of goods, their availability and, finally, the individual's free will to consume the desired goods indicated the highest stage of development.

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Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* tackles modern progress as a kind of spiritual cataclysm, parodying America's immersion in late-capitalist consumerism and media hypnosis with all that, in Richard Poirier's words, has caused human beings to become things. This paper deals with the way in which literary parody is embedded in the socio-historical context of the second half of the 20th century and the ability of parody to generate social commentary, with a focus on several postmodernist phenomena such as the decline of the individual subject, the socio-ideological conflict between the dominant thought and its marginalized alternatives, the phenomenon of corporate business, as well as of sensationalism in public space.

2. Sixties, post-sixties and postmodernism

In his essay "Postmodern America: A New Democratic Order in the Second Gilded Age", which stands as one of the introductions to the collection *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, the historian Van Gosse (2003) points to the lack of available historiographical data as a problem faced by every researcher who intends to deal with American history from the 1960s onwards. Highlighting the previous fifty years as a period when the study of history saw constant changes as well as considerable challenges, Gosse wonders how it is possible that there is so little "serious history" written about an extremely eventful historical period in terms of diplomacy, politics, culture, society, business, women's rights, etc. Gosse cites three processes in the American society as instrumental in the latter half of the 20th century: the largest wave of immigrants in the entire twentieth century, the transition to a post-industrial economy, and the dissolution of the family as the basic unit of society based on patriarchal principles. He sees the lack of generally accepted periodization as one of the reasons for the lack of written history, noting that he and other historians "get by with makeshift phrases" such as "post-Sixties", "late" or "post-Cold War" America, but that these phrases lack "explanatory weight" and "carry no evident associations" that can be found in the phrases such as "Great Depression" or "Cold War". Gosse concludes that, because of this "historiographical limbo", the last decades of the 20th century were treated as "the present", which, according to Gosse (2003: 2), is the best way to discourage historians, given that they do not want to get contradicted by events that turn out to be the present, not the past.

Gosse then turns to the use of "the ubiquitous, much-abused" descriptive adjective that he also uses in the title of his introduction: "postmodern", pointing out that both positive and negative connotations are appropriate, and continues by distinguishing between the historical periods of modernism and postmodernism: "Whereas the modern age assumed a driving imperative of industrial development and progress, 'postmodernism' has come to signal drift, fragmentation, and the sense that no center can hold" (idem: 3). In his essay "Postmodernism and Politics", Stanley Aronowitz (1988: 46) explains the differences (and similarities) between modernism, modernity and postmodernist discourse. He interprets modernism and modernity as "similar but non-identical aspects of 20th-century life", whereby modernity is both political and economic, with the idea of development as dominant, and refers to "growth-oriented planning and production, with a pluralist political system in which

class politics is replaced by interest-group struggles, and with a strong bureaucracy that can regulate relations among, and between, money and human capital". On the other hand, the postmodernist discourse deals with the deconstruction of modernist myths and narratives. Gosse (2003: 3) cites the example of the US after the Vietnam War as "the epitome of a postmodern capitalist democratic state, where an extreme liberalism regarding personal liberty coexists with a rigorous corporate-driven regime of consumption" Such societies, he continues,

> plunder its own past for styles and cultural artifacts that can be marketed to precisely defined niches of the public. [...] Much that was authentic or at least 'local' has faded fast in the past generation under the onslaught of Wal-Mart and other chains. Nor is this sense of commodified uniformity and vulgarity restricted to what we see, hear, wear, buy, and eat. (ibid.)

On the other hand, Gosse affirms that the postmodernism of late twentieth-century America had positive aspects to it, primarily because of the distinctly postmodern phenomena, such as the diversity that is "more than a slogan". And although, in the postmodern pluralist frame of "fragmentation and alienation", Americans come first as consumers and only then as citizens, Gosse (idem: 4) perceives postmodern America as "more democratic than any America that came before", referring to democracy as the platform for exercising rights, but also as an access to goods and services that had been unavailable to previous generations. He does not deny that, from the 1960s onwards, conservative currents undermined movements that fought for civil and minority rights, but no matter how "mindlessly partisan and trivialized" these movements may seem today and despite all the conservative obstructions, he argues that "we live in a world the Sixties made" (idem: 4-5). Gosse sees the key to disillusionment with the achievements of the revolution in the Sixties in the fact that the changes, although extensive, were not radical. Instead of being dismantled, "late" capitalism proved capable of accommodating, absorbing, and even welcoming revolutions in racial, sexual, and gender relations" (idem: 6). Literary and artistic production became just one of the segments that got absorbed by the system and adapted to the rules of the market.

3. Postmodern individual and construction of identity

In her study *Thinking Politics: Perspectives in Ancient, Modern and Postmodern Political Theory*, Leslie Thiele (2002) emphasizes the postmodernists' claim that institutions and the economic sector, being under the direct control of dominant political structures, are not the only ones that have the power to shape everyday life. Postmodernists, he continues, put discourses in the foreground, defining them as "(systematized collections of mores) that permeate society and generate social identities" (idem: 79). Unlike the structuralists, the postmodernists see the examination and understanding of unsystematic singularities of discourses as the only way to study (and deconstruct) them:

> One must begin with individual practices, particular institutions, and singular events that are themselves the products of the sorts of power being investigated. In turn, one's investigation must originate from one's own particular standpoint, a standpoint that is also largely a product of social power. (ibid.)

The importance of one's own point of view lies in the fact that "identities, desires, and predilections are the products of social power" and "investigations will only reveal the effects of particular relations of power as they are theorized from a particular vantage point" (ibid.). In the case of the postmodernist understanding of discourse, where "even basic individual desire and will are less the trademarks of individual autonomy than the constructs of a social environment" (idem: 81), a vantage point within the very discourse one is deconstructing provides greater leverage. In terms of identity politics, Thiele (idem: 80) emphasizes that "(i)dentities are not just roles people whimsically choose to play, roles that can be exchanged or given up at will from one day to the next" but "complex patterns of norms and desires, modes of thinking and behaving, that are formed over time owing to the integration of individuals within dense social networks". As such, individual and collective identities are intricate constructions that defy dismantling.

Hans Bertens (2005) addresses the opposition to the discourses that are socially dominant and, as such, create reality. He sees mimetic representation as a great ally of dominant discourses, stating that "[t]o control representations, which now no longer reflected reality, but instead had come to actively constitute it, was to wield power", while "to attack representation was to attack that power" (idem: 80). Postmodern literature has resorted to various discursive strategies and rhetorical figures, with parody being one of them, that diagnose, attack, and deconstruct dominant discourses and their creators, pointing to their role in fabricating reality.

Patricia Waugh's (2001) study on metafiction distinguishes between the modernist and postmodernist treatment of identity construction. While in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction we find "the struggle for personal autonomy" reflected in the "*opposition* to existing social institutions and conventions", where

> the individual is always finally integrated into the social structure (usually through family relationships, marriage, birth or the ultimate dissolution of death), in the twentieth- and twenty first centuries we encounter the power structures that are more diverse, mysterious and overall difficult to detect, which challenges the postmodern writer to first determine the very object of the individual's opposition in order to be able to give it a literary treatment. (Waugh 2001: 11)

Waugh (ibid.) explains that postmodern writers, in search of a solution to this situation, turned to idiosyncratic expression as opposed to "everyday" language that "endorses and sustains such power structures through a continuous process of naturalization whereby forms of oppression are constructed in apparently 'innocent' representations." Waugh points out that the language of the traditional novel with all the associated realist conventions is the equivalent of "everyday", "common sense" speech, while the metafictional turning of the text's focus on itself and its internal workings – a process similar to parody – is a form of "an opposition, not to ostensibly

'objective' facts in the 'real' world, but to the language of the realistic novel which has sustained and endorsed such a view of reality" (ibid.). Parodic writing as a form of metafiction bridges the gap between a very tangible crisis, alienation and oppression on the one hand and established literary conventions that no longer have the ability to produce an appropriate expression of the contemporary state on the other (idem: 11-12).

According to Waugh, the problem that appears when writers adhere to traditional literary conventions and, at the same time, try to write about a world that is rapidly changing is the triviality of produced work and its ephemeral value. She (idem: 12) argues that the author should write while keeping in mind the balance that must exist between the unknown (innovative) and the known (conventional or traditional). The parodic text, which functions as a signifier and takes over the previous text in a new context, maintains precisely the balance that Waugh talks about. Parody enables the reader to encounter a familiar – previous text, but also makes it innovative through parodic reworking.

4. Daniel J. Boorstin: Democratization of experience in modern society

Efficiency, which Boorstin (2002: 555) calls "an American gospel in the twentieth century", meant "packaging work into units of time". After time "became a series of homogeneous – precisely measured and precisely repeatable – units", work, in order to have maximum output achieved, had to be organized into smaller parts as well (ibid.). Boorstin (2002: 556) mentions Frederick W. Taylor, "the Apostle of the American Gospel of Efficiency"," who regarded any expenditure of time and mental and physical strength invested in work that could be done more effectively if broken down into parts and delegated to a larger number of people an individualistic show-off, resulting in a waste of time and money. The imperative of standardization and mercantilism also spread to the economic sector that dealt with sales, which was primarily reflected in the emergence of corporations, which will have a key importance in both the economic and the political spheres in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Like Gosse, Boorstin emphasizes the individual's transition from the citizen to the consumer, conditioned by the development of corporations:

> Instead of haphazard personal enterprise, the American consumer found standardized, market-tested, nationally advertised brands of all products and services. He became the beneficiary, as he was the target, of the most sophisticated market research, product research, and sales know-how. His neighborhood world was flattened into the national consuming landscape. (Boorstin 2002: 663)

The expansion of consumerism and general development of technology and mass production were also transferred from the industrial to the cultural sphere. Boorstin (idem: 568) states that, by the mid-twentieth century, Americans "had perfected many new techniques for repeating sights and sounds at their own convenience". And this segment of progress, he points out, represents an attack on the uniqueness of experience:

> Uniqueness had once been the hallmark of experience. Each moment of life was supposed to be unrepeatable; the visible body and gestures, and the voice of a man, lasted during the brief span of his life and then dissolved with his death. Images of the past required the artistry of painter or sculptor; bygone actions could be recaptured only by the mimicry of the actor. The most vivid accounts of the dead were the work of men of letters. Now without anyone having so intended it, a host of inventions and innovations, large and small, were beginning to add up to a whole new grasp on past experience. (ibid.)

Boorstin calls this phenomenon of repeated experience *democratization*, as technological development allowed a huge part of the population to have access to previously unavailable forms. The early 1900s were marked by a variety of technological inventions in all domains, music being one of them. Boorstin points out that "(t)he machines that brought a vast new stock of repeatable experience into everyone's living room or automobile had the power both to enrich musical experience and to trivialize it" (idem: 591). The trivialization of experiences – yet another step towards the collapse of unique experience – essentially stemmed from repetition, as well as from the market overload with products that sold well. Such circumstances started to slowly take away the exceptionality of both the artistic production and consumption, including tragedy and melodrama (idem: 594). These are forms whose cathartic function provides emotional discharge, and their overuse could only numb their consumers, especially when combined with a very questionable quality of their content. Boorstin (idem: 687) states that art forms increasingly sought to appeal to the common citizen, but that he, on the other hand, "became less certain than ever whether what he saw really was art, and if that wasn't art, what it really was".

5. *The Crying of Lot 49*

Margaret A. Rose (1993: 1) speaks of "several different understandings, and misunderstandings of (the) background, functions and structure" of parody. Abrams (1999: 26), for example, characterises parody as one of the varieties of high burlesque, in which the relationship between the antecedent text and the parodic imitation is nothing other than that between the "serious" and the "lowly and comically inappropriate". Rose (1993: 1) argues that this view of parody as a low form persisted over a very long period of time, which is evidence of a lack of awareness of the power that intertextuality or allusion has in parody. Parody harbours its critical potential through the act of mentioning, even if comedy and humour often conceal it. As pointed out by Prince (1997: ix), Genette's palimpsestic view of texts sees parody as a form of transformation in language that is ludic and lacking critical acuity. In much of her work Hutcheon takes the same view, but, in "The Politics of Parody", she (2002: 90) states exactly the opposite, namely that postmodern parody is "a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations". In this book chapter, Hutcheon (2002: 89) speaks of the "parodic reprise of the past", which "is always critical", and of the fact that the juxtaposition of two representations, the present and the past, is where the critical commentary of parody emerges from.

Pynchon's novel deals with the repressed subjectivity of the modern individual and the socio-ideological and cultural construction of their identity as a major theme. Opposite the main character Oedipa Maas, who, although lonely, fiercely resists the loss of her subjectivity by choosing to remain "in relative paranoia", where she, just like dr. Hilarius, at least knows "who I am and who the others are" (Pynchon 1996: 104), there is Oedipa's husband Wendell "Mucho" Maas, whose own self is irretrievably lost in a bifurcation of the identities he adopts. The parodic workings of *The Crying of Lot 49* point to the collapse of subjectivity in the modern world: the band Paranoids and its lookalike members "Miles, Dean, Serge, and/or Leonard" (idem: 131), young men uniformed and styled in a way that makes it hard for Oedipa to tell them apart; Miles's clumsy sexual insinuations (idem: 16) as well as Nefastis's inappropriate invitation to sexual intercourse that the narrator says he "had doubtless learned from watching the TV" (idem: 81); Roseman's romantic outpour of emotions, articulated as a common romantic trope and therefore lacking any authenticity (idem: 9), etc. These are light, isolated episodes that have the power of parodic deconstruction with a comical effect. The decay of Mucho Maas's subjectivity, on the other hand, is progressive; his downfall culminates when Oedipa learns that he has fallen under the influence of Dr. Hilarius, her psychiatrist who, at the beginning of the novel, tries to drag her, along with many other suburban housewives, into a medical experiment with the drug LSD.

Mucho Maas is introduced to the reader as a salesman of used cars he "believes in", and as a person who, feeling great anxiety, tries to resist resembling a car salesman. Being formed in a society in which everything is "prefabricated, packaged, predictable, repeatable" (Boorstin 2002: 626), the individual loses the experience of authentic life, and is only capable of living its "manifestations" ("a life that bifurcates into nocturnal, sexual, public, new, other, personal, military, sweet, etc." (Basara 2008: 161)). Mucho's revulsion at the very thought that he might look like a car salesman indicates a premonition of identity loss. Still, Mucho, as a true American,

> had believed in the cars. Maybe to excess: 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, frame cockeyed, rusty underneath, fender repainted in a shade just off enough to depress the value, if not Mucho himself [...] (Pynchon 1996: 4)

In a consumer society marked by technological progress, Mucho Maas feels reverence for "the human penetration of the Thingness of this country, the signatures we make on the grossest evidences of our existence" (Richard Poirier (1966) on Pynchon's prose). People laid bare through their cars is a sort of melancholic parody of the moment in American history in which a used car salesman understands the phenomenon of emotional baring - a traditionally intimate and complex act going from one human being to another - as technologically mediated. The narrator lists what could be found in the purchased cars:

> [...] coupons promising savings of .05 or .10, trading stamps, pink flyers advertising specials at the markets, butts, tooth-shy combs, help-wanted ads, Yellow Pages torn from the phone book, rags of old underwear or dresses that already were period costumes, [...] (Pynchon 1996: 4-5)

Only a segment of the list of things found is quoted here; that list continues in the novel, as evidence of atomized reality reduced to lists of fragments as the only possible whole. The news of Inverarity's death finds Oedipa and Mucho at the time when he is working as a DJ at a radio station, and the narrator parodies Mucho's experiences as a seller of used cars by comparing them to the things "older husbands" went through in the Second World War and the wars in Korea. Like them, Mucho wakes up "pouring sweat", "crying out in the language of bad dreams", which makes Oedipa wonder: "when was Mucho going to forget?" (idem: 5) Set in the time of "mutation" of the post-1945 period into the period defined as the late 60s (1966-1974), the character of Mucho Maas reflects the identity anxieties of the great changes this transition brought about. Leaving his job at the car lot, which provided Mucho with at least indirect contact with human experience, and switching to the radio alludes to an even further departure from human interaction. The radio job implies assuming identities that will, at the given moment, provide better ratings: either "horny", or "a young father", or "a big brother", which will later in the novel push him into hallucinations and madness. The novel ironizes Mucho's sexuality; on the radio, "naked lust ... throbs" in every word he says when "little chicks" (idem: 6) call in with requests, while, on the other hand, he retreats completely when he learns that his wife Oedipa was named executrix of the will of her former lover, Pierce Inverarity. Their dialogue can be read as a parody of romantic literary conventions, when the husband experiences an outburst of jealousy at the very thought that a man from his wife's past reappears in his beloved's life. In the case of Oedipa and Mucho, she is the one who assures him that there is nothing to be jealous about, while he assures her that he is not capable of it anyway:

> She showed him the letter from Metzger. Mucho knew all about her and Pierce: it had ended a year before Mucho married her. He read the letter and withdrew along a shy string of eyeblinks. "What am I going to do?" she said. "Oh, no," said Mucho, "you got the wrong fella. Not me. I can't even make out our income tax right. Execute a will, there's nothing I can tell you, see Roseman." Their lawyer. "Mucho. Wendell. It was over. Before he put my name on it." "Yeah, yeah. I meant only that, Oed. I'm not capable." (ibid.)

Talking about television and the kind of influence it had on the Americans, Boorstin (2002: 605) refers to the fact that television, whose influence had become immeasurable, did not provide any opportunity for feedback except through indirect means such as public opinion polls. The Americans had to rely on the telephone, which, again, could not guarantee an answer, or "a venerable nineteenth-century institution, the post office". Oedipa's trip to San Narciso and her encounter with Mike Fallopian is also her first encounter with the word Tristero, the central mystery of the novel tied to the conflict between the US state and independent

postal services back in the mid-nineteenth century. Fallopian's character provides a kind of historiographic insight into the mystery of Tristero, which will torment Oedipa so much:

> Turned out Fallopian was doing a history of private mail delivery in the U.S., attempting to link the Civil War to the postal reform movement that had begun around 1845. He found it beyond simple coincidence that in of all years 1861 the federal government should have set out on a vigorous suppression of those independent mail routes still surviving the various Acts of '45, '47, '51 and '55, Acts all designed to drive any private competition into financial ruin. (Pynchon 1996: 37)

The narrator continues with a comment on the deeper meaning of the postal service conflict: "[Fallopian] saw it all as a parable of power, its feeding, growth and systematic abuse, though he didn't go into it that far with her, that particular night" (ibid.). The novel's conflict between the two postal services, with Thurn and Taxis being historically recorded, while Tristero is fictitious, is metafictional as it is instrumental for the reader, who will navigate the text knowing that Oedipa's quest can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the continuous socio-ideological conflict between the dominant forms of thought and their marginalized alternatives. The conflict between the state postal service and Thurn and Taxis is a kind of binary opposition characteristic of modernist literature; however, the introduction of Tristero as a dark, undefined force that is both epistemologically and ontologically problematic – does Tristero exist at all, and if so, how to uncover it – is a problem inherent in postmodernist literature. As Waugh (2001: 11) puts it, one first needs to establish who the opponent is, and then to find an appropriate linguistic expression to articulate the object of their opposition.

Becoming the executrix of Inverarity's will, Oedipa enters the world of the elusive relationships of corporate business. Speaking of the democratization of experience, of which the rise and expansion of corporations is part, Boorstin (2002: 386) writes about the fears that the American fathers had of them. That fear stemmed from the "immortality" of corporations – their indifference to the human factor – and the fact that, as a creation of the US government, they could be given as much power as lawmakers determined. Boorstin (ibid.) cites the example of Sir Edward Coke, seventeenth century champion of common-law rights, who warned that corporations "cannot commit treason, nor be outlawed nor excommunicated, for they have no souls". Oedipa's visit to the bar *The Scope*, where she meets Fallopian and learns about Tristero for the first time, takes her further, in search of answers, to the high-tech company Yoyodyne. One of the first scenes Oedipa witnesses at Yoyodyne is "a Yoyodyne songfest" held by "the shareholders and proxies and company officers" who sing and swear "undying loyalty to [Yoyodyne] ... to the end" (Pynchon 1996: 61). By presenting the corporation as a kind of church of modern America – in other words, comparing the "soulless" corporate system focused solely on profit with the church as an organization whose task is to help people save their soul, Pynchon parodies their evident equalization in the American society. Boorstin (2002: 607) also talks about this equalization and includes the influence of television, pointing out that "(i)n this supermarket of surrogate experience, the old compartments were

dissolved" and that "[g]oing to a church or to a lecture was no different from going to a play or a movie or a ball game, from going to a political rally or stopping to hear a patent-medicine salesman's pitch".

Dealing with the phenomenon of television, Boorstin (2002: 618) notes that modern Americans, exposed to the "increasingly repeatable packaged experience" marketed by television, were "eagerly, sometimes desperately, looking for unique, spontaneous, and exciting episodes with which to spice their lives". In this need, he sees the root of sensationalism, extremely present in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in every media form. Boorstin states that sensationalism "was not the product merely of the greed of newspaper publishers or the morbidity of public taste" (ibid.), but precisely the product of exposure to predictable television content and formats. Sensationalism was a response to the human need for surprise, and it meant "a new prominence and vividness for crime, disaster, sex, scandal, and monstrosities" (idem: 619). The novel addresses the problem of sensationalism by taking its heroine Oedipa Maas to a theatrical performance of the fictional Jacobean tragedy *The Courier's Tragedy* by the fictional playwright Richard Wharfinger, thereby alluding to the socio-cultural similarities between the postmodern American audiences of *The Courier's Tragedy* and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jacobean theater spectators. Watching the play, Oedipa "found herself after five minutes sucked utterly into the landscape of evil Richard Wharfinger had fashioned for his 17th-century audiences, so preapocalyptic, death-wishful, sensually fatigued, unprepared, a little poignantly, for that abyss of civil war that had been waiting, cold and deep, only a few years ahead of them" (Pynchon 1996: 46).

Jacobean tragedy as a genre abandons all subtlety in leading its spectators to the moment of catharsis; extreme and violent, overflowing with blood, brutal crimes and fornication, Jacobean tragedy tends to achieve an effect by sensationalistic and violent plot developments that will hold the viewer's attention with shock. The novel introduces metafictional parallels between the plot of *The Courier's Tragedy*, specifically Angelo's mysterious mentioning of the bones of the slain knights, and the events that represent extra-linguistic reality for the novel's characters. Namely, Oedipa and Metzger learn from Manny Di Presso that mobster Tony Jaguar intends to file a lawsuit against Inverarity's estate, because he claims that Inverarity never paid him for the human bones he supplied him with, intended for the production of filters for Beaconsfield Cigarettes. The bones were collected from the bottom of Lago di Pieta in Italy, where several American troops died tragically during the Second World War, and whose bodies were later thrown to the bottom of the lake by the Germans. Manny Di Presso narrates the historical event in a lofty tone that takes on a lyrical quality, different from the dialogue he has had with Oedipa and Metzger until then:

> Lago di Pieta was near the Tyrrhenian coast, somewhere between Naples and Rome, and had been the scene of a now ignored (in 1943 tragic) battle of attrition in a minor pocket developed during the advance on Rome. For weeks, a handful of American troops, cut off and without communications, huddled on the narrow shore of the clear and tranquil lake while from the cliffs that tilted vertiginously over the beach Germans

> hit them day and night with plunging, enfilading fire. [...] They did what they could to break out; failing, they clung to life as long as they could. But they died, every one, dumbly, without a trace or a word. (idem: 43)

Di Presso goes on to say that Tony Jaguar, who was a corporal in the Italian army during the war, knew that weapons and other combat material had been thrown in the lake, and, driven by the possibility of profit, decided to recover as much as possible from the bottom of the lake. He manages to extract only bones, which he then "unloads" to Inverarity. Somewhere towards the end of this story, consisting of narratively extremely intricate relationships typical of *The Crying of Lot 49*, there is information that the bones, in fact, were never bought by Inverarity in the first place, but by Beaconsfield; still, Oedipa will go to the performance of *The Courier's Tragedy*, in search of (the word) Tristero. Di Presso's story has no relevance for the compactness and causal consequence of the novel's plot, however it points to the complexity of corporate relations, which abolish historical relations and are interested only in profit. The former wartime enemies, Americans and Italians, unite for the sake of profit, desacralizing the memory of those who died in the war by exploiting their remains. And hence the seemingly naive, but still allusive question that Oedipa's character poses: "How," inquired Oedipa, "are road builders in any position to sell bones, pray?" (ibid.) "No bribes, no freeways", di Presso insists, with the novel's message that even the bones of honorably fallen freedom fighters are not to be thrown away: first they are bought by an import-export company and sold to a fertilizer company, which "may have used one or two femurs for laboratory tests but eventually decided to phase entirely into menhaden" and left the bones to a joint-stock company from which Beaconsfield later buys them (idem: 44). With a thorough reasoning behind Tony Jaguar's conclusion that the bones of American soldiers could have a marketable value, the novel ironically suggests that even a potentially noble outcome – marking the place when soldiers died in battle – is initially motivated by postwar profiteering.

6. Conclusion

With the cultural and historical context of the second half of the twentieth century as the basis for examining parody in postmodern novel, this paper deals with the ways in which numerous individual parodies in *The Crying of Lot 49*, embodied in the discursive exchanges between the characters, their experiences of reality, and the linguistic expression of that reality reflect the problem of lost subjectivity. It is similar to the great parodies of the genre (general parodies), primarily through the parodied absence of the omniscient narrator as a reliable mediator and final authority, whose unreliability leads the reader to attempts at having a direct, subjective experience of a literary work – to interpret and understand a defamiliarized text – and to abandon passive faith in the narrator. Parodic reworkings, i.e. the act of either serious or ludic reference to past texts, permeate "The Crying of Lot 49" and simultaneously point to tectonic structural and political changes that postmodernism has identified in both fiction and real life. The paper addresses the socio-ideological and cultural construction of identity by examining the character of Oedipa's husband

Mucho Maas, the pervasive clash between dominant and marginalized discourses through the conflict between the postal services Thurn and Taxis and Tristero, the problematic nature of corporate intrusion into American society embodied in Yoyodine, and the overall legacy of Pierce Inverarity and the late capitalist system that desacralizes historical memory for the sake of profit. A genuine parody of the genre, interspersed with a multitude of individual parodies, *The Crying of Lot 49* disguises its deconstructive seriousness through the confusion and anxiety of its plot, events, and characters. And although often comedically chaotic in the way it conveys the message, the parody in Pynchon's novel is serious in that it gets to the heart of the changes in postmodern societies with the utmost seriousness.

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