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A Travel to Nowhere: Paranoia and Escapism in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*

A Dissertation Submitted in partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctorate in English (Anglo-Saxon Studies)

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I hear by declare that the substance of this thesis is entirely the result of my investigation and that reference or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

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Abstract

This thesis applies the concepts of paranoia and escapism to interpret postmodern literature. It also seeks to provide a description of a theoretical position and a cultural expression associated with postmodernism and to provide a literary criticism of its conclusions. Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow, and Donna Tartt's The Secret History are used in this study to explore the postmodern position on the issues of subjectivity and rationality in the post WWII American culture. Postmodernism is considered as a sceptical theoretical and cultural system which levels down every value system known to Man. In literary criticism, the postmodern discourse becomes challenging for literary interpretation through its extreme experimentation and by textually transgressing traditional forms of narration, which complicates the interpretive task. By identifying the signs of what is known as the "incredulity towards metanarratives", this thesis examines a selection of postmodern texts, which are characteristic of the challenges that postmodern literature presents. In analysing the literary accounts provided by Pynchon and Tartt, this study shows that paranoia, considered as a postmodernist anti-authoritarian little narrative, is an escapist endeavour to evade the chaos of post-Second World War United States. This thesis also shows the way in which the writers' critical contributions can inform the reading of the postmodern text, and also, how the consideration of paranoia and escapism foregrounds the tenets of the postmodernist theoretical framework.

Keywords: postmodern literature, Thomas Pynchon, Donna Tartt, paranoia, escapism.

Table of Contents

List Of Abbreviations

C. L. 49	*The Crying of Lot 49*
G. R	*Gravity's Rainbow*
S. H	*The Secret History*

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"When I speak of the paranoid style, I use the term much as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style. It is, above all, a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself"[1], states Richard Hofstadter in his introduction to the *Paranoid Style in American Politics*. This labelling of the "paranoid style" initiated the process of trying to comprehend it – of placing it under philosophical scrutiny and isolating its original causes and results. To be clear, the word paranoid does not indicate a medical pathology. Rather, the word style which matters the most in this labelling, bestows a socio-political and cultural meaning to paranoia. Paired with something like the baroque and mannerism, the paranoid style demands to be studied and comprehended as much as any style of expression recognized before. Applying the paranoid style onto the world of fiction, and particularly on Thomas Pynchon's paranoid discourse and Donna Tartt's classical writing, this study aims at developing a fresh insight into the rhetoric of paranoia by relating it to the concept of escapism.

In broad terms, paranoia is a mental inclination in which the cognitive abilities of the subject are neither completely damaged nor fully cut off from reality, but instead re-arranged with an unusual distortion.[2] A key aspect to paranoid thinking is that it has two facets: one is related to schizophrenia, which has to do with the clinical definition of psychosis as a mental illness. The other is what matters the most to the study of paranoia as a social, political, and cultural phenomenon. It can appear in people who behave somewhat naturally but whose thinking displays what may be explained as a "paranoid perspective". This latter refers to an obsessive desire at exaggerating one's own reputation, as he [3] feels persecuted, preoccupied with authority and power, or motivated by other people's

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[1] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays," *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964): 3-40, 3.

[2] John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) 1.

[3] Female characters suffer from paranoia as much as male character do. However, the study at hand is not meant to compare and contrast between the paranoid personalities on the basis of gender. Therefore the masculine pronoun adopted in this study maintains a gender-neutral usage all along the research.

manners.[4] A paranoid personality maintains resentment for long. They often remain secretive and superior.[5] In some instances things develop from a mere "perspective" to lead to the discovery of hidden schemes, enemies and symbols that appear to the average man hollow and insignificant. The paranoid's sense of persecution and intimidation is usually complemented by a delusion of grandeur, and maintained by an wide-ranging system of interpretation.[6] In such case, the objective separation between fantasy and reality falls effortlessly into the false distinction between truth and lie.[7]

For the paranoid character, there is no such thing as a coincidence, or accident; everything is connected and related to him. The fact that the world does not demonstrate its violence simply confirms its cruelty. Evil reassures the paranoid of the validity of his fantasies even when it provokes real fear, and the opposite – kindliness and affection – makes him more suspicious. It may be his life under threat, a valued object at his possession, or his reputation as a genius. The opponents range from family members and friends, to political leaders, international organizations, and even other-worldly and supernatural creatures. In general, the paranoid feels uncherished in his immediate environment, attacked, tormented, and subjugated with no solid stimulus, which often brings him the very enmity and intimidation he dreads. Paranoia is a malady of justice, that needs to be heard.[8]

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[4] Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies : Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S Narrative* (London: Duke University Press, 2000) 10-12.

[5] Ibid.

[6] John Farrell, *Freud's Paranoid Quest: Psychoanalysis and Modern Suspicion* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 28-29, online, Jstor, 12 June 2021. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qggcc/ .

[7] Ibid.

[8] John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau*: op.cit., pp. 4-5.

At the centre of the paranoid style, Hofstadter tells us, resides conspiracy; a distinguishing characteristic of the American history. "In the history of the United States," writes Hofstadter;

> one finds conspiracy, for example, in the anti-Masonic movement, the nativist and anti-Catholic movement, in certain spokesmen for abolitionism who regarded the United States as being in the grip of a slaveholders' conspiracy, in many writers alarmed by Mormonism, in some Greenback and Populist writers who constructed a great conspiracy of international bankers, in the exposure of a munitions makers' conspiracy of the First World War, in the popular left-wing press, in the contemporary American right wing, and on both sides of the race controversy today, among White Citizens Councils and Black Muslims (. . .)[9]

Baffled by such long history of conspiracy, the unexplained incidents of post-World War Two and the online experience of the Cold War,[10] the paranoid individual cannot stomach the reality of society as it is, and therefore creates his own subverted vision of the world.[11] "A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices," said William James in his study *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.[12] This is to say that every individual or group of people in the United States have experienced some sort of bias during their lifetime because the human's sense of logic can be fragile at certain instances. History, religion, and philosophy are typically normative and offer either a legitimation or a challenge to the social orders. This conspiracy-rich history enhanced the possibility that certain value systems can be biased in the strict ways

[9] Richard Hofstadter: op.cit., pp. 9.

[10] This denotes for the heavy influence of the internet and social media which start by mid to the end of the Cold War period. Information was freely distributed by the masses and the media conglomerates alike which created an imbalance between opinion and truth. This is assumed by many critics – such as Baudrillard – to be one of the primary reasons for the escalated spread of conspiracy theories.

[11] Ibid.

[12] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2000) 68.

they explain the world in which we live. Hence, the Postmodern age is the age of paranoia[13] and doubt, and the paranoid style can be considered as a method of escape and meaning-making in time when a strict value system is distrusted.

Although paranoia is a modern conception, the interest in picturizing the obsessive paranoid characters in artistic forms, and predominantly in literature, is fairly old. Examples range from Sophocles' *Ajax*, to Cervantes' Don Quixote, to "Swift's Gulliver, Stendhal's Julien Sorel, Melville's Ahab, Dostoyevsky's Underground Man, Ibsen's Master builder Solness, Strindberg's Captain (in The Father), Kafka's K., and Joyce's hero Stephen Dedalus."[14] However, the paranoid perspective of the kind explained above appears to be a prevalent theme in a number of post-World-War Two artwork, including Hollywood films such Groundhog Day, Nick of Time, and Back to the Futures; and influential literature such as that of Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and William Burroughs.[15] Taking that the vast majority of the postmodern critics shed light on the unavailability of a value system and meaning and the terror that the thought entails, discussions about paranoia in the age of uncertainty and human manipulation as a literary theme comes to no surprise.

In the introduction to the translation of Derrida's *Mes Chances*, William Kerrigan and Joseph Smith provide a functional statement to describe the postmodern text: postmodernism in literature is "the embrace of the uncertainties

[13] This claim is not new. Many theorists and critics asserted that the postmodern age is the age of paranoia. These include: Timothy Melley, John Farrell, Patrick O'Donnell, and Hofstadter among others.

[14] John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau*: op.cit., pp. 3.

It should be noted that not all of these writers portrayed the paranoid character in the same way. Don Quixote for instance, is astonished with the little details of the world, that the characters' personality symbolizes mere madness. In Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* A degree of sarcasm is evident in treatment of the auto-biographical hero in. *The Father* on the other hand, presents a paranoid play on a real victim of a conspiracy.

[15] Ibid.

of discourse".[16] This denotes that the experience of the postmodern narrative is allied with disbelief and scepticism in the presumed truths and events which cannot be reasonably verified. Jean-Francois Lyotard assumes a similar philosophical take on postmodernism, a movement that he describes as the "incredulity towards metanarratives",[17] with metanarratives being the trusted authoritarian theories and narrative structures that lecture about history and culture while maintaining absolute legitimacy. On the same line of thought, Jean Baudrillard speaks of the "simulacrum", which predominates the postmodern world, as a copy with no original.[18] He suggests that the truth is lost because of over-technologizing, and the world is nothing but an arrangement of copies.[19] One may infer that these viewpoints show that the postmodern discourse is "paranoid" in so far as it arises form a projective intention where narrative is read as a representation instead of a criticism or a solution to the lived experience. Rather than offering a reasonable analysis of the appeals of the paranoid thinking, hence, major literary criticism in the post-world war and the Cold War period mainly contributed to the craze.

Just as Hofstadter could trace the paranoid style in the American politics, critics could trace, and study it in the fiction of the postmodern period. The view of the contemporary scene as revolving around paranoia and skepticism became remarkably widespread, especially after postmodern writers such Pynchon and DeLillo agreed on the argument that "paranoia replaced history in the American life".[20] One of the major critics who traced the paranoid tendency throughout the

[16] William Kerrigan and Joseph Smith quoted in Jerry Aline Flieger, "Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye." *New Literary History* , vol. 28, no. 1, (Cultural Studies: China and the West, 1997): 87-109, online, Jstor, 3 June 2021. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20057403/ .

[17] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge", *Theory and History of Literature* , forward. Fredric Jameson, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, vol. 10, (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1984) xxiv.

[18] Mike Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory* (London: Routledge, 1991) 187.
[19] Ibid.
[20] "And Quiet Writes the Don", *The Irish Times* (10 January 1998), online, Internet, 17 September 2021. Available : https://www.irishtimes.com/news/and-quiet-writes-the-don-1.123144/.

American literary history is John Farrell in his book *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (2006).

Farrell starts his analysis with the assumption that paranoia, disbelief, and the paradigms of power have been central concerns to the Western intellectuals since the sixteenth century.[21] He also suggests that paranoia is a dominant thematic concern in modern literature, which symptoms – including grandiosity, suspicion, irrelevant resentment, fear of persecution and conspiracy – are often typical characteristics of the modern hero.[22] Throughout the book, Farrell traces paranoia since the very infancy of modernity. He explains that Don Quixote "is the first great modern paranoid adventurer, and Cervantes' treatment of him, with its astonishing minuteness and delicacy of observation, remains the most penetrating and influential portrait of madness in western literature".[23] Establishing these premises, Farrell proceeds to follow the line of suspicion and paranoid thought through the religious formulas of Martin Luther King, John Calvin, and John Bunyan, as well as through the modern philosophies of Francis Bacon, Descartes, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Swift, Hobbes, Locke, Adam Smith, and lastly Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Farrell however, does not simply track the manifestations of the paranoid style throughout the history of the American fiction for the sake of demonstration and analysis. The main argument in his book is in the association of the paranoid attitude to the problem of agency raised in the intellectual development of the West: "a history that shows the principled denial of agency and its displacement to be two of the deeply rooted impulses in modern culture as it emerged out of the modern framework".[24] The cultural power of the theoretical accounts that dwell

[21] John Farrell. *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau*: op.cit., pp. 2.

[22] Ibid., pp. 7.

[23] Ibid., pp. 3.

[24] Ibid., pp. 6.

on the problem of agency – being a feeling that complex structures of power are ordered against the individual – is in itself problematic. "*Once a belief is diminished agency pervades our thinking*" claims Farrell,

> we have passed the point at which it is possible to make a distinction between paranoia and anything else to which the term could be meaningfully opposed (. . .) The sense that we are being manipulated and controlled cannot be labelled false because we are indeed, according to this view, the victims of social relations of unfathomable and inescapable manipulative power; nor can it be labelled true because that would be to fall back into the myth of the plenitude of metaphysical discourse that is one of the effects of power itself.[25]

Hence, Farrell demonstrates that, although literary criticism has involved imagining the world as deceptive, random, and absurd, this way of considering paranoia is threatening to the human agency. This is especially apparent in the critic's accentuation of Cervantes' mocking style of his paranoid hero's irrational vision, exposing that he has been "victimized, not by enchanters, but by the authors of the books of chivalry who furnished him with his ideal".[26] Contrary to Cervantes' image, this book shows that the celebration of paranoia in fiction is in itself an unfriendly practice against the human individuality. Moving to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it becomes evident that paranoia grew into a full-blown theoretical framework especially with the rise of the conspiracy theories in the political arena.

What can be seen as a continuation of Farrell's analysis of the paranoid mentality into the twentieth century are the works of Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Post-war America* (2000) and Samuel Chase Coale, *Paradigms of Paranoia: the Culture of Conspiracy in Contemporary*

[25] Ibid., pp. 4.

[26] Ibid., pp. 46.

American Fiction (2005). Both of these writers share in common the idea that the rise of conspiracy nurtured the postmodern paranoia, which Farrell insinuates at the end of his book. In an effort to relate it to the contemporary scene, Melley scrutinizes the reasons that made paranoia the main metaphor in the American fiction of post-Cold War. He focuses on key postmodern writers including DeLillo, Margret Atwood, Kathy Acker, William Burroughs, Joseph Heller, Diane Johnson, and Thomas Pynchon.

Melley's central view is that the rise of conspiracy and paranoia in the twentieth century Western culture communicates suspicions about the "changing social and technological conditions".[27] These suspicions are labelled "agency panic" denoting "an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control".[28] Through the selected literature, Melley does not only demonstrate this panic, but also "reasserts the vitality of a more familiar and comforting model of self in response".[29] He separates between reasonable paranoia, which maintains resistance as the central trigger, and unreasonable paranoia such as the one related to addiction, stalking, and anorexia. This is to say that the fiction of conspiracy theories and paranoid resistance like that of DeLillo and Pynchon is overextended to inform a formula of "agency panic". This latter indicates the continuing interest in a form of individuality that is no longer practical, but still reinforces a national fantasy of self-determination against social control.[30]

This very assumption fuels Coale's research in *Paradigms of Paranoia*. The main statement of the book is that the fascination of the American public with

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[27] Timothy Melley, *The Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Post-war America* (Cornell University Press, 2000) 44, online, Google Books, Internet, 7 Nov 2019. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=8tX17AXujekC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false/.

[28] Ibid., pp. 12.

[29] Ibid., pp. 45.

[30] Ibid.

conspiracy and paranoia develops initially from the profound desire at freedom and individuality in the chaotic postmodern world. Arguing that paranoia is central to conspiracy, Coale suggests that conspiracy becomes "a metanarrative of deceit and deception unmasked".[31] He traces the manifestations of conspiracy as such in popular writings of Joan Didion, DeLillo, Pynchon, and Toni Morrison. The emphasis is placed on the relationship between the Calvinist roots and the postmodern conspiracy and paranoia. From a theological perspective, particularly that of the apocalyptic Biblical narratives of the early Calvinists, the belief in conspiracy and paranoia is imbedded in the Calvinist view that everything is connected under a bigger power.[32]

One of Coale's major concepts engaged in this work is the "postmodern sublime". [33] It refers to a trace of truth, not *the* truth, but *a* truth with all its ambiguity and mystery, as opposed to mystification. This concept is what he finds most suitable to discuss the literature of conspiracy and paranoia in postmodernism. "conspiracy seeks refuge in abolishing mystery. The postmodern sublime [34] pursues and performs it; imbued with radical scepticism and anti-authoritarianism at the same time it celebrates the pursuit and the performance themselves" concludes Coale; "literature becomes theory (…) it occupies the space where imagination and contemplation become one".[35] The postmodern sublime is therefore presented as one of the strategies the postmodern authors use to reconcile

[31] Samuel Chase Coale, *Paradigms of Paranoia: The Culture of Conspiracy In Contemporary American Fiction* (University of Alabama Press, 2019) 05, online, Google Books, Internet, 22 Dec 2019. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=nG-cDwAAQBAJ&dq=paranoid+fiction+statistics&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[32] Ibid., pp. 12.

[33] Ibid., pp. 7.

[34] Though Coale appears very interested in the postmodern sublime, a full explanation of the concept, or a theoretical foundation of it is not specified. For more information on the postmodern sublime see Christophe Den Tandt's "Invoking the Abyss: The Ideologies of the Postmodern Sublime" published in *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* (1995).

[35] Ibid., pp. 245.

the tension between the longing for freedom and the uncertainty of the conspiratorial world.

As perceived above, both Melley and Coale understood paranoia in relation to the fiction of conspiracy, and – like Farrell – attempted to provide a rational explanation to its consequences, limitations, and dangers on the human agency. Major critics join them in the way they explain paranoia in fiction such as Patrick O'Donnell, Daniel Pipes, George Marcus, Devon Jackson, and Mark Fenster among others.[36] Yet, there happens to be innovative and challenging ways of viewing paranoia in fiction such as the one in David Trotter's *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the professionalization of English Society* (2001). Though he made it specific that his work is dealing with the British fiction, Trotter offers what he deems a professionalized literary criticism of paranoia. He discusses writers whom he associates with "madness, (and who) went a little mad themselves."[37] These are Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, T.E. Hulme, D.H Lawrence, and Wyndham Lewis; and they are considered by Trotter to be paranoids who write about paranoia.[38]

Paranoid modernism is grounded on the supposition that a literary critic is able to realize a medical diagnosis of a literary piece, and particularly, a modernist one. Since the first pages the emphasis is given to psychology as Trotter separates between paranoia and schizophrenia at first before diving into the texts of choice. Clinically, the paranoid individuals "*cannot abide contingency*", and therefore, create extremely meaningful but illusory visions, where everything that occurs to them can be assumed to be the result of the intrusion of the other.[39] The critic's

[36] Alan Biackstock, "Paradoxy of Modernism Review", *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2006): 84-88.

[37] David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 7-8.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., pp. 38.

main argument is driven from contradicting Kraepelin's philosophy: "to imitate for imitation's sake, Kraepelin thought, was to abandon any notion of meaning and value, of purposefulness, of inner psychic unity". Instead, "writers from John Stuart Mill to Wyndham Lewis", argues Trotter, "were so violently to fulminate, thus constituting an anti-mimetic paranoid post-liberalism".[40]

Another argument presented in the book also is the new notion of paranoid professionalism. Trotter suggests that the British public grew more and more professionalized by the end of the nineteenth century, that qualified groups had to secure their positions in society, and that paranoia assisted in the process.[41] Writers being in a lower rank than other expertise such as doctors and lawyers, became paranoid about their carriers and ambitions.[42] Trotter then, defines the worries of the British writers in holding a satisfying position in society as paranoia, which they exhibit in their writings. He asserts that paranoia is one of the problems activated in the "democratic society by a withholding of recognition",[43] and that paranoia is a "meritocracy's illness, a psychopathology of expertise".[44] Although this books sets us far from acknowledging the widespread cultural implications of paranoia – especially that it strives largely for a medicalization of the text – it shows that the study of paranoia in fiction was – and still is – open for extremist diagnostics.

Based on what has been said, we notice that a number of conclusions are agreed upon with regard to the paranoid discourse, both literary and theoretical. 1) The paranoid text is anti-authoritarian, driven by a crisis of legitimation and therefore of interpretation, 2) it is preoccupied with the historical and political

[40] Ibid., pp. 40.

[41] Ibid., pp. 83.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., pp. 22.

[44] Ibid., pp. 82.

conspiracies in a way that challenges the inaccuracy of the post-war era, 3) it gravitates towards a reconceptualization of paranoia as less of a diagnosis than a prescription for the problem of agency, 4) it is anticipatory, reflexive yet anti-mimetic, and places confidence in disclosure and discovery.

The fifth characteristic that I would like to add to this list is related to the fact that the paranoid style retains a certain staying power throughout history. This is evident by the mid twentieth century, when the literary concern switched from reflecting the subtle interest in illuminating some possibly hidden truths and plots, to a matter of asserting one's own self-definition and personal freedom. Following that, the relevance of the paranoid style in fiction subsided by the end of the Cold War, only to be triggered again by the 9/11 attacks.[45] This is to say that the paranoid fiction – as a representation and a criticism of the lived reality – is praised at times of uncertainty and conspiracy and parodied at times of peace and silence. Because the paranoid discourse goes hand in hand with the real-life experiences of uncertainty and conspiracy, Hofstadter's explanation on its reoccurrence is relevant to the literary arena as it is to the political; he writes:

> (…) the fact that movements employing the paranoid style are not constant but come in successive episodic waves suggests that the paranoid disposition is mobilized into action chiefly by social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values and that bring fundamental fears and hatreds, rather than negotiable interests (…) The paranoid tendency is aroused by a confrontation of opposed interests which are (or felt to be) totally irreconcilable.[46]

Viewing the matter as such, the Western civilization during the timeframe associated with the aftermath of the Second World War onward, which grew tarnished by industrialization, consumerism, technological advancements, and the

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[45] Nicholas Lemann, "Paranoid Style", *The New Yorker* (The Wayward Press, 2016) 96, online, Internet, 8 September 2021. Available: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/10/16/paranoid-style/.

[46] Richard Hofstadter: op.cit., pp. 38.

absence of value systems; stands as a prison to humanity and demands to be escaped. This is perhaps the reason why the paranoid style flourished at that particular period. Nothing has been said of escapism as a primary trigger in the human mind which leads to paranoia. If the postmodern world is a prison, then "in a passionate escape there must be not only a place from which to flee but a place to which to flee".[47] Hence, this study suggests that the essence of the paranoid thinking is the obsessive desire of the individual to escape the real experiences for which he cannot find a convincing explanation, to a more fathomable world.

The problem with paranoia studies in the field of psychology and subsequently in analysing the literary representation, is that paranoia is often attributed to unclear causations. According to Health Direct [48] and Health line [49], the reason for which people develop a paranoid disorder is unknown. Most of the times, it is vaguely linked to genes, brain chemistry, mood disorders, neurological diseases, drug use, and stress.[50] In fiction, the difficulty with paranoia is that it is always followed by the shadow of its indeterminacy. However popular, paranoia in fiction is accompanied by a sense of dissatisfaction and difficulty that often gives birth to critical responses, which attempt at either over-generalize or resist the concept. At the same time, it is with great ease that some label a fictional character as paranoid. The characterization offers some comfort in designating the divergence of a character. However, such appropriation allows a certain acceptance of an impediment in the understanding of paranoid fiction. As a result,

[47] Lewis Sinclair, *Main Street*, (2010) 641, online, Google Books, 20 August 2021. Available: https://books.google.dz/books?id=Llq7v6Zg8PUC&hl=fr&source=gbs_book_other_versions/.

[48] The Health Direct website is operated by Health direct Australia and offers comprehensible and clinically reliable content.
"Paranoia," *Health Direct,* (December 2020), online, Internet, 12 September 2021. Available: https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/paranoia/.

[49] Health line is an American website which offers a medically peer reviewed content.
"Paranoia", *Health Line,* (26 August 2021), online, Internet, 12 September 2021. Available: https://www.healthline.com/health/paranoia/.

[50] Ibid.

paranoia often appears synonymous with madness, psychopathy, depression, and alienation, among other mental problems.

My thesis will be primarily concerned with the escapist characteristic of paranoia, and the way in which we can explain such a problematic condition by highlighting its foundation in the human mind. I shall attempt to argue that the movement from an average mental state to a paranoid one symbolizes the psychological escape from a hostile atmosphere to a pleasant one. Having discarded operational spiritual, social and moral values, the paranoid character under the postmodern condition is in fact traveling from a random thought to another hoping to settle on a confident interpretation of the world. Unlike the previous studies undertaken on paranoia which usually link it to conspiracy and panic, the purpose of my work is to argue that a great deal of the paranoid perspective has to do with the individual's dissatisfaction with the real world, and his urgent need for escape. Proposing a new insight into the trendy conversation of mental health in fiction, the present study shall prove that paranoia is in essence an act of escapism because it demonstrates the mind's deviation from the unpleasant experiences of the real world, through the comportment of obsessive imagining. Understanding the paranoid fiction as an attempt to psychological emancipation shall open new possibilities for understanding paranoia as an attempt at creating little narratives. Studying paranoia as an agent of escape in two different writing styles, this research hopes to provide a clear answer to whether or not did paranoia as a subjective form of interpretation compensate for the need to metanarratives following the postmodernist agenda.

Relating this to the postmodernist theory, and to its previously mentioned foundational claim that there are infinite possibilities of truths and interpretations, paranoia is an exemplification of the postmodernist call to read the world from a subjective anti-authoritarian standpoint. Based on the views of its main proponents including Derrida, and Lyotard, the aim of the postmodern philosophy is to deliberately evade the truth of the world, and to escape into the human's own

created narratives. These latter are considered as the new "truths" under the postmodern philosophy. Hence, by arguing that paranoia – as an ingredient of the postmodern philosophy – , is essentially an agency of escape, this study shall bring to clarity that the postmodern philosophy is also an attempt at escaping the grand-narratives associated with the human existence since the beginning of time.

It should be maintained at this regard, that the concept of escapism with which paranoia is to be associated is different from mere escape as a literary motif. What the title of this thesis reflects is that the travel is not made to physical location as in "escape", but to a made-up fantastic domain that does not physically exist. What makes this concept judicial to this study is that it has the similar illusory nature that paranoia maintains. Escapism refers to the tendency of finding refuge in the imaginary and sometimes implausible world; a situation characterized by temporality and self-deception. In "The Rationality of Escapism and Self-Deception" (1990), John Longeway illustrates the primary nature of the escapist activity as being "geared to the agent's avoiding consideration of offending beliefs".[51] This belief may offend because it opens to criticism an act one desires to perform, or because of its contradiction to other beliefs or assumptions to which one is attached, or by giving rise to unwanted feelings when one considers it. "Typically this unwanted feeling is guilt, anxiety, or shame",[52] but sometimes it may also be the thirst for meaningfulness and truth, or the desire for social approval and grandiosity. Escapism, hence, operates as the trigger to paranoid visions that seek to keep the belief one does not like out of consciousness.

Despite all the latest studies, a number of issues still confronts the interpretation of paranoia in literature, to which this research shall seek solutions. First, what makes for the acceptability or unacceptability of an irrational type of thinking, which is based on temporary self-deception, and which undermines its

[51] John L. Longeway, "The Rationality of Escapism and Self-Deception", *Behaviour and Philosophy*, vol. 18, no. 2. (1990) 1 – 20, online, Jstor, 12 June 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/27759220/.

[52] Ibid.

own enterprise at retrieving real truth and meaning? Second, what role does the "unwanted believes" – or could we say metanarratives, such as history and religion – perform within the paranoid discourse, and how are they possibly disengaged for the favour of an individualistic discourse? And finally what does the developing of paranoia as escapist desire in fiction tell the reader about himself and the way he reads the postmodern paranoid literature? The final question, it is essential to understand, originates from the first, for if it is assumed that paranoia is a common feature of the postmodern fiction. This assumption is likely to affect the reader's reception of it, and his sense of its cultural significance.

In answering these questions, a certain literary material is selected. Thomas Pynchon gave paranoia one of its most unforgettable definitions in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) as "the leading edge of the discovery that everything is connected."[53] when the 1974 Pulitzer Prize committee rejected the recommendation of Pynchon's novel, the claim was that the narrative was "overwritten" and "unreadable".[54] Years later, Harold Bloom disagrees with the claim and describes the novel as a "difficult pleasure".[55] Two novels of Pynchon are crucial to a full understanding of the paranoid mentality of postwar America: the *Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. Throughout *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), Pynchon endorses active, though ineffective, battle against the negative forces of deindividualization, dehumanization, and death associated with the 1960s United States. Next, a brief glimpse at *Gravity's Rainbow*, though set at the end of World War Two, reveals the cost of submissiveness to the systems of manipulation

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[53] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, (London: Picador, 1975) 703.

[54] Peter Kihss, "Pulitzer Jurors Dismayed on Pynchon", *The New York Times* (8 May 1974), online, Internet, 18 September 2021. Available : https://www.nytimes.com/1974/05/08/archives/pulitzer-jurors-his-third-novel.html/.

[55] Antonio Weiss, "Harold Bloom, The Art of Criticism No. 1", *The Paris Review* (Spring 1991), online, Internet, 29 August 2021. Available : https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2225/the-art-of-criticism-no-1-harold-bloom/.

and destruction. In many respects, these novels provide a résumé of Pynchon's view on paranoia as a weapon of last resort.

Though this study could have been undertaken on well-known novels of the paranoid fiction such as DeLillo's and Burroughs', this research proposes – along with considering Pynchon's standpoint – to look at paranoia from a different angle. Taking into consideration the timeframe of its publication, Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History* (1992) communicates paranoia as an unconstructive mechanism.[56] The novel is a classic-inspired anti-epic that depicts the dishonesty, agony, and obsessiveness of a small group of classics students.[57] Though this novel was never designated as paranoid fiction – as it is the case with Pynchon's novels – the paranoid behaviour of the main characters cannot be denied. Through this novel, I shall trace a withdrawal in the interest in the paranoid style, which branded the ending of the Cold War period. A concluding look at Tartt's work may disclose the negative consequences of succumbing to obsession and paranoia beyond the human limitations.

It will be evident through the research that I am using the term paranoia in two different senses. First, I use paranoia to demonstrate those cases of the human mind that aim to provide an alternative to the chaos or meaninglessness. In this situation, the term may hold a positive connotation as to the subject's effort at combating and escaping the manipulative patterns around him. Secondly, I use paranoia to distinguish the psychological inclination towards grandiosity, a tendency which seems to be one of the disturbing abnormalities of the human character. The urge at escape then, is unjustifiable and motivated by erroneous reasons, and the positive connotation to paranoia turns into a negative one. We may explain this second sense of paranoia as an allegorical extension of the first,

[56] It should be noted that this research does not aim at comparing and contrasting the writings of Pynchon and Tartt, but to provide a dualistic analysis that encompasses the engagement of two utterly different accounts on both levels: the thematic concerns and the narrative style.

[57] Greg Cwik, "Donna Tartt's New Anti-Epic", *Los Angeles Review of Books* (30 October 2013), online, Internet, 27 August 2021. Available: https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/greg-cwik-on-donna-tartts-the-goldfinch/.

and even think of its use as a satiric way of describing the declining encouragement to paranoia by the time Tartt's novel was published. Additionally, escapism is suggested to operate along with paranoia, once at the level of the characters, and another time at the level of the reader. As such, this study involves finally, an investigation of the possibilities of psychological immersion in the postmodern fiction of Pynchon and Tartt, with the hypothesis being that the postmodern paranoid fiction echoes the reading patterns of the period of its publication.

One of the primary characteristics of the postmodern text is its obsessiveness with citation and external references.[58] In Both Pynchon's novels a great deal of references is made to mathematics, physics, science, psychology, and medicine. Similarly, Tartt's narrative is drenched in theology, mythology, and philosophy. Therefore, this research engages an interdisciplinary approach to analyse the literary texts of choice. For the sake of clarity, the different scholarly approaches at work are not to be detached, listed, or classified, because they tend to overlap to a large extent that this study may be considered intersectional.

In a project originally devoted to the postmodern discourse, it may not be surprising that I list the postmodern approaches first. The theories forwarded by the French postmodern philosophers Lyotard and Baudrillard as mentioned before aid in the interpretation of the novelists' various ways of presenting the postmodern condition of suspicion. Designed by the power-wielders and big-brothers, objective truths are no longer comprehensible as they comprise conspiracies and incomplete explanations. Therefore, Lyotard's statement of the death of metanarratives invites a rather deconstructive discussion on history and religion. Furthermore, Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum also applies: false reality is stimulated or produced by the media lobbies and other ideological apparatuses.[59] Accordingly, this research draws from the ideologies forwarded by

[58] Heise Ursula, "Between Technophobia and Utopia: Science and Postmodern Literature" n.d, online, Internet, 12 September 2021. Available: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/21stC/issue-2.3/heise.html/.

these postmodern philosophers. These theories help explain the general idea that one is not born but rather becomes a "paranoid", and that the paranoid is determined not by his madness but by his compulsive interest at escape.

Dealing with paranoia as a thematic concern clearly involves the use of psychological conceptualizations that explain the mental operations. That does not mean, however, that the second method of choice is intensely psychanalytical. Psychological analysis tends to emphasize individuality and subjectivity, and the essence of this research appears to follow that direction. However, while it is assumed that the paranoid character may emerge out of psychological needs, the study at hand is not particularly concerned with the clinical aspect of paranoia or escapism as a psychological syndrome. Sigmund Freud's approaches to paranoia and escapism may be said to frame some of the analysis on the concepts in so far as they illustrate the performance of the minds of the paranoid characters within the plots.

Third, the historical approach functions as a way of explaining the evolvement of the paranoid mentality in the timeframe between the aftermath of the Second World War by the 1950s until the end of the Cold War by the 1990s. This historical period plays a major role in the novels' storylines and the characters' development. Real-life events have often influenced and modified the roles of the paranoid personalities in society and the representation of power relations between "them" and "us" in the fictional accounts. Hence, a historical method is especially appropriate for interpreting the significance of certain events, and the interesting ways the writers explain them in a non-metanarrative technique.

[59] Baudrillard provides also a similar model of understanding postmodernism that he called "hypervisibility" advanced in his work *The Transparency of Evil* (1993). This refers to the supremacy of the virtual in the millennial age, supplemented by a collective blindness to the real physical conditions that ground us. This concept, I find, is a derivative of his original theory of the simulacrum. Clearly, a virtual is a representation of an authentic in a cybernetic simulated manner, and can be considered under the postmodern condition as a replica or a simulacrum of the real. Hence the choice of the theoretical conceptualization offered by Baudrillard is the "precession of simulacrum".

Finally, the reader response approach is integrated with the historical approach in order to investigate the interaction between the reader and the text by the time the novels where released. The reading practices are significant in the way in which the academics viewed themselves in relation to their social and political milieus, and it stands as a direct reaction to the difficulties experienced in the post-war and the contemporary period. Reviewing distinct reading zeitgeist of each of the decades associated with the novels allows us to isolate the influence of the paranoid fiction on the reader. The history of the reader response criticism related to the postmodern fiction, helps to address the question of whether or not did the postmodern paranoid fiction influence certain paranoid reading habits.

To date there have been no full-length studies of paranoia in the last half of the twentieth century that relates it to the concept of escapism. The value of the this research is that it directs attention towards the nature of paranoia as an escapist behaviour, which applies to the thematical study of some fictional accounts from different decades. My inquiry into the poetics of paranoia and escapism is situated at the intersection between three related subjects, namely the history of the paranoid style in the American culture of conspiracy; the characterizations of the postmodern American fiction, and the survey of the decades apropos reading and interpretation.

The first chapter of my study is an introduction to the postmodern philosophy in the American society, and the way in which it brought about a body of conspiracy-focused fictional representations. Following that, the second chapter, provides a thorough explanation on the concepts of paranoia and escapism in a manner that familiarizes their connection and their engagement with the postmodern fiction and the case studies at play. The third chapter takes up the issue of what is to count for as the constructive optimistic representation of paranoia and escapism. Engaging Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, the lived experiences of doubt and misbelief in post-war America is explored through the character of Oedipa Maas and Tyrone Slothrop. This section of the research

investigates the way in which the novelist structures the postmodern world in the absence of metanarratives. It also exposes the merits of paranoia and escapism, and the unfortunate conclusions that may result from passivity and anti-paranoia. In both of these novels, I read Pynchon's works as a commentary on and a product of the cultural logic of postmodernity, a situation in which escaping from the grand narratives into the little narrative of paranoia is promoted. The fourth chapter engages the contemporary classics-inspired novel *The Secret History* and its free use of the Greek tradition of the Dionysian practice. This chapter will demonstrate the declining invitation to paranoia and escapism. It features – through Tartt's account – a distinct and disturbing variety of escapism, which draws upon the individual's anxieties about the human body's powers, pleasures, and limitations. This chapter shall debunk the possibility of paranoia as an anti-authoritarian little narrative. In the fifth chapter, an overview of the reading patterns during the decades in which Pynchon's novels were published, will be provided. This is to investigate whether or not had the paranoid literature of postmodernism, by any means, influence or mirror the way people read fiction at that time. The hypothesis is that paranoia in Pynchon's novels was a representation of and an inducement to a distinct suspicious reading behaviour, which counters the guidelines provided by the traditional schools of criticism at the time. The last chapter, continues tracing the character-reader parallel in Tartt's novel to show that the practice of paranoid reading does not stand as the optimum reading strategy regarding the postmodern fiction. The concept of paranoia in relation to escapism, is therefore appreciated on the level of plots and characters on one hand, and on the level of the reading practices in the academia on the other.

CHAPTER ONE:

A REGIME OF ANTI-TRUTH: THE RISE OF POSTMODERNISM IN THE UNITED STATES

"There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false."

Harold Pinter

"The science of negation" as in Leo Tolstoy's words is the shortcut to an individualized expression.[60] In the aftermath of the Second World War, political and social structures, philosophy, and artistic production were dominated by this science of negation as a result of the rise in conspiracy theorizing. This multiplicity of interpretations is what marked the period as postmodern which Bran Nicol describes as "Post-modern? (…) Weird for the sake of weird".[61] Although the postmodern rhetoric is complicated and overwhelming, the negative aura that it acquired develops from the instability of inclinations, the inadequacy of the terminology, and the resistance to structuralizing. Nevertheless, a desire to explore a writing that "doesn't go down easily" as in Beckett's words, have consumed critics and theorists such as Brain McHale, Ihab Hassan, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, and many more since the rise of the tendency.[62] Most of these critics agreed on one defining aspect of postmodernism, which is the scepticism towards grand narratives and the absence of universal truths.[63]

Because the literary texts engaged in this study are to be treated as postmodernist texts, this chapter provides a general introduction to postmodernism, especially with regard to the pervasive anxieties related to conspiracy theories that branded the atmosphere as postmodern. This is especially important to the following study of paranoia since it has roots in this overall atmosphere of uncertainty. In this chapter, I argue that the postmodern philosophy is inspired by the growth of conspiracy theories in the United States after the

[60] Leo Tolstoy explains the meaning of intellectuality in our modern world as such: "In old times, you see, a man who wanted to educate himself—a Frenchman, for instance—would have set to work to study all the classics and theologians and tragedians and historians and philosophers, and, you know, all the intellectual work that came in his way. But in our day he goes straight for the literature of negation, very quickly assimilates all the extracts of the science of negation, and he's ready."
Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, part 5, chapter 9 (Penguin Books Limited, 2002) 434.

[61] Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 1.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

Second World War. In doing so, I take into consideration the resemblance between the nature of the fundamentals of the postmodernist philosophy and the basic tenets of conspiracy theories.

My intention in this opening chapter is to clarify the general tenets of postmodernism in philosophy and fiction in post-war America. In the first section, relying on the historical context, I survey the rise of conspiratorial thinking in the United States and explain the way in which uncertainty was the branding attitude during the post-war period. In the second section, I argue that this attitude was translated in philosophy as the postmodernist thought. In that, I will be focusing on the explanations forwarded by Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard among other contributors to shaping the postmodernist thinking. In the final section, I argue that the new attitude resulted in a specific nervous form of literary expression; a way of imagining the postmodern condition in fiction in terms of mind control, and the desire it compels to paranoia. Ultimately through this chapter, I hope to provide a clear view of what is meant by postmodernism in philosophy and literature, in a manner that facilitates the understanding of paranoia as a potential subjective form of interpretation.

Conspiracy theories do not just come in various forms and sizes but are vastly popular as well. In line with many opinion polls in the United States, a significant portion of the Western people adheres to one or more conspiracy theories. [64] For instance, according to a 2013 Gallup poll, 61 per cent of Americans still believe that many operators other than Lee Harvey Oswald were responsible for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. 13 per cent said that the

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[64] For more on conspiracy theories polling houses and surveys see Karen, M. Douglas, et al, "Understanding Conspiracy Theories", *Advances in Political Psychology*, vol. 40, n. 1 (2019): 3-35.

Karen M. Douglas et all conducted a 2019 detailed study on conspiracy theories in the United States to demonstrate the number of the population believing in them. They classified their findings according to different measuring scales and came to the conclusion that conspiracy theories are a pervasive psychological, political, and social phenomenon with far-reaching risks (and benefits) on American citizens and societal institutions.

incident was organized by "the Mafia"; 13 per cent said it was the federal government and 7 per cent said the CIA.[65] Another survey by Public Policy Polling revealed in the same year that 28 per cent of the American voters believed that a secretive arrangement is conspiring to ultimately rule the world through a totalitarian global government, or a "New World Order".[66] Another 15 per cent believed that in the Orwellian tradition that the US government was controlling the citizens' minds through the television.[67] These numbers stand for millions of citizens in the United States and similar records could be found in other Western countries.[68] Therefore, it is safe to say that conspiracy theories became a mass societal phenomenon in the Western World.

In general, conspiracy theorists make bad use of data and truths, and their shared strive for evidence is often unmethodological,[69] and "inhabits a different epistemic universe, where the usual rules for determining truth and falsity do not apply".[70] Sunstein and Vermeule suggest that because conspiracy theories are the only theories which use evidence against them as constructive evidence for them, they are "resistant and in extreme cases invulnerable to contrary evidence".[71] This self-fastening property makes conspiracy theories at their heart unfalsifiable. No

[65] Olivia B Waxman, *JFK Conspiracy Theories Are Alive and Well, According to Gallup Poll* (15 November 2013), online, Internet, 20 October 2021. Available : https://nation.time.com/2013/11/15/jfk-conspiracy-theories-are-alive-and-well-according-to-gallup-poll/.

[66] Jaron Harambam, *The Truth Is Out There: Conspiracy Culture in an Age of Epistemic Instability* (Rotterdam: Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2021) 05.

[67] Ibid.

[68] For example, a 2015 study conducted by YouGov in the United Kingdom revealed that 52 percent of the countries citizens believed that UFO evidence has been intentionally hidden because the possibility of their existence would destabilize the government. Another research conducted in the Netherlands showed that people believed that the pharmaceutical industry can cure serious diseases, but makes more profit from keeping people sick.

[69] Cass R. Sunstein, and Adrian Vermeule, "Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures", *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 17, n. 2 (2009) 212.

[70] Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013) 187.

[71] Cass R. Sunstein, and Adrian Vermeule: op.cit., pp. 223.

matter how much evidence their adherents accumulate, belief in conspiracy theory ultimately becomes a matter of faith rather than proof.[72] Conspiracy theories are the product of negation to the natural research practices. This is the new attitude of anti-truth which dominated the United States mainly since the assassination of President Kennedy. Therefore, the rise of the postmodernist thought and artistic representation as a manifestation of scepticism and anti-truth is a natural response to the living conditions at that time.

1. The Rise of the Conspiratorial Thinking

Given the prevalence of conspiracy theories in today's culture, most individuals are familiar with them. Some would bring up the September 11 attacks and the widespread doubts about the official story, while others would bring up assassinations such as that of John F. Kennedy. But conspiracy theories come in different shapes and sizes. Allegations of deception and political manipulation are as old as the Roman civilization. According to Byford, the ancient Roman's political system was occupied with fears of conspiracies.[73] For instance Julius Caesar's death in 44BC was "the paradigmatic inside-job".[74] Similar discussions of schemes and conspiracies may be found in the works of the ancient Athenians. The claimed Jewish plan against Jesus, as well as the anti-Semitic sentiments that have plagued Christianity since then, are good examples of conspiratorial discourse from a long time ago.[75]

In a historical examination, Gordon Stewart Wood clarifies why and how did the conspiratorial explanations emerge as a primary technique of making

[72] Michael Barkun: op.cit., pp. 7.

[73] Jaron Harambam: op.cit., pp. 63-64.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

meaning out of the political reality in the early modern period.[76] He claims that the concept of conspiracy suited people's modern understanding of political reality during the Enlightenment. When the accidental or the supernatural no longer have a place, all consequences must have their causes. The focus of causality shifted to people since divinity was not a source of accurate explanations anymore. In other words, the concept of conspiracy fits well with the modern epistemology of mechanistic causality that was gaining hold at the time. Since then, the most prominent type of conspiracy theories which gained traction in the post-World War Two postmodern world is that of hidden societies and powerful interest groups.[77] Hannah Arendt supports this discourse in her book *Totalitarianism* as she suggests that:

> The masses' escape from reality is a verdict against the world in which they are forced to live and in which they cannot exist, since coincidence has become its supreme master and human beings need the constant transformation of chaotic and accidental conditions into a man-made pattern of relative consistency. [78]

Despite the vastly varied narratives, rhetoric, and histories, (ranging from JFK assassination to the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement and public surveillance) the cultural meaning and social purpose of conspiracy dialogues are the same.[79] As such, conspiracy theories can strengthen a strong feeling of community identity by scapegoating a specific and identifiable opponent. This is referred to as "secure paranoia" by Peter Knight which denotes that conspiracy

[76] Gordon Stewart Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deciet in the Eighteenth Century", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 39, n. 3 (1982): 401-441.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Hannah Arendt, "Totalitarianism: Part Three of the Origins of Totalitarianism" (1968) 50, online, *Google Books,* 21 September 2021. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=I0pVKCVM4TQC&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[79] Jaron Harambam: op.cit., pp. 69.

theories may create a sense of danger, but once the link is revealed and the dark goals are brought forward, they paradoxically create a sense of security and order.[80]

This "secure" variety of the conspiracy discourse has been used by individuals in power in a range of countries and political affiliations to unite a divided populace by creating a dangerous adversary.[81] A well-known example on this can be the Red Scare in the United States during the twentieth century. Given these qualities of "secure paranoia", of generating order and peace in a chaotic environment, and taking into account the fundamental epistemology of mechanistic causality,[82] one may consider conspiracy theories to be postmodern creations at heart. After all, they all indicate a man-made trajectory of history, in which every occurrence has a known cause and is a deliberate act.

The world – and more particularly the United States – began to speak about a postmodern theory in the United States since the 1960s as a result to an era marked by a radical scepticism in the authoritarian. The legacy of the sixties has become a key issue in recent political and cultural dialogues, specifically with the unprecedented acceptance of and reliance on conspiracy theories. The foundational incident to the new public attitude of uncertainty was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. In the thirty years thereafter over 5000 books, articles, and films engaged with the subject. [83] The 1990s in particular have witnessed a great interest in the investigation and assassination

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[80] Peter Knight, "Everything Is Connected: Underworld's Secret History of Paranoia", *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 45 (1999): 811-836.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Gordon Stewart Wood: op.cit., pp. 411.

[83] Stephen E. Ambrose, "Writers on the Grassy Knoll: A Reader's Guide", *New York Times Book Review* (2 February 1992): 23 – 25.

industry, with half the records on the *New York Times* top-ten bestseller list written about the case in early 1992.[84]

The obsessive demand for conspiracy theories arouse as it had never before upon the President's death, because they were and still are considered to make sense of what would otherwise appear as a brutally random act. William Manchester, author of the classic *Death of a President*, wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1993 what seems to brief about the predominant mindset during the period post-assassination of both the governments and the masses:

> (…) if you put the murdered President of the United States on one side of a scale and that wretched waif Oswald on the other side, it doesn't balance. You want to add something weightier to Oswald.[85] It would invest the President's death with meaning, endowing him with martyrdom. He would have died for something. A conspiracy would, of course, do the job nicely.[86]

Thus, conspiracy theories satisfy an emotional craving and in this case compensate for the unease and fear that the assassination left in the American consciousness. Heavily consumed, the Kennedy case ranged between different accounts, from official reports which happen to be fabrications [87], to factual claims which read like lies [88], and fictional interpretations that turn out to be more

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Lee Harvey Oswald, was arrested and accused of conspiring with Communists to murder the President. The case and charges were reported in the BBC Timewatch documentary broadcast in 1993.

[86] William Manchester quoted in Max Holland, "After Thirty Years: Making Sense of the Assassination", *Reviews in American History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1994): 191–209, online, Jstor, 29 Jan 2020. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/2702884/.

[87] An example is the "lone gunman" theory that relates to the accusation of Oswald.

[88] For instance the privately printed pamphlet of James M. Beasely and Jerald Lee Cockburn "The Assassination Festival of Jacqueline the Praying Mantis" (1971). The claim is that the incident stands for the accomplishment of the old resentment between the French Bouvier and the Irish Kennedy clans, and transforms later to what seems more like a historical romance.

objective and reliable than any nonfictional report.[89] In short, the incident grew to be a target of ideological disputes between the authoritative and the individualist, the verified and the trendy, and the accurate and the fictitious.[90]

The multiple narratives constructed upon the conspiracies about the murder, whether fictional or nonfictional, became just some more stories about the loss of wholeness and truth among the public. Followed by the Vietnam War, the Watergate and the different plots associated with the Cold War that their allegations and secrets are yet to be exposed; this is the environment labelled "postmodern". In describing which Jonathan Schell writes:

> The world of undiscriminating cynicism, where no one is trusted and nothing is believed, is in many ways a comfortable one. every citizen enjoys the automatic right to a sly, knowing, and superior attitude toward all authorities but has no obligation to do anything about them. What is the use of changing one for another when they are the same? (…) everyone grumbles, but it leads to nothing (…) "they are all crooks," the people say to one another, and go about their business. This state of mind is new to the United States. But it is all too familiar to anyone who has spent some time in Eastern Europe or in South America, or in any countless other places in the world where people have lost the bold, sometimes innocent spirit of the free and adopted the easy sophistication of the powerless. [91]

There arises therefore, something hardly surprising about the causal influence that the Kennedy case and its aftermath experience exert over the collective understanding of the American political culture, something that communicates scepticism. From the overwhelming number of conspiracy theories

[89] A considerable amount of fictional works can be said to explore the case rather nonfictionally. Examples include: Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate*, J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, D.M. Thomas's *Flying on to love*, among others.

[90] Stephen E, Ambrose: op.cit., pp. 25.

[91] Jonathan Schell quoted in Samuel Chase Coale: op.cit., pp. 01.

and fabricated tales about the assassination is born the feeling of cynicism, the hermeneutics of suspicion[92] that underlined much of the public attitude towards all that they receive. Out of these circumstances appeared the postmodernist novel as an animation of the political culture that endorsed the mixture of conspiracy theories. With Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988), and Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991), among others the postmodern novel came to materialize, with the last two deconstructing the metanarratives that were produced on the Kennedy case in the most "postmodern" of the ways. And since the world of representation is in large originated from the living experiences, the conspiratorial atmosphere that dominated the time after the assassination of the President was translated into some chaotically interdisciplinary accounts written about chaos.

2. Postmodernism and the Postmodern Philosophies

Theory and theorization have constantly been challenging, remarkably as numerous theorists have grown eager to dive beyond conceptions and accentuate the certain and the real. It issues a superiority in its will to authority, establishing a dominant/submissive relationship between the hypothetical proposals it advances and the preceding lines of thoughts. Most importantly, it dictates human behaviour and guides his vision according to the assumptions celebrated during a certain timeframe. One may be able to recognize and understand most of the philosophical tendencies that humans have expressed throughout history. However, with the extensive use of the term "postmodern", only a few people can confidently say something about what the term actually stands for. Some experts have proposed that the postmodern refers to a mood or attitude of mind. [93] This suggestion seems to open infinite possibilities to what this mood or attitude can

[92] This term was coined by Paul Ricoeur in his work on Sigmund Freud. Freud and Marx were the masters of such hermeneutics in the nineteenth century and They have had a significant impact on contemporary hermeneutics.

[93] Stuart Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. (London: Routledge, 2001) 7.

encompass in the world of philosophy, hence the ever going craving of numerous critics and theoreticians to stretch this conversation to its thinnest.

In vague terms, postmodernism is deemed to react to and rebuff most of the conventional enterprises upon which the Western culture has been grounded over the two preceding centuries. The commitment to morality and progress sensed in the established mindset of self-betterment and the demand for continuous cultural, economic, and political advancements are called into question under the postmodern institution. Postmodernists frequently draw from the "Humanist ideology" that influenced the Wester thought through different historical phases most notably the Enlightenment period. [94] The aspiration is to emancipate the humankind from the spiritual and dogmatic cuffs of ancient times.[95]

The dilemma faced when talking about postmodernism is semantic instability; as there is no clear compromise about the implications of the movement – if so to be called – among scholars.[96] Richard Kostelanetz for instance expresses a negative take on the matter as he advocates that " (post) is a petty prefix, both today and historically, for major movements are defined in their own terms, rather than by their relation to something else (. . .) no genuine avant-garde artist would want to be 'post' anything". [97] However, the fact that the terminology encompasses a suffix or a prefix is not a flaw that undermines an entire movement that claims originality and limitlessness. Brain McHale explains that every philosophical or cultural movement has a certain point in history as prior or posterior to another

[94] Ibid.
It is important to mention that Postmodernists -being the anti-authoritarians that they are-, still reject the conclusions of Humanism as it also falls -like most renowned Western concepts and metanarratives- under the typical scheme of the universalizing theories.

[95] Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp. 7-8.

[96] Dick Hebdige, "Postmodernism and "the Other Side"", *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006) 37.

[97] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987) 3, online, Internet, 12 June 2021. Available: http://homepage.westmont.edu/hoeckley/readings/symposium/pdf/201_300/225.pdf.

movement, and the fact that it makes use of the term modernism does not automatically entail an ideological prolongation to it.

Therefore, the problem of terminology that most critics complain about should not be of great significance that it negates the existence of the movement altogether. proposing that postmodernism can be a substantial amendment,[98] if not an original set of thoughts, Ihab Hassan [99] wonders; "what better name have we to give this curious age? The Atomic, or Space, or Television, Age?" and if so "these technological tags lack theoretical definition. Or shall we simply live and let others live to call us what they may?" [100] In fact, movements are not drastically separated from each other, and as such postmodernism came – to a great extent – as a reaction to its predecessor. This is what Brain McHale calls a "historical consequentiality".[101] however, dwelling on this post-ness remains insufficient to debunk the entire institution of postmodernism because generally all authors and all kinds of literature are "a little Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern, at once". [102] An example of that is contrasting Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with his *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Modernism itself may be integrated into romanticism, romanticism in the enlightenment, the enlightenment in the renaissance, and so back until reaching the "Olduvai Gorge" and the Greek tradition.[103]

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[98] Dick Hebdige: op.cit., pp. 37-38.

[99] Ihab Hassan writes the term as "POSTmodernISM". The ISM for Hassan explains that Postmodernism does not mean postmodern, but post *modernism*. It does not refer to the idea that the movement comes after a historical point, but after the *modernist movement*. Thus the term "postmodernism", if taken literally, stands for a literature that is the successor of (or the reaction to) the literature of early twentieth-century modernism, and not "*some hypothetical writing of the future*". As for the POST, it is what has mostly bothered people about the term "postmodernism". It need not have, Hassan claims. After all the presence of the prefix 'post' merely signifies the inevitable "historicity" of all literary movements.

[100] Ihab Hassan, "Representing the Postmodern", in Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, *A Postmodern Reader* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993) 276, online, Internet, 25 June 2019. Available: http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/HassanPoMo.pdf/.

[101] Brain McHale: op.cit., pp.5.

[102] Ihab Hassan, "The Culture of Postmodernism", Rpt. in *Art and Interpretation: An Anthology of Readings in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Dayton Eric (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998) 482.

[103] Ibid.

In addition to that, a number of scholars and critics argued that postmodernism does not refer to a precise movement, among which are Noam Chomsky, Richard Dawkins, Perry Anderson, and Christopher Hitchens among others.[104] Many have suggested that the world is witnessing what may be seen as an extension of the Modernist period. This assumption is accurately summarized in the work of the British sociologist Dick Hebdige *Postmodernism and "The Other Side"*. He lists all the details that were – in a way or another – labelled postmodern, he writes:

> When it becomes possible for a people to describe as 'postmodern' the décor of a room, the design of a building, the diegesis of a film, the construction of a record, or a 'scratch' video, a TV commercial, or an arts documentary, or the 'intertextual' relations between them, the layout of a page in a fashion magazine or critical journal, an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, the attack on the 'metaphysics of presence', a general attenuation of feeling, the collective chagrin and morbid projections of a post-War generation of Baby Boomers confronting disillusioned middle-age, the 'predicament' of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase in commodity fetishism, a fascination for images, codes and styles, a process of cultural, political or existential fragmentation and/or crisis, the 'de-centering' of the subject, an 'incredulity towards metanarratives', the replacement of unitary power axes by a plurality of power/discourse formations, the 'implosion of meaning', the collapse of cultural hierarchies, the dread engendered by the threat of nuclear self-destruction, the decline of the University, the functioning and effects of the new miniaturized technologies, broad societal and economic shifts into a 'media', 'consumer' or 'multinational' phase, a sense (depending on whom you read) of 'placelessness' or the abandonment of placelessness ('critical regionalism') or (even) a generalized substitution of spatial for temporal coordinates – when it becomes possible to describe all these things as 'Postmodern' (or more simply using a current

[104] Dick Hebdige: op.cit., pp. 37.

> abbreviation as 'post' or 'very post') then it is clear we are in the presence of a buzzword.[105]

This assumption, however, is opposed by other critics such as Hassan and McHale because the fuzziness of the term 'postmodern' does not simply mean that we are still living within the modernist trend. It also appears to contradict itself because it is probably illogical to assume that the new world-views and philosophical trends are encompassed still under the modernist thought.[106]

On the level of philosophy, the term "postmodern" stands, generally, for an attitude of doubt towards the traditional ideologies and value systems. In doing so, it draws from the theories of poststructuralism and deconstruction to a great extent. Poststructuralism is based on the denunciation of the structuralist convention. It maintains a similar attitude of cynicism towards the established authority of structuralism. [107] One of the outstanding certainties that structuralists defend is the belief that the world was intrinsically knowable, and that structuralism gave us a methodological key to unlock the various systems that made up that world. The linguistic archetype set up by Ferdinand de Saussure, which frames the structuralist inquiry, is based on the hypothesis that every system had an internal syntax that ruled its functioning; and the aim from the structuralist evaluation was to expose that syntax.[108] The poststructuralist concern lies in the limited possibility allowed for creativity and innovation as the structuralist analysis of syntax reveals – most likely – predictable outcomes. With the broad assumption that all phenomena were methodically reducible to the functions of systems, we could come to restrict the various possibilities of expression. Within

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[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Nick J. Fox, "Post-structuralism and Postmodernism", Rpt in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Health, Illness, Behavior and Society* , eds. Cockerham, W.C., Dingwall, R. and Quah, S.R. (Chichester: Wiley) 1-2.

[108] Ibid.

the postmodern thought, poststructuralism dwells upon the divergence of systems, the nonconformity to analytical structures, and the unpredictability of outcomes.[109]

Within the postmodern frame as well, the principle of deconstruction is that the linguistic systems are endlessly variable and unpredictable which tolerates infinite and unanticipated meanings. In a broad sense, the full meaning of an utterance is present solely in the mind of the utterer and is usually inexpressible given the inconsistency of communications. Hence, the completeness of meaning is nothing but a fantasy under the deconstruction program. Stressing the inconsistencies and unconformities through deconstructing the established knowledge illuminates much of the postmodern philosophical attitude. [110] Assuming that the postmodern philosophy originated as a critic to the previously celebrated modernist philosophy, and deliberating on the sceptical outlook that it exhibits, questioning the knowledge of the modern is probably the highest tenet of the postmodern viewpoint.

Generally speaking, knowledge under the modern philosophy holds two major characteristics: rationality and unquestionability. Good and evil are demarcated under modern in relation to the rational nature of the human mind, which is governed and structured by the metanarratives (i.e. theories that declare the ability to illuminate every act and thought and defy any endeavour to deviation from the mainstream account). These latter hold an unquestionable status, for as long as the human cravings to knowledge expand, a unified moral criterion shall function as a verifying apparatus. However, under the postmodern philosophy, drawing from the poststructuralist and the deconstructivist viewpoints, the legitimization of certain forms of action through metanarratives is questioned, hence the abandonment of universal ideologies for marginalized individualism.[111]

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[109] Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp.7-8.

[110] Steven Connor, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2004) 191-192.

[111] Ibid.

From this basis, a number of theoreticians fashioned a variety of postmodern philosophies that maintain the essence of the poststructuralist and deconstructivist attitude of scepticism. At the core of anti-authoritarianism and anti-metanarrative comes Jean-François Lyotard's most remarkable work, *La Condition Postmoderne* (1979). Lyotard explains that in the current world, knowledge became the most valuable yet scarce artefact, one that the more the person controls, the more his share of the political power amplifies. Analysing the centralization of the political hegemony of knowledge opens the door to criticizing the way in which this knowledge is communicated throughout the world, and that is by means of metanarratives. Instead of being flexible and fertile to continuously amend under demanding cultural settings, les grands récits – as Lyotard coined the term – embrace certain impregnable viewpoints that appear precise, and therefore beyond any criticism or amendment.[112]

A key to the study of postmodernism is antagonizing the Western philosophy across different binary oppositions: "universality/ singularity", "discourse/ perception", and "rationality/ irrationality". The authoritative traditional Western philosophies – including modernism – entitled by universality, discourse, and rationality allows no room for communicating the expressions of those binary oppositions.[113] These traditional Western philosophies prefer the expression of specific terms maintaining the features of unification and universality. Out of this point that the discourse of power is initiated, as Lyotard contends that this unification of the value systems – grounded on pure rationality – is meant to silence its opponents.[114]

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[112] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge", *Theory and History of Literature* , ed. Fr. Fredric Jameson, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, vol. 10 (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1984) 80.

[113] Ibid., pp. 66.

[114] Ibid., pp. 77-78-79.

Along with Lyotard's ideology, a number of philosophers sought to challenge the grand narratives of preference. Michel Foucault for instance drew attention to the marginalized minority factions whose behavioural uncommonness results in their exclusion from the supposedly collective political scenery.[115] Simply put, Foucault argues that the prisoners, the insane, and the homosexuals are victims of the post-renaissance culture that never questioned and rather supported the exclusion of power in the hands of a single politically dominant social group. Institutions such as hospitals and prisons are manifestations of the desire for containment and domination over the unusual attitudes. He implies that it is time to give the word to the 'different'.[116] An example of this can be Foucault's arguments presented in his three–volume work *The History of Sexuality* (1976-84) which he bases on a comparison between the Greek and Roman culture and the modern world over the concept of sexual diversity.[117] The insistence on a certain sexual discourse as a norm that eradicates other comportments appears to be a part of the authoritarian modern tactics to expel the divergent. Exhibiting anti-conventionalism, this claim is considered postmodern in essence. [118]

The postmodern theories do not attempt at developing a unified structure or a universal set of norms but is concerned with the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the value systems. The need for a sign-signifier stable relation can by no means provide a clear conceptualization to the new patterns of thought associated with the postmodern era, and if ever, this relation is probably arbitrary.[119] In Baudrillard's book, any interaction with the truth or "reality" is irredeemably lost

[115] Clare O'Farrell, "Foucault and Postmodernism", *Sydney Papers*, vol. 18, n. 3 (2006): 182-194.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp.6.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

under the postmodern condition resulting in an absolute lack of orientation.[120] The general assumption is that truth is nothing but an illusion, and it can never be fully grasped. "What therefore is truth?" asks Friedrich Nietzsche almost a century ago "truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions".[121]

For Baudrillard, there is an unconcealable relation between the chronological parameter and the significance of the signs in the world.[122] From a historical lens, he describes the postmodern era as a period overflowing with signs of all sorts as a result of the developments witnessed after the Second World War and the rise of consumerism.[123] In a time when modernism valued the signs in subordination to the signifiers or truths they represent, postmodernism blurred the lines between the two and became an age of simulation. An example of such deterioration is that mass media today managed to counterbalance the truth initially by representing it, then disguising and abrogating it, then concealing that it has been disguised. [124] The mixture that mass media presents between information, advertisements and entertainment, and between facts and fictional thoughts developing what is known as "infotainment" intensifies the confusion. The postmodern world is a 'simulacra' where the "American" [125] identity is constructed by Disneyland and grand TV shows; a world where the Golf War did not necessarily happen and was possibly a mere simulation. A simulacrum of the original is the only product available in the postmodern world, argues Baudrillard.[126] Hence, it appears illogical for any philosophical thought in the world to claim the status of a grand narrative.

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[120] Mike Gane, *Baudrillard. Critical and Fatal Theory,* vol. 6 (London: Routledge, 1991). 9.
[121] Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in Mike Gane: op.cit., pp. 9-10.

[122]Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988): 167-168.

[125] Baudrillard spoke specifically about the American identity when he referred to the exploitation and trafficking of truth by media corporations.

[126] Ibid.

The distinctive feature of the postmodern line of thought then lies in its distrust of the grand narratives' dogmatic manner and inflexibility to encompass unfamiliar social factions, based on the false idea that they exclusively possess universal truth. Richard Rorty – a contemporary American pragmatist philosopher – speaks about 'post-philosophy'; a term which denotes the decreasing relevance of philosophy being a collection of applicable methods. Instead, he prefers to consider philosophy a conversation that produces concepts and guidance for literature, which is manifested in his rejection of the typical narrative related to the traditional Western philosophy; a position that is predominantly postmodern.[127]

3. The Configuration of the Postmodernist Discourse:

It is evident that any literary change occurs symptomatically as a result of broader social and cultural events. If the term "postmodern fiction" has any relevance, it comes from its application to more than just identifying specific themes within a group of writings. similarly, postmodern literature must be understood in terms of specific currents within literary theory and practice, as well as being a symptom of broad cultural change. This entails examining the postmodern fiction in terms of form rather than context, evaluating how social and cultural changes could cause changes in what fiction does and how readers respond to it. Inspired by the philosophy of Lyotard, the fundamental postmodernist approach is the "incredulity towards realism". [128]

As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, determining how postmodern attitude is postmodernist – in other words, how precisely it can be evaluated as following on from the modernist viewpoints – is a difficult task. Throughout the postmodernism discussion, there has always been a strongly

[127] Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp. 13.
[128] Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 17.

voiced variation of opinions over whether postmodernism truly represents a departure from modernism or merely continues to address issues that were previously addressed by modernist writers.[129] Many critics have credibly characterized the technical advances of writers like Beckett as both modernist and postmodernist, while modernist attitudes and practices can be identified in current writers who might otherwise be regarded in tune with the postmodern (such as Jeanette Winterson, Ian McEwan, or James Kelman). Rather than delving into the discussion over the relationship between modernist and postmodernist literature, it is more instructive to focus on one specific characteristic that both movements share: a discontent with the nineteenth-century realistic mode of representation. More specifically, how writers who came after modernism conceived about and created their own fiction while being influenced by the modernist approach to realistic representation.[130]

Realism is a form of representation in literature, art, and film that aims at maintaining the illusion that the imaginary world we read or see is a credible approximation of the physical one, duplicating how it looks, how people act, and what happens to them. A realist narrative is frequently described as presenting the audience with a 'segment of life' as if the text had carved out a specific chunk of the human experience – either past or present – and served it to the audience.[131] Mimesis, the Greek term for 'imitation' (introduced intro literary theory by Aristotle), the idea that art and literature can recreate features of the real world, is central to realism. However, as the suffix 'ism' suggests, realism is more than an aesthetic practice. It is a belief system centred on the argument that a piece of art not only has the ability to replicate the practical world (that is, whatever the human being can experience in real life) but also has a responsibility to do so. The realist ideology believes that art and literature should accurately reflect the life and the

[129] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988) x.

[130] Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 17-18.

[131] Brian Crews, "Postmodernist Narrative: In Search of an Alternative", *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingles* , vol. 12 (1999): 19-36.

world so that the audience can learn from or analyse it rather than being carried away by the idealistic escapist fantasies.[132]

Though it has been a part of literature since Chaucer, realism is most closely connected with the novel, particularly the extraordinary pan-European production of rich and profound novels by authors like Balzac and Flaubert in France, Tolstoy in Russia, and Dickens and George Eliot in England from 1830s to the 1870s.[133] This particular form of literature displayed the realist philosophy most adequately. As a result, in the early twentieth century, it became the primary target of modernist novelists' criticism. The poet Ezra Pound's famous admonition that authors of the day "make it new" encapsulates the essential motivation underlying modernist writing. Modernist novelists such as Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce agreed that subjectivity should be rendered more accurately than it was in the nineteenth-century novel.[134] For them, this was the basic objective that overpowers the desire at increasing the possibilities for the novel in the name of creating something distinctive.

In consequence, their fiction uses techniques that illustrate the way in which the conscious mind views reality as something intensely personal and unique, rather than something that can be measured by universal rules. For instance, the stream of consciousness technique, possibly the most well-known modernist literature innovation, depicts the contents of a character's conscious thinking directly without the use of a narrator.[135] The effect of this technique is typical of modernism insofar as it restricts the conventional narrator's duty as a mediator, whose job is to portray the imaginary world to the reader by framing and

[132] Ibid.

[133] Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 18.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid., pp.19.

shaping our reactions to it. Instead, it throws the reader into the fictional universe with little to no instruction or context.[136]

Although high modernism, or the writings that boldly expresses the values of the movement, was brief (running from approximately 1890 to 1930), it had a tremendous influence on subsequent writers. It destabilized the widely held notion of the novel as a form geared toward accurately presenting the nature of the individual-society relationship.[137] It also prompted novelists to become more self-aware of the practice of writing fiction, which often took the form of scepticism about the very function or possibility of realism.[138] Even the writers who were satisfied with continuing the tradition of the great nineteenth-century realists felt compelled to defend their principles and approaches against the model produced by the modernist novelists.

To paraphrase Lyotard's famous statement, one can describe the postmodern literature as a writing influenced in some manner by uncertainty towards realism. This denotes a state of mind which does not openly conclude that authentically representing the postmodern world is no longer desirable, but is convinced that the act of representation cannot be performed as unselfconsciously and committedly as it was in the nineteenth century.

This uncertainty is best expressed by practitioners of the French nouveau roman or the New Novel in the mid– 1950s. Their approach to fiction had a major impact on both the British and American experimental novelists in the 1960s and 1970s. Nathalie Sarraute claimed in her influential 1956 collection of essays "The Age of Suspicion" (Translated into English in 1963) that modernism was crucial in what she regards as a necessary transition from certainty to doubt – on the part of the writer and the reader alike – which defined the modern literature. According

[136] Ibid.

[137] Brian Crews: op.cit., pp. 21.

[138] Ibid.

to Sarraute, the distinguishing characteristic of the modernist novel is that it develops to a rejection of the claim that the world depicted in a piece of literature, its characters and story, is real.[139] This is apparent in the modernist treatment of the character. That is, the novelist does not believe in the characters anymore, and even if he or she does, the reader does not.

The most distinguishing qualities of modernist fiction, according to Sarraute, are an unidentified first-person narrator/ protagonist who is "everything yet nothing", and secondary characters who are, therefore, "deprived of their own existence by this narrator".[140] as a result, the reader is unable to recognize these figures as human, let alone identify with them (in a sympathetic connection which is essential to the effect of the nineteenth-century realistic novel). The imaginary universe ceases to exist objectively and instead appears to be entirely the invention of the narrator's mind. This creates a new relationship between the reader and the writer, as the former cannot rely on the latter to guide him or her through the imaginary world anymore.[141] Indeed, it appears that the writer is discovering this world for the first time. instead of the novel's world being offered to the reader as completely formed and ready to occupy, it seems as if both the author and the reader are simultaneously involved in discovering the new imaginary territory. The novel is hence, the product of the collaboration between the writer and reader.[142]

Contrary to the dominant view of the time, Sarraute considers this new problematic interaction between the writer and the reader as a sign of the novel's strength rather than failure. along with Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet appreciated this change. His 1955 collection of essays *For a New Novel* (also translated into

[139] Sarraute quoted in Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 20.

[140] Nathalie Sarraute, *The Age of Suspicion: Essays on the Novel*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: George Braziller, 1963) 58-59.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 20-21.

English in 1963) offers a complementary explanation of the incredulity towards realism. He suggests that the nineteenth-century novels are packed with exhaustively detailed descriptions of settings, houses, costumes, faces, bodies, etc. with the goal of making the reader see.[143] The original purpose of these descriptions is to:

> Convince the reader of the objective existence – outside literature – of a world which the novelist appeared merely to reproduce, to copy, to transmit, as if one were dealing with a chronicle or a document of some kind (…) Description once served to situate the chief contours of a setting, then to cast light on some of its particularly revealing elements; it no longer mentions anything except insignificant objects (…) It once claimed to reproduce a pre-existing reality; it now asserts its creative function (…) It once made us see things, now it seems to destroy them (…) [144]

The function of the novel, therefore, was altered in the twentieth century. If the realists regarded the novel as a tool designed to reproduce reality, Robbe-Grillet emphasizes that the new objective of the twentieth-century novel is not to interpret what came before or after it, or to "respect the truth". The objective is not to teach the reader about reality, but to create it – that is, to construct an aesthetic universe that lives apart from and does not automatically correspond to reality.[145] Robbe-Grillet exemplifies "the realistic illusion" in the writing process of his 1955 novel The Voyeur. He describes how he desired to portray the way gulls fly, which made him travel to England to see them in real life. He then says: "from the first gull I saw, I understood my error: on the one hand, the gulls I now saw had only very confused relations with those I was describing in my book, and on the other hand, it couldn't have mattered less to me whether they did or not".[146] Therefore,

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[143] Alain Robbe-Grillet, "For A New Novel", (1963) 146, online, Internet, Google Books , 2 November 2021. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=jPJQWrtpIuIC&dq=Alain+Robbe-Grillet+'Time+and+Description+in+Fiction+Today'+(1963)&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[144] Ibid., pp 146-147.

[145] Ibid., pp 160-162.

[146] Ibid.

while it is natural for a writer to convey the image of reality as is, his chief intention in writing the novel ought to be to construct instead of to record.

In conceptualizing the new novel, Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet's arguments were representative of a much broader concern among later postmodernist writers. From the mid– 1950s through the early 1970s, a number of writers and critics[147] responded to the way the modernist novel revolutionized the possibilities of fiction, manifested most notably in their ability to be ambivalent towards realism instead of the desire to reject it outright. [148]

At this point, the descriptions of how the postmodern text works by Linda Hutcheon and Brain McHale help in distinguishing this fiction apart from its predecessors. Hutcheon suggests that the postmodern fiction is double-coded. The postmodern text, she explains "is both intensively self-reflexive and parodic, yet it also attempts to root itself in that which both reflexivity and parody appear to short-circuit: the historical world".[149] According to Hutcheon, the postmodern fiction is both referential and self-reflexive. It is both a continuation of some of the values of realism and a crushing critique of them, which is the main innovation that distinguishes the postmodern novel from the modern one.[150] It is natural for the

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[147] Such as John Barth, Robert Coover, William Gass, and Donald Barthelme.

[148] Bran Nicole: op.cit., pp. 23.

[149] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Second Edition (Routledge, 1989) x.

[150] Hutcheon especially insists at the inadequacy of constantly comparing modernism and postmodernism as two opposing movements as she writes :

> The binary oppositions that are usually set up in the writing on postmodernism – between past and present, modern and postmodern – should probably be called into question, if only because, like the rhetoric or rupture (discontinuity, decentring, and so on), postmodernism literally names and constitutes its own paradoxical identity, and does so in an uneasy contradictory relationship of constant slippage. so much that has been written on this subject has physically taken the form of opposing columns, usually labelled modernist versus postmodernist. but this is a structure that implicitly denies the mixed, plural, and contradictory nature of the postmodern enterprise.

Linda Hutcheon: op.cit., pp. 20.

postmodern writing to be parodic, considering that parody itself is also dual because it paradoxically both embraces and criticizes that which it parodies.[151] This duality pertains to the reader's position, in which he or she is encouraged to interpret the text freely on one hand, but is also compelled to subscribe to the novelist's outline.

Therefore, postmodernism is not essentially a breakaway from modernism, but a breakaway and a continuation of the modernist conventions at the same time. It definitely makes no attempt to put into practice a complete rejection of realism. Indeed, Hutcheon describes that "the ideology of postmodernism is paradoxical, for it depends upon and draws its power from that which it contests. it is not truly radical; nor is it truly oppositional." [152] The postmodern scepticism is justifiable not only on the level of writing and manufacturing psychologically troubling characters but also on the level of reading, taking into consideration the way in which most postmodern fiction is composed. Hutcheon explains that the postmodern narrative shows a disturbing juxtaposition as "its forms … use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention (…) in their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past".[153] This alludes to the significance of 'historiographic metafiction' to the postmodern mode of narrative.[154] The freedom of not only commenting boundlessly on the historical events but also of fusing history with fantasy, confusing the reader and setting him on a sceptical journey towards unlimited interpretations. This is "the apocryphal history and anachronism" in the words of Brain McHale, which stands for the mode of narrative that aims at counterfeiting the accepted historical incidents, their implications, and their timing.[155] Postmodernist literature celebrates temporal

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[151] Ibid., pp. 11.

[152] Ibid., pp. 120.

[153] Ibid., pp. 3.

[154] Ibid., pp 14.

[155] Bran Nicole: op.cit., pp. 23-24.

disorder; examples that demonstrate the workings of the fictional history in the postmodern narrative include Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), and Tom Crick's *Graham Swift's Waterland* (1983) among others.[156] Some of these novels fictionalize the details of both the past and the present.

In the postmodernist work, the fictional and the real world amalgamate. When real historical figures appear differently in postmodernist works, they pose a dilemma. In the postmodern fiction, writers involving historical figures often play spontaneously through their roles and intellect feeding the sceptical inner workings of the reader. Brain Nicol explains that in this process "rather than collapsing history and fiction into one another so that the possibility of representing 'the real' is eliminated", the postmodern fiction problematizes the boundaries in between.[157] "The reader is made aware of the fictionality of the historical material in a text while at the same time remaining conscious (and sometimes confused) about its basis in real events." [158]

On these grounds, McHale's theory is that the dominant component of the modernist fiction is epistemological, and that of the postmodernist is ontological. [159] The first revolving around questions about 'knowing' the world, and the second about 'being' in the world(s). [160] As such the postmodern fiction involves rather a

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[156] David Christopher, *British Culture: An Introduction* (Routledge, 1999) 92.

[157] Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 103.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Brain McHale: op.cit., pp. 9-10.
McHale writes in his explanation of the modernist "epistemology" and the postmodernist "ontology" that the difference is sensed in Alan Wilde's use of "ontology" in his account of postmodernist irony. Of Donald Barthelme, Wilde writes: "Like the pop artists, Barthelme puts aside the central modernist preoccupation with the epistemology, and it may well be the absence of questions about how we know that has operated most strongly to "defamiliarize" his (and their) work." For Wilde Barthelme's concerns are rather "ontological in their acceptance of a world that is, willy-nilly, a given of experience."
Ibid., pp. 26.

[160] Ibid.

radical ‘violation of ontological boundaries’ as it tends to fictionalize the lives of real people and the accepted historical events. In contradiction, the traditional novel beforehand strives to suppress these violations between fictional projections and the real-world facts. It does so by carefully avoiding contradiction between their accounts of real people and the familiar details of these peoples’ lives, and “by making the background norms governing their projected worlds conform to accepted real-world norms”. [161]

Therefore, the postmodernist incredulity towards realism manifested in its double-coded-ness and its free use of historiographic metafiction [162] does not indicate that the postmodernist novel is forthrightly anti-realistic. The configuration of the postmodernist discourse in fiction is much inspired by the growing popularity of conspiracy theories in the United States. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy followed by the Vietnam war and the civil rights movement contributed in various ways to a growing ‘counter-culture’.[163] this latter started with the Beat generation during the 1950s and expanded to the following decade with the ‘hippy’ movement, the drug culture, and the left-wing political rallies. In general, this emerging ‘counter-culture’ expressed incredulity towards authority in a variety of ways. The spirit of the ‘counter-culture’ was translated into the ‘popular culture’ in music and film and in art and literature as well. even though the postmodern fiction was interested in violating the realistic modes of representation – as explained afore –, the 1960s and 1970s literature were highly concerned with the political and social changes of the time. Yet, American novelists tended to conceive of the realist novel as the literary equivalent of official structures of power and oppressive social convention.[164]

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[161] Ibid.

[162] In addition to other writing techniques such as: dirty realism, pastiche, the cut-up, the fold-in etc.

[163] Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 72.

[164] Ibid., pp. 73.

American Literature of the 1960s and 1970s conveyed the impression that ordinary life in the United States was packed with events so odd, fantastic, or absurd that they surpassed anything even the most inventive fiction writers could conjure up. Philip Roth's 1961 essay "Writing American Fiction", demonstrates "the fixes, the scandals, the insanity, the idiocy, the piety, the lies" which characterized the everyday supply offered by the newspapers.[165] He explains that Richard Nixon and other real-life public leaders felt more like satiric literary inventions than real individuals.[166] He concludes that:

> The American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make credible much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally, it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meagre imagination. [167]

The political and social atmosphere of the period convinced the American public and novelists that reality and history were not accurate, but are a kind of façade for the true stories which have been deliberately concealed. Therefore, the need to investigate fictionality since the 1960s stemmed from a belief that everyday experience was already fictionalized, either due to its sheer ridiculousness, or due to the power of the media and the hidden manipulators in moulding and presenting it to the audience. [168] The postmodern literature is the

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[165] Philip Roth, *Writing American Fiction* (March 1961), online, Internet, 30 November 2021. Available : https://www.commentary.org/articles/philip-roth/writing-american-fiction/.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Stanley Grenz makes a summarizing commentary on the way in which media in the postmodern world plays and manipulated the users' minds. He describes:

> A typical evening newscast, for example, will bombard the viewer with a series of unrelated images in quick succession—a war in a remote country, a murder closer to home, a sound bite from a political speech, the latest on a sex scandal, a new scientific discovery, highlights from a sporting event. This collage is interspersed with advertisements for better batteries, better soap, better cereal, and better vacations. By giving all these varied images— news stories and commercials alike—roughly equal treatment, the broadcast leaves the impression that they are all of the roughly equal importance [...] The evening sitcoms and dramas seem to be invested with the same weight as the earlier news

aesthetic response to the identity crisis and the battle for legitimization in a deceitful society.

Indeed, the American writers depicted the effects of communications technology and consumerism. They mostly expressed negative positions towards the new Western culture and much more tolerance to drugs, alcohol, and impulsiveness in lifestyle as a substitute for the norms and rules of the new Western society. This was not only a matter of a thematic concern but more than that a change in the overall understanding of art and its form, as it began to be considered as a part of the social experience. This is especially significant since the American 'metafiction' writers are frequently considered to be merely interested in experimenting with the potential of self-conscious fiction for its own sake, or to remark solely on the chronicle of the novel rather than history in itself. However, it is reasonable to observe the shift to the creative non-realist approaches as the outcome of a literary contribution to the popular counter-cultural opinion that the lived reality was becoming dangerously fictional.[169]

4. Conclusion: Towards Paranoia and Self-deception

The shift from the realist to the non-realist approaches in making the postmodernist novel is inspired by and coupled with an incredulity towards metanarratives. The nature of the postmodern fiction is recapitulated in the scepticism towards objective truth claims, a prioritization of other ways of knowing (emotions, feelings, intuition, personal experience, custom, metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, myth, religious sentiment, mystical experience), the bricolage of new realities from various forms of knowledge, and a request for equal

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> stories. In this manner, television blurs the line between truth and fiction, between truly earth-shattering and the trivial.

Stanley J. Grenz. *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 34.

[169] Bran Nicol: op.cit., pp. 75.

positions in relation to grand-narratives.[170] This is in essence the embodiment of the culture of conspiracy. Considered as little narratives in the postmodernist jargon, conspiracy theories tell us about a world where the truth is no longer guaranteed but is somehow " 'out there' for us to weigh, juggle, construct, assess, remodel, measure, combat, analyse, play with, and struggle with. And that is no easy task, for none of us." [171]

The question of truth plays a central role in this regard. Conspiracy theories and the postmodern discourse commonly distrust the official accounts. Both of them are based on the assumptions that any interaction with the truth or "reality" is incurably lost under the postmodern condition, and that truth is nothing but an illusion, which can never be fully grasped. This resulted in a culture of paranoia. Acknowledged is the fact that this nervousness about a supposed depth beneath the surface is no novelty in the American history. However, even Richard Hofstadter, who traced the governmental paranoia back to the colonial period, maintains that prior involvements have always been different when compared to the post-war obsession. Deliberating on the pre-assassination chronicle of scepticism and fear, Hofstadter characterizes Communist plots and McCarthyism as an example of foreign threats which remains, at its best, a structured array of discourses and techniques.[172]

The nature of paranoia prevalent in the post-war world does not only relate to the political agencies as Hofstadter suggested. More than that, the role that mass media and social media occupied in the last fifty years, transforms the whole model of the conspiracy known before. The new model of conspiracy implies that these agencies or the "Hidden Persuaders and Masters of Deceit" are not simply political and technical operatives.[173] Rather dramatically, the entire populace is being

[170] Jaron Harambam: op.cit., pp. 319-320.

[171] Ibid.

[172] Hofstadter quoted in Timothy Melley: op.cit., pp. 1-2.

[173] Ibid.

implicated in the matter, performing the roles of both the predator and the prey. With the inability to assume a structural form of causality, and with the growing distrust in all systems of explanation, the postmodern conspiratorial world becomes the epitome of paranoia.

CHAPTER TWO:

PARANOIA
AND
ESCAPISM
IN POSTMODERN FICTION

"Conspiracy theorists, she knew, were paranoid by definition, and usually with good reason – they were indeed being watched, largely because they were standing on an upturned bucket, haranguing the sheeple about their wingnut delusions."

Mick Herron

Established in the previous chapter that the discourse of conspiracy is tied to the postmodernist philosophy given its communication of relativity and uncertainty. The postmodern literature emphasizes the extreme effects on the subject of postmodern society: a world dominated by rampant consumerism and electronic media, where intersubjective communication has broken down, discourse is power, and information is the most valuable commodity, digested and dispersed by computers.[174] Following that the postmodern intellect refuses to bound truth to its logical feature and thus overthrows the human mind as the judge of truth. Under the postmodern condition, there are other ways to knowledge besides logic and reason including the feelings, the instincts, and potentially paranoia.[175] Although this discussion began with a few emblematic illustrations, this chapter is concerned with the far-reaching cultural and artistic phenomenon of paranoia; a widespread set of apprehensions about the way in which social structures and technological advancements flattened the human individuality, and its interpretation in the postmodern narrative.

Regarding postmodern fiction, "culture is contradictory," Writes Ian Parker. "We are often forced to acknowledge the presence of conflicting discourses in its texts, and it is this presence of contradiction which allows room for resistance, the refusal to respond within dominant meanings." [176] There is no precise and coherent cultural representation of what actually happened. Instead, the variation between competing discourses appears to be the norm. Postmodern fiction, I suggest, is especially open to paranoid interpretations as a manner of responding outside the dominant meanings.

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[174] Bran Nicol, "Reading Paranoia: Paranoia, Epistemophilia and the Postmodern Crisis of Interpretation", *Literature and Psychology* ,vol. 45, no. 1 (1999): 44-62.

[175] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 7-8.

[176] Ian Parker, *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*, (New York: Routledge, 1992) 49.

Beginning with an overview of the paranoid style, the first section of this chapter argues that the experience of post-war America was the optimum environment for growing the seeds of paranoid thinking among the masses, and among producers and consumers of art. This is the result of the absence of truth and the growth of conspiracy theories. In the following section, I will explain the interest in the paranoid style within the literary movement of postmodernism in relation to the longing for escape. This section answers the question: to whom paranoia is? to confirm that the escapist desire of the fictional characters is mostly what triggers the paranoid thinking. In the last section, I will explore parallels between the psychological studies of paranoia and escapism in order to show that the only truth the postmodern paranoid fiction affirms is the truth about the escapist desire. These parallels reveal the potential of the paranoid fiction to create a dualistic setting: a totalitarian atmosphere that is typical of the paranoid literature and which represents in most cases the post-war world, and an emancipating personal world constructed through conspiracy, illusion and individualized interpretation of data. By the end, this chapter will provide a clear link between the postmodern literature and the theme of paranoia as an illusion of escape, which is to be empirically explored in the coming chapters.

In a 2004 report of Surveillance & Society, David Wood encouraged more focus on surveillance studies for the examination of paranoia.[177] Indeed, it has been commonplace for critics of surveillance culture to observe that, the more surveillance increases, the more people become paranoid.[178] Correspondingly, in a 2008 article David Harper argues that although surveillance technologies, paranoia, and conspiratorial interpretations are different from each other, they are connected. [179] The reason is that the rise of surveillance technologies sets the

[177] David Wood, "People Watching People", *Surveillance and Society*, vol. 2, no. 4 (2004): 474 – 478. https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v2i4.3358/.

[178] Ibid.

[179] David Harper, "The Politics of Paranoia: Paranoid Positioning and Conspiratorial Narratives in the Surveillance Society", *Surveillance and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1. (2008): 1 – 32, 2.

preconditions for the development of conspiracy theories, which are in essence a manifestation of a paranoid psyche.[180] One of the most dominant themes to develop from the paradigms of conspiracy culture and paranoia is that of surveillance. In fiction, the worlds fabricated in numerous paranoid texts are often of an operative evil observer; a representation realized predominantly by the totalitarian states in dystopian literature. This connection leads us to the question: is paranoia an agency of escape?

For the postmodern writers, and especially paranoid fiction writers, the conception of human manipulation appears to be an overpowering exposé that promotes a maze of conspiratorial structures, a vision of human existence so obscure in which a free intellect is a luxury. One of its most significant cultural functions, I shall propose, is to sustain a form of individualism that appears increasingly challenged by the post-war dogmatic structures. Escapism becomes a commitment, paranoia grows into a lavishness, and anxiety about the meaning of human existence happens to be mended before the two. In other words, escapism and paranoia are inseparable parts of the paradox in which a supposed individualist culture conserves its individualism by continually imagining alternative scenarios to escape the looming menace.

1. The Interest in The Paranoid Style Under the Postmodern Condition

The term paranoia has a long record. The use of the word goes back to as early as the ancient Greeks since it was used in the medical writings of the Hippocrates. It originated from para-(stands for outside, deranged) and noia-(stands for mind, thinking) holding the precise meaning of being ‘out of your

[180] Ibid.

mind' or 'mad'.[181] Later in the 19th century, the term was recovered to the psychiatric lexis and it gained momentum with the concept of "dementia paranoides" created by Kraepelin in 1899.[182] Kraepelin used this concept to describe a faction of people who exhibited persecutory illusions and hallucinations along with mental weakening, a condition that is presently distinguishing to what is called a psychosomatic schizophrenic syndrome.[183] This illness can simply be summarized in the prevalence of delusion over rational thinking in the everyday life. The attitude of delusion as it is deployed by clinical psychologists is explained as:

> A false personal belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly sustained in spite of what almost everyone else believes and in spite of what usually constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary.[184]

Therefore, a belief is an essential factor in order for delusion to cause an alarming transformation in the mind. This belief is distinctive to the subject and is usually unacknowledged in his societal norms and culture.[185] Outstandingly, these subjects are mostly recognized by other people to rather have healthy mental balance. In contrast to the widespread understanding, individuals that are diagnosed as paranoid or – in severe cases schizophrenic –, do not necessarily exhibit a noticeable troubling behaviour. The Dunedin Study Cohort elucidates how the recent decades witnessed the recognition of the subclinical delusions in

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[181] The roots of the term "paranoia" are traced in D. Swanson, P. Bohnert and J. Smith, The Paranoid. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1970., and in W. Meissner. The Paranoid Process. (New York: Jason Aaronson. 1978).

[182] *Symptoms of Schizophrenia*, ed. Charles G. Costello, (John Wiley and Sons, 1993) 94.

[183] The distinction still exists in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) today. Paranoid ideation without prominent hallucinations or impairment to cognitive or affective functioning can be viewed as a subtype of delusional disorder within the schizophrenia spectrum or as an aspect of the related paranoid personality disorder.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid.

the public sphere.[186] In that, 12.6% of the individuals were estimated to experience some paranoid illusion at some point in their lives. Although 'average' paranoid subjects are rarely diagnosed and treated, they still can sometimes partake in political duties and be socially active.

Viewed as such, an important characteristic of the paranoid condition is the estimative defensive mechanism as illustrated in the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM):

> Paranoid psychology is characterized by unbearable effects, impulses and ideas that are disavowed and attributed to others, and are then viewed with fear and/or outrage (. . .) Projected feelings may include hostility, as in the common paranoid conviction that one is being persecuted by hostile others; dependency, as in the sense of being rendered humiliatingly dependent by others; and attraction, as in the belief that others have sexual designs on the self or to the people whom one is attached. [187]

Implicating chiefly the act of forming an incorrect awareness of the exterior world, paranoia is diagnosed by two major deviations in the mind. The first is the feeling of persecution and the augmented fear of the oppressive forces that it entails. The second is the drift towards fabricating a personal delusional world that serves as a substitute for these assumedly over-oppressive forces of the actual world. Essentially, these behaviours are in essence a way to protect the self from outside threatening forces.

To no surprise, among the scientists who took the initiative to expand the concept of paranoia is Sigmund Freud, which is revealed in writing his formative

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[186] Richard P. Bentall, et al, "Persecutory Delusions: A Review and Theoretical Integration", *Clinical Psychology Review*, vol. 21, no. 8 (2001): 1146 – 1147.
[187] *Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual*, ed. Vittorio Lingiardi, and Nancy McWilliams, Second Edition: PDM-2 (The Guilford Press, 2017) 48.

papers about the paranoid disorder in 1922. [188] Freud theorized paranoia in psychoanalysis when he made the connection between it and homosexuality in his paper *Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia* (1911). Freud drew upon the writings of the German jurist Daniel Schreber. This latter was clinically constrained for being psychiatrically paranoid in 1893. In order for him to get released, Schreber authored a comprehensive explanation: *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903) in which he outputs his confusion and viewpoints triggering great sympathy in that period.[189]

Freud's understanding of paranoia then was entrenched in the repressed homosexuality, which causes the paranoiac subject to envision his libidinal vigour directed towards same–sex affection as repaying in some formula of hostility. Based on this conclusion, Lacan -who later elaborated on the works of Freud- claims that paranoia is rather an exaggerated facet of individual awareness that engages in visualizing the perceptions of the other.[190] In other words, the paranoid assumes the task of digging too deep in the connotation of simple everyday language only to see himself in the place of the other, and therefore building a distorted belief upon this act. It is simply a matter of interpretation.[191]

Implicitly within his explanation of the disorder, Freud made the claim that paranoia has a remarkable association with the modernization of culture.[192] This is due to the fact that the value systems of modernized cultures suppress in one way or another different desires of individuals. However, the suppressed desires of the human being that stem from the blind subscription to religion, social norms, or cultural codes is not the only provocative of the paranoid disorder during the postmodern age. Paranoia becomes an ordinary experience in the modern

[188] John Farrell, *Freud's Paranoid Quest: Psychoanalysis and Modern Suspicion*: op.cit., pp. 213.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Ibid., pp. 213-214.

[192] Ibid.

world as a reaction to the ever–rising feeling of suspicion and uncertainty. The new modernization of culture experienced after the Second World War, by nurturing uncertainty, renders paranoia a natural phenomenon in the contemporary world.[193] Farrell explains that:

> (…) it is not on account of the suppression of religious impulses by science that paranoia achieves its force and visibility in modern experience. Rather, paranoia becomes a viable, even normal stance when intellectual culture depends fundamentally and without limit upon suspicion of the faculties that make it possible. [194]

If paranoia as a psychological disorder has such a strong tie with the modernization of culture, no doubt that the postmodern becomes its best host. The connection between postmodernism and scepticism – translated into the feeling of paranoia – has been the theme of interest for numerous academics. In doing so, studies emphasized the notion of psychosis to illustrate the postmodern settings.[195] The interest is directed towards investigating the extreme impact and conclusions of the postindustrial culture on the individual's behaviour. What is meant by

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[193] An important differentiation should be made in this regard. Hendrik Hertzberg and David McClelland highlight the difference between medical and societal paranoia, with the latter being taken as subjects common individuals. Social paranoia can be illustrated as the belief in the presence of a massive, undisclosed and highly operative cosmopolitan conspiratorial arrangement that prescribes every citizen's behaviour. Based on such conceptualization, this model of paranoia turns out to be more of a modern psychological syndrome; "It follows the adoption of rationalism as the quasi-official religion of Western man and the collapse of certain communitarian bonds (the extended family, belief in God, the harmony of the spheres) which once made sense of the universe in all its parts". Paranoia is the alternative of a rigorous – however incorrect – order for chaos. Not only that but it dispels at the same time " the sense of individual insignificance by making the paranoid the focus of all he sees around him—a natural response to the condition of modern life".
Hendrick Hertzberg, and David C.K. McClelland, "Paranoia", *Harper's*, (June 1974) 51.

[194]Ibid.

[195] Some of these contemporary studies arrange from the political to the social and the religious in relation to the psychological workings of paranoia in the industrialized U.S culture. examples include Patrick O'Donnell's Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S Narrative (2000), Peter Knight's Everything is Connected: Underworld's Secret History of Paranoia (1999), Guy Davidson's "Contagious Relations": Simulation, Paranoia, and the Postmodern Condition (2005), Nicholas Holm's Conspiracy Theorizing Surveillance: Considering Modalities of Paranoia and Conspiracy in Surveillance Studies (2009), Liam Kennedy's Alien Nation: White Male Paranoia and Imperial Culture in the United States (2009), among many others.

postindustrial culture in this context is the unusual life condition that encourages the rise of rambling consumerism and the enslavement to media. A situation under which open collective interaction has been banned and knowledge, the font of power and the most precious commodity, has been encrypted and disseminated by computers.

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 and security. The crisis of identity is amplified by the 'technological pursuit' or 'public surveillance', which characterizes the post-war American 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 all social subjects. 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".[196]

It is especially the post-war experience that fostered such extreme conditions. In that, large scale efforts are being made, often with impressive success, to channel people's unthinking habits, their purchasing decisions, and their thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social science.[197] This suggests that public relations corporations, advertisers, political activists, and social engineers took the mission of manipulating the human attitude in all aspects of life. These efforts take place underneath the level of awareness, which explains the psychological disorder associated with the period. Consequently, In the aftermath of the Second World War, this psychological

[196] Kenneth Paradis, *Sex, Paranoia, and Modern Masculinity* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2007) 30.

[197] Vance Packard quoted in William Leiss and Stephen Kline, *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products and Images of Well-being* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 22.

disorder comes as no surprise when noticing the unprecedented rise in the information sciences, cybernetics, and more importantly an economy that thrives on the fabrication and distribution of knowledge rather than the production and distribution of merchandises.[198]

Tony Tanner explains that paranoia stems 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." [199] The postmodern fiction accentuates paranoia in a variety of ways that range from the naïve distrust in social institutions to questioning one's own identity and even constructing a multiplicity of beliefs to challenge the doubted conventions and realities. This anxiety is triggered by the possibility that all knowledge is partially or completely incorrect, which pushes the individual to dig through historical events and provided data for alternative interpretations; hence psychological freedom from the straitjackets of control by outside forces. While the goal appears at first glance glorious and worth the effort, the difficulty is when the individual is confronted by the ridiculousness of his attempt as universal truth is unattainable in the postmodern. As exemplified earlier with the Kennedy case, the truth was irredeemably lost once the conspiratorial discourses attempting authenticity joined to mask it.

Don DeLillo's declaration "*This is the age of conspiracy*", in *Running Dog* (1978), has become progressively typical to the post-war decades, in which the United States was drowning in the conspiracy hysteria, manifested in the rise of a "new paranoid style in the American arts".[200] Therefore, it is only reasonable to

[198] Melley, Timothy: op.cit., pp. 18.

[199] Tony Tanner quoted in Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp. 129.

[200] Ibid.
Although this style of paranoia has been flourishing for decades, it gained momentum once it was included in the postmodern condition of scepticism.

maintain that the postmodern is also the "age of paranoia".[201] Claims that paranoia has long been associated with modernism instead of postmodernism when it comes to not only literature but also art, architecture, and cultural artefacts in general, are widely popular. It should be noted in this regard that the attempt to describe the paranoid psychology is admittedly not a new one, however, its originality cannot be associated with modernism.

Paranoia as a thematic concern was perhaps introduced long ago in the literary history with Cervantes' masterpiece of comic fiction *Don Quixote*. The tale is about a mature feeble gentleman who is consumed by the concept of exaggerated romances and grows precipitously persuaded that he is a knight with the task of renovating the grandeur of chivalry. It may appear more relevant to encompass the paranoid representation within the modernist framework when reflecting upon the post-World War One discourse. However, this does not proscribe the existence of a postmodern delusion that some analysts describe rather as a schizophrenic in nature which happens to be even more intense than the modernist paranoia.[202]

If the modernist discourse maintains a commitment toward a rewarding interpretation, the postmodernist one refuses to grant the characters and the reader this satisfaction. This submission firmly eradicates all attempts to prove that paranoia is a modernist concept. In his article about the postmodern crisis of interpretation, Bran Nicol affirms that "in a sense, modernist reading is not paranoid at all. For if there is a totalized structure of meaning beneath the surface, which proves every detail is significant after all, surely this vindicates our paranoid suspicions about some hidden alternative truth to the one we are presented with."[203] Hence, if the paranoiac is evidently right, then how can he be paranoid?

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[201] Ibid.

[202] Bran Nicol: "Reading Paranoia: Paranoia, Epistemophilia and the Postmodern Crisis of Interpretation": op.cit., pp. 55.

[203] Ibid.

On the other hand, "The rhetorical weight of postmodernist fiction (…) implies that the paranoiac is wrong. It reminds us (…) that the privileged quest for hidden meanings may be profoundly mistaken".[204]

If the postmodernist movement is any different from the ones that preceded it, it is the altered mindset that nurtured this difference. The dilemma of unravelling the unknown meanings allows for postmodern fiction to communicate more anxiety than is previously allowed. Bran Nicol explains this in his essay "Reading Postmodern Paranoia" as follows:

> (…) In postmodernism, the realization that we cannot achieve absolute knowledge has not wiped out the desire for it. The result frequently manifests itself as a kind of paranoia: a desperate desire to make sense of what we know does not make sense. The ability to transcend social and cultural fragmentation and the invisible workings of the industrial machine were still available to the writers before because of their belief in the transcendent creative power of the self. In postmodernism, one of the few ways this transcendence is possible is through paranoia. This is not necessarily negative; psychoanalysis affirms that there is a positive regenerative side to paranoia, whereby the subject builds up a more easily inhabitable and less oppressive world s/he can more easily know and inhabit. But it is a distorted view nonetheless. [205]

The majority of post-war representations portray characters panicking about the means by which giant, and often indeterminate, establishments might be manipulating their lives and dictating their choices. Writers such as Italo Calvino, Margret Atwood, William S. Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Joan Didion, Kathy Acker, Joseph Heller, Ishmael Reed, and Leslie Marmon Silko produced books, the shared aspect of which is the presence of a widespread totalitarian regime. This latter plans to continuously and secretively reign the public behaviour and command the actions of each social constituent.

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[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid., pp. 49.

Furthermore, these works take various outlooks and thematic concerns that convey the feeling of paranoia, constructing a large catalogue of topics under postmodernism. Some of them dwell on conspiracy theories like Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*. Other major examples include the appropriation of Kennedy's assassination story to fabricate a number of suspicious plots such as Bryan Woolley's *November 22*, Thomas's *Flying into Love*, DeLillo's *Libra*, and James Ellroy's *American Tabloid* and many others. Other novels promote real–life conspiracy theories like the accounts written by Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd in *Revisiting of Old London*, about the group of 'the psychogeographers' who retrieve a web of 'occult knowledge'. Other writers choose to elaborate upon the mental breakdown of protagonists and its implications in reworking their own and their surroundings' world.

By exploring the manifestations of paranoia in the postmodern world therefore, one can underpin the two major symptoms of the paranoiac disorder in the postmodern discourse. The suspicious -yet embraced- belief in conspiracy theory, and the obsessive craving for authentic knowledge and alternative interpretations to what was once understandable.

2. For Whom Paranoia is? The Link Between Paranoia and Escapism

In the post-war rhetoric of undermined individualism, the influence of societal systematization is a recurrent theme. The last half of the twentieth century's fiction dwelled upon the realization that every human behaviour or thought can be orchestrated by technical reflexologies and communicative tools. The reason goes back to the large socio-economic establishments, governments, data-processing organisms, public diplomacy agencies, and communication

webs.[206] These systems appear to share the same agenda of subjugating all people. Jacques Ellul commented in 1954 that in a technologically advanced society "there can be no human autonomy in face of technical autonomy. The individual must be fashioned by techniques (…) in order to wipe out the blots his personal determination introduces into the perfect design of the organization".[207] Such comment progresses out of the sociological tradition of Oswald Spengler, Lewis Mumford, and Siegfried Giedion, and implicates that the human comportment had necessarily transformed in response to the regulatory stimulus of social organizations and mass media.[208]

Outstandingly, postmodernist writers in this regard barely articulate such technical regulations to generate various rewards and drawbacks for various social groups in their fiction.[209] Instead, a binary opposition is usually engaged between the individuals and the socio-technical organizations. Not only the frequency of these organizations or the fear of the new mechanisms is openly pronounced, but also the communal logic that human manipulation is ought to be very omnipresent, very efficient, and very absolute.

In addition to that, in postmodern fiction, the assessments of the different estranged narrators among other numerous voices, give the impression of the narratives' proceedings as distinctly problematic in terms of the level of "reality" that can be credited to several episodes. Dreams, hallucinations, and paranoid illusions are hardly detectible from the events which trigger them or to which they may refer. Unusually, the critical plot interrogation is "what truly happened?" applicable not only to the paranoid actors in the fiction but to the reader who faces the identical drawbacks: all seeking knowledge about a coherent theory that governs the fictional world in which the reader is a peculiarly framed spectator.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Melley, Timothy: op.cit., pp. 19 – 20.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Ibid.

Conclusive resolutions are unattainable as the narratives orchestrate tremendous arrays of claims about the ways in which the world functions. The question that should be asked is not "how are the characters paranoid?" but "why are they?" and "why them?" not solely in terms of external provocations but in relation to the inner incentives that their minds cultivated unassailable.

On the grounds of what has been said, the principal question then, for the study of paranoia in postmodern fiction is not "what is paranoia?" or "where is paranoia?", but "for whom paranoia is?" The interest lies less in the commonly assumed idea that social and political systems manoeuvre individual actions and conceal authentic knowledge. Rather, it lies in a particular psychological manifestation of this idea, a manifestation that gravitates toward representations of paranoid visions, fantasies, and private revelations, as an escape measurement.

To elaborate on Freud's understanding of paranoia as a voicing-over of the individual's repressed desires, one may recall John L. Longeway's explanation of what repression is.[210] "Repression results from and is supported by escapist activity" claims Longeway.[211] It appears when the subject is "without special assistance, or an onerous process of self-examination, or the shock of some catastrophic event, or a combination of these, incapable of bringing the repressed material to consciousness."[212] Connecting that to the post-war lived experiences, it is no doubt that all these preconditions are at play.

A repressed desire for individuality, meaningfulness, and truth is unpronounced but enthusiastically craved. Longeway clarifies this argument by giving the example of a person who maintains a number of irrational viewpoints largely failure or misfortune (loss of dignity, others' disapproval, being wrong). He is in need of emancipating strategies to be able to cope temporarily with these

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[211] John L. Longeway : op.cit., pp. 09 – 10.

[212] Ibid.

beliefs as a matter of psychological comfort. Given the likelihood that such irrational beliefs will be present in the average rational being, "and the amount of time that might be needed to correct them, it might very well be best, in the short run, to go with escapism".[213] Appropriating this understanding to the theorization of postmodern paranoia, the hypothesis is that escapism is opted for in a rather reversed manner: to temporarily avoid the irrationality of the outer world into a more meaningful, comfortable, and subjective atmosphere by means of paranoia.

The primary nature of the escapist activity as explained by theorists and critics validates this hypothesis. For Longeway, escapist activity is adjusted to the agent's avoiding consideration of offending beliefs.[214] This latter may offend in its bearing on action (since it opens to criticism an action one wished to perform as in Freud's repressed desires), or in its importance to the truth, or the likelihood of other beliefs or assumptions to which one is devoted, or by giving rise to undesirable feelings once considered. Usually, this undesired feeling is guilt, anxiety, shame, anger, a sense of helplessness, or anything else the person particularly finds aversive. "Escapism attempts to keep beliefs one does not like out of consciousness", because if they enter consciousness, the individual may not perform healthily.[215]

This view of escapism is especially relevant to the discussion of the postmodern paranoid character, who feels offended by the impossibility of certainty and peace in the outer world. not only that, but the monotony of daily life aggravates the need for an escapist atmosphere to avoid boredom and depression. This is one of the first definitions of the term escapism provided by William Ralph Inge in his article "Escape" published in 1940. He discusses the concept from the perspective of a historicist. In that, he clarifies the historical significances of

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[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Ibid.

"boredom" – which echoes the leisure time of Bacon – in human demise.[216] Inge suggests that:

> the effect of boredom on a large scale in history in underestimated. It is a main cause of revolution, and would soon bring to and en all the static Utopias, and the farmyard civilization of the Fabians. France has never been so well governed as under Louis Philippe; but after eighteen years of his prudent and prosaic administration, Lamartine declares that 'la France s'ennuie', and Napoleon the Little is installed in his place. Determined not to repeat the mistake of his predecessor, Louis Napoleon gives his country "glory", of which the stages are the Crimea, Solferino, Mexico, and Sedan. Boredom often generates wars, the supreme exhibition of human folly and wickedness (. . .) wars are not boring.[217]

On the personal level when boredom attacks an individual it leads to his final escape to suicide. Therefore, in answer to the question of for whom paranoia is? the postmodern subject suffering from uncertainty and boredom is especially expected to turn into an escapist medium for relief. Paranoid illusions in this sense, perform as a second world; one that is essentially self-contained, emancipating, and counter-operative to the offending and depressive real world.

3. The Travel From the Real to the Unreal:

In a 1975 research entitled "Escape and Escapism Varieties of Literary Experience", Robert Heilman suggests that if we observe any historical dictionary we find that escape has long been perceived as a "departure from tangible sources of distress and disaster". [218] Escape is always related to an unpleasant

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[216] William Ralph Inge, "Escape", *Philosophy*, vol. 15, no. 60. (1940): 386–399, online, Jstor, 13 June 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/3746087/.

[217] Ibid.

[218] Robert B. Heilman, "Escape and Escapism Varieties of Literary Experience", *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 83, no. 3. (1975): 439 – 458, online, Jstor, 24 March 2019. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/27542986/.

circumstance: accidents, dangers, epidemics, unfriendly creatures, premature death in various forms; enemies of whatever kind, jails, castles and towers, prison camps; wars and military actions, ambushes, assaults, traps, battles, hunts, fires, floods etc. [219]

This observation that Robert Heilman makes, emphasizes the physical facade of the meaning of escape as was indicated in the Funk and Wagnalls unabridged dictionary of 1925. Since that time fresh alternatives to the old patterns have emerged including "new physical flights from oppressors, sadists in power, and official murderers" and new variants of "escape routes, undergrounds, mass emigrations, the hazardous penetration of international curtains concealing cruel and sinister deeds". In whatever fashion, the term never ceases to imprint on the counter idea of constraint and confining, that whenever the boundary is present, the feeling of escape is omnipresent. The idea of escaping the boundaries has always been received with high interest and enthusiasm, and fiction about it triggers great attention among the audience. Heilman recalls some of the many occasions in which escape made a stance in the literary arena; he writes:

> As early as 1926 there was an escape "from the Primitive"; perhaps then a Victorian bias toward the civilized still helped mould a buying public. In 1940 there was an escape "from Fear" (shades of FDR), and the book was well enough to be reissued in 1958. In 1941 the title phrase was "from Freedom"; the book reappeared in 1968, perhaps meant to appeal to a second metaphor doubtless referred to some circumscribed evil, but it also images an extensive realm to be free from. In 1961, we learned how to escape "from Authority" (noticing the postmodern anti-authoritarianism); that was about the time I attended a conference of professors and professionals of various sorts who, in discussing an assigned aesthetic theme, managed to discredit many an idea or theory by associating it with "authority". At the end of the decade someone was helping us escape "from Power" -an understandable getaway in 1969, though the book probably meant power in office rather than in the streets. Soon after, a rush of escape titles gives us a clue to various historical moments: 1970, "from

[219] Ibid.

> Addiction"; 1971, "from Marriage"; and 1972, not only "from Anarchy" but also "from The Doll's House"- from monarchy or worse, doubtless.[220]

From Heilman's argument, one aspect demands observation; that is the increasing use of the term escape in the timeframe associated with postmodernism.[221] Logically, and based on what has been said in previous chapters, the age of postmodernism images the epitome of thought confinement, human manipulation, and anti-individuality. The psychological activity of abstract escape via illusory apparatuses dates back to the 1930s, especially with the advancements in technology that enhanced the human practice of self-deception and mental drifting. The physical aspect is different from this psychological activity as an escape from escapism. If Heilman designates the post-war rush of escape narrative as a continuation of the escape theme apparent since the Victorian literature and positively even earlier, I suggest that the post-war use of the escape theme – particularly in relation to paranoid characters in fiction – should be classified separately and designated more as an escapist psychological activity instead of a simple endeavour at physical deliverance.

Arthur Christopher Benson explains the aesthetic significance of the phenomenon since early times. He suggests that all the best stories in the world are but one story in reality the story of an escape. [222] The only captivating account of the human mind is the method of escape no matter how irregular the context may be. Indeed, all the classical and modern accounts that are known for levitating a special curiosity within the human intellect are mostly of escape. The stories of Joseph, of Odysseus, the prodigal son, the Pilgrim's Progress, the "Ugly Duckling", and "Sintram" in addition to Hamlet and other legendary Shakespearean tragedies are all narratives of escapes. Similar are all love stories

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[220] Ibid., pp. 440.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Arthur Christopher Benson, *Escape and Other Essays* (London: Murray, 1915) 12 – 13.

for “the course of true love never can run smooth”, and they are in essence the couple’s endeavour to “escape from the desert of lovelessness into the citadel of love”.[223] In one way or another, therefore, every storyline revolves around the character’s desire to escape a certain risk, danger, unhappiness, responsibility, sorrow, shame, and in the postmodern world, actual life altogether with the hope of reaching more rewarding conclusions.

Under the postmodern condition, the problem resides in the motionlessness and conformity of the human being.[224] Since confinement to the daily routines and requirements is forced on the individual, and since all attempts at penetrating the machine-like atmosphere of the world created by authorities, the non-escapist way of life has been set in stone for humanity. Largely, preserving order among society has been the primary goal for establishments and regimes since the Classical periods (ignoring certain intermittent historical junctures). People would immerse in quotidian responsibilities in order to live simply out of compulsion. With the age of postmodern paranoia, the world order of the Victorian terms became a limitation, and whether or not the escape presents a sane allegory, it became especially desired.

Keeping in mind the challenges surrounding the individual during the post-war period and the development of scandalous schemes, the leitmotif in all fictional plots mirroring the era is, to no surprise, the desire to migrate from forbidding circumstances to healthier ones no matter how efficacious the efforts, or how unpleasing the ramifications might be. “The man who slays himself is not the man who hates life,” writes Benson, “he only hates the sorrow and the shame which make unbearable that life which he loves only too well.”[225] For the postmodern character, the brain that sinks into the confusion of paranoia is not the brain that hates realistic existence, it only hates the manipulation and the

[223] Ibid.

[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid,. pp. 20.

conspiracies which make unreachable human dignity in that realistic environment, which only comforts him too well.[226] For writers like Pynchon, the escape from manipulating systems to individuality, from ignorance to knowledge, from clumsiness to skilfulness is a noble cause, even if pursued in escapist manners through paranoid illusions. As for Tartt, the human mind never ceases to find boundaries, for life with nothing to escape from, nothing more to crave, anticipate, and learn would be monotonous.

Though postmodern fiction is distinctively irregular with regards to timeframes, settings, and narrative styles, mutual postmodern premises can be found when looking at paranoia as a nuance of escapism. The escape theme can be categorized as a move away from a detrimental position by constructing – either fictionally or factually, either deliberately or reflexively – one that, at least originally, happens to be better. Protagonists are usually portrayed in the postmodern fiction as struggling to escape from the conventions of society through sex, drugs, and eventually private illusions that counter the new culture and its conformist lifestyle. Paranoid escapism proposes an alternative to the mainstream daily monotony. As such, escapism into illusion and psychological states of delirium counterbalances for other illogicalities elsewhere, when the individual finds himself obliged to evade depression, or to compensate for the consequences of a background heavily chaotic, in which it is else how difficult for a naturally functioning individual to survive mentally. Paranoia and escapism as

[226] Olaf Stapledon draws the example of escapism in the age of chaos and disorder from a political standpoint. He categorizes it as a specific kind of escapism, labelled "left escapism". He explains that for the Left escapist "true salvation lies in recognizing that his motive for condemning the social order is not as disinterested as he believes. (…) Left escapism is but a special case of the escapism which characterized so much of modern "scientific" culture." Stapledon also suggests that "accepting the temper of our age, we tend to withdraw attention from the inner life, and to seek escape from individual moral responsibility by constructing a fictitious world in which individuals are wholly products of external forces, physical or social".

For more on Stapledon's explanation see Robert Crossley, *An Olaf Stapledon Reader* (Syracuse University Press, 1997) : 196, online, Google Books, Internet, 26 November 2019. Available: https://books.google.dz/books/about/An_Olaf_Stapledon_Reader.html?id=rULPTKNwlx8C&redir_esc=y/.

psychological dis/orders cannot be separated under the postmodern condition for one nurtures the other.

Benson's understanding is challenging when it comes to human escapism. He calls it "the desire of the spirit at its healthiest" and considers it the authentic driving force behind the human existence.[227] The essence of life is to keep moving and if the individual "will not run to the goal, (he) must at least flee, with backward glances at something which threatens (him)".[228] Correspondingly, the view of escape stands in postmodern paranoid plots as fleeing fear and potential manipulations. While Benson's statement that escape is an agreeable dynamic force of life makes perfect sense under the postmodern condition, still, too much of a thing can be dangerous, then if all human action is favourably escaping from something, an addiction to the practice, and a devotion to the matter can be dreaded.

A crucial question to a full understanding of paranoid escapism in relation to the postmodern fiction is whether all attempts at imagination and illusion can be encompassed under the category of escapism? Considering that every act of imagination is a method of psychological escape risks a generalization that comprehends all the mental activities. What is unique about escapism as represented in postmodern fiction is its involvement with self-deception. In his essay "The Rationality of Escapism and Self-Deception", Longeway clarifies the argument that escapism can be considered a rational self-deceptive practice. "Escapism and self-deception tend to go together, and from the one, we insensibly drift into the other" and escapism without self-deception can only be found where the concern is easily avoided and the individual is not necessarily forced to direct deceit. [229] It can also happen "where the unpleasant belief is not so bad that we will not face it whenever we must". In other words " if one does not wish to talk about

[227] Ibid., pp. 21.

[228] Ibid.

[229] John L. Longeway: op.cit., pp. 12 – 13.

some truth, simply not bringing the subject up may accomplish this".[230] However, if this truth is insistently reappears, mere avoidance will have to be elaborated into a deliberate attempt at deceit. "It is the same when one tries to avoid some truth with oneself. If it keeps coming up anyway and facing one's belief is too painful, then deliberate deception, now on oneself, is the outcome."[231]

This is to say that seeking disruptions from reality by immersing oneself in exhausting activities may not necessarily suggest psychological trickery or self-deceit. The characters who indulge in drugs, sex, and television for instance are not always paranoid escapists. Pynchon, as well as many other postmodernist writers, portrays characters who when met with high mysteries, suspicion, and unresolvable purpose of existence, do not quite operate haphazardly to momentarily escape the disturbing experiences. The construction of self-contained fantastic visions about the world and deeming them to be true – for truth proves never attainable – turn into self-deception.[232]

Applying Benson's argument about escapism on fictional accounts, and after establishing the link between paranoia and escapism, investigating the reader's psychological feedback and the mind's performance while being exposed to such stories of illusionary escape, is another dimension of this study on paranoia. The question is: Do these accounts of paranoid escapists transcribed in the most irrational of the styles transform the reader into a paranoid escapist in his turn? Does this experience remove him from his authentic world? Or does it reinforce his consciousness to confront the postmodern confusion? The term escapism is

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[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid.

[232] It may be said that the techniques of self-deception and escapism into delusion may present relief, and may even adjust a belief about the extremely problematic circumstances, yet, they jeopardize being utterly cut off from reality. However, self-deception can also bring about very contradictory consequences. Being an extreme formula of escapism, self-deceptive strategies bring the proposition to mind, and so tend to bring the offending belief itself, to mind. Rather than repudiating the problematic truth itself outright, which is in this case the absence of any truth, characters show great interest in backing their hope for certainty, and their self-constructed whims with actual evidence.
John L. Longeway: op.cit., pp. 15.

more problematic when is translated into a psychological phenomenon related to the audience. In addition to the indication of a standard attitude of fictional characters seeking safety when facing a hitch, tackling escapism on the level of the audience is equally important. This is the procedure of analysing paranoia-exhibiting literary works on the basis of how escapist can they be for the reader; that is escapist literature.

In 1973 Webster's New Collegiate offered a definition of escapism as a "habitual diversion of the mind to imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine".[233] In this regard, this "imaginative activity" is – or can be – considered as the literary involvement of either the writer or the reader through scripting or perceiving a certain storyline. T.S. Eliot remarked as early as 1921, that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion (…) It is not the expression of personality" he continues, "but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things". [234] Though not straight was his deployment of the term "escapism", the reference to poetry as a means of escape for the rich in personality and emotion suggests a similar connotation. The positive tone of the statement also suggests that an aesthetic aspect of poetry is its escapist value. This positiveness is short-lived though, for the term ceased to imply

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[233] Merriam-Webster Staff, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition. (Merriam-Webster Inc, 2004) 426, online Google Books, Internet, 17 July 2019. Available: https://books.google.dz/books?id=TAnheeIPcAEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

The term escapism, as in one who seeks entertainment and avoidance of reality or routine, first appeared in the 1933 *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*. However this, certainly, does not entail that it may not have seen prior use. Also, the term "Escapism" should be distinguished from the term "escapology" (which appeared simultaneously), which is the practice that involves escaping from ceilings, traps, or captivities. Therefore, an "escapist" could positively be an individual who escapes from imprisonment or, as in this paradigm, an individual who obsesses over the psychological activity of emotional deviation by means of amusement (as in reading) or some alternative varieties of leisure tricks to evade or retreat from what is measured an unfriendly or obnoxious existence.

[234] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", *Perspecta*, vol. 19 (1982) : 36 – 42 online, Internet, 20 January 2020. Available: https://doi.org/10.2307/1567048/.

refinement and splendour in the postmodern culture, and whether or not escapism denotes positivity or negativity is yet to be investigated. [235]

The term "escapism" was met with a mixture of reactions since Eliot perceived it optimistically in poetry and more specifically since the 1930s. And by the 1970s, new perspectives were initiated by J. R. R. Tolkien, and his student C. S. Lewis among others which includes that fantastic – or escapist – literature, creates free space that allows for an objective reconsideration of the real world.[236] Later with Johan Ransom Crowe's Southern New Criticism, a new perspective emerged as he defined the escapists as those blinded by industrialism and progressivism. He explains that as: "it is much too likely that they betoken a defeated and escapist people – a people which is afraid of the fullness of the inner life and prefers to rush into violent action – a people that takes its work as an anaesthetic – an impotent people building up a legend of power".[237] Later, in the Freudian and the Marxist jargon, the term escapist suggests any work of literature that does not confine to Realism.[238]

It should be noted, however, that Tolkien did not use the term escapism as such since the beginning of his analysis of fairy stories. However, his input is generally understood to allude to the mechanisms of escapism as it were, the creation of a new world inside the mind. In favour of this fantastic world, he describes his theory based on the fact that pleasure produces a "Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity, it is artistic in desire and purpose". [239]

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[235] Lars Konzack, "Escapism". *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf, (New York: Routledge, 2017): 246-255.

[236] Ibid.

[237] Ibid.

[238] Ibid.

[239] J. R. R. Tolkien, "Tree and Leaf: "On Fairy-Stories"", (1965), online, Archive.org. Internet, 19 September 2019. Available : https://archive.org/details/on-fairy-stories/page/39/mode/2up/.

Therefore, "Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity".[240] Furthermore, Tolkien's conceptualization of escapism appears as he acknowledges that "there are also other and more profound (escapsims) that have always appeared in fairy-tale and legend." These escapisms are suggested to be "things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, ruthlessness, and extravagance of the internal-combustion engine. There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death".[241]

On the same line of thought, Freud has also never explicitly employed the term escapism, nor devoted proper psychoanalysis to the phenomenon as is the case with the paranoid disorder. Still, his offspring gave much attention to grounding escapism in literary criticism. "Fantasy" is what Sigmund Freud used to suggest what Ransom entitles as a "pathological infantilism": a psychological condition in which the mind is immersed in reveries instead of digesting the experiences of the actual world. [242] Murray Krieger's statement of the Freudian explanation of escapism can be taken to recapitulate much of the vindications that touched the matter henceforward:

> Now one can simply dwell upon the once-upon-a-time element in fiction and justify it as an escape from the world around us. Fiction's made-up, make-believe character is the very feature which the escapist celebrates. Indeed, it can be argued that Freud justified literature precisely on such escapist grounds, as a necessary sublimation for the frustrated poet who, as a daydreamer, provided daydreams for the rest of us.[243]

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[240] Ibid.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Murray Krieger quoted in Lars Konzack: op.cit., pp. 252 – 253.

[243] Ibid.

From the Marxist perspective, the term has been used as early as the 1930s in Allan Bacon's "The Literature of Escape" (1932). He suggests that depression – born out of unemployment – is a major cause in the individual's escape to leisure time. [244] "The schedule of shorter hours obtaining in many branches of employment still holds" and for that "many employers have attempted to partially solve the unemployment problem by shortening the hours of their workers (…) thus creating more jobs".[245] The problem with the increased leisure time is the mass tendency to indulge in periodical literature which witnessed an unprecedented boom in the current decade.

Thereafter, critics indulged in the use of the term "escapism" as a way to condemn Romanticism and criticize fiction altogether. Nevertheless, it should not be taken for granted that this condemnation undermines a literary movement and the works associated with it just for the experience that it may provide. Kenneth Burke justifies that "Properly used, the idea of escape should present no difficulties. If a situation is unsatisfactory, it is quite normal and natural that people should want to avoid it and should try any means at their disposal to do so." [246] However, the term escape has had more limited usage. Significantly, although it appropriately applies to all men, "there was an attempt to restrict its application to some men. (…) In the end, the term came to be applied loosely, in literary criticism especially, to designate any writer or reader whose interests or aims did not closely coincide with those of the critic."[247] In that, while seemingly describing a characteristic of the person referred to, what the term does the most is convey the attitude of the person making the reference. "It looked objective, as though

[244] Allan Bacon, "The Literature Of Escape", *Social Science*, vol. 7, no. 4. (1932): 367–374, online, Jstor, Internet, 13 June 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/23758355/.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Kenneth Burke quoted in Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley, *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought*, vol. 8 (New York: Routledge, 1999) 285.

[247] Ibid.

the critic were saying 'X is doing so-and- so'; but too often it became merely a strategic way of saying, 'I personally don't like what X is doing.'" [248]

Based on what has been clarified earlier about the postmodernist fiction and the new novel, particularly that the new postmodernist approach was anti-realistic in its traditional sense; the argument about escapism can be applied to texts of this movement as well. However, in 1939 Olaf Stapledon, a prominent British science-fiction author, wrote a critical account entitled "Escapism in Literature" commenting on the fiction that provokes an escapist – writing or reading – reaction to it. He simply introduces his paper by saying that "we often hear it said that some writer is 'escapist,' or that a particular piece of writing is sheer 'escapism.' It is implied that the true function of literature is, not to offer an escape from unpleasant facts, but to help the reader to face up to reality, and cope with it successfully." [249] Upon classifying literature into four categories[250], Stapledon argues that "escape" literature, in which the fundamental raison d'être is escaping, is rather illegitimate in that it constructs a mere hallucination, and the

[248] Ibid., pp. 286.

[249] Robert Crossley: op.cit., pp. 188.

[250] The four categories Stapledon outlines are *creative*, *propaganda*, *release*, and *escape.* In creative literature the primary motive and interest are creative. In that, the new advancements in the sciences and other fields of human curiosity may be the material from which a fresh narrative is created.
Propaganda literature lacks such artistic motives. It is concerned more with evoking certain ideologies and emotions to influence people's opinions and behaviours. Propaganda is acceptable as long as its social consequences are positive for society and humanity. Clichés and slogans are used in such literature to change people's views in one particular direction, and they should not be considered significant literature because it is a mere matter of propaganda.

In release literature, the motivation is catharsis or "the assuagement of starved needs". It is the release of pent-up forces that leads to change in emotion, resulting in replenishment and renewal. The aim is not to be overly creative, but release literature does have a legitimate function; authored with such expressive imagination of sensitivity that it generates an inner recuperating outcome. While the creative kind of literature destabilizes or alters the conformist structure of established beliefs and accepted wisdom, release literature generally admits to these ideas, implicitly and unconsciously. Release literature could be anything from crime fiction and thrillers to poems and romances.

Escape literature, on the contrary, is illegitimate. Seemingly, it is much like release literature, and it may prove difficult to decide whether a work of art is either escape or release. There is, nonetheless, a difference. While release literature creates catharsis so that the reader can meet the world renewed and refreshed, escape literature constructs a dream world that protects the mind of the reader from an unpleasant reality.
Lars Konzack: op.cit., pp. 248-251.

more realistic and strongly representative the account is, the more convincing the hallucination becomes to the reader.[251]

Reflecting on what has been said earlier about the paranoing trait of the postmodern fiction, the novels of Thomas Pynchon and Donna Tartt tackle a variety of postmodern paranoia that involves a flight from reality, a figurative distraction from routine, and a retreat from the realities of life. Speaking of escapism in post-war fiction has much to reveal about the human consciousness and experience under the age of paranoia. Suppose the remedy to chaos and meaninglessness is framed in the parameters of paranoid attitudes or even in death and loss of consciousness. In this case, escapism is a key motive to subscribe to such measurements. Relevant to the postmodern reality, and as I shall argue to the Pynchon and Tartt – though quite differently represented – is Heilman's statement that "we have a more embracing view of escape than did our ancestors (in pre-postmodern time)".[252] Indeed, we voluntarily believe in escape as a manner of dealing with unsatisfactory existence, however, we do not always clearly distinguish between the escapable and the inescapable, or between the "ought to be escaped and … (the) ought not to be escaped and that which, painful though it may be, cannot be escaped."[253]

4. Conclusion: The Study of Paranoia and Escapism in Fiction

All in all, as a method of digesting the structures of power that appeals to both the core and the periphery, conspiratorial explanations grew to form a body of discourse that galvanized the American cinema, television, and fiction since the

[251] Robert Crossley: op.cit., pp. 188-189.

[252] Robert B. Heilman: op.cit., pp. 449.

[253] Ibid.

Second World War. Under this regime of anti-truth, paranoia might be regarded as a justified reaction originating from an intelligent anxiety about the uncertain surrounding world. Though paranoia may be said to be the result of an individual's problems in the act of interpreting the world, in a postmodern context, the characters are almost always forced to search for meaning longing to escape the insecurity associated with the prevailing culture of conspiracy. A mind-made personal little narrative, therefore, may provide the possibility of meaningfulness in the absence of something real.

In the postmodern context, paranoia represents the promise of liberation. The disentanglement and unpredictability that lead to anti-paranoia are symptomatic of the "presence of absence" that not everyone can tolerate. [254] In spite of being an unlikable remedy, paranoia appears to produce a compensatory illusion of returning the individual back to the centre of attention and significance. Up until this point, one can consider paranoia as an alternative, a means of compromise for the individual "to face the music that is being played loud and harsh." [255]

Postmodern texts such as Pynchon's, not only present the concept of paranoia as a manifestation of the increasingly alienating atmosphere of the post-war, but more so as an attempt at restoring human uniqueness. Paranoia is portrayed not as a deviation from life, but as a source of life. Typical of postmodern fiction is that characters appear addicted to drugs, sex, and screens, but they are also addicted to signs, words, images, and even to control itself. Indeed, some of the most bizarre scenarios are found in the works of Pynchon. While these characters and scenarios have frequently been claimed to represent or result from the intoxicated imagination of the author, I shall argue that they have widespread

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[254] Aaron S. Rosenfeld, "The "Scanty Plot": Orwell, Pynchon, and the Poetics of Paranoia", *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Duke University Press. Winter, 2004): 337-367. Available: https://doi.org/4149267/ .

[255] Ibid.

cultural roots. My intention in the coming chapters, then, is not only to study the techniques used by Pynchon to make possible this presentation, but to disentangle the enigma of a vastly individualistic society that believes itself plagued by threats to human sovereignty.

CHAPTER THREE:

THOMAS PYNCHON AND THE PARANOIA ABOUT THE ESCAPABLE

"The rest of us not chosen for enlightenment, left on the outside of Earth, at the mercy of a Gravity we have only begun to learn how to detect and measure, must go on blundering inside our front-brain faith in Kute Korrespondences, hoping that for each psi-synthetic taken from Earth's soul there is a molecule, secular, more or less ordinary and named, over here – kicking endlessly among the plastic trivia, finding in each Deeper Significance and trying to string them all together like terms of a power series hoping to zero in on the tremendous and secret Function whose name, like the permuted names of God, cannot be spoken …"

Gravity's Rainbow

In the previous chapters, we explored the way in which conspiracy theories about the American political life (starting with the Kennedy assassination) have shaped a rampant paranoid behaviour that branded the period as postmodern. Subsequently, a zealous desire for psychological freedom has encouraged the implementation of the language and narrative form of conspiracy theory and paranoia into the postmodern literature. One explanation of paranoia is the symptom in which an individual feels as if the world is 'out to get' him or her. The novels of Thomas Pynchon embody the effect of an all-surveying eye on the individual. Although he does not designate terminology like "Big Brother" to describe his authoritarian figures, the presence of "Them" is always sensed by his paranoid protagonists. Two of Pynchon's novels, I suggest, are not merely one more contribution to a large vogue of conspiracy and paranoid literature, varying between thrillers and political storylines that demonstrate extreme psychological anxiety. Rather, they reveal an uncommon self-reflexive argument about paranoia as a recognizable form of interpretation. Paranoia for Pynchon becomes a therapeutic technique to escape back into the human sanity lost within the wrinkles of the postmodern madness. It is recommended as a method of counter-responding to the distorted world on a private psychological level.

Thomas Ruggles Pynchon is an American writer based in New York City, recognized for his complex style and his varied array of interests. Earl Shorris describes *The Crying of Lot 49* as "a terrifying novel. There are barely few other places in literature where the idea of the void is more certain".[256] This novel is more compact compared to *Gravity's Rainbow* and its scope is reduced to the state of California instead of the whole world. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, we recognize in much clearness the characters who prefer – or are permitted to – stay "on the edge" of social difficulties and spend their lives in ignorance with a distressing sense of absurdity and spiritual hollowness. On the other side of the spectrum, we also perceive the characters who choose to – or are compelled to – dig deeper into the secretive associations that the American world might -as it might not- include.

[256] Earl Shorris, "The Worldly Palimpsest of Thomas Pynchon", *Harper's*, 246, (1973) 80.

The book's protagonist, Oedipa Maas, is a character seeking meaning in a meaningless world. The story begins with a domestic scene as she stands "in the living room, stared at by the greenish dead eye of the TV tube, spoke the name of God, tries to feel as drunk as possible" (C. L. 49., p.1). Oedipa's journey is initiated with a letter from her ex-boyfriend, the businessman Pierce Inverarity -who had an affinity for pranking- naming her the executrix of his estate. In a mindful effort to execute the will, she finds herself immersed in a complex process of reviewing the history of a dual postal system; a double-sided world fluctuating between reality and fantasy; between the surface and underground. She is portrayed as a disturbed character especially since she doubts the legitimacy of Pierce's will. Oedipa is thrown into a world that she did not understand. However, inspired by the odds that she confronts, she struggles to remodel it into an ordered and meaningful ground. From the beginning of the narrative, retrieving meaning to life and finding connections between clues controls Oedipa's life. However, everything that she notices is unfathomable, and the attempt for order and rationality in the world of secrets remains unsuccessful.

Regarding the second novel, Michael Wood comments on *Gravity's Rainbow* In the New York Review of books, upon its first release in 1973 writing:

> Gravity's Rainbow is literally indescribable, a tortured cadenza of lurid imaginings and total recall that goes on longer than you can quite believe. Its people, like the characters in V., are marginal people, layabouts, dropouts, gangsters, failed scientists, despairing spiritualists, spies, SS men, dancing girls, and faded movie stars. [257]

Gravity's Rainbow is among the most widely celebrated, unread novels,[258] either due to its length or the hardly-deciphered narrative details. What sets this narrative

[257] Michael Wood, "Rocketing to the Apocalypse", *The New York Review,* 22 March 1973, online, internet, 12 December 2021. Available : https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1973/03/22/rocketing-to-the-apocalypse/.

[258] Ibid.

apart is the diversity of subject matters and the subversive plot pending into various sub-plots. Through mixing seriousness and humour, the novel presents the reader with details and clues, which tempt him to solve. Telling mostly about the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, the general tone of the narration is rather gloomy and nihilistic; hence the wild criticism fostered against the work. Joseph Hendin describes the book as "the sign of Death's hate, Death's grimace, the tragic mask of heaven's pulled down forever in one inviolable affirmation of depression".[259] In September 1944, the American soldier Tyrone Slothrop Wakes up to the sound of the first V-2s falling on London. His journey carries him all around Europe during the war. Pynchon reinterprets the war from a paranoid point of view demonstrating that it was a good chance for the secretive corporations on both sides to conduct inhuman research and increase their profit. The protagonist is drifted between different sites of the war aiming to uncover these hidden powers.

A number of literary critics presented various accounts of Pynchon's paranoid fiction. In 1979, Brain McHale offered one of the most detailed analyses of *Gravity's Rainbow* which was republished later as a section of his book *Constructing Postmodernism*. His thesis is based on what has been explained in the previous chapters as the 'change of dominant' from the epistemological to the ontological between modernism and postmodernism.[260] McHale suggests that the epistemological dominance is preserved in Pynchon's earlier work *The Crying of Lot 49*, which he considers to be a modernist work at best. Subsequently, the shift to the ontological dominant is present in *Gravity's Rainbow* through the pluralistic nature of paranoid interpretations.[261] This notion of the pluralistic interpretations encouraged by Pynchon was considered in a variety of critical accounts. In

[259] Ibid.

[260] Brain McHale, "Modernist Reading, Post-modern Text: The Case of Gravity's Rainbow", *Poetics Today* 1.1/2 Literature, Interpretation, Communication (Duke University Press: Autumn, 1979): 85-110, online, Jstor, Accessed 1 May 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/1772042/.

[261] McHale explains this shift by moving from Oedipa's anguished cry: "Shall I project a world" to "the unconstrained projection of worlds in the plural" in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

"Creative Paranoia: A Postmodern Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping" for instance, Steven Best argues that Pynchon points to the need for new cognitive maps that embody the postmodern logic of indeterminacy and multiperspectivalism.[262]

Therefore, considering paranoia as a subjective and pluralistic mode of interpretation is a major point of criticism regarding Pynchon's novels. Scott Sanders in "Pynchon's Paranoid History" furthers this argument by claiming that the typical citizen of advanced industrial society which influences the course of history and controls the public beliefs – such as Pynchon's characters –, lives inside a paranoid vision.[263] He also links these visions to the conspiratorial worlds created by the writer, and considers them an inclusive counter-response to the mainstream culture.[264] What this chapter aims to do differently is to foreground the desire to escape the worlds created by Pynchon as the main reason for which the characters grow paranoid. In other words, this original reading of Pynchon's novels emphasizes the escapist desire that thrives only at the private psychological level, and cannot be more than a short-lived mental peace.

For the purpose of studying paranoia as an escapist endeavour, the choice of these two novels appears to be the most adequate. Out of all Pynchon's works which appear to foreground paranoia each at a different level, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* demonstrate a sequence. A succession of thoughts and beliefs that influenced the postmodern period, the narratives are centred around a complex consideration of paranoia and anti-paranoia. The novels are not to be separated in the analysis, especially since the purpose is not to compare and contrast the themes and the narrative techniques. Rather they are to be examined

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[262] Steven Best, "Creative Paranoia: A Postmodern Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping in "Gravity's Rainbow"", *The Centennial Review*, vol. 36, no. 1 Cultural Studies (Michigan State University Press: Winter, 1992): 59-87, 28 September 2021. Available: https://doi.org/10.2307/3684395/.

[263] Scott Sanders, "Pynchon's Paranoid History", *Twentieth Century Literature* , vol. 21, no. 2 Essays on Thomas Pynchon (Duke University Press, May 1975): 177-192, 188, online, Jstor, Internet, 11 December 2021. Available: https://doi.org/10.2307/440707/.

[264] Ibid.

collectively to reveal the way in which the writer represented the emancipating power of paranoia. I start first by giving an overview of Pynchon's writing style and worldview as is presented through his fiction. This section explores the tone by which Pynchon criticizes the history of the world and the scientific advancements that it had witnessed. With this criticism in mind, in the second section, I argue that the way in which Pynchon was able to profile paranoid characters is by creating a distorted world. The loss of religious guidelines, intimate bonds, and historical truths are fundamental motifs in both novels. Following that, in examining the paranoid escapist quest of Oedipa and Slothrop, Pynchon's subscription for paranoia essentially as a means of mental escape is underlined in the final section. Eventually, this chapter will have explored a way of imaging paranoia from an optimistic standpoint. But it shall not be the only one.

1. Pynchon: The Typical Paranoid Writer

Pynchon's preoccupation with paranoia stems from a long journey of historical investigation and analysis. Following his first three novels *V*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* in a study made by John McMichaels, Pynchon gradually branded his unique way of writing by examining and mocking historical events. Under the pressure of events that galvanized the American society, especially between 1963 and 1972[265] and the ideological progression towards excessive rationalism and fanatic materialism, Pynchon's awareness – as communicated through his fiction – has shifted to the postmodern preference of what can be labelled as chaotic order. McMichaels explains:

> Plug in a certain equation, and the result is inevitable. This is the calculus of "gravity's rainbow," the arc of the V-2 rocket as a metaphor for the Modern Age, taking off with Galileo, Francis Bacon, accelerating with Newton, coming into its prime with Darwin in biology and the anonymous contributors

[265] This period includes breaking events mainly – and not limited to – the assassination of John Kennedy in 1963, the killing of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy in 1968 and the Watergate scandal of Richard Nixon in 1972.

> to chemistry, and finally Einstein and Oppenheimer—the progress of modern science. Do we still believe in progress of this sort? Pynchon does not. [266]

Much like critics who dealt with Pynchon, McMichaels identifies a sequence through the novelist's three consecutive novels based on the fact that they follow the rise and fall of the V. What I will focus on however, is not specifically "the progress of the modern science" or "the calculus of gravity's rainbow" as it is finely exhibited in the progression of the three narratives. More than that, the effect that this postmodern age metaphor has to offer on the human brain is the centre of attention. Here, the notion of paranoid escapism is rather polished in the characters of *The Crying of Lot* and *Gravity's Rainbow* in a manner that elucidates the pros and cons of being a paranoid escapist in and about the postmodern age.

Pynchon's writing style – as discussed in the literary world – is distinguished by a zealous yearning for correspondences. He resorts to some extravagant exploration of codes and maps alluring the reader to believe every particle meaningful; it is not only about historical events but also about large paintings, toilet paper, and simple everyday objects. The desire is to tie together the untidy universe by observing or even formulating correspondences. Pynchon excludes nothing from the circle of significance; every miniature detail matter and if the data of reality are connected at all, they are all connected. [267] Perhaps Pynchon enjoys the satisfaction when it becomes contagious to his reader the rewards of the paranoid mindset, who turns into a detective to whom the significance of his semi-fictional codes are treasured to decipher his mischievous conviction. The reader is left exactly like the painting that haunts Oedipa, in which she sees young girls in a tower; "embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out

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[266] John McMichaels, "Pynchon's Allegory of the V as Paranoid History", *A Paranoid Companion to Thomas Pynchon: The Early Stories and Novels*, Chapter 3, online, Internet, 21 November 2021. Available: https://allegoriaparanoia.com/pynchon/early_stories/chapter3.html/.

[267] Scott Sanders: op.cit., pp. 177.

the slit windows 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 " (C. L. 49., p.21).

At first view, one may argue that Pynchon deliberately intends at some instances to provide the reader with insights into his philosophy by employing famous symbols that allow interpretation. This is not necessarily true for Pynchon has profound suspicion of words, or "the Word" as he calls it in Gravity's Rainbow. For him "nothing is a Holy writ, not even if he wrote, or especially if he wrote it" [268]. In the best cases, Pynchon might be not to be as reliable when it comes to meaningful symbolism. In one of the rarely found interviews made with the author, he openly admits that;

> (. . .) You know the W.A.S.T.E. horn in The Crying of Lot 49? The symbol of the secret message service? Every weirdo in the world is on my wave length. You cannot understand the kind of letters I get. Someone wrote to tell me that the very same horn was the symbol of a private mail system in medieval times. I checked it out at the library. It's true. But I made it up myself before the book was ever published, before I ever got that letter. [269]

To what extent his words are reliable is debatable. Strangely though "With one very slight exception all of Pynchon's material especially in The Crying of Lot 49 about that postal system is historically verifiable." [270] Yet we receive such declaration that his writings were never based on factual knowledge is a bewildering matter. Perhaps it is enjoyable for Pynchon to supplement his conspiratorial fiction to the audience making them drift between the real and the

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[268] John McMichaels: op.cit.

[269] Extracted from Jules Siegel's May 1995 Playboy profile "Who Is Thomas Pynchon… And Why Did He Take Off With My Wife?"

[270] Richard Poirier, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon", *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Duke University Press, May 1975): 151-162, 157, online, Jstor, Internet, 10 December 2021. Available: https://doi.org/10.2307/440705/.

unreal. "There is Thomas Pynchon appearing out of nowhere with a vision so contemporary it makes your nose bleed", writes Friedman. [271] For that, he might seem as many ascribed to him a black humourist, an affluent terrorist, a psychic novelist, a self-parodist, a novelist of disintegration, an absurdist, an anti-novelist, a neo-realist or a grim apocalyptic.[272]

Pynchon's view of the world is not abnormal considering the economic and political system, the shared social experiences and the spiritual atmosphere that galvanized the world at that phase of his life. The influence of early human achievements also never ceases to inspire Pynchon's philosophy of life, which can be grasped from his writings. The journey of humanity towards decadence for Pynchon starts – as early as – the coming of Machiavelli and his nation-state; with Francis Bacon and his Scientific Materialism that was broadened with Newton and continues with the substantial move of the 1859 theory of evolution. The publication of The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life marks the concrete creation of the "Realpolitik" with the code of adhering to no value or ideal, and targeting nothing but pragmatism. [273] This is evident in the exclusion of God from the universal process of creation and the embracement of Scientific Materialism and biological explanations of existence. For Pynchon, the Darwinist theory was the first suitable explanation for the European to justify Imperialism during the late nineteenth century. The white race was the one to take by default the lavishness of

[271] Bruce Jay Friedman, ed. *Black Humour*, vol. 602 (New York: Bantam Books, 1965) VIII.

[272] It is established in the literary arena that whenever Pynchon's writing is in order, the black humourism of Heller, Barth, Southern and Hawkes follows suit. Bruce Janoff declares that the black humourists "welcome the opportunity to rage blindly, like Lear, at the abysmal pointlessness of human condition". From what has been mentioned above about the experiences of characters with annihilation, it is commonly a black humourist characteristic of Pynchon to permit his characters the search for alternatives to the void in nothing but death. *In The Crying of Lot 49* as well as in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon shows no optimism about life; life simply means continuing to live rather than committing suicide, "and optimism is nothing more than laughing darkly at a tragically insensitive environment where uncertainty and anxiety have become a way of life."
For more explanation see Bruce Janoff, *Beyond Satire: Black Humour in the Novels of John Barth and Joseph Heller*, (Ohio: Ohio University. 1972): 12-19.

[273] John McMichaels: op.cit.

the "favoured race" as it started mollifying other races. This idea is mainly depicted in his first work *V*.[274]

European Imperialism reached its peak during the nineteenth century based on the ideology of capitalism and the dog-eat-dog code of Social Darwinism. With capitalism, small businesses were merged along with big businesses and industrial cartels to generate powerful influencers and pressure groups, whose work does not only touch the economic and social but also the governmental domain. Pynchon provides a cluster of real stories that demonstrates the contemptuous ambition for profits that adheres to no morality. He mentions the threatening dominance of the capitalist trusts, European Imperialism, and racial struggle in *Gravity's Rainbow* through the character of Chu Piang, the victim of British supremacy;

> … (Chu) is a living monument to the success of British trade policy back during the last century. This classic hustle is still famous, even today, for the cold purity of its execution: bring opium from India, introduce it into China—howdy Fong, this here's opium, opium this is Fong—ah, so, me eatee!—no-ho-ho, Fong, you smoke, smoke, see? Pretty soon Fong's coming back for more and more, so you create an inelastic demand for the shit, get China into a couple-three disastrous wars over the right of your merchants to sell opium, which by now you are describing as sacred. You win, China loses. Fantastic.
>
> (G. R., p.346)

Pynchon does not see European Imperialism as a means of self-promotion and profit for the European colonizers. He provides a cynical yet unique explanation of why the European Christian individual is in desperate need for those colonies from which it becomes impossible for them to withdraw. Again, to go back to the realm of illusory, Europeans find in these settlements the opportunity

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[274] Ibid.

to live their subliminal appeal of enthusiastic nonconformity which is unattainable in their 'sophisticated' mother countries. He explains that the colonies are:

> the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his own shit (…) Christian Europe was always death (…) death and repression. Out and down in the colonies, life can be indulged, life and sensuality in all its forms, with no harm done to the Metropolis, nothing to soil those cathedrals, white marble statues, noble thoughts (…) No word ever gets back. The silences down here are vast enough to absorb all behaviour no matter how dirty, how animal it gets.
>
> (G. R., p.317)

It is not only these historical advancements -or probably diminishments- that influenced Pynchon's approach, for it may as well be the case with all the writers and theorists of the preceding one to two centuries. Individuals are powerfully influenced by the socio-historical context in which they are embedded. By configuring a certain period and setting for his plots though, Pynchon offers a key insinuation into why he chose to author the way he did. His novels take place during the immediate aftermath of the World War II. This was the age of propaganda, of paranoia, and of ideological uncertainty; the age of public diplomacy, espionage, human engineering, and behaviour modification that came with the technological and scientific boom.

On the political level it was the era of unrest; the growth of totalitarian campaigns against minority factions, Stalin's purgative policies, the United States' detention manoeuvres, the preliminary signs of the Cold War, the largescale media coverages yet a larger-scale of esoteric unfamiliarity. This is the epoch in which individuals find themselves gradually subject to external surveillance and influence, being ruthlessly compelled by devious means to serve the interests of centralized powers, governmental unions, and industrial conglomerates.

The miserable conditions of last half of the twentieth century is aggravated by the rampant mechanization and capitalism. Humanity becomes nothing more than an imperative for consumerism to which commodities of no significance to its necessities are hypnotizingly vended. The inner worth of the human being begins to deteriorate as the only concern of civilization becomes the external guise. Materialism begets meaninglessness, and life in mass-consuming society comes quickly to consist of no more than empty and repetitious acts of buying and selling [275], which is what Irving Howe describes as "the hovering sickness of soul, the despairing contentment, the prosperous malaise". [276] When individuals sacrifice the human morals that monitor their lives, they progressively find it essential to cultivate their morals from the needs of their machines, becoming purely an echo of what they produced. [277]

Thriving on the sensation that one's life and thinking are manipulated by agencies, most likely ominous, plotting together to bring about humanity's doom; anxiety comes to no wonder. The suspicions of the paranoid is nurtured by the unprecedented authority of technologies and trusts such as IG Farben, Siemens, General Electrics, Shell Oil and the like. This psychological tendency is engraved even in the smallest dialogues in *Gravity's Rainbow*; for instance at the beginning of the narrative "Jessica notes a coal-black Packard up a side street, filled with dark-suited civilians. Their white collars rigid in the shadows". She wonders about them as "He (Mexico) shrugs: "they" is good enough; "not a friendly lot". (G. R., p.40).

[275] Owana K. McLester-Greenfield, *When Even the Best is Bad: Thomas Pynchon's Alternatives to the Wasteland* (Drake University, 1978) 4.

[276] Irving Howe quoted in Eberhard Alsen, *Romantic Postmodernism in American Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V, 1996) 25.

[277] Peter L. Abernethy, "Entropy in Pynchon's *The Crying Lot 49*", *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1972): 18-33, 21.

The "mass man" of the post-war culture is a replaceable element to the industrial and technological organizations; with his individuality extinguished, beliefs ambiguated, and functionality out-powered, the "mass man" sinks into alienation and identity crisis. To no surprise, Pynchon reminds the reader of Henry Adams in his loathing for the new American ideals. His look dwells on the unhealthy atmosphere of the whole age, and its rampant meanness even in violence, "the one-sided flabbiness of America, the want of self-respect, of education, of purpose; the intellectual feebleness, and the material greed, --I loathe it all."[278]

The outcome of this frenzied recklessness is the mechanized and technological obliteration of World War II as embodied in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and its repercussions in the United States as mirrored in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Since individuality is eradicated, this timeframe does not allow any room for creative personalities and unique interpretations. Averageness is globally reached, and the deviancy from aggregate conformism is problematic. The paranoid vision is the solution Pynchon provides a rather non-conformist solution for this problematic situation, he affirms:

> A market needed no longer be run by the Invisible Hand, but now could create itself—its own logic, momentum, style, from inside. Putting the control inside was ratifying what de facto had happened—that you had dispensed with God. But you had taken on a greater, and more harmful, illusion. The illusion of control. That A could do B. But that was false. Completely. No one can do. Thing only happen, A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable (…)
>
> (G. R., p.30)

[278] Henry Adams quoted in Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989) 414.

If his characters were not erroneous for their paranoid behaviours considering their upbringing, Pynchon is equally precise in his conspiratorial creativity. At the aftershock of civilization in the face of an all-shattering war and some all-sacrificing regimes " … paranoid suspicion becomes a measure of mental health in a garrison state". [279] The nightmares of real-life satisfy the void inside the soulless postmodern man, and render life blindingly significant for those who commit brutalities. The eruption of paranoid psychic manners happens typically in contexts of Social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values, and that bring essential dreads and revulsions, rather than flexible interests, into political action. Cataclysm or the distress over cataclysm is most likely to provoke the syndrome of paranoid rhetoric.[280] Pynchon preaches a vision of a maddingly violent epoch, chaotic naturally and humanly made, it is the "incredible reality", a reality that channels every life towards wretched fatality and changes constantly to unexpected levels of absurdity mocking all potentials of human imagination. This

[279] Scott Sanders: op.cit., pp. 189.

[280] Ibid.

An important remark should be illustrated while analysing Pynchon's engagement with paranoia. Conventionally, in examining conspiratorial/paranoid accounts, critics appear to have assumed one of two methods: either considering these accounts as a personal psychosomatic experience, and as such the interest in psychology or, as a collective social expression, and thus the interest in historical, cultural and social theories.

The first method leans toward analysing the mental and socio-psychological subtleties which result in the subject's increasing paranoid viewpoints. These studies include that of Keen (1986), Robins and Post (1997), Sass (1987, 1994) and Lacan (1932) and Žižek (1992). The second method underlines the historical, cultural, social, and political connotation of paranoia as a conspiratorial discourse, especially after the research conducted by Hofstadter in 1966. He claimed that such discourse was fancied by the minority political movements. Nevertheless, Hofstadter's verdict, at the time, as a traditionalist consensus historian might suggest that he desired to marginalize anti-mainstream visions that often and is in essence conspiratorial. In his article "The Politics of Paranoia", David Harper explains that: "*The disciplinary division of labour between psychologists and psychiatrists, on the* one hand, and historians and cultural and social theorists, on the other, has hampered a fully inter-disciplinary investigation of the meanings of paranoia." He suggests that "Some have attempted to bridge these two approaches, but this is often done by attempting to apply to the social realm, models developed from psychological research and therapy with individuals and rarely, if ever, the other way around."
However, in this investigation, I would prove it possible to channel this individualistic/societal rupture by observing the paranoid accounts as records within which one may locate both himself and the others. From this perspective, the narrative of paranoia could be analysed depending on the context, which shifts according to how people are positioned and who is doing the positioning. Thenceforth, the distinction between the personal and the communal is to be bridged, and the question of socio-cultural versus clinical psychiatric is to be sacrificed for the objective of the study.

David Harper, "The Politics of Paranoia: Paranoid Positioning and Conspiratorial Narratives in the Surveillance Society", *Surveillance Society* , vol. 5, no. 1 (2008) 7-8.

nauseous visualization is less the outcome of a repulsive ingenuity than of an all-witnessing eye and an over-scrutinizing brain.

On the same structure of thought, the apocalyptic and conspiratorial images of history have conventionally ascended amongst the peripheral social factions. Pynchon fancies marginal characters in most of his novels. He focuses on the underprivileged, the powerless, and consequently the neurotic personalities on whom the intimidation of industrial and political schemes is mostly afflicting. Deliberating on *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon sees in these minority factions the proper fit for his psychological experience;

> The underworld of San Narciso, Los Angles, San Francisco and, most probably, the entire country seem to overflow with the unfortunate, the alienated, the discarded, the unfit and the forgotten; they comprise the (conspiracy), if it exists. So also do those who feel betrayed by the American myths which falsely affirm the equality of all persons; or the uniqueness and worth of the individual; or a Horatio Algerian success for the industrious; or the unalienable, unhampered guarantees of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. [281]

Differing from Oedipa's account, the typical atmosphere of *Gravity's Rainbow* is summarized in mere suspicion and reluctance, though ironically the novel can hardly be subject to summarization. In total, the plot weaves about between diverse procedures and balances that appear to the characters as manipulative clusters designed by unparalleled forces (often sinister). However, one may pinpoint a certain strategy that Pynchon ordered to construct the web of paranoia. Before dwelling on the psychological performance of the characters, he sets the building blocks of an unfathomable world. In that, it is the loss of every grand value system the humans trusted that Pynchon highlights as a prerequisite for the age of paranoia. Religious connotations, family relationships, and historical certainties, happen to be no longer confidential in Pynchon's terms.

[281] Owana K. McLester-Greenfield: op.cit., pp. 165.

2. Between the Wasteland and the Ivory Tower: The Eradication Of the Indispensable

2.1. Religion: A Mind-poisoning Myth

In *"Religion and Science: a Phantom Dilemma"*, T.S. Eliot investigates the wearying of the Christian faith since the Middle Ages. He claims that "*even the wisest of human beings is so middleheaded, without God, that he cannot destroy an evil without destroying some good, or grasp at some good without grasping at some evil; the wheat never grows without the tares*".[282] It is an accurate prophecy from Eliot to warn about the evils entrenched in the modern city, that it can pervert even the "wisest" of all. the Puritan Eliot sees the humanity's rejection of the religious beliefs alarming and contagious. In modernism, this view of evil and good, the arbitrary moral standards that the individuals formed for themselves in the modern city, still provide certain guidelines to the human comportment despite the absence of holiness.

Opposingly, in the world that Pynchon lived through and reconstructed in his fiction, religion and moral standards are equally diminished under globalization and mass authoritarianism.[283] With all possibilities to guidance, knowledge, and enthusiasm, the void becomes inevitable; it is the ultimate Waste Land. "One sees many signs in literature and in the theatre of absence of values. The only values expressed in many plays and novels are, I suppose, the values indicated by their absence," suggests Eliot. [284] He believes that "a good deal of what's happening

[282] T.S. Eliot, "Religion and Science : A Phantom Dilemma", *The Listener*, vol. 7, no. 167 (23 March, 1932): 428-429, 429 .

[283] This argument is inspired by Foued Djemai, *The Religiosity of Art: Puritan Sensibility In T.S. Eliot's Poetry* (University of Mostaganem, 2006).

now was foreshadowed long ago (…) There's a deterioration (…) in the quality of amusement as it becomes more mass entertainment and as the media for mass entertainment become more developed (…) A people without religion will in the end find that (the world) has nothing to live for." [285]

Pynchon is the product of a culture that he endeavours at analysing and judging through fictional writing, and the signs of his distrust in everything authoritarianism appeared as early as his novel *V*. This postmodern investigation thrives to provide alternative hypothesis of control to the one appealing to the spiritual significance and the belief in deity power. The idea of the loss of religious trust and its relationship with paranoia is best explained in Scott Sanders' "Pynchon's Paranoid History". He writes:

> God is the original conspiracy theory: behind floods, deaths in the family, the sprouting of seeds or splatter of rain, behind every heartbeat and thought of man himself, monotheists discerned the single guiding will of a deity. An otherwise chaotic world made sense because it was perceived as a plot, narrated by God, who worked through angels or lightning bolts or by subtle prods on the linings of men's souls. Whether we agree with Feuerbach and Marx that such a mastermind God is no more than a paradigm of our own alienated powers, or with Freud that He is a projection of our superego, or with believers that He simply is, the notion of God still orders the world more elegantly and thoroughly than any other hypothesis (…) A mind that preserves Puritan expectations after the Puritan God has been discredited will naturally seek another hypothesis that explains life as … a plot whose furthest reaches he cannot fathom. Paranoia offers the ideally suited hypothesis that the world is organized into a conspiracy governed by shadowy figures whose powers approach omniscience (…) and whose manipulations of history may be detected in every chance gesture of their servants. It substitutes for the divine plan a demonic one. Viewed in this

[284] Leslie Paul, "A Conversation with T.S. Eliot", *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Winter, 1965): 11-21, 13-14, online, Jstor, Internet, 13 November 2021. Available: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4334503/.

[285] Ibid.

> perspective, paranoia is the last retreat of the Puritan imagination. [286]

Pynchon is keen to present his protagonist Slothrop as Puritan in essence following the faith of his ancestors. He tells about a Salem Witch and a Puritan Minister, which denotes the desire to find meaning in all aspects of life via religious structures. At one moment Slothrop wonders if he is genetically predisposed with earlier packing Bible, structures of Arks, Temples, and Visionary Thrones; with all the materials and dimensions; with "data behind which always, nearer or farther, was the numinous certainty of God" (G.R., p.241-242). Realizing his hereditary preoccupation, Slothrop continues to search for hints of meanings in every life detail through religion. "Signs will find him here in the Zone[287], and ancestors will reassert themselves", narrates Pynchon, "his own WASPs in buckled black, who heard God clamouring to them in every turn of a leaf or cow loose among apple orchards in autumn" (G.R., p.288).

Pynchon made it clear at one point in the novel that paranoia is a no spiritual formula of the Puritan insight. He describes his main characters as obsessed – in the case of Slothrop – with the "Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia" (G.R., p.188). Oedipa is no different for she does not see in her suspicions of the Tristero plot a disadvantage. Rather, she believes that it is compensation for her having lost the direct, "epileptic Word ". For Pynchon truth can be attainable through paranoia, not only that but this process can stimulate the same moments of epiphany of a devout revelation:

> About paranoia (…) There is nothing less remarkable (…) it is nothing less than the onset, the leading edge, of the discovery that everything is connected, everything in the Creation, a secondary illumination_ not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a route In for those like Tchitcherine who are held at the edge (…)

[286] Scott Sanders: op.cit., pp. 177.

[287] The Zone of post-war Germany is the setting where Slothrop's conspiracies mostly thrive.

(G.R., p.703)

In a materialized world in which Godly powers are ridiculed, the individual search for identity is often by means of worshipping the state, which evidently climaxed in two world wars reigned by totalitarian regimes. Ironically in Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon through the character of Säure Bummer, mocks the music of Beethoven.[288] He favours the celebrations of humans and the love of Rossini to Beethoven for he makes you feel like "going out and invading Poland" (G.R., p.440). The unique characteristic of the postmodern fiction of paranoia is that the dilemma is in essence ideological. Exponents do not necessarily perceive random conspiracies throughout different historical phases. More than that, it is a belief grounded in the subject that a massive conspiracy is the "motive force" behind the world and the historical occurrences.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tyrone Slothrop is pictured as the prototype of paranoid behaviour for obvious reasons. He was exposed to machine-based exterior manipulation since childhood resulting in him being tormented by suspicion at every move that he declares himself paranoid. This echoes Eliot's initial thesis that religious faith is eradicated by scientific developments. The scientific Laszlo Jamf, the Pavlovian Pointsman, the German mobocracy, some African emigrants, Soviet agents and black marketeers; all seem to have an interest in Slothrop's condition. As the novel progresses, Slothrop's paranoid judgements becomes clearer to the reader. His translation of reality is reliant either on mere chance (hence a belief in absurdity), or on a "more realistic" power than chance; that is a conspiracy. The problem with this latter however, is its secretive nature; that this explanation of the "more realistic" force is methodically concealed from Slothrop's limited scope: "Oh, the hand of a terrible croupier is that touch on the sleeves of his dreams". He feels that "all in his life of what has looked free or

[288] According to McMichaels, Pynchon chooses the example of Beethoven because he portrays a "skewed Romanticism" that is thwarted and spoiled by Scientific Materialism.

random, is discovered to've been under some control, all the time, the same as a fixed roulette wheel" (G.R., p.209).

Interestingly, Pynchon's protagonists although are part of the conspiracy they want to unveil, they are -as Tchitcherine is described- "held at the edge". If the centre of the Puritan as Sanders suggests is the wholly God, the centre of Slothrop's -and Oedipa's alike- is the power structure that is inherently unfathomable. Ironically, this is accurate even when it is the individuals themselves who personally crafted all the fantasy. Influenced by the Puritan reflex, they end up obsessed chasing after some ambiguous clues and hints to make sense of the plot in everywhere but themselves. "Those like Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity" (G.R., p.582), which are all in essence spiritual endeavours to replenish the loss of a religious platform. [289]

2.2. Familial Bonds and Relationships

In addition to the obsession cultivated from the Puritan reflex, familial bonding – as a means of consolidation and survival – is equally crushed. In creating Slothrop's mystery, Pynchon makes use of the Freudian view of the father. Slothrop suspects that he is the actual target of the rocket falling on London and he calls it a "Father Conspiracy".[290] As an infant, his father offered him to be a

[289] Scott Sanders: op.cit., pp. 182.

[290] In clinical psychology, studies reveal the significant link between paranoid personality and the individuals familial backdrop, and that its major attribute is the longevity of the disorder and its intensification over time. Thomas F. Oltmanns in his study about personality disorders explains that most of the research made on the matter emphasizes two central premises. One revolves around a strategy of self-defence particularly "from a tumultuous family background characterized by parental dominance and mistreatment". The second is the inclination that the fundamental mechanism that drives the paranoid outlook is low self-esteem. Oltmanns continues that "some theorists trace this deeply ingrained feeling of personal failure to early family interactions, which are presumably characterized by parental dominance, mistreatment, and lack of consistent affection … Family rejection leads to a further reduction in self-esteem."

subject for Laszlo Jamf's mental experimentations. This was not only the source of his current disturbance, but also relates to the deceitful corporate from which he could never escape. Of the protagonist Pynchon writes:

> There is a villain here, serious as death. It is this typical American teenager's own father, trying episode after episode to kill his son. And the kid knows it. Imagine that. So far he's managed to escape his father's daily little death-plots_ but nobody has said he has to keep escaping.
>
> (G.R., p.674)

Slothrop later encounters Pointsman who progressively takes the status of the father and continues exposing him to experimentations. Once Pointsman's research was conducted, he sent two clinicians to castrate him. Hence in Slothrop's vision, he is constantly in a battle against the father, or the "Father Conspiracy" in which he persistently loses.

Equivalently, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Metzger is persuaded that he was the victim of the Mother Conspiracy. He recalls his story to Oedipa regretting: "My mother (…) was really out to kasher me, boy, like a piece of beef on the sink, she wanted me drained and white … you know what mothers like that turn their make children into" (C. L. 49., p.16). This Freudian Oedipal complex supports what has been previously mentioned about the Puritan influence on the individual. Family bonds celebrated under the metanarrative of religiosity and high-value-ness are in order, indicating the way in which the character is extracted from social life and left isolated to battle his own mind.[291] Along with the father/mother complex, relationships and affection are treated with equal ambivalence and frustration in the narratives.

Quote in Thomas Oltmanns and Mayumi Okada, "Paranoia", *Practitioner's Guide to Evidence-Based Psychotherapy* (2006) 503-514, 506.

[291] Hendrika Vande Kemp, "The Family Religion, and Identity: A Reformed Perspective", *Family Therapy: Christian Perspectives* (Baker Books, 1991): 39-75.

In the Californian void, no domestic affection is conserved. Although the prevalence of sex is -to recall the romanticists- a manifestation of love; love has no chance to foster in Pynchon's universe. The relationship of the husband-wife Mucho and Oedipa is typical to the rest of Pynchon's exemplification of the family couple: commonly estranged. characters appear to be paranoid about sex. Neighbouring San Francisco is recognized for the profusion of "members of the third sex, the lavender crowd" (C. L. 49., p.81). In California, there is this rock group very properly called "the paranoids" among them are "teenage voyeurs, who's all had copies of … passkeys made so they could check in at whim on any bizarre sexual action" (C. L. 49., p.30). One of the group members dedicated himself to playgrounds and parks to be accessible for the willing eight-year-olds. This detachment from the significant other and absence of affection, along with the Oedipus complex toward "the Father" and "the Mother" interrupts one's sense of duty, family, and identity, to the extent that even the slightest vestige of honest sentiment or passion seems out of logic.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon criticizes sex as a form of sadism and control. He combines the corruption of German Imperialism with behavioural psychology through Slothrop's fear that his "programmed" penis is a colonial outpost; another office representing Their white Metropolis far away. The entire conspiracy is initiated when the map of Slothrop's sexual actions is identical to the targets of the German rocket. By pairing the rocket with the phallus, love and death are adequately equivalent in their fatality in the postmodern world. This may also suggest that the human body is subjugated to systematization through technology, with which Slothrop was first treated, and through which his body was dominated. Pynchon portrays the sadist regime as one that is "bent on replacing the human organism with the image of machinery. Sade is the offspring of an age that was enraptured by automatons."[292]

[292] Brian Jarvis, "Thomas Pynchon", In: John N. Duvall: *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011): 220 - 232.

2.3. The Virus of Technology

The loss of religiosity and familial relationships and human affection recurrently appears to tie with the excessive reliance on technology in everyday life, and its effects in framing the postmodern confusion. The emptiness brought by technology does not only eradicate one's relationship with immediate partners but also with himself. Similar to a number of postmodern writers, Pynchon treats technology from a metaphysical standpoint. Instead of a scientific manoeuvre that aims at meeting humanity's needs throughout their experience with the material world, Pynchon promotes technology as a power of its own, freestanding the human jurisdiction.

The fabrication of simulacrums in both of Pynchon's novels is obvious in the use of cinematic projection, which stands for projecting falsehoods and illusions into the real world, and confusing fact with fiction. This is evident by taking the example of Hitler who projected his totalitarian paranoid imaginations to the world through technology, brainwashing his audience. In *Gravity's Rainbow* film scenes are associated with the movie director Gerhard von Göll. One of them revolves around the imagination of "Black Storm Troopers", which enigmatically turns a reality in the *Schwarzcommando*[293]. This episode among others portrays the real fear of the White people of Blackness. Pynchon explains that his employment of King Kong movie, which for him is not about an ape, is about the fright of the whites from the colonized populations as they may tragically react against them. Also, in one of the sceneries of *The Crying of Lot 49*, the junior movie star "baby Igor" is bewilderingly unrelated to his mature version known to Oedipa as her lawyer Metzger.

[293] Black men who work as rocket technicians in the German Army.

The image of Gölls's other movie Alpdrücken[294] is another example. The movie star is Greta Erdmann; she is raped both in the movie and in real life bearing a child called Bianca. The projection of such fantasy in real life is not exclusive to Erdmann, but to all the audience that gets involved by watching the movie. All viewers seem to be heavily impacted by the story to the point that the movie is said to be responsible for the making of loads of babies, which Erdmann imagines as "ghostly as double exposure" (G.R., p.484). In the narrative, the rule is that if the fantasy is flawlessly crafted on the screen, it sooner or later turns into reality.

Apart from screen shows, Pynchon makes the link between the growth of massive corporations and industrial trusts to the advancements in technology. He shows that, had there not been such an explosion in programming and mechanization which abrogates the traditional human values, the world might have had a less traumatizing experience in the twentieth century even in the existence of Darwinist Sociology and Imperialist drives. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon argues that biological chemistry stands as the sneaky factor that made "our ages' neutral (…) silent passing into the machineries of indifference" (G.R., p.413). Biological chemistry offered: "a basis for new compounds, new arrangements, so that there would be a field of aromatic chemistry to ally itself with secular power and find new methods of synthesis, so there would be a German dye industry to become IG [295]" (G.R., p.413). Technology is not simply an imperative player in creating a paranoid crowd, but more than that is a motivating vigour behind history, because "this War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre (…) secretly it was being dictated by the needs of technology" (G.R., p.521). The hidden allegories of technology is not limited to the power of the rocket but reaches far to the imprisonment of the individual; Byron the Bulb for instance is "an old, old soul" caught in a glass prison.

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[294] In German; stands for the 'nightmare' in English.
[295] In Pynchon's account, IG Farben is an international cartel that operates without limitations for its own proliferation and profit. It depends on the massive exploitation of natural resources of the whole world, and technology, it managed to replace the natural with the synthetic.

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the effect of machinery is translated into another dimension of delusion. To go back to Peter Abernethy's point, characters seem to be weirdly committed to their technological instruments. Oedipa's husband Mucho Maas who is dissatisfied with his life as a used car salesman, is preoccupied with the idea that these automobiles are no less than "motorized metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like" (C. L. 49., p.4). The identification of the human with the non-human and the alteration of the self through machinery swap is alarmingly accurate. A sketch of the human awareness during the 1960s, Mucho believes that "each owner, each shadow, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else's life" (C. L. 49., p.4). Each subject is enmeshed in his own paranoid pattern intensified with technology that it is not only probable but natural for a photographer from Palo Alto to believe that he was a volleyball!

The protagonists' eager undertakings to salvage some information regarding their mysterious past, present, and future, and their inscrutable correlation with the Tristero/the rocket schemes, are rather self-unacknowledged yearnings to secure their own identity. Don DeLillo in *Running Dog* explains that: **"**When technology reaches a certain level, people begin to feel like Criminals (…) Someone in after you, the computers may be, the machine-police. You can't escape investigation". He also suggest that "The facts about you and your whole existence have been collected or are being collected (…) Devices make us pliant. If they issue a print-out saying we're guilty, then we're guilty. [296] The opposition is between "Them" and "Us"; "They", the capitalists, technocracies, lobbies and the unknown, aim to substitute fact with fantasy, meaning with absurdity, nature with technology, sex with violence, and life with death. Pynchon then does not see hope in gathering but in individuality. He brings apart some social "waste" and draws the paradigm of psychological defiance motivated by scepticism in the evident, while echoing the postmodern scepticism in the modernist possibility of a

[296] Don DeLillo quoted in Timothy Melley: op.cit., pp. 31.

collective counter-force. The aim is not for "Us" – en masse – to recuperate power from "Them", but to recover "me" from "Them".

2.4. History: The Suspicious Package

History is a conspiracy "set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power" [297] writes Hofstadter, "we are all sufferers from history, but the paranoid is a double sufferer, since he is afflicted not only by the real world, with the rest of us, but by his fantasies as well".[298] Though the story of Slothrop is set along the historical events of the Second World War, The Crying of Lot 49 exhibits best Hofstadter's claim. Reflecting on the post-war reality, Pynchon pervades his fictional accounts with an extravaganza of historically verifiable details that bewilder the knowledgeable reader. Poirer suggests that;

> in Pynchon the factuality seems willing to participate in the fiction (…) crazy names like Pierce Inverarity turn out, when we do little investigation, to be a compound of a quite famous, real-life stamp collector named Pierce, and of the fact that if you should go to Mr. Pierce for the kind of flawed and peculiar stamps so important in The Crying of Lot 49 you would ask him for an "inverse rarity". What sounds like crazy schemes turn out to have been actual experiments, such as Maxwell's Demon, again in The Crying of Lot 49, or historically important institutions like Thurn and Taxis (…) [299]

Oedipa succeeds in retrieving a substantial deal of evidence about the history of the Tristero. Back in the history of Europe, the Tristero originated in the sixteenth century Holy Roman Empire. A 400-year-old practice of postal counterfeit, the purpose of the Tristero is to defy the conventional mailing system of the Empire known as the Thurn and the Taxis cartel. In 1577, the northern domains of the Low Countries were battling for independence from Catholic Spain

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[297] Richard Hofstadter: op.cit., pp. 29.

[298] Ibid., pp. 40.

[299] Richard Poirer: op.cit., pp. 156.

and the Catholic Holy Roman Empire, led by William of Orange. When the opposition successfully reached Brussels, William replaced the postmaster of that time Leonard I with his lord of Ohain Jan Hinckart. Reacting to these measures, Hernando Joaquin de Tristero y Calavera, the founder of the whole thing, "perhaps a madman, perhaps an honest rebel, according to some only a con artist" (C. L. 49., p.219-220), desired the position. He claimed himself the equitable Lord of Ohain as the cousin of Hinckart and the ancestor of the Spanish, therefore to be the inheritor of his cousin's custody, the Grand Master of the Post for the Low Countries, and the executor of the Thurn and Taxis.

Once his claims were met with complete disregard, Tristero started a revolutionary rivalry against William until Emperor Randolph II regained the territory of Brussels in 1585, with Leonard instated back to his position as a Grand Master. The Emperor, subsequently, chose to renounce his sponsorship to the Thun and Taxis creating a wobble within the system. Tristero lastly found the perfect atmosphere for his own mailing system to thrive; with the symbol of the muted posthorn and the members dressed in black uniform, "black to symbolize the only thing that truly belonged to them in their exile: the night" (C. L. 49., p.219-220). The first bullet was fired. The Tristero began to operate along the lanes of the Thurn and Taxis committed to mute the posthorn until the Empire was brought down.

At the time the Holy Roman Empire crumbled and the Thurn and Taxis dissolved, Oedipa finds no clear explanation for what has actually happened. With nothing particularly verifiable, gossip increased about the evolution of the Tristero and it was thought to be the trigger of the French Revolution. Most prominently is the rumour about the noble factions exiting the scheme, allowing the continuation of the tradition at the hands of the lower classes. The remaining group gradually "drifted on, deprived of nearly all the noble patronage that had sustained them; now reduced to handling anarchist correspondence" (C. L. 49., p.229). And the bulk of them migrated to the New World upon its discovery.

The policies of the United States, however, were no different from the ones they loathed in Europe. In the 1840s, the government announced a variety of postal reforms so typical to the United States' political philosophy to dismiss small mail facilities in favour of the U.S. postal monopoly signified as the Pony Express and Wells Fargo. Following the tradition of insubordination, the Tristero launched operations in America. By 1861 they were well-established and powerful. While the Pony Express was challenging wildernesses, brutalizes and "sidewinders", the Tristero was giving its employees crash courses in Siouan and Athapascan dialects. Disguised as Indians, their envoys drifted westward. They reached the Coast every time, with "zero attrition rate, not a scratch on them". Pynchon resumes that "their entire emphasis now toward silence, impersonation, opposition masquerading as allegiance." (C. L. 49., p.230).

In the present-day (the 1960s) United States, Oedipa believes -as she becomes involved in the Tristero plot- that the underworld organization is still prospering in contemporary America in the framework of a conspiracy. The blueprint of this modern extension is to absorb the cast-offs of the surface world, and the depersonalized within the new culture. Proven unable to cope with the status-quo, the "waste" of society -supposedly- finds asylum in a shadowy association which allows the possibility for dissimilarity and appreciates the human diversity. Altering the word "waste" to refer to this faction of the socially exiled does not necessarily signal a bad connotation. On the contrary, it stands for its literal meaning; the remaining minority rejected from a majority of the capitalist society. The Tristero is the "sort of subcontinent of obsolescent, a union of the cracked and damned, silently watching 'undergrounds'". [300] It is her continual encounter with samples of those "waste" that provokes Oedipa to move from an episode to another scrutinizing Inverarity's testimony.

[300] Erik Wensberg quoted in Owana K McLester-Greenfield: op.cit., pp. 163.

It is especially difficult to distinguish between what Pynchon provides as real and what is simply Oedipa's imagination. Therefore, it is uncertain that the existence of the Tristero is a real conspiracy or just a paranoia. Keeping in mind what Pynchon himself said about the irrelevance of his account to history, this long narrative about the Tristero shows that history is a fiction fabricated by the dominant, and grounded on the manipulation of facts, linearity, interconnection, and succession.[301] Pynchon provides his most uncluttered comment on what Hayden White labels in *Mason & Dixon* "metahistory, or the deep structure of the historical imagination". "Facts are but the Play-things of lawyers . . . History is not Chronology . . . not a Chain of single Links", Pynchon continues, "(it is) rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep . . . History is hir'd, or coerc'd, only in Interests that must ever prove base.[302] The author aligns himself then, with the tradition of manufacturing counter-facts that are ideological, non-linear, and disconnected. Therefore, history is no more a grand narrative to be trusted.

2.5. Towards Paranoid Escapism

On the basis of the above mentioned, it is safe to maintain that overriding the traditional systems continues to detach the individual from himself and from his surroundings. Faith in Godly power and Family relationships which is characterized by "comfort in the presence of the other" [303] are diminished in the post-war setting that the narratives represent. Additionally, the difficulty with Pynchon's style is that it challenges the norms of history education as we know it in traditional narrative. It seeks an alternative and unusual way of telling about the past; one that is primarily imaginative, sceptical and adventurous. For Religion,

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[301] Brain Jarvis: op.cit., pp. 227.

[302] Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* quoted in Jarvis, Brain: op.cit., pp. 224.

[303] Hendrika Vande Kemp: op.cit., pp. 42.

family, and history provide a sense of identity and belonging, the departure may result only in meaninglessness. Self-definition does not occur in a vacuum, but in a world already defined, and in Pynchon's case the application of the multi-perspective approach to the process of defining that world is connected with the ways history is narrated, the selection of sources, and the methods used to interpret these sources by the characters. As stated above, the facts and sources to which Pynchon's explanation relates remain suspicious.

Mutually in the novels, Pynchon registers paranoia as the leading edge of the discovery that *everything is connected*, *everything in the Creation*. No matter how loose or tight this connection is, every detail in Pynchon's chronicle has something to do with paranoia. Conspiracies and master cabals at every level, from the historical and political to the galactic and sub-atomic all, relate to this obsession. [304] On the very foundation, paranoia transpires from two key peculiarities; it is a legacy of the Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible on one side, and on the other is a defence mechanism of the "waste" against the chaotic universe.

The transnational establishments, industrial lobbies, surveillance and artificial intelligence firms dominate the post-war American ground cultivating the ideal atmosphere for the paranoid behaviour to flourish. Being carried out in a toxic environment does not indicate though that paranoia is held negatively in this context. On the contrary, paranoia is almost always vindicated in Pynchon's books and often the paranoid characters seem to be just the ordinary. Leo Bersani notes that in Pynchon "at least in the traditional sense of the word – (the paranoid attitude is) really not paranoid at all"; after all "since when do paranoids label themselves paranoids?" [305] With the manifestation of two societies, two worlds, and two choices, it is naïve to assume that Pynchon's narrative demonstrates simply

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[304] John N. Duvall, *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction After 1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 223.

[305] Leo Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature", *Representation*, no. 25 (1989): 99-118.

paranoia. Rather, it is a paranoid behaviour about the mental, and possibly physical escape from one unpleasant setting to another, that is paranoid escapism.

3. The Merit of Paranoid Escapism

Characters within both novels sense the presence of "Them" which is mainly problematic for its secrecy and authority. Assumed that "Them" is furtively orchestrating their lives and needs, characters get involved in a game that is rather "Theirs"; once in it, they are compelled to act differently from their primary intentions. The pattern of paranoid escapism subsequently repeats itself. It operates as "the end of character as a category in possession of agency, interiority, essence – in short, in possession of itself".[306] It develops into a weapon against the counterfeited prototype of value; it is a sporadic genius of stitching random events together. Stipulating comfort and order upon the messy, this psychological dis/order proves to be natural feedback to an era in which grand explanatory schemes and master narratives have utterly faded. Under similar conditions, paranoid escapism is justifiable as a response to a corrupt social environment in which human agency is weakened. If characters are not in control of not only the happenings around them but graver, their own behaviours, as normal as breathing the obsessive escapist desire becomes.

If the ambition is to retrieve correspondences, paranoia is then the psychological conjuncture for world schemes. We are witnessing a culture organized along increasingly rational lines to serve increasingly irrational ends.[307] Hence, once encircled by structures of power, suspecting oneself to be the prey of mysterious plots is a biologically accepted feedback of the human mind. "since the assassination of John F. Kennedy" claims Norman Mailer, " we have been marooned in one of the two equally intolerable spiritual states, apathy or

[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.

paranoia".[308] Against this background, no one has charted these "spiritual states" as fanatically as Thomas Pynchon, whose self-proclaimed paranoids (the fanatic Oedipa for example) are often set into relief against apathetic figures (similar to the husband Mucho). These substitutes are fundamental to popular conspiracy/ paranoid fictions, where a potentially obsessed party frequently struggles to persuade more apathetic characters that a threatening plan is afoot. Hence, such repeated patterns in the writings of Pynchon and more broadly the post-war literature appear to entail a serious cultural concern. On one side, a deep suspicion in the already known and established to be true, paired with a paradoxical feeling that no matter how "everything is connected" the alternatives are yet not trusted to be true. On the other side, the belief in the existence of an indiscriminately structured "alternative world", the pleasure of which is so inoperably desired.[309] This represents a form of "paranoia" that is self-judgmental, tempered with uncertainty about its own opinions, and so powerful that the escape from it is impossible unless it is to it.

A powerful metaphor is that of the Zero and the One. [310] The characters are caught up in the space between the two; the void of meaninglessness, and the meaningfulness of paranoia. Therefore, characters are not to be blamed because of their subscription to paranoid interpretations. Being caught up in a certain conspiracy is much better than not being caught up at all, even if this conspiracy progresses to disappointment. Not being engaged means total alienation from external patterns and dissolvement in the nowhere; just like Mondaugen's Law[311]. Slothrop throughout the entire novel has been slouched through numerous

[308] Norman Mailer quoted in Timothy Melley: op.cit., 26

[309] Ibid.

[310] Pynchon gives hint to this in the first chapter of Gravity's Rainbow as he calls it "Beyond the Zero". McMichaels suggests that it hints at the "Between the Zero and the One" which is the realm of probabilities. This is valid considering his position between meaninglessness and meaningfulness.

[311] Pynchon formulates this inclination in Mondaugen's Law stating that the more you dwell in the past and in the future the More solid your persona. But the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are. (G.R., p. 509)

fantasies only to end up surrendering to meaninglessness and losing all sense of identity; a fate to which all other characters follow suit. Nevertheless, Pynchon reveals a lot through another character that is Pig Bodine. He tells his friend Slothrop "Let's not get any more paranoid than we have to". (G. R., p.601-603). Every time Slothrop fears the existence of a plot Bodine replies "Everything is some kind of plot, man". The strategy of escape is to keep reading even if you feel lost in the midst of nonsense; to follow wherever the flow of conspiracies takes you without getting completely trapped in it; constantly, following the nodes of power.

Another fine illustration of the rewards of paranoid escapism is Dr Hilarious, Oedipa's mad psychiatrist. Although he achieved huge success in his experiment: the Bridge[312], he is unable to break from the past experiences. He dwells upon years of involvement in Buchenwald, where he conducted operations of stimulating lunacy in Jewish detainees. He finally confesses to Oedipa: " I tried to believe it all. I slept three hours a night trying not to dream, and spent the other 21 at the forcible acquisition of faith. And yet my penance hasn't been enough" (C. L. 49., p.102). His delusion is that he is hunted by the Israelis as he calls them "the angles of death". He realizes the amenity of death, and endeavors for an easier way out as he places a gun close to Oedipa, who knew he had wanted her to get the weapon. . She, however, being the new applicant to the abyss, questions the credibility of submissive fatality.

The most important imagery of the desire for death as an instant escape is the one portrayed through the Puritan group. Robert Scurvham and his clique of Scurvhamites are enthusiastic with the belief that all virtuous in the world was the exertion of God. On the contrary, all malicious is the exertion of "some opposite principle, something blind, soulless; a brute automatism that led to eternal death"

[312] The Bridge is his pet name for the experiment he was helping the community hospital run on "*the effects of LSD-25, mescalin, psilocybin, and related drugs on a large sample of suburban housewives*" (C. L. 49., p.7).

(C. L. 49., p.116). As auspicious as it may sound at first, the ambition of the Scurvhamites was to enlighten the non-devotees and bring them back to significant existence. Nonetheless, for an anti-conventionalism writer, such paradigm would not thrive for long. The negative dynamism of death are enthralling, and virtually seductive that it is hard not to succumb;

> (…) somehow those few saved Scurvhamites found themselves looking out into the gaudy clockwork of the doomed with a certain sick and fascinated horror, and this was to prove fatal. One by one the glamorous prospect of annihilation coaxed them over, until there was no one left in the sect, not even Robert Scurvham, who, like a ship's master, had been last to go.
>
> (C. L. 49., p.116)

Whether or not Oedipa proves successful at her mission of retrieving meaning to the postmodern life is not entirely the interest. Her character triumphs in conveying Pynchon's memorandum; that -no matter how fruitless it might seem- all roads to the truth should be explored; that all chances to knowledge should be visited; and that a determination at escape should never be compromised by death. Like Rapunzel, Oedipa's former existence is akin to the tower painting she spotted; the enigmatic bequest was to her both a means of escape and an alternative trap. Outstandingly, she does not resolve into meaninglessness after failing her mission. It is yet a statement that the *Gravity's Rainbow* happens nevertheless to communicate.

As Slothrop -and all paranoid characters- remain solitarily curved not knowing where to lift up like the crooked cross of the *swastika* of Nazi Germany, it is an inevitable interrogation at this point; what is going to happen if every man was an island? If every opportunity of communication is rendered a vulnerability, a death trap? If the word is turned out a liability? If Joseph Staline's "Je ne fais confiance a pesone meme pas a moi-même" was relevant to everyman? the outcome is most likely an Orwellian world governed by fear and

miscommunication; the ultimate dream of the very authoritarian powers that the paranoid sets himself to repudiate.

4. The Price of Apathy

To all the characters in both novels, a passage from *Gravity's Rainbow* appears perfectly applicable: "When something real is about to happen to you, you go toward it with a transparent surface parallel to your own front that hums and bisects your ears, making eyes very alert. The light bends toward chalky blue. Your skin aches. At last: something real [emphasis added]" (G. R., p.880). This description of paranoid explanations as moments of epiphany – although is a short-lived delusion of completeness – holds a special significance for Pynchon. In that, anti-paranoia is described as the parallel to death.

What leads the protagonists to experience some disjointed episodes of anti-paranoia is the overwhelming amount of details with which they are confronted, although it is supposed to enflame paranoid escapism itself. Oedipa feels that "It was now like walking among the matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless (. . .) Ones and Zeroes" (C. L. 49., p. 136-137). At one point, the paranoid characters in both novels affirm that "offhand they had to say that they hadn't learned a goddam thing". They find themselves eventually trapped in a loop of unresolvable questions; is the idea of escape meant to be a structured game or a free judgement? Is the underworld up to some higher message? Which is authentic historical and scientific information and which is fantasy?

The trail that the compulsive characters undertake toward plausible interpretations is simply absorbing the haphazard incidents and proofs into their own illusory constructions. Once the plot is started, it is almost impossible for the characters to get out of the journey. The outcome of this journey is that Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* and Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* each

fabricate their own model of paranoia about what is happening in their worlds. Slothrop doubts the existence of a global conspiracy involving the V-2 rocket and throughs himself in a froggy ride to uncover the mystery. Oedipa Maas finds the Tristero and the W.A.S.T.E. mail system counteracting the military-industrial complex of the Yoyodyne related somehow to what seems to be a massive conspiracy to silencing all opposition which is symbolized by the muted posthorn. In spite of the rigorous determination to observe every particle, none of the characters is able to notice every clue, and all have the subjective paranoid inner worlds that hold them alive.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the German actress Greta Erdmann sees herself chased by Gestapo; the betrayer Herero leader Enzian by the American, the British, and the Russian operators in the Zone; the Soviet agent Tchitcherine by other Soviet agents. The German rocket scientist Franz Pokler believes that the girl who identifies herself as his daughter, is changed each year and is sent by the German Nazi officialdom to ease him and harvest his abilities. To enhance this image as the narrative proceeds, Pokler develops tedious anxiety that he is the target of the apocalyptic machine, and that this whole research is made with the exclusive intention to devastate him. It is possible then to incorporate every character in the novel into the list of the "paranoids". Each character lapses into paranoia either throughout all his journey or at a certain point in it.

In *Gravity's Rainbow,* the reader is challenged not only by an uncommonly entangled string of events and fates, but also by a sequence of entangled accounts of some alienated individuals who secretively hypothesise their own zeal. The reader is told of pigs driven to murder, characters like Katje and Greta trapped inside a film. He is reminded that every individual might have a radio implanted in his brain, dictating every urge. He witnesses mediums turned into puppets by "spirits from the Other Side", dogs trained to salivate on command,

"and of course at the centre of the novel is the Rocket itself, the consummate image of the object governed by external controls.[313]

In all that, and for all Pynchon's character, the industrial lobbies are said to be the controllers. The world is governed by them, and all the historical events happened in support of their profits. In time when the characters' paranoid observance guided them to consider the German industrial corporation the responsible for the total scheme, Enzian's description of the possibilities of power structures is a reminder of Lyotard's concept of the death of metanarrative. This passage is applicable to the way in which the world is now to be considered in terms of individual thought structure instead of a collective one. Enzian calls:

> we have to look for power sources here, and distribution networks we were never taught, routes of power our teachers never imagined, or were encouraged to avoid (…) we have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function (…) zeroing in on what incalculable plot? Up here, on the surface, coal-tars, hydrogenation, synthesis were always phony, dummy functions to hide the real, the planetary mission (…)
>
> (G. R., p.521)

Hence the choice of paranoia or apathy is to be made by the characters at a certain stage. It was well-expressed that in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa managed to keep up the paranoid spirit until the open end of the narrative. However, characters like Randolph Driblette happen to take a different journey. The Yoyodyne manager finds himself caught up in a seemingly endless course of signing his name to memorandums he does not recognize. Throughout the novel, this manager ends up jobless and abandoned by his dishonest spouse. Growing obsessed with the idea of suicide, he finds his last resolve in announcing his condition in the *Los Angeles Times* seeking support from persons who lived

[313] Scott Sanders: op.cit., pp. 187.

through the same experience. The manager finds that most of the letters were from suicides who had failed, either through clumsiness or last-minute fear. None of them, however, could offer any persuasive reasons for staying alive. Simply everyone wished to go to heaven, but nobody wanted to die. The manager is only carried off thinking of suicide when he gets prompted to retrieve the underground conspiracy of the Tristero. unable to maintain the paranoid detective behaviour though, Randolph Driblette chose to conclude his career by jumping off the set of *The Courier's Tragedy* into the pacific ocean.

Much like Oedipa, Slothrop was forced to make a choice at one point in his journey. Either to follow Enzian's call or succumb to apathy. Continuing the thesis that remained open in *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests through the failure of Slothrop that anti-paranoia, (or conformism) is fatal to the human mind. Pynchon maintains that: "if there is something comforting_ religious, if you want_ about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected no anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long." By the end of his journey though, "Slothrop feels himself sliding onto the anti-paranoid part of his cycle, centred as he is (…) Either They have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that reason. (G. R., p.434)

The obstacle facing Slothrop that brought his demise is not originated from the outside chaotic universe of the war. Pynchon powerfully sheds light on the irony of existence in the postmodern mayhem in which the greatest enemy is no more than oneself. After proving his ability to fight against the System and overcome the troops of psychological manipulation imposed on the postmodern individual, Slothrop fails to maintain the free spirit he was once paranoid about preserving. Now that he failed himself, Pynchon declares that he can never be found again in the sense of the identified. Edward Mendelson explains that:

> Slothrop's disintegration at the end of the book (…) is not the work of those who oppose or betray him, but is the consequence of his own betrayals, his own loss of interest in the world, and his own failures to relate and connect (…) When he has entered his isolation in the Zone, his sense that acts have consequences in time begins to diminish; he forgets that he exists in a realm of responsibility where relations extend into the past and future (…) Separated by his own escape and his own empty freedom an originating past or a future to which he could be responsible, Slothrop can only diminish and disintegrate. 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. [314]

Viewing it as such, the fact that Pynchon does not allow his characters the luxury of religious certitude, domestic shelter, or factual experience does not make him any less idealist than T. S. Eliot.[315] In the absence of all the above, shelter and certitude are to be found through paranoid escapism, and to maintained through unnegotiable self-esteem. Such perception then, suggests that while death remains sweet heaven, life on earth still deserves to be claimed.

5. Conclusion: Reversing the Equation

[314] Edward Mendelson quoted in Owana. K McLester-Greenfield: op.cit., pp. 423.

[315] The majority of Pynchon's critics arrived at the opposite conclusion shedding light primarily on entropy and the apocalyptic ambience of the two novels. The notion of entropy was the major concern of a large number of studies on Pynchon's literature. Zamora dedicated a chapter in his work *Writing the Apocalypse* (1989) arguing that it "describes the gradual death of the universe", especially in the presence of an automated background. Analogously, The Psychological Politics of the American Dream (1994) by Tyson offers an extensive analysis of entropy in every sign Oedipa encounters throughout her journey. the argument is that the signs illustrate the way in which the American culture is headed toward catastrophe. Additionally, a common concern in studying Pynchon was the transformation of the notion of the apocalypse from the traditional sense to the postmodern one. In "Pynchon, JFK, and the CIA" (1997), Hollander conducts a comparative study between the United States and Nazi Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War in terms of social and political unrest. In *The Woman of the Crowd* (2000) Daniele foregrounds Pynchon's account of the threat of industrialization and technology in the postmodern world. Similarly, Grausam explores the nuclear peril in Pynchon's novels on the ground of its association with the end of the world as presented in his work *On Endings* (2001).

The Crying of Lot 49 suggests the possibility of paranoia and the counterculture of the Tristero through a detailed satire, and the task is sustained in its successive post-McCarthyism paranoia of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The two novels construct a picture of an author both admirer and criticizer of conspiracies. In a world maintained by conventionality and subjugation, Pynchon suggests that the conspiratorial systems can never get you asking the wrong question to which they have to worry about answers. You probably "*may never get to touch the Master*"; your innocence is probably "*in inverse proportion to the immorality of the Master*". (G. R., p.276-281) And it is only by creating contra-scenarios and alternative idiosyncratic worlds that one can survive.

The discourse of paranoid escapism is highly authorized in Pynchon's narrative after it has been met with specific reluctance at the beginning of each of the novels. No more the fear of conspiracy but faith in it; no more mortified of paranoia but satisfied with it; it is the "Puritan reflex" of seeking other orders behind the disorder. Phrasing it this way renders paranoid escapism a little narrative which stands as an alternative to the downgrading grand narratives. Paranoia progresses from a psychological disorder to a language of resistance that operates on the private level with the ultimate goal of escaping the wasteland.

However, recognizing that Pynchon's recommendation of paranoia arises as a creative response to the shared social experiences of the postmodern world is not necessarily to say that it is the only possible response, or the best one. In concluding this chapter, I would like to raise a few oppositions against this view of human psychology and history. First, the paranoid interpretation as a means of understanding and coping with the world is unavoidably self-centred. Both Oedipa and Slothrop were only capable of imagining the plots which revolve around themselves. This view of the individual as a separate entity from the rest of the societal members can never produce a solution to the social fears presented in the texts through the structure of "them". Therefore, paranoia can also be read as a

personal temporary freedom, deceiving in nature, and obscuring the real human obligation at resistance.

Second, observing the novel's distorted logic, one may argue that branding a character's true-self as paranoid is an exaggerated judgment. The idea that identity is whatever that haphazardly appears in the human's mind is postmodern at heart. In fact, any thought or idea needs to be contextualized within one's overall sense of reality. The problem with Pynchon's representation of modern life is the lack of space for reflection on the bigger questions about the meaning and purpose of life. As grasped from the above analysis, there is a daily deluge of trivial information to distract and preoccupy the characters' minds leaving little time for the individual to achieve an integrated sense of one's reality and direction in life. This disorientation or confusion is the root cause of increased anxiety, which could be treated instead of escaped.

Finally, Pynchon's recommendation of paranoia as perceived through his fiction and the various critical responses to his novels, is generalized as the human condition. The representation of the manipulative advanced industrial society as if it were a lived social condition is far from symbolizing the real world. Sanders writes: " Pynchon interprets an era of decadence in a particular form of society as proof that we are doomed to fall away from the human. He treats the Zone as the World, the Displaced Person as Everyman",[316] which can be regarded as an overstated representation.

Breaking apart from the Pynchonian tradition of the conspiratorial chronicles, a handful of succeeding novels developed a highly individualistic mythography of paranoid imaginations which touch upon the feelings of revulsion and longing to escape the human body. The unique foundation of paranoid escapism resides in the binary: between the wasteland and the ivory tower, between them and us, between the intangible real and the tangible fantasy.

[316] Scott Sanders: op.cit., pp. 191.

Subsequently, the binary arises between the escapable and the inescapable in respect of the contrast between wasteland and the human body. In what can be interpreted as a counter discourse to Pynchon's paranoid accounts, Tartt's *The Secret History* challenges the merits of paranoid escapism and demonstrates its potential at human demise.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DONNA TARTT
AND
THE PARANOIA ABOUT
THE INESCAPABLE

"We don't like to admit it, but the idea of losing control is one that fascinates controlled people such as ourselves more than almost anything. All truly civilized people – the ancients no less than us – have civilized themselves through the wilful repression of the old, animal self."

The Secret History

In the previous chapter, I attempted to show how the temptation to paranoid escapism was contained within the model of conspiracy "them vs us", and how that model was later transformed into an enthusiastic negation of passivity. However, concluding that Pynchon's call for paranoia cannot be the finest subjective form of expression implies the insufficiency of paranoia as a postmodernist little narrative. Indeed, the dynamic of suspicion, fear and rage that arrived with the culture of conspiracy started to decrease by the end of the Cold War. Unlike Pynchon's previous novels, *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt is everything but conspiratorial. Yet, the characters display paranoid behaviours regarding secret Greek mythology which sets the human soul free from the boundaries of the physical body. Instead of praising the power of paranoia at escape, Tartt's novel – I shall argue – imagines the repercussions of such acts on the individual and society.

Donna Tartt is an American writer based in New York City and Virginia. Her first novel *The Secret History* influenced by the Greek tradition and to a great extent by the model of the Apollonian and Dionysian expression in The Birth of Tragedy.[317] The plot starts with a description of the narrator Richard Papen's daily routine as a working-class schoolboy from California. Much like in Oedipa's world, the 1980s California does not allow for much amusement or change. He then obtains a scholarship at the liberal college of Vermont, in which he is confronted with a different lifestyle. Since his early days in Vermont, Richard is captivated by the mysterious Greek professor Julian Morrow and his small group of high-class students. Separated from the rest of the college members, this group is often found studying Greek mythology, discussing metaphysical views, smoking, and drinking. As the story continues, Tartt portrays a non-suspicious attitude in which the narrator remains distanced from what he suspects to be a secret plan by the group. He learns that Henry and his comrades have performed a

[317] Amanda Vaill, "Beyond Good and Evil", *The Washington Post: Democracy Dies in Darkness* (September 13, 1992) online, Internet, 12 April 2021. Available: https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1992/09/13/beyond-good-and-evil/05cfbdcc-fa94-4382-837c-b0f7fbf644f2/.

Dionysian supernatural practice that seems to separate the soul from the body in a state of psychological frenzy. The group subsequently grows paranoid about the possibility of escaping the human body. They also attempt at covering the series of murders that they have committed meanwhile. In the end, there remains "almost as many dead and injured bodies as the last act of a Jacobean tragedy".[318] Henry himself commits suicide thinking that death is the final stage of psychological transcendence.

Though *The Secret History* marked a great success, only a few critical responses to the novel are found in the academic arena. Sophie Mills writes in her article "What "Does" She Think of Us?" that through *The Secret History* one may understand that classics are the enemy of the ordinary.[319] The representation of the characters, she argues, can be seen as intriguing, stimulating, and individualistic, but even more exclusive, curiously cold, and impractical.[320] This view of division between the elite and the ordinary people is highly criticized in Tartt's novel. The attempt of the elite to separate themselves from the rest of society is considered the prevailing theme in the narrative. From a religious point of view, Hanna Makela in *The Poetics of Transcendence*, suggests that the figure of god in modern culture is to be perceived in the idol peer Henry.[321] Applying the theoretical approach of mimesis forwarded by René Girard to analyse the characters' transcendentalist desires, she then continues to suggest that the group's engagement with the Dionysiac religion and philosophy does not have any meaning in the twentieth-century Western society and that it is another form of setting the elite apart from the rest of the community.

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[318] Ibid.

[319] Sophie Mills, "What "Does" She Think of Us? Donna Tartt, "The Secret History", and the Image of Classicists", *The Classical Outlook*, vol. 83, no. 1 (American Classical League: Fall, 2005): 14-19, online, Jstor, Internet, 26 December 2021. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43939020/.

[320] Ibid.

[321] Hanna Makela, "Horizontal Rivalry, Vertical Transcendence: Identity and Idolatry in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*", *The Poetics of Transcendence*, ed. Elisa Heinamaki, P.M. Mehtonen and Atti Salminen, vol. 51 (2015): 179-199.

Therefore, the desire to separate oneself from the mainstream and to transcend the physical world are established points of criticism in *The Secret History*. Yet, to date, there is no full analysis of Tartt's novel that relates it to paranoia studies. By the late 1980s, a new interest in anti-paranoia was sensed in the world of literary representation. I argue that Tartt correspondingly steps out of the conspiratorial plots and moves to the paranoia about the inescapable to show the dark side of psychological obsession and escapism. Considering it a whydunit thriller, Louise Jones reports that: "sometimes the result of character-driven whydunits is an ambivalent view of the crime. When the actions of a criminal become psychologically explicable, they can also become understandable and even rather pardonable".[322] This chapter suggests that The Secret History shows the opposite. I argue that Henry is very much implied to be a paranoid escapist, unable to sympathize with people around him, remarkably self-centred, charming and witty that everyone remains ignorant about his impassive nature. This model of the paranoid repudiates the optimistic view of paranoia as a form of psychological resistance.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I argue that Tartt's writing style and world view as perceived from her fiction is utterly different from the earlier postmodern post-war writers'. I explain that *The Secret History* eases the conspiratorial narrative found in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the paranoid detective displayed in *The Crying of Lot 49*. If the chaotic nature of the worlds portrayed in the two novels rendered the most unreasonable of the acts sound reasonable, the world of *The Secret History* shows the opposite. In the next section, I find it vital to examine the concept of knowledge with its triggering nature at escapism especially since the setting of the novel is an academic site. The third section of this chapter highlights the paranoid characteristics that the Classics

[322] Rebecca Croser, "Chronotopic hybridity in the contemporary campus novel: The Secret History", *Writing the Ghost Train: Refereed Conference Papers of the 20th Annual AAWP Conference*, ed. Eugen Bacon, Dominique Hecq and Amelia Walker (Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, 2015): 1-12, 10 – 11.

group – specifically Henry – display as they engage in the Dionysian frenzy. Along with that, I attempt to link the Dionysian concept to the nature of paranoia and escapism. The final section explores the destructive side of psychological escapism, and what it means to succumb to paranoia in the absence of a chaotic world. At last, this chapter shall bring to clarity the fact that paranoia as an escapist mechanism does not necessarily provide an enduring little narrative that may dethrone what Lyotard condemns as insufficient metanarratives.

1. Tartt: Breaking Apart From Post-war Paranoia

As mentioned in the second part of this thesis, while it initially articulated simply an undetermined sense of madness, the word "paranoia" dates as far back as the Hippocratic times to express something "beyond reason". References to chronic suspiciousness and extreme addiction to spirituality are present in numerous classical writings. Nevertheless, it was not until the eighteenth-century writers such as Kant and Emil Kraepelin validated the concept of what came to be known as paranoia today with its clinical and socio-political connotations.

Freud proposed the fundamental comprehensive psychoanalytical examination of the workings of paranoia. his argument was shaped after reading Daniel Paul Schreber's 1903 analysis entitled *Memorabilia of a Nerve Patient*. This latter was a prominent judge who became primarily suspicious about his physician, thinking he was switching him into a female in order to abuse him sexually. Subsequently, he was convinced that Divinity had selected him exclusively to be the noble liberator of humankind through the course of sexual transformation, which involved God's gleams beaming into his anus. Schreber goes on to explain his delight in excretion and his routine of "standing before the

mirror or elsewhere, with the upper portion of my body bared, and wearing sundry feminine adornments".[323]

It is to no astonishment, therefore, that Freud's analysis involves sexual repression as the trigger of his disorder. Freud then continues to foreground the premise that the different manifestations of paranoid disorder – delusions of persecution, apocalyptic nightmare, jealousy, and erotomania – are developed from the oblivious alteration of the rudimentary, yet unbacked, suggestion that "*I* (a man) *love him* (a man)".[324] On this ground, paranoia is a rebellion against some repressed (male) homosexual desires, in cases when the forbidden sentiments for a fellow man exceeding the norms are turned into revulsion and projected unconsciously onto the immediate environment.[325] Simply put, the patient's understanding of reality is phantasmagoric, impelled at odds by the unconscious perplexities of homosexual urges.[326]

For post-world war writers, such as Pynchon and Burroughs, paranoia is less an indicator of suppressed desires than an appropriate and essential rational attitude in the present culture. Based on the accounts that were presented in earlier chapters, the characters called paranoid are the ones in possession of considerable knowledge about politics or surrounding powers. [327] Questioning the traditional proposition offered by Freud that paranoia functions by a projection of inner desires onto the outer world, these writers are committed to displaying how those dynamisms are actually present out there. "Now the Psychiatrists tell us that any voices anyone hears in his head originate there, and they do not and cannot have

[7] D. L. Macdonald, "Merrill and Freud: The Psychopathology of Eternal Life", Mosaic: An Interdisciplina ry Critical Journal, vol. 19, no. 4 Literature and Altered States of Consciousness (Part II) (Fall 1986): 159 –172, online, Jstor, Internet, 22 February 2021. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24777661/.

[8] Ibid., pp. 162.

[325] Naomi Schor discusses the gender implications of Freud's theory in "Female Paranoia: The Case for Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism", *Yale French Studies*, vol . 62 (1981): 204-219.

[326] Ibid.

[327] William S. Burroughs, *The Adding Machine : Selected Essays* (New York: Arcade, 1993) 62.

an extraneous origin"; claims Burroughs in his selected essays. "The whole psychiatric dogma that voices are the imaginings of a sick mind" he continues, "has been called into question by voices which are of extraneous origins and are objectively and demonstrably there on tape". As such "the psychotic patients may be tuning in to a global and intergalactic network of voices".[328]

In summary then, for these postmodern writers, political happenings such as presidential assassinations, nuclear wars and peace treaties do not result in simply isolated lunatics tormented by a personal pathology of paranoia. hence, instead of seeking to comprehend the psychology of paranoia, these writers developed the notion of paranoia as an escapist endeavour against unexplainable occurrences. The definition of paranoid escapism, therefore, as a defensive response of the human intellect versus the unfamiliar conspiratorial culture of the post-war epoch cannot be rejected. Yet, this does not automatically entail the rejection of the definition that can be developed from Freud and Schreber's analysis.

In *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau*, John Farrell explains that to be able to execute an intentional act, it is essential for the human mind to have apprehended some knowledge of an existing condition, to have envisaged another condition superior to it, and to have a grasp of the aptitude necessitated to carry the second condition out of the first. Elsewise, any human behaviour is doomed ineligible for a true morally significant action.[329] It is on this ground that human behaviour is adjudged. It should be granted, however, that this process does not take place every time we act.[330] The more standardized and integrated the

[328] Ibid.

[329] John Farrell, "Agent and other", *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2006) 13.

[330] Donald Davidson summarizes the tradition of thought about moral thinking as follows: "When a person acts with an intention, the following seems to be a true, if rough and incomplete, description of what goes on: he sets a positive value on some state of affairs (an end, or the performance by himself of an action satisfying certain conditions); he believes (or knows or perceives) that an action, of a kind open to him to

behaviour is into the communal background, the less effort the human mind is to perform. Human action then is simply caught in the loop of the "Is" and the "Ought". Farrell explains that:

> (. . .) the sense of Is and Ought and the choice that moves between them, embedded in the very form of moral judgement, permit categories of agency that extend beyond the performance of a single action. We see our behaviour as defining us broadly and substantially in ethical terms, investing us with a moral identity that carries beyond the moment or situation. This identity is shaped by the performance of roles that have been devised to accomplish the variety of ends proper to society.[331]

The emphasis given here is not so much on the ethics or the philosophy of action, but on such cases where the human "agent" is not what he feels he should be. The moral space of the individual has been violated so that one cannot act the way he likes, or as he feels he has a right to do.[332] Starting from the Freudian claim that paranoia stems from repression, and based on Farrell's definition of the character, I would argue then, that the figure of paranoid escapism could take a different shape. If paranoid escapism of the post-war fiction places human sanity and individuality at the centre of a conspiracy game, classical literature grounds paranoid escapism in self-aggrandizing and idealism.

The fictional accounts that have rarely been connected to paranoia today can be proven to actually concord with this model of paranoid escapism. Classical narratives such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and long before Cervantes' *Don Quixote* had little to do with the political and social atmosphere causing a mental disorder.[333] This style of writing witnessed a

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perform, will promise or produce or realize the valued state of affairs; and so he acts (that is, he acts *because* of his value or desire and his belief).
Essays on Actions and Events (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 31.

[331] John Farrell: op.cit., pp. 13-16.

[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid.

sudden reappearance in the postmodern period especially during the late twentieth, and beginning of the twenty-first century. Numerous writers indulged in retrieving the essence of classical/ realist literature to produce a fusion of postmodern and classical narratives. The implication in texts like Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, Margret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Marie Phillips *Gods Behaving Badly*, and – as I shall argue –, Tartt's *The Secret History* is that characters admire the cordiality, empathy, and grandeur of their visions all the more for the fact that it settles in contradiction to clichéd life experiences.

The environment that Tartt creates is as ambiguous as that of Pynchon even though her writing might not discernibly convince the reader of an alarming abstruseness. In time when Pynchon deliberates on the need to expose the hidden structures of power, to dig through the unknown while constructing a hardly interpretable chronicle, Tartt's style is less paranoid. Through a hefty practice of collage, pastiche, and intertextuality going back and forth between the Greek orthodoxy and the modernist custom, Tartt casts the muddle of a civilization from which her adolescent protagonists attempt to break free. Unlike Pynchon, she acknowledges that such performance may attain catastrophic consequences for the individual.

It is no easy task to categorize *The Secret History* under any theoretical realm considering its richness in philosophical implications. Upon its release, *The Secret History* provoked great controversy for critics failed to categorize it under the realm of a certain genre. Some critics compared it to Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*, some others classified it as Greek tragedy for all the Greek symbolism the tragic account supports, and some others aligned it with the gothic, the bildungsroman, college fiction, and thriller, among other genres. Interviewed about that, Tartt maintained that "as evidenced by all these disparate comparisons, I don't think it fits into an easy or convenient category".[334] In another interview with Jill

[334] Rebecca Croser: op.cit., pp 6.

Eisenstadt, she then admitted that her fiction reads as a whydunit.[335] An accentuated assessment of the chaotic state of the human psyche when faced with knowledge and power; the novel was as Pearl Bell proposed "pretensions to erudition and moral seriousness".[336] The fact that this work amply demonstrates that a little learning is a tiresome thing makes the breakdown of this narrative of concern when conducting a postmodern analysis on paranoid escapism. The question is how does such a whydunit about some college youth expose a different angle of paranoid escapism, especially in accordance with the traditional Freudian definition of paranoia.

2. Knowledge and Escapism: The Double-Edged Swords

The Secret History in the first place is a mystery narrative in which a great deal revolves around inner corruption and the ability of the human mind to commit crimes to satisfy one's repressed desires. In his essay "Postmodernism and the Postmodern Detective Genre" Wesley Triffitt argues that in the traditional detective fiction, it is the mystery that is the real antagonist, the real evil, with the most necessary element to facilitate the creation of mystery being incoherence and fragmentation.[337] In Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: 'the Boscombe Valley Mystery' Watson meditates: "the deep mystery through which we were groping (. . .) what hellish thing, what absolutely unforeseen and extraordinary calamity could have occurred (. . .) it was something terrible and deadly. What could it be?"[338] Because some details must escape the detective at first, because a puzzle must be the calamity for him, the detective genre is naturally fragmented and

[335] Ibid.

[336] Pearl Bell quoted in Rebecca Croser: op.cit., pp. 7.

[21] Kenneth Van Dover, We Must Have Certainty: Four Essays on the Detective Story, (Susquehanna University Press, 2005) 26, online, Internet, Google Books. 26 November 2021. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=s8SMQ2GBDcoC&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[22] Ibid.

disarranged. Still, however patchy the detective fiction might be, it proves a heroic deed at the end which wriggles some unity and meaning out of the jumbled.[339]

The storyline at hand is not typical of the postmodern fiction for no appreciation of a fragmented narrative is there to recognize. However, while linearity is preserved and little is in the form to confuse the audience as unexpected of a postmodern account, the seemingly classical narrative plays on the boundaries of different genres in a postmodernist fashion. As discussed before in previous chapters, the draft of the postmodern philosophy and fiction deconstructs what some critics call the "the all-embracing "metanarrative".[340] This agenda has much to do with the conventional detective narrative; a design standard to an atrocious secretive murder being the motive that initiates the total story, with an intelligence engaged to untangle the illegal particulars in diverse ways. The thrilling detective vigorously attempts to never miss any detail about the murder, that is in short the belief that "everything is connected" (G.R., p.703). Once chronologically assembled, the facts are evaluated with the hope that they would disclose a reasonable elucidation to the mystery. The reader is drifted between the suspense and haziness that this narrative delivers; his mind keeps working in a highly realistic manner – much like the investigator(s) in play – to construct meaning of what challenges his intellect.[341]

The detective narrative pattern follows one of the two scenarios; either a howcatchem or a whodunit. In the first, the reader is fairly aware from the beginning of the tale of the identity of the murderer, even when the investigator is not; therefore he meticulously traces the investigator's steps while attempting to solve the case. In the second, the reader and the investigator are both ignorant of

[23] Ibid., pp. 125.

[24] Bruno Zerweck, "Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction", Style, vol. 35, no. 1 (2001): 151–176, online, Jstor, Internet, 23 May 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.35.1.151/.

[25] Ibid.

the identity of the killer, so they passionately join together in the process of enquiry which grants continuous suspense till the end of the narrative. In both cases, one aspect is common to the traditional detective account; claiming the possession of the ultimate truth. Guaranteed is the flatteringly satisfactory conclusion at the end of the typical detective fiction through the active effort of a commendable intelligence, which not only re-establishes harmony and order but also eradicates any chance of vagueness or mis-judgment. The detective is portrayed as a hero, with perfect brainpower fiercely intelligent and perceptive; one who possesses 'perfect reasoning' and extraordinary powers of observation.[342]

As explained in previous parts of this study, the postmodernist narrative does not distinguish reality and certainty as something to be seized or requested for, but as illusions.[343] Understanding truth as an illusion and reality as naturally fragmented, a meaningful conclusion is not likely in postmodern fiction. If the traditional detective struggles to move towards connection and the ultimate restoration of interpretation, the postmodern counterpart deconstructs these connections and conclusions.[344] Total knowledge is suspected, a single voice is ignored, and the belief in multiplicity and openness, with all its side effects in self-contradiction and incomprehensibility, is the new norm. In this regard, the shift from the conventional detective to the postmodern counterpart is very culturally suggestive; Karen Seago detailly explains in detail that:

> Because crime fiction engages with the motives and means of how a crime is committed, it is deeply concerned with characterization, psychological motivation and the minutiae of everyday life which give the investigating detective clues to departures from what is considered normal. Crime and

[342] Ali Gunes, "The Deconstruction of 'Metanarrative' of Traditional Detective Fiction", *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Karabük: Karabük University, 2018): 216-229. https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i2.1228/.

[343] Apparent in Derrida's reporting of reality as objects and ideas produces by difference, instigating "*an endless inventory of relations (...) truth as a result will always be incomplete*". Also in Baudrillard's argument of the vanishing of the real and its replacement with the simulacrum.

[344] Ibid.

> criminals are indicators of what a particular culture views as legitimate and crime fiction functions as a barometer of society's values and morals reflecting and interrogating what is inscribed a crime. The central engagement with what, who and why a particular behaviour or action is deemed deviant gives insight into structures and ideologies of power and is indicative of cultural and social anxieties at a particular time in a particular culture.[345]

Correspondingly, Tartt prefers for her speaker Richard Papen right in the prologue to tell of the murder of Bunny calling it "a crime for which I was partly responsible". He seems to learn how to live with it, yet often appears disturbed by the weight of his deed and coldness; he admits that it is the most important incident of his life: "I suppose at one time in my life I might have had a number of stories, but now there is no other. This is the only story I will ever be able to tell" (S. H. 2). The reader is then thrilled to find out how a schoolboy could have committed such a crime as the novelist, like Shakespeare, fancies apprehension over astonishment. For what appears to be similar to a conventional detective not only in structure but also in its classical style, the development is rather drastically different and intensely indicative.

Before the story turns into a detective, a synopsis about the life of the narrator and the rest of the group members is given first for a reason. The pattern of the secret history is a rather less familiar and minorly explored sub-genre of crime fiction; the "whydunit", though not easily perceptible at first glance. [346] This is slightly different from the howcatchem as it deals predominantly not with the detective's efforts to catch the sinner but with the motives behind committing the crime. The narrative revolves more around surveying the motivations that the characters had for murder, than the preparation and the termination that reveals the murderer. Since the highlight of the narrative seems to be given away in advance,

[345] Karen Seago, "Introduction and Overview: Crime (Fiction) in translation", *The Journal of Specialized Translation*, vol. 22 (2014): 2-14, online, Internet, 20 December 2020. Available: http://www.jostrans.org/issue22/art_seago.pdf/.

[346] Mullan, John. *How Novels Work*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 31.

the reader is dragged in to survey the psychological transformations of the characters. The students' lies and rivalries will, we realize, turn horrible, "so we are ready to detect their nastiness".[347]

The novel depicts, in a different way, a world which is progressively divorced from the real as a consequence of the pervasive influence of knowledge and representation which dominate the élite culture. The outcome for the individual is that the self is assumed as being deflated of substance, neglecting rationality and consistency. A particular characteristic of the psychology of the characters represented in Tartt's novel is what J. G. Ballard labelled "the death of affect".[348] This concept is employed by psychoanalysts and therapists to indicate feelings: as in being affected by a certain factor. As such, "affect" is believed to be an essential manifestation of living a normal social life, for it is by which that the individual makes sense of his own experiences, and significantly, by which he sympathizes with other social members' experiences.[349] Complementing Jameson's understanding of the workings of postmodernity in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Ballard advocates that the human ability to sense authentic sentiments has been weakening since the late twentieth century.[350] Postmodernity has simply altered the structure of expressing and sensing emotions, and in Jameson's words "(now) since there is no longer a self-present to do the feeling we are more subject to the more free-floating and impersonal emotions which Lyotard terms 'intensities'".[351]

In *The Secret History*, this "death of affect", I argue, is constructed by means of excessive misused knowledge. The main drawback to knowledge as

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[347] Ibid.

[348] Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*: op.cit., pp. 183-184.

[349] Ibid.

[350] Ibid.

[351] Fredric Jameson quoted in Nicol, Bran: op.cit., pp. 185.

acclaimed by the conventional ways of thought, we recall, is the enslavement to science for legitimization. Great philosophers of the age of reason such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Buffon, among others, related reason to all aspects of life including human conscience and societal and political matters, the practice which the postmodern critic much reproaches.[352] In deconstructing metanarratives, Tartt adopts the tropes of college fiction as she places the story within academe; a setting traditionally related to evident information, high qualifications, uncorrupted awareness and the birthplace of most theoretical and technical developments. Her protagonists are placed at the top of the social hierarchy through the symbol of college. They separate themselves from the masses for they possess knowledge and power as Janice Rossen advocates in her book *The University In Modern Fiction*:

> In fiction, (. . .) there is a tacit acknowledgement that academe as a whole consists of an elite community, which defines itself in part by excluding others (...) Like their counterparts in any other profession, academics delight in reinforcing this view of themselves as comprising circles which are closed to the uninitiated. They also tend to compete with each other within that realm for positions of power.[353]

In college, Tartt detaches the classics group from the rest of the students in a variety of ways, most obviously in the geographical and societal parameters. The building where they have seminars is located in an isolated spot on the campus perimeter, and Julian insists that the group attends his courses exclusively for it is "*better to know one book intimately than a* hundred superficially" (S. H. 32). Unlike the rest of the teachers on campus, Julian is also completely detached. Professor Laforgue censures his beliefs saying: "Forgive me, but I should think the elitist values of such a man would be repugnant to you", he continues "Frankly,

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[352] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge": op.cit., pp. xxiv.

[353] Janice Rossen quoted in Elaine Showalter, "Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents" (Oxford University Press, 2005) 4, online, Google Books, Internet, November 29 2021. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=jnpf3RJXnF8C&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

this is the first time I have ever heard of his accepting a pupil who is on such considerably financial aid." (S. H. 33). In another instance, Laforgue says that he has what to he considered some very odd ideas about teaching. He explains that he and his students have virtually no contact with the rest of the division and that whoever is told to study with him, must have read the right things, and hold similar views.

Typical under the postmodern hierarchy is the exclusion of individuals from what seems to be a privilege, on the basis of the amount of knowledge they possess.[354] As the narrative progresses, knowledge of ancient Greek language and culture is what the protagonists have in common. Richard says that "In a certain sense … they, too knew this beautiful and harrowing landscape, centuries dead; they'd had the same experience of looking up from their books with fifth-century eyes and finding the world disconcertingly sluggish and alien, as if it were not their home." (S. H. 203) Richard was able to display his familiarity with the Greek language when he overheard the group debating a grammar problem in the library. The answer he provides is the only tactic that afforded him a second interview with Julian, who finally permitted his access to the course. Having proved his worth and interest in their knowledge, Richard is welcomed to take part in their assemblies. Tartt's representation in this case is only a symbol which echoes the dangerous side of the all-explaining knowledge. Observing the cryptic nature of what information they possess and the single-mindedness that stems from attending one class with one teacher makes the reader doubt their abilities at accurate interpretation.

In a world portrayed in the form of college wherein knowledge is the only valuable accommodation, affect is indeed dead. Henry comments on the difference between the elite and the average to Richard as he says: "you don't feel a great deal of emotion for other people, do you? (. . .) It doesn't matter, (. . .) I don't

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[354] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge": op.cit., pp. xxiv.

either" (S. H. 436). Continuously, the characters use Greek knowledge for their own advantage to separate themselves from the masses in Hampden and to belittle the aftereffects of their actions. After the murder of Bunny Julian speaks "about a Hindu saint being able to slay a thousand on the battlefield and it not being a sin unless he felt remorse'" (S. H. 444) suggesting that the feeling itself is the source of sin, not the deed.

Janice Rossen suggests that the public becomes fascinated with the academy for two prospects: idealistic and political. The former is in the fascination with knowledge and the hunt for more understanding. The latter is in viewing knowledge as means to reach a certain end. While Richard – and most average men – strive for the second, the Greeks group aims for the first. Richard remarks of the group that:

> They were intrigued by even the most mundane of my habits: by my fondness for mystery novels and my chronic movie-going; by the fact that I used disposable razors from the supermarket and cut my own hair instead of going to the barber; even by the fact that I read papers and watched the news on television from time to time (a habit which seemed to them an outrageous eccentricity, peculiar to me alone; none of them was the least bit interested in anything that went on in the world, and their ignorance of current events and even recent history was rather astounding. Once, over dinner, Henry was quite startled to learn from me that men had walked on the moon."
>
> (S. H. 93)

Through the idealistic learning that Tartt installs in her characters, especially Henry, she demonstrates the postmodern ideology that knowledge is the end in itself. Clearly, studying an ancient dead language and customs has no applicability to the modern world, yet the high interest in Greek is demonstrated mostly for preternatural purposes. What Julian and his fellows seek in their idealistic endeavours is uniquely different from any scholarly ambitions: acquiring more

control over life and death and overpassing the natural functions of the human being. This is simply the "death of affect" in its purest form.

The portrayal of Bunny as a liability to the group is of high implication. Lack of knowledge and intense affect may be said to be represented in the personality of Bunny. He was never welcomed by the group members even though they have been together for a long time. Bunny and Richard stand on the two opposite sides of the spectrum, and from the early stages, Richard makes clear this opposition as he explains that Bunny will die and he will succeed. The principal reason for him to be excluded from the group's activities and secret plans is the very same thing that allowed Richard to be included within them: knowledge of Greek culture. About Bunny Richard remarks:

> Though Greek gave him so much trouble, he'd actually studied it far longer than any of the rest of us, since he was twelve (. . .) He suggested slyly that this had simply been a childish whim of his, a manifestation of early genius á la Alexander Pope; but the truth of the matter (as I learned from Henry) was that he suffered from fairly severe dyslexia and the Greek had been a mandatory course of therapy, his prep school having theorized it was good to force the dyslexic student to study languages like Greek, Hebrew, and Russian, which did not utilize the Roman alphabet. At any rate, his talent as a linguist was considerably less than he led one to believe, and he was unable to wade through even the simplest assignments without continual questions, complaints, and infusions of food."
>
> (S. H. 94)

Affect is replaced with knowledge. The fact that Bunny's personality exhibits less of the latter and more of the former clashes with the altered structure of human sensation experienced in the postmodern times as Jameson suggested. This proposition recalls the Pynchonian postmodern ideology that the source of all discomfort in the postmodern universe is knowledge, since the more the individual discerns, the more anxious he becomes about what can possibly happen. Ironic are

the words of Alexander Pope in the novel which stresses that "*a little learning is a dangerous thing*; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring". [355] (S. H. 90) The Greek professor puts it as such: "the more cultivated a person is, the more intelligent, the more repressed, then the more he needs some method of channelling the primitive impulses he's worked so hard to kill". (S. H. 48) This is an essential submission regarding *The Secret History*, one that links the paranoid escapism triggered by knowledge to the Freudian institution of paranoia.

3. Fear, Body panic, and the Dionysian Frenzy

As stated above, *The Secret History* operates by merging different genres in a postmodernist fashion. Apart from the detective nature of the novel and reflecting on the gloomy atmosphere inhabited by the characters, *The Secret History* is often considered a gothic account. In *Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* by Maria Beville, the writer introduces her original attribute that the gothic-postmodern is a distinctive genre by itself. While she separates her argument from the predictable supernatural obsession that is usually associated with the gothic[356], she suggests the aptitude of the gothic to expose the postmodern atmosphere.[357] For Beville, this genre of the gothic-postmodern carefully appropriates and abrogates the conventional gothic topoi to illuminate the postmodern scenery characterized by meaninglessness, indeterminacy, and obscure paranoia. She distinguishes the genre as: "An amplification of the gothic language of terror to encompass the more recent terrors of our postmodern age and

[355] In Greek mythology, for the Macedonians the Pierian Spring was sanctified to the Muses. The expression bears a metaphorical sense denoting to the source of knowledge, art and science; and was propagated in a poem by Alexander Pope "An Essay on Criticism" (1711) from which the quote is retrieved.

[356] Maria Belville, *Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (New York: Rodopi. 2009) 9.
Beville refers to this consideration of the gothic as what Fred Botting assumes "candy gothic" in his book Gothic: The New Critical Idiom (1996). The term refers mainly to the contemporary fashion of vampire and werewolf manuscripts and television productions.

[357] Ibid.

also the theories of terror that have been put forward as part of the enterprise of postmodern cultural theory".[358]

The joining approach that functions in both the gothic and the postmodern and renders them combinable is the "overriding concept of terror". The marriage of these genera together overly resides on panic and apprehension that is (as explained in previous chapters) of high relevance to the late-capitalist society, which is marked by standardizing the human brain, lobbying big industries and businesses, plotting against the unknown by the unknown, and embracing madness and viciousness. The depiction of the environment in Tartt's account reveals this tenet; "Horrific as it was. the present dark, I was afraid to leave it for the other, permanent dark — jelly and bloat, the muddy pit", describes Richard. (S. H. 443) Hence, it is in this use of the gothic features that Tartt's enterprise of the postmodern condition is exposed. Belville clarifies that some of the questions that are explored independently in the gothic and the postmodernist fiction, are one and the same, namely: crises of identity, fragmentation of the self, the darkness of the human psyche, and the philosophy of being and knowing.[359]

It is the perceivable traces of terror and anguish that differentiate *The Secret History* from the classical coming-of-age narratives which prove inapplicable to the postmodern literature. The novel is an expression of the dark interruptions of the human consciousness, sensuality, depression, morbid enthrallment, forbidden feelings, and the sublime aspects of pain and terror ascended from inhabiting a chaotic universe, acquiring hazardous comprehensions, and committing a reprehensible sin. To heighten the postmodern element of fear and confusion, Tartt resorts to a gothic-like narrative for it is too often seen as a means of accessing the real or unconscious and the dark side of subjectivity and reality, through its excesses, abjections and monsters.[360] Hence,

[358] Ibid.

[359] Ibid., pp. 53.

[360] Ibid.

Tartt's novel provides new insight into the postmodern; one that is rather anticipated centuries before as in Belville's explanation of the postmodern experience.

"Gothic writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offered an insight into the human condition in a manner that one could argue anticipated the evolution of literature towards the realm of postmodernism", Writes Belville.[361] For instance, a primary concern of gothic literature is "our lack of access to reality".[362] From this point of view, one could argue that the postmodernist imagination, that which values fiction and fantasy over a quantified, limited concept of reality, "is quite possibly inspired by the gothic".[363] Subsequently, it is important to account for the fundamental role that the gothic plays in the expression of the postmodern experience through literature: "that experience of darkness, confusion, and lack of meaning and authority in a desensitized world that confronts alienation and death on a daily basis".[364]

Therefore, Tartt's portrayal of the paranoid disorder among her characters is relatively different from that of Pynchon; it can be précised simply as horrifying about the postmodern atmosphere. Fear and anxiety are associated with a fluctuating world outlined by violence, incomprehension and loss of meaning and faith. They soon develop into a subjective practice of reluctance and distrust. What turns later into a paranoid escapist disorder is this fear of the outer world for the group of students, specifically Henry.

From the beginning, Tartt demonstrates such darkness and terror firstly through the special household in which the group usually gathers. An old country house with dark and monotonous nights: "It was tremendous". describes Richard; "I saw, in sharp, ink-black silhouette against the sky, turrets and pikes, a widow's

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[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.

walk". This representation is also a voiceover of the narrator's own anxiety and fearfulness regarding himself and his environment.[365] Richard's account of the house continues to develop along the narrative; a "sweet, musty smell … walls were spidery with the shadows of potted palms" and bewildering hullabaloos as if "someone in the back of the house was playing the piano" (S. H. 77). Tartt's selection of the settings to place her protagonists is highly troublesome and anxiety-provoking that everything tends directly towards the catastrophe. Never is the reader's attention relaxed.[366] When Richard first describes the campus of Hampden College he is consumed by "the shock of first seeing a birch tree at night, rising up in the dark as cool and slim as a ghost. And the nights, bigger than imagining: black and gusty and enormous, disordered and wild with stars"; (S. H. 13) He also spends the Christmas break in an old worn-out warehouse that metaphorically resembles the setting of the post-war; wrecked ashes and residues of what once used to be a liveable site. The cold in the warehouse was like nothing Richard have known before or since. Once falling sick, Richard realizes that "the true cause of this malady was hard, merciless shivering, his muscles contracting as mechanically as if by electric impulse, all night long, every night." (S. H. 115)

Not only the surrounding elements of nature and buildings that trigger unease and panic within the narrator, but also the people's aura with which Richard is not yet fully acquainted when he first steps at Hampden. Outlined through the words of the narrator, it is hard to decide which characteristic of the other characters is real and which is a pure phantasm. Richard describes Francis "In a swish of black cashmere and cigarette smoke, (who) had brushed past me in a corridor." And when he physically touched his arm he was stunned that "he was a creature of flesh and blood", only to rapidly become a hallucination again, "a figment of the imagination stalking down the hallway as heedless of me as ghosts, in their shadowy rounds, are said to be heedless of the living". (S. H. 22)

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[365] Ibid.

[366] from Horace Walpole, the "founder" of the gothic genre, in his claim in the introduction to his own novel, *The Castle of Otranto.*

These traces of mystery, terror, ghosts and creepy creatures result in a perplexed mindset which has little connection and appreciation to reality as is. Stressing upon the fact that Richard is a young student, he appears to be concerned with his own view in his own eyes and in the eyes of the others around him more than the troublesome incidents in which he takes part. The manifestation of paranoia in the character of Richard is summed in the unresolved emotions and the psychological imprisonment, and it has a lot to do with his immediate fear-provoking settings. Once again he describes the college building with a "peculiar layout, with unexpected windows and halls that led nowhere and low doors I had to duck to get through" (S. H. 65). This account mirrors what he is experiencing psychologically; a troubling sense of trepidation and disorientation that only escalates as the storyline proceeds. Evidently, after Bunny's incident, as Richard approaches the Corcoran family he notices his college that the place was like a maze.[367] This maze metaphor is suggestive of Richard's character, for it may not be particularly the place that feels like a maze, but rather his own mentality and psychological status.

A manifestation of his troubled psyche, Richard's sleeping pattern is a recurrent theme in the story, for approximately in every chapter of the novel something is said about the way he was found asleep. It is not only the sleeping aspect that raises concern about Richard, but also the dreams that accompany this pattern. From a postmodern lens, the character appears most of the time unable to distinguish reality from his dreams which usually relate in some way to what he experienced that day; "In some strange country between dream and waking, (he) found (himself) in a cemetery, not the one Bunny was buried in but a different one" (S. H. 423). Richard appears to enter a liminal phase when asleep, a state in which he is not fully present neither in the real world nor in his delusional one. This mingling is repetitively interrupted by some other characters stepping in and

[367] Hanna Makela: op.cit., pp. 189.

forcing Richard to travel back to the real. In one episode he says: “it was almost dark when somewhere, through great depths, I became aware that someone was knocking at my door”. Camilla remarks: “all you ever do is sleep! Why is it you are always sleeping when I come to see you” (S. H. 205). Strangely, she is not the only one; about every one of the group walks in when Richard is asleep at different points in the novel.

In addition to the fact that Richard is disturbed by the gloomy backgrounds, the abnormal people, and the inconsistent collage of sleep and insomnia; apparently every student seems to enter this liminal phase through drunkenness. Several students of Hampden are drug addicts and often portrayed in states of frenzy and dizziness in which – in Richard’s words – “everything was bathed in a celestial light” (S. H. 285). The mingling of real and fantastic worlds manifested in the disjointed sleeping patterns and drunkenness is an exhibition of Tartt’s characters’ inner confusion and restlessness. “Nothing is lonelier or more disorienting than insomnia,” Richard says in one scene, and in another “I was tired but I couldn’t sleep; my irritation and perplexity were growing stronger, kept in motion by a ridiculous sense of unease” (S. H. 138). He also recalls falling down “like a dead man”, dreaming of observing his own corpse, freezing to death. In his mentally balanced times, Richard often appears to be out of conscious and paranoid about his own presence, he says;

> (. . .) And each time I crossed the footbridge over the river, twice a day, I had to stop and scoop in the coffee-coloured snow at the road's edge until I found a decent-sized rock. I would then lean over the icy railing and drop it into the rapid current (. . .) perhaps some attempt to prove to it that I, though invisible, did exist.”
>
> (S. H. 131)

The severe pain of life and existence, in general, is highly depicted in Richard’s character. His depressing life in the warehouse is rather a synopsis of what he feels for life altogether; from as early as the eighth page of the novel, of

his youth he states: "I honestly can't remember much else about those years except a certain mood that permeated most of them, a melancholy feeling" (S. H. 8). Moving on in the narrative again he says: "I was as depressed as I have ever been in my life. I pulled down the shades and lay down on my unmade bed and went back to sleep" (S. H. 111). In many instances Richard refers to his life in a rather existentialist manner; he calls it "my short sad life" which he considers to be "the essential rottenness of the world". (S. H. 547) Particularly distinguished are feelings of discomfort, fear, and doubt about the surroundings in Richard's as in Slothrop's and Oedipa's perspectives. "My melancholy began to turn into something like an alarm" (S. H. 104); "a spider of anxiety crawled up the back of my neck" (S. H. 318); "my God, I thought, what are they (people) doing?" (S. H. 145) Richard exclaims. If Slothrop and Oedipa voice over much confusion about life and the possibilities of plotting conspiracies resulting in them fabricating illusive contrasting scenarios, Richard is not much of a difference. Drowned in his own uncertainties about his environment and his social network, not being able to fathom the meaning of his existence nor the meaning of what criminality he is involved in, he keeps dazing back and forth between sleep and reality, between assumptions and observations without a significant conclusion.

Echoing Slothrop and Oedipa – though, in a subtle way –, the narrator of *The Secret History* falls for his own fantastic illusion and settles in his own private world. He openly maintains that he fabricated his own subjective secret history that challenges the mundane reality of his Californian upbringing. "My years there created for me an expendable past, disposable as a plastic cup. Which I suppose was a very great gift, in a way" admits Richard; "On leaving home, however, I was able to fabricate a new and far more satisfying history, full of striking, simplistic environmental influences; a colourful past.[368]" (S. H. 7)

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368 It should be noted that this expression of a colourful past does not only refer to Richard's life in the illusory world, but also the murder. Reviewers of Tartt's novel often dwell on the fact that her narrator finds delight in recognizing the beauty of evil. He explains that he spent all his time in the library, reading about the Jacobean dramatists Webster and Middleton, Tourneur and Ford. He concludes that reading by realizing that "*it was an obscure specialization, but the candlelit and treacherous universe in which (these*

Following that, Richard's perception of truth is vague and unstable. He believes that telling lies – to himself as well as to others – is not necessarily wrongful for it allows room for other opportunities, and other possibilities of truth to take place. With low self-esteem, Richard believes that if there was one thing he is good at, it is "lying on his feet for it is a sort of a gift (he) had" (S. H. 26). He admits that after blending in with the wealthy and earning some money from telling a web of lies. This image of the protagonist provides the narration with undecidedness, paradox, and instability because it denies the reader any satisfying certainty since the edge between the embellished tale and the actual truth is blurred in a postmodernist fashion.

However Richard's case varies in a way from that of Pynchon's protagonists; if Slothrop and Oedipa manufacture imaginary scenarios and live in subjective illusory worlds for they prove unable to retrieve authentic knowledge or truth, Richard's delusional world is created for the exact opposite reason: to conceal what is ugly truth and memories that may be pregnant of meaning and escape into a more enhanced world. "I wish I could remember more of what was said that day _ actually, I do remember much of what I said, most of it too fatuous for me to recall with pleasure" (S. H. 29). He simply does not want to recall truths that have unfavourable meaning to him, and he lies to himself that he could not remember. At one point in the narrative he asks himself: "Does such a thing as 'the fatal flaw,' that showy dark crack running down the middle of a life, exist outside literature?" He then briefly admits: "I used to think it didn't. Now I think it does. And I think that mine is this: a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs." He reaches continuously along the story for the attractive and the gilded: "The

dramatists) moved – of sin unpunished, and of innocence destroyed – was one that I found appealing". He fascinates at the titles of their plays because he find them strangely seductive. As such, the one thing Richard confirms is that he understood not only evil, but the extravagance of tricks with which evil presents itself as good. That even stepping forward facing the horrifying scene of the murder of a friend, for the group, was "*a silent-movie comedian slipping on a banana peel, before he toppled backwards, and fell to his death*" (S. H. 227).

cufflinks were beaten up and had someone else's initials on them, but they looked like real gold" (S. H. 26) and he kept wearing them for that. Ironically, Richard draws the comparison between himself and Gatsby, for both of them grow obsessed with the beauty of illusion as they fanatically attempt to escape the truth and rewrite their past lives:

> When I could no longer concentrate on Greek (. . .) I read The Great Gatsby. It is one of my favourite books and I had taken it out of the library in hopes that it would cheer me up; of course, it only made me feel worse, since in my own humourless state I failed to see anything except what I construed as certain tragic similarities between Gatsby and myself.
>
> (S. H. 72)

This aspect of individualism and self-absorption resulted in some way in Richard's independence from the group. He was not summoned to contribute to the Greek bacchanalian ceremonial; he was the last among the group fellows to be informed about the murder of the farmer, and the last to learn about the collective plot against Bunny. In fact, it may be even suggested that Richard does not contribute to much of the story which he claims to be his only life experience. If not for narrating the account, one can imagine that he would not have been in it at all. Henry declares to Richard that he was simply the alarm bell, for no other task he seems to serve throughout his time in Vermont but to transmit the news he receives from one group member to the other. Acknowledging his estrangement, Richard demonstrates a great deal of independence from the group. Henry tells him: "But you're so scrupulous about not borrowing money that it's rather silly (…) I think you might have died in that warehouse rather than wire one of us for a couple of hundred dollars." (S. H. 219) Remaining an outsider does not particularly generate a positive sensation for Richard. Nevertheless, perhaps the fortune because of which he comes out as the only successful character in the novel is his capability of self-reliance and his minor involvement with the paranoid engagements of the group.

If a parallel could be drawn between Richard, Slothrop, and Oedipa regarding the paranoid escapist mentality that derives from the external influences, an equal parallel can be drawn between Henry and the Schreber-inspired Freudian paradigm of paranoia. As explained earlier, the unusual yearning for the loss of consciousness is one of the profound themes in the narrative at hand. It epitomizes the ultimate state of fear and anxiety as the individual submits to forgetfulness. The "pleasure displeasure" that Belville explains referring to Kant and Lyotard's viewpoints as:

> When the subject has this sublime experience, it is one of simultaneous 'terror' at the loss of 'time moving' and 'exultation' at the comprehension of the 'finite'. That simultaneous experience of terror and exultation, fear and desire (. . .) (Lyotard) suggests that through these Differends one has the potential to exist for a moment beyond the perceived homogeneity that governs our acceptance of imposed realities and identities. Importantly this postmodern approach to the sublime acknowledges it as significant not for its infinite or transcendental qualities which were valued by Kant, but for its subjective and self- realizing properties.[369]

Belville resumes her explanation that the postmodern state of unconsciousness and loss of character, "unlike the romantic sublime, is neither beautiful nor necessarily invested with a moral imperative; instead, between knowing and feeling, it is at the limits of ethics and aesthetics."[370] This postmodern state of unconsciousness is far from being an attempt at certainty, meaningfulness, or truth as in the case of Pynchon's protagonists. It is rather a straight vacuuming out of feelings and cancelling of one's connection with the exterior world. Professor Julian explains this very argument as he reminds his students that "beauty is terror. Whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it. And what could

[369] Belville, Maria. op.cit., pp. 25.

[370] Ibid., pp. 78.

be more terrifying and beautiful, to souls like the Greeks or our own, than to lose control completely?" (S. H. 42).

Though the argument presented by Belville acknowledges the escapist properties concerned with this discussion, the link between this "moment beyond perceived homogeneity" and the idea of the "repressed desires" is yet to be uncovered. As explained earlier, the Greek students, and specifically Henry, had unlimited access to knowledge about mythology, Greek and Roman art, and the violent godly practices that they could conduct. With regard to the Greek mythology and the creation of Greek culture, the conflict between reason and the irrational is largely confronted in Nietzsche's *The Dionysian Vision of the World* (1870), and *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) where he sets out an explanation of the becoming of the world and the difference between the human logical mind and his drives; an explanation fundamental to all his later philosophical contributions.[371] The notion of the irrational in this regard has less to do with the human awareness and feelings about the world, but this latter's appealing side, which is only comprehended through the Dionysian vision.[372]

Nietzsche suggests that the "aesthetic phenomenon" of the world becoming is based on "Nature" having two artistic energies, the Apollonian and the Dionysian with no intervention of the human.[373] These artistic energies operate in a conflicting manner. The Apollonian impulse conceals the world through an

[371] The becoming of the world through the Dionysian vision is usually coupled with the composition of music by Nietzsche and following critics and philosophers. Christoph Cox in Nietzsche, Dionysus, and the Ontology of Music, relates describes this idea of Nietzsche as an ontology of music. He speaks of an "incomparable harmony" that combines both consonant and dissonant notes serving as the origin of the becoming of the world. This mirrors the motion of coming into the life and passing away, which is not intelligible at first glance by conceptual languages. Since music is a fusion between consonance and dissonance, the world becomes an aesthetic musical piece composed of agreement and disagreement. This very idea is also expressed by Tartt when the characters decided to undergo the Bacchanal.
A Companion to Nietzsche, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 495-513.

[372] Ibid.

[373] These energies are inspired by the Greek deity Apollo and Dionysus sons of Zeus. Apollo is the god of sun, logical thinking, purity, and structure. Dionysus is the god of wine, dance, illogical emotions and untamed instincts.

excessive accentuation on appearance. In creating a dream world of beauty and ideals, the Apollonian sheds light away from the Dionysian pain and ecstasy.[374] Nietzsche ascribes the following aspects to the Apollonian and Dionysian respectively: "dreams" and "intoxication". The Apollonian dreamworld is marked by *Schein* or "seeming", which implication ranges from luminosity to hiding or veiling up.[375] The luminosity of Apollo's dominion makes the god of "*principium individuationis*", which denotes self-protection from contradiction. The Apollonian is then governed by the principles of logicality and self-discipline which is echoed to a certain extent in Freud's superego in the human psyche. Nietzsche explains the Apollonian as:

> (...) it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly to another, nor is it beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be where it beautiful for some people and ugly for others (...) absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colours (...)[376]

It is, however, the Dionysian intoxication that happens to be the best at realizing the world in Nietzsche's vision.[377] Reflecting on the "drive of springtime" and the Bacchanalia in honour of Dionysus, Nietzsche explains "intoxication" as a sort of unrestrained "rush" rather than a narcotic stupor as in psychology.[378] In this case, the Apollonian *principium individuationis* is completely sacrificed and the boundaries of logic are broken.[379] Language is substituted by singing, and walking is replaced by dancing and running. Once the human consciousness is lost, the physical body is tuned in with nature, the logical principles violated, and there

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[374] Ibid.

[375] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, tr. Ira J. Allen, (Minneapolis: Univocal publishing, 2013) 5.

[376] Ibid., pp. 6.

[377] *A Companion to Nietzsche.* op.cit., pp. 104.

[378] Ibid.

[379] Nietzsche calls the Dionysus "ho lysios", which stands for the liberator who undoes the ties.

remains no demand for the brain at going back. The wisdom behind this is to express the suffering intrinsic in the world in terms of intoxication or ecstasy where pain and pleasure seem to be intertwined, instead of simply finding shelter in the seeming, or the dreamworld that eases down the suffering. Nietzsche suggests that:

> (...) the Dionysian vision of the Will's pain-bliss connection is related to that Will's being eternally suffering and contradictory (…) this suffering Will [380], needs the rapturous vision, pleasurable seeming, for its continuous relief (…) we are wholly captured by and comprised of this seeming, which we are compelled to apprehend as empirical reality, as that which is truly not, an ongoing becoming in time, space, and causality.[381]

Keith Ansell Pearson explains that this philosophy revolves around the awareness that the world of becoming is realized mostly through the Dionysian vision, in a time when the Apollonian dreamworld provides only the chance for escape into the world of logic and beauty.[382] In *The Secret History*, many are the references to the Dionysian and the Bacchanal as an act of liberation for the group apart from Richard and especially for Henry. The first encounter with the idea of the loss of consciousness is in Richard's first class with Julian in which "The discussion that day was about the loss of self (. . .) he began by talking about what he called the burden of the self, and why people want to lose the self in the first place". They honour the act to be "the fire of pure being" and Julian concludes: "I hope we're all ready to leave the phenomenal world, and enter into the sublime?" (S. H. 36). Correspondingly, the group appreciates the idea even more as the lecturer shifts from theory to practice about the Dionysian:

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[380] The Will is understood to mean the "heart of nature" or the "primordial unity" in Nietzsche's words, that is being as opposed to appearance. Schopenhauer saw that the Will was representative of the Dionysian: the cosmic madness of drunkenness, creativity and the complete forgetting of the self by becoming integrated with a primal unity of the world.

[381] *A Companion to Nietzsche.* op.cit., pp. 105.

[382] Ibid.

> The revellers were apparently hurled back into a non-rational, pre- intellectual state, where the personality was replaced by something completely different – and by 'different' I mean something to all appearances not mortal. Inhuman (. . .) I thought of The Bacchae, whose violence and savagery made me uneasy, as did the sadism of its bloodthirsty god (. . .) it was a triumph of barbarism over reason: dark, chaotic, inexplicable
>
> (S. H. 40)

Later on that "fire of pure being" is unleashed and the group – apart from Richard and Bunny – succeed in achieving the ultimate state of unconsciousness. Henry describes the experience as such: "It was heart-shaking. Glorious (…) Duality ceases to exist; there is no ego, no "I." (…) You have no idea how pallid the workday boundaries of ordinary existence seem, after such an ecstasy. It was like being a baby" (S. H. 168). To recall Ruth Benedict's [383] explanation of the Dionysian, the act is "an escape from the boundaries imposed on him by his five senses, to break through the usual sensory routines into another order of experience".[384] Succumbing to what appears to be a free practice of the Greek bacchanal is the triumph of paranoid escapism that materializes in response to repressed desires. These desires are not nurtured out of homosexuality as Freud suggests, but more profoundly from a humanly attempt to transcend the physical boundaries and biological senses.[385]

Freud himself explains in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) that man is intrinsically an entity thriving on aggression, a desire present in the unconscious

[383] Ruth Benedict was an American anthropologist who adopted Nietzsche's typology to what she called "simplification", in dealing with the Indian cultures she attempted at researching.

[384] Ruth Benedict quoted in John Alan Cohan, "The Primtive Mind and Modern Man", (Bentham Science Publishers, 30 December 2010) 31, online, Google Books, Internet, 27 November 2021. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=m5fbAwAAQBAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[385] Ibid.

and is willing to escape from thought to action.[386] This is achieved by means of paranoid escapism exemplified in the Dionysian frenzy Henry and his comrades obsessively value. Though not specified as a paranoid outlook by Freud, he explains the inner-workings of Man whose Dionysian drives have been repressed historically, he says:

> the element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful shape of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.[387]

For the outcome of the unconsciousness of the human mind is hardly expectable, Henry and his colleagues do not have a full grasp of what happened or how it happened at the time of the bacchanal; the killing of the innocent farmer. Right before the murder, Richard voices his fear and uncertainty about the atmosphere of the forest that day; he says "this is Kansas before the cyclone hits (. . .) the woods were deathly still, more forbidding than I had ever seen them – green and black and stagnant, dark with the smells of mud and rot" (S. H. 296-298). Applying Freud's view, the farmer replaces what he calls the neighbour, for he was the object upon whom the repressed desires of the group at aggressiveness and body transcending had to fall. This is evident especially that the group did not feel a pang of slight guilt about their deed, and the only disturbing matter was to be caught or punished. "When Charles came back with Camilla, we just left", narrates Richard; "after all (…) it's a primitive place. People die violent natural deaths all

[386] Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its discontents.* tr. James Strachey. 1930. Online. Internet. 13 December 2020. https://www.stephenhicks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FreudS-CIVILIZATION-AND-ITS-DISCONTENTS-text-final.pdf/.

[387] Ibid.

the time" (S. H. 170). Experiencing a delightful episode of a fanatical escape into otherworldliness, the crime supplemented a feeling of clarity within both Henry and his friends, rendering everything look more "technicolour", then when the appalling investigation about Bunny takes place, even Julian is "thrilled with the splendour of it". (S. H. 359).

Since then, Henry detaches himself and his friends completely from the crime only because the presence of the intellect is what makes the sinful person sinful. Recalling Julian's instructions, if the mind is inattentive, the individual is not to be held accountable for what his body performs. Additionally, as long as the mind rationalizes the murder, it is not a sin. Because he believes that his actions were far from sinful, Henry does not give a second thought to killing his best friend Bunny as he was not trusted with the secret. As such, Henry sought a method to express the repressed desires in his inner self. Since life for him has constantly been unchanging, relaxed, and to a great extent hollow and empty of purpose, a remedy in the Dionysian practice was the green light of hope in his way to mental autonomy. In Sexual Personae, Camille Paglia argues that Dionysus among the Greek deities is a liberator, the god who empowers the one – even for a brief period – to stop being oneself, and thereby set him free.[388] Tartt quotes E.R. Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational* to explain the state of mind experienced by her characters and the power of the frenzy. It says that the "Dionysus [is] the Master of Illusions, who could make a vine grow out of a ship's plank, and in general enable his votaries to see the world as the world is not." (S. H. 307)

Putting in combination the loss of consciousness experienced in the Bacchanal along with the fantastic hallucinations that the characters lapse into and especially the narrator, fiction replaces the fact in *The Secret History*. Truth is lost along with societal connections in a world that looks like a fake television show

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[388] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (Yale University Press, 1990) online, Google Books, Internet. 27 November 2021. Available: https://books.google.dz/books/about/Sexual_Personae.html?id=jpZmBuUoAf8C&redir_esc=y/.

for them. Each party understands what he wants to understand with or without any orientation from the outside reality. After Bunny's disappearance, versions of not "what might have had happened" but "what is known to happen" creatively bounce here and there among the crowds while each storyteller insistently trusts his own report. A particular televised broadcast design appears to tackle the student's disappearance, and all of a sudden Bunny is known to and missed dearly by everybody who tries to explain the loss. A group of people claim to have actually seen Bunny long after he was gone missing. Another Hampden student tells of what he "knows" that Bunny was involved in drug dealing and abducted by the dealers. Yet another version tells of how the student was for some reason captured by the Arabs. Appropriately, Henry notes that "no one will give us a second glance. People don't pay attention to ninety per cent of what they see" and "people think they see all kinds of things" (S. H. 257-300). In a postmodern fashion, *The Secret History* narrative is enmeshed in the loss of reality and the prevalence of simulacrums.

The reaction of the parents is rather exemplary, for a family that recently lost a child "they didn't seem out of their minds or anything." Mr Corcoran is described as a bewildered personality that drifts between two mental states. He "would act all sad and worried for a while, then the next thing you knew he'd be playing with the baby, giving everybody a beer" (S. H. 334). The fact that the son's murder did not actually invoke a feeling is the best illustration of "the death of Affect" in postmodern times. In one incident the friends mourn with the Corcoran family the loss of a dear member, and in another, they watch television, drink beer, and play with the babies with no sensitivity distinguished. Of that says Bunny's mother rather coldly:

> Of course, we're all just out of our minds, really. And I certainly hope that no mother will ever have to endure what I have for the past few nights. But the weather does seem to be breaking, and we've met so many lovely people, and the local merchants have all been generous in so many little ways.

(S. H. 348)

Not for her son, "For she is a wicked woman", but she grieves for the shame which has fallen on her house (S. H. 383). Henry tells in Greek about the rumours that Bunny was caught in drugs and alcohol dealings. From then on, Mrs Corcoran is no different from every other character in the novel. She constructs her own version of reality and inhabits her own world of deceit in an attempt to resemble the Kennedys: "She was carrying I don't know why – a small bouquet of rosebuds. Patrick offered her an arm and she slipped a gloved hand in the crook of his elbow, inscrutable behind her dark glasses, calm as a bride" (S. H. 418).

The obsession that translates into the paranoid escapist mentality is sensible at two different levels. On one hand, prevails the personal desire to rewrite the boundaries of the human body, and on another the concealing of the truth. However, it is not a compulsive behaviour in Tartt's account to succumb to the atrocities of paranoid escapism. Contrary to Henry, Richard remains self-absorbed and the wild thoughts he designs in his illusory world never materialize "I felt a fierce, nearly irresistible desire to seize Camilla by her bruised wrist, twist her arm behind her back until she cried out, throw her on my bed: strangle her, rape her, I don't know what." Fortunately, "the cloud then passed over the sun again, and the life went out of everything". (S. H. 484)

4. The Endgame of Paranoid Escapism

Within the mystery surrounding the character of Henry, Tartt reveals a great deal of dangerous paranoia in her novel. For the more orthodox pre-postmodern way of thinking, Henry is irrefutably the antihero of the story. Being accountable for the Greek ritual and the murder of the farmer, the murder of the group member Bunny, the distortion of truth and the misguidance of the investigation in the absence of guilt, Henry is the villain among the other

characters. When Richard questions Henry: "you don't feel a great deal of emotion for other people, do you?"; he answers rather wickedly:

> My life, for the most part, has been very stale and colourless. Dead, I mean. The world has always been an empty place to me. I was incapable of enjoying even the simplest things. I felt dead in everything I did. But then it changed, the night I killed that man. It was the most important night of my life. It enabled me to do what I've always wanted most. To live without thinking."
>
> (S. H. 493)

Tartt is concerned with the significance of death and the fear that is generated with it in *The Secret History*. Throughout the narrative, we strangely read about the death of a dog, a deer, and a duck; suicides and suicidal shots of the young students with not much explanation of the reason. This reveals the looseness of the ties that link the characters to life. On another side, death stimulates distrust for Tartt as her protagonists appear in episodes alarmed about the possibility of fatality: "I'm afraid Henry's going to kill me" (S. H. 526) admits Charles. Charles is obsessed with the idea of death that he keeps dwelling on the possibility of his friend killing him: "I mean – not that I thought Henry would kill (Camilla) or anything, but you know – it was strange. (. . .) I hate to say this, but sometimes I wonder about Henry. Especially with things like – well, you know what I mean?" (S. H. 481). Echoing Pynchon's protagonists, Charles suspects that his best friend might be conspiring against him and his sister. He inquires if Henry has committed two murders, what will stop him from committing more?

For Henry, however, death is not a matter to fear. Since it provides an escape, at last, being a murderer does not necessarily entail feelings of sorrow, because what is important is that new impression of vivacity; "That surge of power and delight, of confidence, of control. That sudden sense of the richness of the world. Its infinite possibility" (S. H. 493). With paranoid escapism fully

rationalized, a new life is then born after taking another. It is "a new lucidity of vision" disclosed before the "living dead"; the "absolute being" in the exhibition of which "a new existence can be initiated as our usual cognitive and emotional counterpoints of self are removed from the frame of experience".[389]

In her lecture entitled *Death and Dying*, Laura Overstreet explains psychological death as it a condition initiated when "the person begins to accept their death and to withdraw from others psychologically".[390] Subjects "may be less interested in normal activities, world events, and social relationships".[391] In the 1960s, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross wrote about the leading stages of psychological death or symbolic death. These are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.[392] This is the essence of the postmodern condition explained by Lyotard; coming to terms with the fact that nothing is authentic, existence is purposeless, and inexistence is the sublime emancipation of the self.

In *The Secret History*, Tartt draws a picture in which symbolic death and physical death amalgamate to show a postmodern supposition complementary to that of Pynchon. Correspondingly, Henry experiences the beyond-human self for he and the classics group enter a state of irrationality and unconsciousness in which the self is lost. This is in simpler terms a short-lived physical death that offers a spiritual immortality. Professor Julian's perception of life and death shapes that of his student's as he relates the ultimate desire of the humans for life and beauty:

> Death is the mother of beauty, said Henry.
> -And what is beauty?
> -Terror.
> (. . .)

[389] Maria Belville: op.cit., pp. 29.

[390] Laura Overstreet, *Death and Dying Lecture*. (Washington: Western Washington, February 2020) online, YouTube, Internet, 12 December 2021. Available: http://youtu.be/rruDCCrFwPA/.

[391] Ibid.

[392] Ibid.

> -And if beauty is terror, said Julian, then what is desire? We think we have many desires, but in fact, we have only one. What is it?
> -To live, said Camilla.
> -To live forever, said Bunny, chin cupped in palm.
>
> (S. H. 41-45)

In fact, both Julian and Henry's perception of beauty and desire reach the same end: an overwhelming enthusiasm about a transcendentalist existence that unlocks the boundaries of the human body. Julian was the one to inspire the group to perform the Bacchanal, because he believes that the Dionysian frenzy is the closet the human can get to "living forever":

> (the Greeks) had a passion for order and symmetry, much like the Romans, but they knew how foolish it was to deny the unseen world, the old gods. Emotion, darkness, barbarism (...) One is quite capable of course, of working out these destructive passions in more vulgar and less efficient ways. But how glorious to release them in a single burst! To sing, to scream, to dance barefoot in the woods in the dead of night, with no more awareness of mortality than an animal! (...) let God consume us, devour us, unstring our bones. Then spit us out reborn.
>
> (S. H. 44-45)

The enthusiasm of the classics group towards power, disintegration and transcendence does not essentially reproduce the same results drawn by Pynchon. The ambition of Henry, and the rest of the group is far from what the average human resourcefulness and cognition may fathom, for they seek "a triumph of barbarism over reason: dark, chaotic, inexplicable". Loaded with knowledge and power, the students find delight in constructing their own versions of the world. If paranoia is a powerful reaction against the possible post-war conspiracies constructed "them" in the literature of Pynchon, this model seeks freedom in

creating chaos and escaping oneself. In possession of knowledge, dominance, and freedom Henry and his comrades find life more significant after emptying out.

To live without thinking for Henry is much more like anti-living altogether. Towards the end of the narrative, Henry appears to be troubled with his convictions especially when Julian abandons the group. Having gained all experiences, talents, and philosophies from Julian, the group feels betrayed by their teacher. Richard condemns that Julian will never be a scholar of the very first-rate, because he is only capable of seeing things on a selective basis (S. H. 577). Julian understands the beauty of the Bacchanal as mentioned earlier, but he was later traumatized by the way it got out of control and changed the structure of life forever in Hampden. Henry feels betrayed by the feebleness of his professor, one for whom he looked for transcendental ideals. Taking then on himself the responsibility to revitalize the situation, Henry decides to live in the Bacchanal forever: “I think he felt the need to make a noble gesture, something to prove to us and to himself that it was in fact possible to put those high cold principles which Julian had taught us to use. Duty, piety, loyalty, sacrifice.” (S. H. 612)

With Henry ending his life at the end of the story, paranoid escapism is doomed to a failure. When Pynchon draws the possibility of reacting to the tropes of the postmodern chaos by the victimized common man in the form of paranoia and the never wearying struggle for escape and freedom, Tartt explores the way to inner paranoia and the anxious intellect of the knowledgeable. This model of paranoid escapism results only in death. At the end of the epilogue, Richard recalls a dream he had about Henry, asking him if he found true happiness in the afterlife, Henry answers: “Not particularly (...) But you're not very happy where you are, either.” (S. H. 629) This is a confirmation that the model of paranoia Tartt presents is not recommended. Indeed, by the 1990s the interest in paranoia and paranoid fiction was coming to end. The secret history that Richard witnessed is a shred of evidence that stepping out of humanity in response to meaninglessness and

challenging the natural restraints imposed by the human body is nothing but a failed distorted attempt at freedom and individuality.

5. Conclusion: Is Paranoia and Escapism Nature Or Nurture?

In *Émile, or, Of Education*, Jean Jacques Rousseau provides his most illuminating expression on the benefits of the social contract with regard to human freedom and control, he writes:

> there are two kinds of dependence, dependence upon things, which is natural, and dependence upon men, which is social. The dependence upon things, having no moral element, does not harm liberty and engenders no vices. The dependence upon men, since they are in disorder, engenders all of them. And it is on account of it that master and slave bring each other into depravity. If there are some means of remedying this evil in society, it is to substitute law in the place of man and to arm the general wills (. . .) with a real force superior to the action of all particular wills. If the laws of nations could have, like those of nature, an inflexibility that no human force could ever conquer, the dependence upon men would then become once again a dependence upon things.[393]

In this view of the world, Rousseau's imagination of an inevitable and unquestionable law is supposed to keep at bey the delusional fantasies. "Is" and "ought" become attached and perfect freedom is achieved.[394] In relation to paranoia, Farrell suggests that this view completely neglects what Freud called men's inherent aggressiveness, and results in as many repressed desires as that of the homosexual. Freedom of the self must not be taken as the only good as in Rousseau's vision, or else the outcome would be an irrational paranoid desire for

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[393] Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Émile, or, Of Education* quoted in John Farrell, "Attempt at escape", *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau*, (London: Cornell University Press, 2006) 297.

[394] Ibid.

escape.[395] In the case of the novel at hand, Freud's idea of repressed desires as a source of delusional imaginations is stretched to surpass the mere sexual desires. Paranoid escapism is present at the centre of the human intellect each time the self is confronted with restrictions. When the call to perform the Bacchanal consumes the characters in Tartt's novel, I have suggested that it is not a different state of nature the human may experience in contradiction to his rational mind, but a paranoid escapist mechanism that occurs when the human mind reaches its highest awareness about the imposed restraints.

We have been hence, challenged with two different cases of the dis/order: paranoia about the escapable as in the case of responding to inexplicable endeavours from the conspiratorial world, and paranoia about the inescapable boundaries of the human physique and existence. In the end, we may settle on the recommendation that both models of paranoid escapism as exemplified in the cases of Slothrop, Oedipa and Henry are equally valid and exist. Complementing the post-war and the Freudian interpretations, paranoia is an escapist formula that can be both necessary and threatening to the human mind. The element of resolve is simply the source from which this dis/order is summoned: either from outsider or insider sources; based on the external world of conspiracy, or from the inner repressed freedom. Subsequently, trailing the historical movement of events and the artistic representations, we understand that unless a scepticism in the outside world about a possible plot is materialized, paranoid escapism continues to operate on a personal level morphing into an aberrant venture at the inescapable.

[395] Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE:

A PARANOID CHARACTER, A PARANOID READER

"It's been a prevalent notion. Fallen sparks. Fragments of vessels broken at the Creation. And someday, somehow, before the end, a gathering back to home. A messenger from the Kingdom, arriving at the last moment. But I tell you there is no such message, no such home…"

Gravity's Rainbow

Thus far, I have traced a line of thought through *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *The Secret History* and made connections that point toward paranoia as an escapist behaviour. This line of thought is outlined in the postmodernist attempt at creating little narratives to escape the domination of metanarratives, to which Pynchon's response was the subjective paranoid discourse. The previous chapters also revealed an account of an irregular and paradoxical characteristic of the human psyche. Paranoia was justified by Pynchon in the way in which his characters are certain that everything is connected (though the connections cannot be seen) and that "They" have a plan against them (though no one can know what it is). The paranoid's faith – his substance of things hoped for and his evidence of things not seen – is: someone's out to get me, therefore, I should be on the run. In debunking this optimistic view, I have shown that Tartt warns against dark paranoia where knowledge, power, and ambition exceed the norm. Her account was read as a struggle for the liberation of the self from the biological limitations imposed on the human being, and the fatal consequences that result from this nonconformity. Following that, the question to be explored in the next pages is centred around the readers' response to Pynchon accounts.

This chapter describes the influence of the post-war cultural changes on the reading practices of literature in the United States. As explained in the first chapter, the postmodern new novel is heavily directed towards influencing the way fiction is read and interpreted. Since the Second World War, reading has been a direct response to or communication of the postmodern social and cultural modifications. After the failure of reconciliation between highbrow and lowbrow cultures in the field of academia, the road towards an individualized reading of literature is unlocked. In this chapter, I maintain the argument that the new reading behaviour which prevailed during the period can be grasped through Pynchon's protagonists Oedipa and Slothrop. The novels show that the new independent reading and interpretation practice is recognized in the paranoid escapist desire of the characters. When viewed as allegories of reading, they reflect the sophisticated

changes in the reading zeitgeist after the war, and also entice the readers to take a certain position. As part of the postmodern ethos, Oedipa and Slothrop as readers, challenge the previously established reading paradigms. This chapter explores Pynchon's allegory for emancipating the reader from the rules of interpretation set by the classical schools of criticism, and celebrating the variety of readings that may emerge with that freedom.

Applying reader-response criticism to Pynchon's novels has been widely associated with the cultural and political changes of post-war America. The relation between the postmodern condition and philosophy and the reader is well-established. In 1975, Richard Poirier suggested that the interaction of perspectives – literary, analytic, pop-cultural, philosophical, scientific, and historic – from which Pynchon operates allure the reader to be suspicious about the chaos that the author creates in his fiction.[396] Much like Oedipa, Poirier argues, the reader is swamped, swept up, and carried away into the randomness with the hope of reaching a satisfying interpretation.[397] Elaborating on that, an analysis of *The Crying of Lot 49* by Kristin Matthews (2012) concluded that Oedipa never learns for certain what the Tristero really means or even if it actually exists, and that she as a reader learns that there is more than one mode of interpretation to the clues surrounding her.[398] From this parallelism, *The Reader's Progress* (2010) by Tobias Julian Meinel labels Pynchon's readers as paranoid readers.[399] He also argues that Stencil[400] and Oedipa are representations of a paranoid reading practice typical to the readers of Pynchon at the time his novels were released.[401]

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[396] Richard Poirier : op.cit., pp. 157.

[397] Ibid., pp. 162.

[398] Kristin L. Matthews, "Reading America Reading in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49", *Arizona Quarterly: Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 68, no. 2 (University of Arizona: January, 2012): 89-122, online, Internet, 15 November 2021. Available: https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2012.2006/.

[399] Tobias Julian Meinel, *The Reader's Progress* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010) 49.

[400] Herbert Stencil is the protagonist in Pynchon's novel *V.* (1963)

[401] Ibid.

Therefore, the idea that Pynchon's characters are allegories of the independent reading behaviour that appeared in the United States since 1945 is not a novelty. However, I shall demonstrate that the reason for that was the growing interest in escaping the established systematic frameworks of reading as a part of the postmodernist agenda. In the first section of this chapter, I will argue that after the Second World War, the issue of how to read, what to read, and how to systematize the reading habits of the audience became a serious cultural concern in academia. The Academic readers were obliged to leave their ivory tower and reconfigure their positions in connection to the changing political and social conditions of the postmodern world. This shift in positions was mostly influenced by the way in which the literature was read and perceived. The interaction of the socio-political changes and the reading habits produced a distinct reading philosophy based on subjectivity and anti-systematization. The paranoid reader is a suspicious decoder who believes every word is useful for meaning-making outside of the traditional methods of interpretation. The following two sections analyse the characters of Oedipa and Slothrop as readers respectively in a way that considers the forces and motivations behind the paranoid escapist reading that they assume. The aim is to foreground a reader-character parallel, and assess the way in which these narratives' thematization maps their own reception, and their preoccupation with reading and interpretation in the main. By the end of this chapter, it will be evident that paranoia as a form of independent reading becomes again an anti-authoritarian little narrative in the field of literary interpretation and criticism.

1. The Paranoid Reader: Between the 1960s and the 1970s

By far it is historically given that the impression of the period between the end of the Second World War and Kennedy's assassination as relaxed, quiet and

blank; is a perception that is in essence nostalgic and shallow.[402] Today, we understand that the timeframe has been marked by a mounting tension manifested later in the civil rights movement, the Cold War, and the growth of new curious lifestyles like the Beats.[403] While facts about the tension and anxiety lived then are widely accepted, the influence of the political life on the field of academia is mostly overlooked. A significant transformation in culture and literature experienced during the late years of the Fifties leading up to the Sixties, brought about confusion and anxieties about representation and interpretation in the critical arena. This swift transformation triggered by television, paperback, and mass production of books and records challenged the intellectual to position himself within this new society.[404]

Debates began then to revolve around the fear of decreasing the educational criteria, or the anxiety of the elite to give up their high standards of knowledge and assimilate within the contagious mass culture.[405] Along with this anxiety, references to the differentiation between highbrow and lowbrow reading were equally present. This differentiation has been around since the beginning of the twentieth century, but is most relevant to the post-war culture when high education institutions were easily accessible by the masses.[406] The New York Intellectuals and their allies the New Critics were leading the conflict versus what they called the "contamination" of high culture by low culture. Their anxiety was not only a restatement of the early fears of "vulgar" culture, but more so as a product of an age where intense political encounters took place. The cases of

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[402] This advocation has been forwarded by several critics such as David Halberstam, William H. Young and Nancy K. Young in their books *The Fifties* and *The 1950s* respectively.

[403] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 20-21.

[404] Ibid.

[405] The idea that mass culture entails intellectual and social deterioration has been promoted even before the post-war time. A detailed account on this debate is provided in Patrick Brantlinger's book *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (1983).

[406] Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 1995) 64-65.

Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany were prophesied to trigger catastrophic outcomes of mass culture.[407] Hugh Wilford maintains that both the theorists of the Frankfurt School and the New York Intellectuals had an apocalyptic vision of the future, one in which the traumatized masses erupted in directionless and barbaric violence.[408] Correspondingly, Serge Guilbaut proposes that "by fighting through art against mass culture, artists (and critics) enjoyed the illusion of actively fighting against repugnant regimes, using the weapons of the elite".[409]

The strict division between high and low culture materialized in the political and economic chaos of the 1930s. Wilford explains that "they began to fear the prospect of being reduced to the same level as the millions of other knowledge workers".[410] The new generation of thinkers demanded the isolation of an elite culture from the majority. Therefore, this period witnessed severe disapproval of communal conformism, and the sole remedy to back up the principles associated with art – innovation, liberation and morality – was to create an ivory tower that safeguards the barrier between the elite and the common. To no surprise then, works of art associated with the Modernist movement came to be composed as a challenging aesthetic material, one that demands to be examined by specialists in the academic departments.[411]

This concept of the wall if appropriated to the cultural modifications witnessed in the United States, one side of it designates the withdrawal from modern-day demands and difficulties, and the other stands for everything the

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[407] Lise Jaillant, "Blurring the Boundaries: 'Fourteen Great Detective Stories' and Joyce's 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' in the Modern Library Series", *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3. (2013): 767–795, online, Jstor, 25 May 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/24598579/.

[408] Hugh Wilford: op.cit., pp. 65.

[409] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 37.

[410] Hugh Wilford: op.cit., pp. 21.

[411] Lise Jaillant : op.cit., pp. 778.

individual is concerned with keeping afar, or, the mass culture. [412] If eighteenth-century England was known throughout history for the vast increase in the intellectual audience, post-World War Two America was not much different. With the upsurge in paperback publishing, the rise of the television as a prestigious household appliance, the ratification of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, the ideas promoted by the elite appear to have had a resilient opposition. [413]

Paperback printing gained momentum only during the 1940s, even though softcover publishing existed long before.[414] Inspired by the unprecedented triumph that Allen Lane's publishing company Penguin attained, Robert de Graff established Pocket Books with support from Simon & Schuster publishing. He initiated the trend of low-cost printed paperback books such as those of Shakespeare, Emily Brontë and Thornton Wilder. Paperback books were classified as low-quality literature, in a time when writers such as Hemingway and D. H. Lawrence made Penguin a reputable paperback publishing company.[415] By the beginning of the 1950s, over 300 million copies of paperback literature was sold largely by Penguin and Pocket Books.[416] "The success of the cheap paperbound book is the most dramatic influence upon book publishing since the invention of printing", argues Ralph Daigh, the editorial director of Gold Medal Books. "It is the paperback book" he continues, "that has made book publishing and authorship

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[412] Dwight Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult: Essays Against the American Grain*, ed. John Simon (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc, 1962) 17.

[413] Ibid.

[414] Neil Soiseth, *Gadflies and Zip Guns: Mass Culture Criticism and Juvenile Delinquent Texts in America, 1945-1960* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2016) 125-126.

[415] Ibid.
It must be specified that the quality of paperback books differed according to the publishing centre. Sex and crime novels were known to be the less refined inexpensive product, and while it was still sold on a large scale, big names such as Penguin, Anchor, and Vintage were more interested in high quality publications. They started to distribute original accounts in paperback with no first edition hardcover, and because a great deal of authors lacked the means to publish in the old fashion, the demand on original quality paperback novels was continuously escalating.

[416]Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 18.

stable, profitable, and altogether desirable enterprises."[417] Subsequently, the industry gained its fair share in the American economic arena and, by equation, reading became the new norm.[418]

Additionally, both publication houses and podcast networks benefitted on a large scale from the post-war conditions. The American common man took pride in reading books and catching breaking news, which they developed into mass mediums. The use of television rose from 9% in 1950 to 86% in 1959 in time when the movie industry started to weaken. Commercials and programs started to be injected into the blood of the nation.[419] The 1950s proved to be the golden age of television, during which the medium experienced massive growth in popularity. Mass-production advances made during the Second World War substantially lowered the cost of purchasing a set, making television accessible to the masses.[420] Family values and prosperous ways of life were firstly explored, before the politicians uncovered the swaying effect of the new media. The 1953 "Checkers Speech" was the first to check the range of the crisp soft power as it managed to control the public consensus. David Halberstam comments that "the big winner in this whole episode was not Nixon but television. Nixon had given a powerful demonstration of what could it do".[421]

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[417] Ralph Daigh quoted in Neil Soiseth: op.cit., pp. 125.

[418] Reading as the new trend, was also criticized by some factions. For example, in 1952, the Gathings Committee reported that "*the so-called pocket-size books, which originally started out as cheap reprints of standard works, have largely degenerated into media for the dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion, and degeneracy*."
Report quoted in Soiseth, Neil: op.cit., pp. 161.

[419] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 25.

[420] *Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Libraries, 2016) 378-379.
According to the World Book Encyclopaedia, there were fewer than 10,000 TV sets in the United States in 1945. By 1950, this figure raised to about 6 million, and by 1960 more than 60 million TV sets were sold.

[421] David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993) 242.

In the sphere of education, The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 was another significant factor which facilitated the expansion of the new mass culture. Known as the G. I. Bill, this piece of law changed forever the face of high education in the US.[422] The bill provided a range of benefits for returning World War Two veterans – also known as the G. I.s – among which is the unrestricted opportunity of enrolling on the American universities. By 1948, nearly half of university scholars of the country were joined by dint of the bill, and about half of the 16 million veterans took advantage of the new legislation.[423] At the times when college enrolment was a noble dream that could have been hardly pursued or afforded, the door to an academic career was burst open for the masses. The total of university students kept increasing until it reached 3.582.726 in 1960, double its number in 1945.[424]

The bill, however, was warmly welcomed by a number of critics and historians on the grounds of social liberty and equality. James Bryant Conant said in 1948, that "there can be no doubt that in terms of equalizing opportunity the G. I. Bill was a revolutionary step forward".[425] In the same year, Isaac L. Kandel claimed likewise, that "the G. I. Bill of Rights indicated that large numbers of young men and women have been enabled to attend colleges and universities, who, because of lack of means, would have been unable to do so".[426] This conclusion has been repeated for years to come. In the 1989 history of veterans written by Richard Severo and Lewis Milford, the Act "emerged as one of the most

[422] Irma Paul, *The Post-9/11 GI Bill and Its Role in For-Profit University Enrolment* (Minneapolis: Walden University, 2019) 29-30.

[423] It should be clarified, however, that about 2.2 million veterans actually attended university programs. The remaining number preferred to take advantage of the bill in professional training, business schools and sub-college education.

[424] Ibid.

[425] James Bryant Conant quoted in Michael C.C. Adams, "Who Didn't Use the G.I. Bill? Notes on a Lingering Question", *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 23, no. 2. (2000): 65–74, online, Jstor, Internet, 27 April 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/23414545/.

[426] Isaac L. Kandel quoted in Michael C.C. Adams: op.cit., pp. 65.

enlightened and significant pieces of social legislation ever written in this country".[427]

Therefore, the bill assisted not only in creating a new generation of artists and authors, but also a new group of readers. Families who did not have the chance to attend universities or were not able to read, were introduced to the fashion of knowledge and intellectuality through their children. Macdonald explained that this enormous college population was the most important fact about the new mass culture, for they did not only absorb but spread the curiosity in education as the latest hype.[428] Since books were inexpensive and available in all-purpose stores and supermarkets on large scales, reading thus, appeared to take a significant share in the new culture in relation to both production and reception. Because of this extraordinary richness in books and education, the concept of reading grew far from that of elitism and intellectuality.

On the other side of the spectrum, not everyone was enthusiastic about the new conditions. The elite behind the wall expressed resentfulness toward the contagious low culture. The president of the University of Chicago, Robert M. Hutchins stated that the American universities were turned into "hobo jungles".[429] His philosophy of education and universities did not match the conditions of the time. He portrays the university as a "community of scholars" in which the noble cause is higher than receiving information. In his 1929 first speech to students on June 11th in Rockefeller Chapel, he declares:

> (. . .) the object of higher education is to unsettle the minds of young men, to widen their horizons, to inflame their intellects. And by this series of mixed metaphors I mean to assert that

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[427] Ibid.

[428] Dwight Macdonald: op.cit., pp. 18-19.

[429] Robert M. Hutchins quoted in George W. Dell, "Robert M. Hutchins' Philosophy of General Education and the College at the University of Chicago", *The Journal of General Education*, vol. 30, no. 1. (1978): 45–58, online, Jstor, Internet, 27 April 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/27796672/.

> education is not to teach men facts, theories, or laws; it is not to reform them, or amuse them, or make them expert technicians in any field; it is to teach them to think, to think straight, if possible; but to think always for themselves.[430]

These principles are certainly out of reach with the advancement of mass education. Hutchins' worries were less about the contagion of low culture and the loss of the elite as a class structure. Rather, he anticipated the negative results attainted when unqualified scholars are created out of the new system. For the educational establishments will not be able to resist the profit attained from the increasing number of learners, the educational system would eventually weaken. The G. I. Bill of Rights gives them a chance to get more money than they have ever dreamed of in the name of patriotism, explains Hutchins, "and they will not want to keep out unqualified veterans; they will not expel those who fail".[431]

As Hutchins prophesied the deterioration in the standards of education associated with the American universities, other critics were able to predict the way in which mass culture flattened the human imagination, and sifted away from the creative thought.[432] The status of the universities as the ivory tower of the elite was badly shaken by the impact of the undertaken political choices. And while many dwelt on the possibility of claiming what was once an "elite bastion"[433] by the middle class, others were frightened of the consequences this new culture might bring to the American intellect. In his article "Masscult and Midcult: Essays Against the American Grain", Macdonald coined the term "Midcult" to describe

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[430] Ibid.

[431] Ibid.

[432] Macdonald, Dwight. op.cit., pp. 37.
The idea that mass culture was bringing to an end human creativity was often brought to the critical debates at that time. Max Horkheimer declared that "*Man has lost his power to conceive a world different from that in which he lives*". Correspondingly, a 1951 *Time* article entitled "*People: The Younger Generation*" maintained that the young population "*either through fear, passivity or conviction, is ready to conform*".

[433] The expression was used by Edward Humes in his book *How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream*, in which he contemplated the fact that universities were "*transformed from an elite bastion to a middle-class entitlement*" (5).

an emerging middle culture, especially threatening to the elite for "it presents itself as part of High Culture". [434] He outlines the Midcult as an abnormal hybrid reproduced from Masscult's uncommon interaction with High Culture, "it has the essential qualities of Masscult – the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity – but it decently covers them with a cultural figleaf".[435]

In his 1954 analysis "This Age of Conformity", Irving Howe expressed a similar attitude towards a mass culture. He claimed that conformity had already spoiled the US thinkers at the time for they grew "tamer than ever" in the face of new political and cultural attitudes.[436] "All of the tendencies toward cultural conformism come to a head in the assumption that the avant-garde, as both concept and intellectual grouping, has become obsolete or irrelevant", explains Howe. And because of the transmissible properties of conformism, "the future quality of American culture (. . .) largely depends on the survival, and the terms of survival, of precisely the kind of dedicated group that the avant-garde has been".[437] The solution for that is then create a curious, sceptical and self-controlled reader, which may be the answer to the question of post-war intellectual conformity.[438]

The dilemma imposing itself at this point is how to train the mass readers to distinguish between Masscult and High culture on one side, and on the other to

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[434] Ibid.

[435] Ibid.

[436] Richard Hofstadter also presented a similar argument revolving around the contemporary low interest in intellectuality. In Anti-Intellectualism, he suggested that since the arrival of the McCarthyistic hysteria, suspicion and insecurity elevated the anti-intellectual sentiment within the public and the elite alike. (Hofstadter: 407)

[437] Irving Howe, This Age of Conformity. *Dissent magazine* (January, 1954) 6, online, Internet, 12 April 2021. Available: https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/irving-howe-voice-still-heard-this-age-of-conformity/.

[438] Ibid.
Howe concludes his article that "*every current of the Zeitgeist, every imprint of social power, every assumption of contemporary American life favours the safe and comforting patterns of middlebrow feeling*". Hence the true elite should "*be committed yet dispassionate, ready to stand alone, curious, eager, sceptical. The banner of critical independence, ragged and torn though it may be, is still the best we have.*" Ibid.

refine their taste so he reaches the ability to value the second one even more. Thereafter, the New York Intellectuals and the New Critics were challenged with a double problematic: either to retreat to the elite tower of High Culture which would safeguard the highbrow elitism, or to attempt rescuing the highbrow mind and effectively compete against the contagion.

Several critics decided it was best to retreat and preserve what could be preserved. Macdonald, for instance, provided a concluding statement to the matter that the ongoing transformation of culture has no chance of turning back, for what was made to the human intellect can never be undone.[439] He explicitly advocated for the need for such measures in the post-war condition, with the hope for the highbrow faction to separate their culture not only from the Masscult complexities but also from the pleasant nature of the Midcult swamp. "Two cultures have developed in this country", writes Macdonald at the end of his inquiry, "so let the masses have their Masscult, let the few who care about good writing, painting, music, architecture, philosophy, etc., have their High Culture, and don't fuzz up the distinction with Midcult".[440]

On their side, the New Critics preferred activism on the battlefield of the wasteland. The aim was to systematize the reading patterns of the new curious segments of society, by providing the guidelines necessary to control the reading habits. New Criticism became the original approach of the school by the 1950s.[441] John Crowe Ransom expresses in his book *The World's Body* the requirement of a "more scientific, or precise and systematic" approach to reading and

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[439] Dwight Macdonald: op.cit., pp. 70-73.

[440] Ibid.

[441] The New Criticism approach being taught in universities to systematize the reading patterns was however criticized by some thinkers. Jancovich comments that New Criticism only began to formalize itself in an attempt to reorganize the teaching of English in America". Birkerts' comment also censors the scientific crave the critics appeared to demonstrate; he writes that "the academic pursuit of literature became pledged to formalism. By adopting strict and teachable modes of close reading, the professoriat was able to sell its discipline as one subject to sound methodological procedures".

interpretation with no slight reliance on the declarations of the effect of the artwork upon the critic.[442] Instead, a belief in the text as the source of interpretation, and synopsis, paraphrasing, linguistic findings, historical reports, and moral conclusions are to be implemented.[443]

The concept of the ideal reader [444] appeared in *Understanding Fiction* by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren denoting a mature and thoughtful reader who engages in the practice of close reading.[445] The aim is for the new reading protocol to be imparted in the universities with the hope of creating a generation of controlled ideal readers, who execute the principles of High Culture.[446] For the New Critics, this new reading approach was the finest way to train the learners to

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[442] John Crowe Ransom, *The World's Body* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1938) 329.

[443] Ibid.
Other New Critics such as Wimsatt and Beardsley supported the claim on the grounds of keeping at bay what came to be known as the "affective fallacy" as an uncontrollable factor in reading and interpretation.

[444] For more explanation on the ideal reader see Mukařovský, Jan. *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*. Tr. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970) 24-26, and Lotman, Yuri M. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Tr. Ann Shukman. Intr. Umberto Eco (London: Tauris, 1990) 64.

[445] *Rereading the New Criticism*, ed. Miranda B. Hickman, John D. McIntyre (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012) 12-13.
In *American Literary Criticism Since the 1930s*, Vincent Leitch outlined the method of close reading in a number of steps:

> (1)Select a short text, often a metaphysical or modern poem; (2) rule out "genetic" critical approaches; (3) avoid "receptionist" inquiry; (4) assume the text to be an autonomous, ahistorical, spatial object; (5) presuppose the text to be both intricate and complex and efficient and unified; (6) carry out multiple retrospective readings; (7) conceive each text as a drama of conflicting forces; (8) focus continually on the text and its manifold semantic and rhetorical interrelations; (9) insist on the fundamentally metaphorical and therefore miraculous powers of literary language; (10) eschew paraphrase and summary or make clear that such statements are not equivalent to poetic meaning; (11) seek an overall balanced or unified comprehensive structure of harmonized textual elements; (12) subordinate incongruities and conflicts; (13) see paradox, ambiguity, and irony as subduing divergences and insuring unifying structure; (14) treat (intrinsic) meaning as just one element of structure; (15) note in passing cognitive, experiential dimensions of the text; and (16) try to be the ideal reader and create the one, true reading, which subsumes multiple readings. (Leitch: 29)

[446] Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism Since the 1930s* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 29-30.

appreciate the noble messages and values expressed through literature. This is the standardization of reading and of teaching the way to read; an attempt at eliminating any unusual reading patterns and any uncontainable influences.[447]

By the beginning of the 1960s, the clashes that dominated the American political life – which are explored in the first chapter – resulted in the emergence of a paranoid discourse. Public assassinations and political scandals gave birth to the conspiracy rhetoric, which assisted in moulding the literature of the time into a politically paranoid recording. However, paranoia was not simply a recurrent theme in the narrative of the time, but more than that a shared temperament that characterized the best of readers. Suddenly confronted with the unprecedented perturbing condition of political conspiracy and public distrust, the new generation of the educated favoured what was then the "cool" literature, that of Brautigan, Burroughs, Pynchon, and Vonnegut among others. This social cluster of the young, knowledgeable, politically engaged yet extremely uncertain of the system, found in reading a way to cope with the post-war culture. The concept of traditional culture became for them not only a suspicious institution, but also a domineering set of judgements that require escaping.

Freud explains that "partly the same things as the concept of the superego, partly something new and more extensive. As long as its primary task is said to be the proscription of sexual and aggressive desires that are incompatible with a social order, culture is just another name for the superego". [448] This suggestion implies that culture is an authoritarian foundation that demands to be negotiated. It highlights the way in which High culture[449] and the superego actually symbolize the same thing: resisting what is considered to be low standards in human

[447] *Rereading the New Criticism*: op.cit., pp. 13.

[448] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, tr. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 249.

[449] Although Freud did not classify what he labelled "culture" as high or low culture, his explanation revealed the traditional sense of highbrow culture.

behaviour. “Culture implies instinctual renunciations: we have only to recall the three most universal prohibitions, against incest, cannibalism, and murder”. [450]

In an age where the aura of the traditional thought appeared to dwindle and rebellious factions materialized in the civil rights movements, the feminist movement, the radical political wings, the new generation’s revolt against outdated morality, the new scholastic and non-scholastic reading patterns happen to challenge the conventional. Subsequently, the rules imposed by the New Critics’ approach were increasingly condemned for being too predictable. In *American Literary Criticism Since the 1930s*, Vincent Leitch explained that during the later phases of its improvement, the New Criticism tended to become rigid and dogmatic. [451] On one side it was the outcome of its rigorous systematizations and codifications, and on the other the consequence of its wide-ranging and successful educational missions. “The progressive “purification” of theory and practice occurred at the same time that the late 1940s Eliot, Richards, Leavis, Blackmur, Winters, and Bruke” suggests Leitch, “had all expanded their projects to include historical, sociological, and ethical matters, though they all retained certain formalist beliefs and practices”.[452]

The new way of reading preferred suspicion and doubt echoing the troubling times. Paranoia in the American intellect was further aggravated as a result to the role that the president and politicians claimed in the Vietnam War onward. Democracy was not the chief political value anymore. The American value system was sacrificed for the war because “The incredible war in Vietnam has provided the razor, the terrifying cutting edge that has finally severed the last vestiges of illusion that morality and democracy are the guiding principles of American foreign policy.”[453] Instead of democracy then, policymakers brought

[450] Ibid.
[451] Vincent B. Leitch: op.cit., pp. 39.
[452] Ibid.

[453] Paul Potter, “The Incredible War: Speech at the Washington Antiwar March (April 17, 1965)”, ed. Massimo Teodori, *The New Left: A Documentary History* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969) 230-231.

into action their own paranoid views, and conspiracy became the new system of governing. Both Vietnam and the US are united in much more than a mutual concern for the conflict to be terminated. There are parties in the two countries who aim at altering the current conditions because the system that irritates the independence movements is identical; a conspiratorial system.[454]

Observing the political actions undertaken by presidents like Kennedy and Nixon, and confronted with conflicting media coverage and fake news, the American public took pride in reading between the lines. Naturally, readers assumed the role of the detective, deciphering and translating and breaking apart every layer of information looking for a promising treasure underneath. The new register of doubt and paranoia is best explained in *Freud and Philosophy* by Paul Ricoeur. He investigates what he believes is a tension in Freud's interpretations between an emphasis on the psychological "energetics" of matters, and an emphasis on hermeneutics. Comparing Freud to Karl Marx and Nietzsche, Ricoeur classifies them as a "school of suspicion". [455]

Ricoeur opens his analysis with the problem of language as an illogically unified system of representation. He argues that in the post-war time the quest for an all-inclusive philosophy of language to express the various occupations of the human act of signifying and their interconnectedness. The question though is how can language be put to such diverse uses as mathematics and myth, physics and art ? Ricoeur clarifies that: "we have at our disposal a symbolic logic, an exegetical science, an anthropology, and a psychoanalysis, and perhaps for the first time, we are able to encompass in a single question the problem of the unification of human discourse." It is the contemporary development of the abovementioned branches of knowledge that brought to the surface and intensified the problem of a unified language.[456]

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[454] Ibid.
[455] Paul Ricoeur: op. cit., pp. 30-32.

[456] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

Clearly, this argument challenges the very foundation on which the New Criticism approaches are grounded. In this regard, texts are not a piece of simple machinery that welcomes mathematical calculation. This is especially true for the nature of literary texts involves symbolism, which can hardly be acknowledged from a formalist interpretation. Ricoeur and the paranoid reader then, are paranoid about the conspiracies hidden within the text. Ricoeur's hermeneutics is always characterized by both "a suspicion which makes him wary of any easy assimilation to any past meanings" and a faith that trusts in "complete appropriation of meanings while warning 'not here', 'not yet'".[457]

On that note, a certain extent of subjective deliberation is inevitable even with the new theoretical approaches to reading that were taught in schools and universities. Whether text-based or context-based approaches, a reading pattern particular to what can be considered a paranoid reader is spotted. Schools of criticism arranging from structuralism, and historicism, to Marxism, feminism, and psychoanalysis, have in common the objective of creating a deeper understanding to the surface structures. I suggest, however, based on Lyotard's concept of the death of metanarratives, that readers were already tired of the guiding theories of literature and willing to sacrifice ideal reading for subjective and unique interpretations. Uncovering hidden messages behind the lines of texts became the umbrella technique with which a narrative is being read.

The figure that we have outlined of the paranoid reader is then everything but delusional, as in the sense of the medicinal disorder of paranoia. The plot of the narrative is met with suspicion and distrust much like a conspiracy, for it creates an irresistible desire at tearing it apart for meaningfulness. The binary of inside and outside the ivory tower as presented in Pynchon's works is a clear reflection of the postmodern reading zeitgeist. In a time when the tower serves as

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[457] Erin White quoted in G. D. Robinson "Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion: A Brief Overview and Critique", *Premise*, vol. 2, no. 8, (1995) 12.

the quarantine of the traditional values, it equally stands for the new generations' dissatisfaction with the old generations' conservatism. The novels show the way in which the new reading pattern is inflicted on the reader through the journey of the paranoid escapist characters toward individuality and freedom.

2. Oedipa As a Paranoid Reader

The protagonist is an investigator in *The Crying of Lot 49,* not in the professional sense of the word, but in the sense that she is extremely compelled to investigate. Once confronted with Oedipa's account, one cannot help but think that Pynchon had simply provided a historical record of what the mass readers of the time actually experienced. An average American citizen in the 1960s, Oedipa Maas throughout her twenty-eight years of existence has a record of personal happenings that cannot be any more momentous than attending Tupperware celebrations invigorated by "too much kirsch in the fondue" (C. L. 49., p. 1). Her existence can be summed up in one of the opening statements:

> Into the mixing of the twilight's whiskey sours against the arrival of her husband, Wendell ("Mucho") Maas from work, she wondered, wondered, shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be first to admit it?) more or less identical, or all pointing the same way subtly like a conjurer's deck, any odd one readily clear to a trained eye.
>
> (C. L. 49., p. 2)

Sadistically quivered from the mundane reality, the life-changing episode was finally the dead lover's demand for her to execute his estate. The affair was the wake-up call that inspired Oedipa to shake off the dust of her old life, in the hope of a novel experience and a greater appreciation of her existence. The bequest of Pierce Inverarity opens the door for Oedipa to escape into a subjective phantasm of paranoia and the faith in the triumph of a conspiracy, as a substitute preferable

to meaningfulness. Entangled in the investigation, Oedipa embodies what Roger Henkle describes as "the desperate and possibly self-destructive drive of Americans to understand the causes of the meaninglessness of their lives".[458] Having escaped to the dynamism of paranoia, she is salvaged from falling victim to the wasteland.

As explained before in this study, the reason why it is assumable that Oedipa underwent an escapist attempt reaching paranoid thoughts is that it is apparent in the novel that she had suffered a strong sentiment of imprisonment prior to the death of Inverarity. The monotonous lifestyle had its hit on her, and powerful is the imagery employed by Pynchon to convey such a dull lifespan; he describes that: "(Oedipa) had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she noticed the absence of intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix" (C. L. 49., p.10). Recurrently, she paralleled herself with Rapunzel: "And had also gently conned herself into the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey, let down your hair" (C. L. 49., p.10). She is the model of the psychological dilemma experienced by the masses during the post-war life. This life is characterized by the absence of individuality, and the confinement to effortlessness and ignorance. Following that, Pynchon remarks:

> such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all. Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its line of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a

[458] Roger B. Henkle, "Pynchon's Tapestries On the Western Wall", *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1971): 207-220, online, Jstor, Internet, 12 December 2021. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26279099/.

> disk jockey. If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance has no proof against its magic, what else?
>
> (C. L. 49., p. 106*)*

Clear in the quote is Pynchon's subscription to the necessity of paranoid escapism in the postmodern culture, and to sum up the premise of his institution, "falling on superstition", or succumbing to the forces of paranoia is a possible endeavour to prevent "going mad". If no prince is there for rescue, meaninglessness would conquest the human awareness. Though vigilantly, Oedipa instantaneously embraces the prince that appears as a hope, a rescuer who would escort her out of the tower.

Oedipa is visibly documented as a reader. Her quest for the Tristero is in essence academic, as she struggles to decipher all the stylistic variations of The Courier's Tragedy. The character follows Ricoeur's aforementioned outline of paranoid reading, which is recognized in her suspicious reactions to the hints around her. The confusion of the paranoid readers when challenged with many patterns and signs during the process of reading and their inability to foreground a clear meaning of the text, is the same confusion that the protagonist appears to convey. While we try to understand and interpret the narrative from multiple perspectives and techniques, we take part in Oedipa's effort to decrypt, and her anxiety of not being able to reach a rewarding conclusion.

Initially, Oedipa began to grasp her day-to-day life as a custodial stamped with ambiguity and endangerment, which made her desire for escape grows higher. The perturbed psyche for Pynchon formulates some unvaryingly unfavourable alternative scenarios reacting to the chaos as falling on superstitions, investing in a hobby, growing irate, or marrying a disk jockey. In the primary scenario undertook, her tongue-tied marriage to a disk jockey proves a failure; in the second scenario, shedding away comfort and following a puzzle. John Hunt remarks that

Oedipa had settled for such a life because of a "gut fear", that outside the tower was only void, only death, or what would pass for it: meanings which would destroy the limited sense she had made of life.[459] This is the very assumption that the paranoid reader of the decade began to assume about the already established reading and interpretation approaches. Inverarity's will forces Oedipa "out of the tower and into the void, to face whatever nameless and malignant magic had held her prisoner".[460] The growing curiosity to read freely and interpret without guiding rules is evident.

The post-war reading patterns outlined by anti-individualism, a struggle to preserve the elite culture, and the constant call for ideal reading, resulted in a systematic practice of deceptive order. Much like the pre-Inverarity Oedipa, readers were as Kolodny and Peters mentioned "conditioned to see the world in terms of symmetrical dualities rather than coextensive multiplicities".[461] Excessively rational becomes one's subscription to traditional modes of evaluation to survive the inconsistency of the post-war world. Hence, it becomes only sane to forsake the rational for the irrational and dwell upon irregularities that may suddenly emerge.

As she enters the world of the Tristero, Oedipa is obliged to shed off every human attempt at reason and logic which parallels the New Critics' approach of systematizing reading. The free reading exemplified in paranoia is for Oedipa, as for the readers, the way to escape from the systematic and to liberation. About her paranoid thinking, Oedipa's psychologist urges her to embrace it. "I came," she said, "hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy." Cherish it!" cried Hilarious, fiercely. "What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it

[459] John Hunt quoted in Owana K. McLester-Greenfield: op. cit., pp. 365.

[460] Harold Bloom, *Thomas Pynchon* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003) 38.
[461] Owana K. McLester-Greenfield: op.cit., pp. 183.

is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be. (C. L. 49., p. 103)

The metaphor of the tower suggested earlier in the discussion of High Culture versus mass culture is derived from Pynchon's own allegory of reading presented through Oedipa. Both Oedipa and the readers of the decade prove unable to withstand neither the tower of safety and systematization, nor the wasteland of conspiracy and untruth. The irony of Remedios Varo's Bordando el Manto Terrestre summarizes the reading journey. The painting of the Spanish exile exhibited in Mexico City enlightens Oedipa into her own state of paranoia and anxiety:

> In the central painting of a triptych, titled "Bordando el Manto Terrestre," were a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of 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 the tapestry, and the tapestry was the world. Oedipa, perverse, had stood in front of the painting and cried. No one had noticed; (…) She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been woven together a couple thousand miles away in her own tower, was only by accident known as Mexico, and so Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape. What did she so desire to escape from?
>
> (C. L. 49., p. 11)

Into paranoia and illusions is the escape that Oedipa was compelled to undertake through Pierce Inverarity, and like the reader, she is driven to "pierce

the inveracity" in order to breach the mendacities of the conventional reading.[462] The dominion that Pynchon designs is not only about paranoia and fabricating illusive worlds to escape from uncertainty and void but the never-ending battle to outflow the elite's culture and the traditions of interpretation. As established afore, it is this very void and purposelessness that intimidates the elite and ideal reader and forces him into the tower detention. In an effort to escape the Wasteland prowling outside as well as inside the tower, Oedipa struggles to craft her personal embroidery with Pierce Inverarity. Just like Oedipa, we initially start to see the Tristero everywhere in the narrative. It does not only illustrate the paranoid reading habits of the main character, but also tempts the reader to unite with her in the quest, and challenges him with the same difficulties and anxieties as hers. *The Crying of Lot 49* thus, invites the reader to hunt for signs on several horizons: the plot, the language, and intertextuality. Our efforts to reason every allusion, to translate every name of the characters, and to determine every association possible with past art confirm that we have been transformed into suspicious readers ourselves.

The first experience the protagonist attempts as "a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate" (C. L. 49., p. 14) mirrors the reader's first encounter with the narrative: we identify recurrent patterns, and search for linguistic connections with no map designed in mind.[463] The movement from the Kinneret garden to San Narciso accompanies the psychological movement that Oedipa's character adopts and reflects the readers of the decades' movement away from the elite tower. She steps in "with no idea she was moving toward anything new" (C. L. 49., p. 12), yet assuming Inverarity's annoyance with her, her distress still preps her conscious for paranoia to which she seems already vulnerable. Upon landing at the new location, the investigator is confronted with the fact that meaning is suddenly impenetrable, and like some transcripts of an

[462] Ibid.

[463] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp 70.

asemic language, the hints of the Tristero are undecipherable. In Inverarity's archives, she stamps upon the hieroglyphic sense of senselessness.

After watching a television commercial for an Inverarity business interest, Oedipa sense some promise and hope in deciphering this language. Perceptive to the accidental revelations that she encounters and troubled by their indecipherability, unconfident in an arena saturated with too much meaning, unaided and somewhat anxious about an arduous and, possibly, malicious task that she doubts is more than symbolic, Mrs Maas effortlessly succumbs to paranoia.[464] She also proceeds to sort out the "real and dreamed" after facing the Inverarity will, as the reader sorts between the representation of reality and the alluding metaphors and visions. The calculation of cyphers lures him to the same question Oedipa appears to ask, that at the end of this, if we may call it an end, we can be equally left with only "compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself". (C. L. 49., p. 76)

By the end of the narrative, Oedipa discovers the inadequacy of Inverarity's apparatus, which she has mistaken all along for the redeemer. The Tristero was indeterminate, and perhaps it is nothing but a filthy seduction with no real implication beyond it. Nonetheless, it is via the quest for solutions to the intricate conundrum that Oedipa realizes, for the first time, a meaningful existence. Fed up with complacency, she unravels a new world pregnant with commitment and direction, the cost of which is a never-ending adventure and ambition. Having escaped from the tower, Oedipa is long-familiarized with the "all-too-predictable and serenely mundane", she must accept the force of paranoia in order to survive.[465] Whether the suspicious readers still strive for some message to be found and failed at it, or they fell victims to Pynchon's game, we still undertook a subjective suspicious reading of the narrative.

[464] Owana K. McLester-Greenfield: op.cit., pp 370.

[465] Ibid.

The parallel between Oedipa and the paranoid reader is recognized in the journey towards breaking the established boundaries and exposing the new knowledge and interpretation. Escaping into paranoia provides the lavishness of a universe subjectively ordered, a luxury that many are deprived of because of the passivity of routine. And because it is all about perceiving high importance in every crumb of life, paranoia becomes the very opposite of emptiness for it saturates every feature of the world in meaning. As that paranoia bursts into certainty about a deceitful conspiracy, the journey of escapism enlengthens with Oedipa enmeshing into a quest, which will ensure her safe distance from Rapunzel's tower and absent her from the wasteland's list of victims.

One crucial argument to be addressed in this regard is the continuous postponing of accomplishment and reward, and as suspicious readers, we are encountered with the same challenge as that of the protagonist. After all, it is this conspiracy that keeps Oedipa from the old life, and if ever Inverarity's underworld is uncovered, it would only suggest that she is trapped again in another Rapunzel tower of conformism. Finally, as she is dragged to attend the auction of Inverarity's irregular stamps, the crying of lot 49, she meditates upon the four alternatives:

> Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LBO or other indole alkaloids, onto a secret richness and concealed density of dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps and ancient books, constant surveillance of your movements, planting of post horn images all over San Francisco, bribing of librarians, hiring of professional actors and Pierce Inverarity only knows what- all-besides, all financed out of the estate in a way either too secret or too involved for your non-legal mind to know about even though you are co-executor, so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical

> joke. Or you are fantasying some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull.
>
> (C. L. 49., p. 128)

The auction for Oedipa is a threat to return to the tower of oblivion, and she finds herself between two choices that lead to the same ending. If she proceeds, she may unveil the whole context which will carry her escape to an immediate end. If she refuses to attend the auction she will certainly lose the durability of escape as there will be no more clues to search for. Ordering the last bits of courage in her, "the courage you find you have when there is nothing more to lose" and decides to face her destiny. Fortunately for the paranoid character, Pynchon implies at the end that the auction was never the end line, and that it will merely offer even greater horizons for further escape. It then appears from the clues and the novel's sudden closure that the crying of lot 49 will only yield another move along the path instead of an end.

Accordingly, this account of a suspended meaning is a representation of the most important reading models of the decade ahead: reader-response theory and deconstruction. The reader-response theory accepts the suspension in that it presumes that there is no finite or fundamental meaning to be retrieved in the piece of literature. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Driblette provides a picturization of himself as "the projector at the planetarium (. . .) that's what I am for. To give the spirit flesh. The words, who cares? (. . .) but the reality is in this head. Mine" (C. L. 49., p. 62). This is to demonstrate the essential claim of the reader-response theory that there is no text, no interpretation, and no meaning apart from that generated in the reader's mind. The absence of meaning sensed in the novel is not a source of anxiety for reader-response critics[466], but the excuse from which emphasis is displaced from the text to the reader's intellect.[467] Correspondingly, Roland Barthes suggests that:

[466] This idea is supported by the reader-response critics Stanley Fish and Hans Robert Jauss.

> The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, or psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted (…) Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature…we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.[468]

The arbitrariness of meaning, which equally tolerates this suspension present in Oedipa's journey, is one of the highlights of the deconstructionist school. Along with what came to be then known as the poststructuralist and the Lancanian psychoanalysis, new paranoid readers' approaches shared the premise that meaning is never inherent in the text. Nevertheless, they doubt the reader's ability to retrieve meaning. One cannot fathom at the end of the narrative whether Oedipa will resume the never-ending ride through which she will be able to garner the individuality absent in Rapunzel's tower. If it is exaggerated, escape into illusive tapestry is nevertheless, a substitute for the Wasteland. Driblette's warning for Oedipa that she might "put together clues, develop a thesis, or several" only to "waste her life that way and never tough the truth", however, turns accurate. The continuation of the reading patterns of the next decade is to be found in the uncertainty of meaning present through the character of Slothrop in Pynchon's next novel.

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[467] Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. 5. (London: Pearson Longman, 2005): 49-55.

[468] Roland Barthes, "Image, Music, Text", *The Death of the Author*, tr. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 148.

3. Slothrop as a Paranoid Reader

The 1970s is historically associated with a pivotal change in the world and in the United States especially, following the economic boom of the post-war. It has been described as a "nondescript interlude", the "Me Decade", the Age of Diminishing Expectations, the Age of Uncertainties, "our strangest decade", and the "Crisis Decade" among other descriptions.[469] The sense of doubt inherited from the previous decade is only intensified, and the political and economic spheres did not realize much progress since the birth of conspiracies. The crisis continued to hit the nation and the sense of cynicism grew in the American consciousness after The New Left, the Women's Rights movement, the Gay Rights movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the Hippie movement witnessed miserable conclusions. Followed by the presidential scandal of Nixon and the 1973 oil crisis,[470] the population was only driven into more suspicion and fear of conspiracies. The drop that spilt the glass was the beginning of the USSR intrusion in the US and the introduction of a different genus of war; one that is in essence surreptitious. In *The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991*, Eric Hobsbawn describes that during the aftermath of the Second World War "entire generations grew up under the shadow of global nuclear battles which, it was widely believed, could break out at any moment, and devastate humanity." [471] The period was marked by constant anxiety, based only on the assumption that the mere fear of destruction would prevent one side or the other from "giving the ever-ready signal for the planned suicide of civilization. It did not happen, but for some forty years it looked a daily possibility." [472]

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[469] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp 89-90.

[470] Eric Hobsbawn, *The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1994) 226.
Confusion among people was intensified with critics starting to doubt the authority of the United States internationally. Hobsbawn declares that it was "awful moments when the greatest power on the earth could find no response to a consortium of feeble Third World states" (Hobsbawn: 248)

[471] Ibid.
[472] Ibid.

The anxiety of the time and the fear of the unknown is unsurprisingly echoed on the level of academy and reading. Famous critics were coming to the surface with new approaches and thoughts: Derrida with his French philosophies, Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller teaching at Yale University, Roland Barthes publishing *The Pleasure of the Text*, Hayden White's *Metahistory*, Wolfgang Iser's *The Implied Reader*, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form*, and Lacan's theory of the "return to Freud".[473] New methods were endorsed at a quick pace, with the aim of replacing the unity outlined by traditional schools of interpretation including the New Critics, with disunity and differentiation.[474]

Unsurprisingly, the prevailing mood of fear and disillusionment brought about a smooth shift into the new reading approaches. Drained from the hard task of obtaining meaning from the conspiratorial texts, and influenced by the mechanisms of politics and the views of Derrida, Barthes, and Lacan the paranoid reader grew more paranoid that he questions the existence of meaning at all in the postmodern literature. Reader-response then, recommends that any interpretation is to be celebrated. Optimism remains in the theory that every piece of literature is readable once encountered by a human mind.

This hope though is shared in the view of other critics like Iser and Jauss, it is not made on the same grounds. The "inexhaustibility of the text" as Iser understands it implies that there remain some prearrangements that guide the creation of meaning in the text. The reader has the freedom to fill in the blanks, yet the written text imposes certain limits on its written implications in order to

[473] More information is available in Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*. He explains the "routinization" of the theoretical approaches of the time and the clash that happened between different schools of interpretation especially the New Criticism.

[474] Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature : An Institutional History* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1992) 224.

prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy.[475] As for Jauss, he explains the way of reading contemporary fiction as such:

> the specific reception which the author anticipates from the reader for a particular work can be achieved, even if the explicit signals are missing, by three generally acceptable means: first, by the familiar standards of the inherent poetry of the genre; second, by the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary historical context; and third, by the contrast between fiction and reality, between the poetic and the practical function of language. [476]

Hence, the proposition is that a number of textual directing devices are still present within the text supporting in a way what Stanley Fish conceptualizes as the "interpretive communities". That is, the reading practice depends essentially on the reader's previously built belief system. This system, claims Fish "exists prior to the act of reading and therefore determines the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around".[477] Fish then, does not suggest that there are prearrangements in the narratives as is in the view of Iser, but a set of triggers that operate on the personal level of the reader.

Gravity's Rainbow being the "encyclopaedic narrative" [478] that it is, is mostly known for the difficulty of reading. The reference to the reading pattern of the novel is found in Brigadier Pudding's exclamation at the beginning of the novel "who can find his way about this lush maze of initials". This may well be the reaction of the suspicious reader being confronted for instance with the labyrinth

[475] Wolfgang Iser, Jauss and Fish quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp 94-98.

[476] Ibid.

[477] Ibid.

[478] Comment by Edward Mendelson on the novel regarding its length and overindulgence in historical events, scientific advancements, and technological devices. He also says that "to refer to it as a novel is convenient, but to read it as a novel (. . .) is to misconstrue it"

Edward Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon", *MLN*, vol. 91, no. 6. (1976): 1267–1275, online, Jstor, Internet, 4 May 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/2907136/.

of abbreviations: IG, AG, AEG, BOQ, FRCS. OKW, MMPI, CBI, NISO, SPOG, WLB and many more. Similarly, the hallucinations of Vanya can be assumed for how a paranoid reader could describe the narrative: “a twisting of yarns or cordage, a giant web a wrenching of hide, of muscles in the hard grip of something, that comes to wrestle when the night is deep”. She later continues: “a sense, too, of visitation by the dead, afterward a sick feeling that they are as friendly as they seemed to be” and just like the reader “he has wakened, cried, sought explanation, but no one ever told him anything he could believe”. (G. R., p. 155)

In the very introductory passage of the novel, the description of “he” in the quick panic caused by the sudden evacuation process, stands for the fear and anxiety that the paranoid reader faces when opening the book. Brian McHale explains this anxiety and urgent desire to “know” triggered by the text’s first paragraph in the questions “who is this “he” whom the narrative does not find it necessary to identify” and “where and when is this Evacuation taking place? What screams across the sky?”.[479] The longing to enter the fictional world of the novel that is normally granted at the first encounter is abruptly denied to the reader.

As a character who mirrors the readers of the time, it has been admitted in this regard though that Oedipa, being the timid character that she is, does often drift apart from her journey as she comforts her compliance-driven rationality-craving mind into outbreaks of diverse sorts of escapist mechanisms rather than paranoid thinking and dreams. Different episodes reveal her passive mind state either by means of alcohol, drugs, sex, or even consumption of television shows. Yet throughout the novel, Oedipa proves highly dedicated to the Tristero, and whether it is fantasy or reality, she shows no feebleness to negotiate her escape. It is this scenario that is utterly overturned in the character of Slothrop, because reading at the time of the seventies was not meant to be interpretively productive.

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[479] Brain McHale, “Modernist Reading, Post-modern Text: The Case of Gravity's Rainbow”, *Poetics Today* 1.1/2 Literature, Interpretation, Communication (Duke University Press: Autumn, 1979): 85-110, online, Jstor, Accessed 1 May 2021. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/1772042/.

The less calamitous *The Crying of Lot 49* is Pynchon's fictitious ratification of dynamic confrontation methods to the destructive potencies that drive the postmodern world. It commemorates the fight between the lost mortality, truth, knowledge, meaning and existence itself against the new culture of anarchy and deceit. Far from that is *Gravity's Rainbow* exhibition of a miserable survival that propagates when the paranoid desires are surrendered. In preparation for the obliteration of meaning, the novel progresses, as Richard Locke depicts it, in a "bone-crushingly dense, compulsively elaborate, silly, obscene, funny, tragic, pastoral, historical, philosophical, poetic, grindingly dull, inspired, horrific, cold, bloated, bleached and blasted" fashion, all at once.[480]

What we learn about the protagonist before encountering him is that he keeps a map of his sexual interactions with a star as a reference. His obsession recalls that of Oedipa, and when he finally enters the course of action in the narrative he speaks of "some horrible secret plot" (G. R., p. 22). He could simply find himself in every bombing scene and relate it to a bigger scheme running after his head. Slothrop is the typical paranoid reader who hunts for meaning beneath the simple words, and shares with Oedipa the suspicion that "they" are after him. Just like her, after being confronted with Imipolex G and S-Gerät, Slothrop enters "The Zone" with high hopes that he will gather the shreds of evidence and uncover the truth. As a Calvinist who lost all certitude in divinity, and as a distrustful personality, Tyrone Slothrop senses the need to "seek other orders behind the visible within every edifice" (G. R., p. 188). His obsession as reviewed beforehand, revolves around the mystery of the Rocket, and its connection to his sexual behaviours, which is manifested in numerous random cues.

At first, Slothrop demonstrates great audacity to pursue the escape from "Them". He begins his paranoid quest by fleeing the Riviera and gathering data about his secret relationship with the Rocket. Chased by "the English, the

[480] Richard Locke quoted in Owana K McLester-Greenfield: op.cit., pp 394.

Russians, the exiled Africans and who-knows-who-else", Slothrop attires several masks. A battle reporter Ian Scuffling, a movie star Max Schlepzig, and a Rocket-man Plechazunga, are all replicated characters to escape from "Their" imposed systems to meaningfulness. He moves from Nice to Geneva, Zurich, the Mittelwerke at Nordhausen, Berlin, the Potsdam Conference, Peenemünde and Swinemünde, Zwölfkinder and Cuxhaven. Slothrop manages to compete in and out of various baffling settings – a midair cream pie fight, a sea-going Nazi saturnalia, a comb for a suicidal lemming, a hashish heist, a sudden meeting with Mickey Rooney, a brave liberation of a German porno-film director, an austere of black marketeers and a face-to-face with an amorous pig – while maintaining all the time a step ahead of "Them".

Up until arriving at the Zone, Slothrop like Oedipa, managed to preserve the motivation for uncovering the truth refusing to kneel to the sadistic set-up. Once in the Zone, however, the irony of the Zero took a step in, and Slothrop begins to feel less anxious about betraying those who trust him. He feels obligations less immediately "a general loss of emotion, a numbness he ought to be alarmed at, but can't quite" (G. R., p. 490-491). This is the moment that Slothrop gives up the endeavour as he grows weary of his paranoid illusory readings. Anti-paranoia then displays "where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long" (G. R., p. 434). In his attempt to paranoid reading, Slothrop – unlike Oedipa, or like a continuation for her character – loses himself. Proving fragile in the face of ambiguity, the once obsessed potency returns to the Wasteland, to a tower of meaninglessness. Stripped of his memories, of obligations and any appreciation for his existence, Slothrop's consciousness ridiculously breaks down:

> 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

> hard-ware but now aw it's JUST LIKE – LOOK-IN' FAWR A NEEDLE IN A HAAAAY-STACK !
>
> (G. R., p. 561)

While the reading mechanism proved possible for Slothrop as it was for Oedipa at first, his abrupt dissolution was rather disastrous. Being able to keep his distance from them for quite a while, and hence, achieving a reading likelihood that most of the characters in the novel fantasized in vain to attain, his final emancipation from "Them" was secured at the price of himself, and the reading mechanism turns against him. While paranoia established an alternative world for him to break off from subjugation, his feebleness delivered him nowhere and the escape from them was rendered an escape from oneself, from commitment, from the past and the future. Edward Mendelson explicates this failure:

> Slothrop's disintegration at the end of the book (…) is not the work of those who oppose or betray him, but is the consequence of his own betrayals, his own loss of interest in the escape, his own failures to relate and connect (. . .) when he has entered his isolation in the Zone, his sense that acts have consequences in time begins to diminish; he forgets that he exists in a realm of responsibility where relations extend into the past and future (. . .) separated by his own escape and his own empty freedom from an originating past or a future to which he could be responsible, Slothrop can only diminish and disintegrate. 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.[481]

The antimodel to Oedipa's journey, Slothrop and the majority of the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, reveal that failure at maintaining the paranoid quest for freedom is nourished by the sense of commitment, responsibility, and gallantry to break the cuffs of the Wasteland. As the narrative approaches the end, Slothrop becomes "one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell-stripped. Scattered all over the zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional

[481] Edward Mendelson: op. cit., pp. 1270.

sense of 'positively identified and detained'" (G. R., p. 712). With such collapse, the system loses curiosity in him, as well as his allied Counterforce as they claim to have never been "*concerned with Slothrop qua Slothrop*" (G. R., p.738). Poof of emptiness is Pynchon's last statement about the character. Upon vanishing into the Zone, his Tarot reading précises his destiny with "the cards of tanker and a feeb: they point only to a long and scuffling future, to mediocrity (. . .) to no clear happiness or redeeming cataclysm. All his hopeful cards are reversed" (G. R., p.738). Lastly, he is described as covered by the Fool, the only card that points out to no particular direction or numeral.

Two significant differences appear between Oedipa and Slothrop: first, in Slothrop's case, the reader dos not grasp a sense of normality at the first encounter with him. Paranoia and conspiracy for him rather appear as a default mode, which he undertakes and accepts as a status quo. Second, he soon accepts the fact that maybe there is no message at the end and that the forces going after him do not want his head after all. That is, he accepts the possibility of living with "them". Along the journey, we do not sense urgency and commitment as in the case of Oedipa and Slothrop happens to participate in the game for has "nothing better to do" (G. R., p.370).

However, this departure from paranoia does not have to denote a negative attitude regarding the way it reflects the reading pattern of the seventies. If paranoia had the reassuring quality of escape and freedom, Slothrop's rejection to it by the end of his journey opens him to what Oedipa has been avoiding: meaninglessness. His final decision to stop reading and interpreting the clues simply suggests his departure from the paranoid reader. He gradually disappears from the narrative and his fate "is not so clear" as he "becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection" (G. R., p. 637-702). The "Zone", in which Slothrop fails at integration, is described as "a great frontierless streaming"(G. R., p.558), disordered, imbalanced, multi-national, multi-lingual, and polyphonic. The struggle of the paranoid reader to dictate order upon it and to establish a secure

meaning in the text is denied ever since. Once in the Zone, the narrator states that "Slothrop, though he doesn't know it yet, is as properly constituted a state as any other in the Zone these days. Not paranoia. Just how it is. Temporary alliances, knit and undone" (G. R., p.295). This demonstrates Paul Feyerabend's concept of the postmodern characteristic that "Anything Goes". He writes:

> The idea of a fixed method, or a fixed theory of rationality, rests on too naïve a view of man and his social surroundings. To those who look at the rich material provided by history, and who are not intent on impoverishing it in order to please their lower instincts, their craving for intellectual security in the form of clarity, precision, 'objectivity', 'truth', it will become clear that there is only one principle that can be defended under all circumstances and in all stages of human development. It is the principle: anything goes.[482]

The novel in both form and content challenges the reader with "unreadability" and at one point in the narrative, he feels the need to sacrifice the quest for meaning altogether. The reading philosophy of the time ranging from Barth's "Death of the Author" to Derrida's de-centring and deconstruction, and to Feyerabend's resistance to resolution share in common the impracticality of definite meaning as presented in Slothrop's character. Correspondingly, both Iser and Jauss celebrate this gap in meaning as of highly aesthetic value in literature. For Iser "no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader's eyes".[483] Artistic productions that do not confuse the audience or "texts which offer nothing but a harmonious world, purified of all contradiction and deliberately excluding anything that might disturb the illusion once established" have less aesthetic value. This is what Jauss labels "the horizon of expectations" which determines the worth of the text: "the way in which a literary work satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or disproves the expectations of its first readers in the

[482] Paul Feyerabend's quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 104-105.

[483] Wolfgang Iser quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 113.

historical moment of its appearance obviously gives a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value".[484]

4. Conclusion: Looking Forward

The paranoid reader then is perhaps morphed slowly into a non-paranoid reader who can be satisfied with the unlikelihood of a rewarding interpretation. When everyone was waiting for Byron-the-Bulb to sing, his song calls openly for the freedom of reading, and recapitulates Slothrop's final anti-paranoia; he says:

> Light-up, and-shine, you – in cande-scent Bulb Ba-bies !
> Looks-like ya got ra-bies
> Just lay there foamin' and a-screamin' like a buncha
> little demons,
> I'm deliv'rin' unto you a king-dom of roa-ches,
> And no-thin' ap-proaches
> That joyful feelin' when-you're up-on the ceilin'
> Lookin' down – night and day – on the king-dom you sur-vey,
> They'll come out 'n' love ya till the break of dawn,
> But they run like hell when that light comes on !
> So shine on, Baby Bulbs, you're the wave of the fu-ture,
> And I'm here to recruit ya,
> In m'great crusade,
> Just sing along Babies – come-on-and-join-the-big-pa-rade !
>
> (G. R., p. 648)

The optimism established in the journey of Oedipa during the 1960s is transformed into an endless deferral of meaning following the critical theories of the 1970s. Arriving at the extreme of meaninglessness and uncertainty, the decades to come displayed to a great extent a rebirth of what Pynchon calls "the Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible" (G. R., p.190). While the American authors were occupied with deferral and disbalancing, many intellectuals were considering rebalancing. In his interpretation of the Me Decade, Tom Wolfe provides his hypothesis that the second half of the seventies will be

[484] Ibid.

characterized by a "Third Great Awakening". He argues that the factions which constitute the mass culture will soon turn into spirituality and morality, or what Hoeveler describes as the "impressive intellectual renaissance of conservatism".[485] This reading pattern shall be explored in the next chapter of this study through Tartt's allegory in her narrator Richard.

[485] Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX:

A PARANOID CHARACTER, A RESISTANT READER

"Let me make no bones about it: I write from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. Nothing is more repulsive to me than the idea of myself setting up a little universe of my own choosing and propounding a little immoralistic message. I write with a solid belief in all the Christian dogmas."

Flannery O'Connor

In the previous chapter, I have explored the reader's response to Pynchon's paranoid fiction, and the way his characters reflected the reading zeitgeist associated with the post-war culture. I have also argued that Pynchon's recommendation of paranoia as an escapist little narrative was sensed in the way his novels were read. Oedipa and Slothrop were the exemplifications of the paranoid reader who is impelled to dig beneath the surface of the texts and chase clues about their obscure meanings. This paranoid reader is the outcome of the battle between the highbrow and lowbrow culture as portrayed in the novels. The former attempts at restricting the reading practices and keeping the literature as high standard art, and the latter calls for personal and free interaction with the text. This chapter attempts to trace the same character-reader parallel in Tartt's novel.

The election of Ronald Reagan on November 4, 1980, was the pinnacle of reviving conservatism in the latter half of the 1970s. While his policies were the most obvious rupture from the previous decade, other events in the 1980s foreshadowed significant developments in the years to come. Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan's deaths in 1980 and 1981 indicated the decline in French theory; Annette Kolodny's article "Dancing through the Minefield" in the Spring 1980 issue of Feminist Studies provided an early insight into the pluralism in methodology that would become the new norm in cultural studies. Additionally, the MTV's debut in August 1981, which seemed to embody the critics' anxieties about the television's ability to cause attention deficit disorder, predicted the confusing advances in technology and entertainment.[486] The next decades that follow the hype of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and by the time *The Secret History* was published, the American culture witnessed the rise of multiculturalism and plurality.[487] Postcolonialism, New Historicism, Feminism, Ethnic Studies, and other schools of criticism composed "a playful pluralism".[488]

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[486] Tobias Julian Meinel*, The Reader's Progress* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010) 118.
[487] Ibid.

[488] Judith Kegan Gardiner, et al, "An Interchange On Feminist Criticism: On "Dancing through the Minefield"", *Feminist Studies,* vol. 8, n. 3 (1982): 629-675.

With the increasing interest in marginality and plurality, I suggest that *The Secret History's* form and subject matter differ from Pynchon's accounts because it reflects an entirely different reading habit: the resistant reading. The reader-response analysis has previously concluded that the creation of paranoid fiction echoes the suspicious reading behaviour that attempted to break from the methods of the classical schools of interpretation in the 1960s and 1970s. Developing on that, this chapter reveals that Tartt's account of the aspiring college youth is an allegory to a resistant reading developed from the collective interest in plurality. As such, the novel will be read by readers who share non-paranoid views of the world as a place structured by illusion and falsehood. The resistant reading unlike the paranoid reading, is based on emphasizing a precise niche instead of operating on a large scale of suspicion.

The Secret History depicts a world in which the new alters the old, and reflects the readers' disagreement in both its narrative structure and its content. Richard's 1990s illustration of America constitutes the introduction of reason into a world of pre-Enlightenment full of magic, superstition, and desire. The work demonstrates the interest in the struggle between rationalism and the persistent nostalgia for mystical possibilities. It could be interpreted as a comment on America or as an example of what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction".[489] Despite the apparent metafictional aspect of the book and the evident reference to reading in the first chapters, there is an astonishing lack of critical analysis of Tartt's novel dealing with the question of reading. Taking into account what I consider a clear thematic presence of reading in the novel, my analysis of the characters as readers not only indicates that the narrative reflects the problems of reading at the time, but also offers a way out of escapism in reading the postmodern literature.

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[489] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 1989) 14.

To date, there is no full-length study that links *The Secret History* to resistant reading, or attempts a reader-response criticism of the novel. Looking at Richard Papen as the embodiment of the paranoia-resisting reader, I suggest that paranoia as a little narrative of anti-conventionalism is not sufficient at replacing the grand methods of interpretation. This phenomenon, I argue, goes hand in hand with the decline of the paranoid experimental style in postmodernist literature. To achieve that, this chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I explore the evolvement of the late-postmodernist literary criticism, and the way it impels at resistant reading. Appropriating the concept from Judith Fetterley's feminist analysis to the study of paranoia, I explain in the next section that Richard mirrors the reader's interest in resistant reading by the 1990s. This is done by reflecting on the way he distances himself from the paranoid views of Henry until the end of the narrative. In the last section of this chapter, I demonstrate that based on the analysis that has been done on the fiction of Pynchon and Tartt, the postmodernist literature – in creating a paranoid and resistant reader – has managed to create a non-escapist fiction that stands apart from the nineteenth-century and the modernist productions.

1. The Resistant Reader and the Discourse of Late-Postmodernism:

The manifestation of the renaissance of conservatism that came with the election of Reagan as president was reinforced with his 1984 re-election. Following the confusion of the Sixties and the uncertainties of the Seventies, Reagan's authoritarian persona, his anti-Soviet stance, and the thriving economy provided a sense of certainty and reassurance for the masses. David Farber claims that Reagan lifted up "the fallen torch of national leadership".[490] He symbolized the president that the American public longed for after decades of insecurity and the period witnessed what Farber described as the "new age of belief in capitalism, even in the righteous power of greed and selfishness, in God's merciful power to

[490] David Farber, "The Torch Had Fallen", *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber, (University Press of Kansas, 2004) 09-28, 25.

help those who help themselves".[491] This is not to suggest though, that the legacy of the previous decades has completely vanished. This is especially apparent in the economic difficulties with which Reagan left office, and the low turnout at the election with less than 30% of eligible Americans voting for him and more than half of them not voting at all.[492] Apparently, the sense of alienation that was inherited from the Sixties and the Seventies has not simply withered away. Essentially, what Reaganism disguised was a social division that was intensely expressed in the Culture War of the decade.[493]

The 1980s literary critics and many more in the following decades,[494] subscribed to the same main thesis: that postmodernist culture and its interpretation represented feedback to the "radical" philosophy of the 1960s, and that a more moderate approach would re-establish the traditional cultural influence. Kristiaan Versluys is an example of the critics who positioned themselves directly within this critical frame in the 1991 conference on neorealism. He asserted that as a by-product of post-structuralism in its many guises, literary critics have been told for the last thirty years or more, that what they always presumed to be the real is nothing but a treacherous "*trompe l'oeil"*, an illusory epiphenomenon – a lie to be unmasked by playfulness and invention.[495] Following Versluys, this "strange overturning of common sense" made the consumers of literature celebrate the radically experimental fiction of postmodernism. The reader of the postmodernist fiction in Versluys words:

> has learnt to accept and appreciate novels in which characters levitate, in which Victorian clergymen gamble or (more

[491] Ibid., pp. 26

[492] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp.120.

[493] Ibid.

[494] For example, Robert Rebein argues in his 2001 analysis "American Fiction After Postmodernism" that some sort of revitalization of realism has taken place and that Tom Wolfe's prediction that the immediate future of the American novel would be in the realist mode has largely come to pass.

[495] Kristiaan Versluys, ed. *Neo-Realism in Contemporary American Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992) 1.

> improbably even) change religions, in which historical figures do un-historical things, in which a character is dead in one chapter, alive and kicking in the next. We have become familiar with novels which proceed by flashbacks but sometimes also by prolepsis, novels with uncertain beginnings and multiple endings, in which no forking path of Ts'ui Pên's garden has been left unexplored. The dervish dance of the signifiers – the raucous free-for-all of polysemy and fabulation – has become the enabling matrix for the John Barthes, Thomas Pynchons, and Ronald Sukenicks of this world. [496]

Versluys' criticism of the reader's response to the postmodernist aesthetic directs his argument that it is a common knowledge that at a certain point in time writers and critics will stop being intellectuals and return to life as ordinary beings, and that "*the real IS real*".[497] These voices stood at the opposite side of the spectrum against the popular postmodernist voices, while the tendency of pluralism and multiculturalism was emerging.

In 1991, James Davison Hunter observed the cultural zeitgeist and came to the conclusion that a full-scale "Culture War" branded the period in the United States. Hunter argues that cultural warriors with sharply differentiated and clearly articulated moral visions – such as multiculturalism, women's rights, gay rights, child-care policy, and education – were fighting for the very identity of the nation.[498] "The contemporary culture war is ultimately a struggle over national identity – over the meaning of America".[499] Accordingly, Gil Troy suggests in Morning in America that on one hand "Reagan's America was remarkably, depressingly conformist, with everyone rushing to get home, kick off their Nikes, and watch Cosby".[500] On the other hand, however, the nation was "remarkably,

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[496] Ibid.
[497] Ibid., pp. 7.

[498] Michael Odell Spivey, *Cultural Warriors Go to Court: The Supreme Court and the Battle For the "Soul" of America* (Maryland, College Park: University of Maryland, 2015) 1-2.

[499] Ibid.

[500] Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) 285.

depressingly, divided, with the loud extremes at opposing sides of the spectrum creating mutually reinforcing but mutually exclusive social, cultural, political, and ideological identities."[501]

Reagan's position on the matter of education was the typical conservative against liberal education. He expressed his worries to his friend Walter Annenberg that "young people are getting a lot of indoctrination along with their teaching".[502] That is to say that if yesterday's radical scholars are today's tenured instructors and deans, then the academicians who are paid to familiarize students with the great ideologies of western civilization have by and large remained faithful to the emancipationist philosophy of the Sixties.[503] Troy describes the new atmosphere as such;

> The multiculturalists broadened the scope of American higher education — but at the cost of a lot of cants. The politically correct, diverse university was a less open, less vigorous, less free, less interesting, less honest, and less happy place than it could have been, with far too much political posturing, obfuscatory lingo, and trendy sloganeering masquerading as cutting-edge thought. The conservatives defended important values, but amid great hysteria and an occasional closed-mindedness of their own. Most American students watched bemusedly, learning to pay homage to the gods of political correctness and parrot the new jargon, while remaining focused on getting admitted to law school or medical school.[504]

Consequently, Allan Bloom and others[505] believed that in a time when the culture of the Sixties and the "tenured radicals" had devalued education and reading in

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[501] Ibid.
[502] Ibid., pp. 271.

[503] Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp.121.
[504] Gil Troy: op.cit., pp. 272.
[505] Conservative culture defenders such as William J. Bennett in *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* (1984), Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), and Roger Kimball's aforementioned *Tenured Radicals* generally took the same stance.

general, it was only the mission for a new conservatism to restore education and a taste of reading and interpretation as in high culture.[506]

In addition to the cultural division manifested in Culture War, technologizing education and reading started to take a different turn. Critics of different views shared the fear that other mediums such as television began to be academically studied along with literature.[507] For example, John Fiske and John Harley's *Reading Television* (1978) demonstrate the emerging trend of including the television in academic debates. They suggest that television can be read and studied by applying the same critical theories that apply to literature. Sloan De Villa explains in his article "The Decline of American Postmodernism" that "postmodernism as a literary movement in the United States in now in its final phase of decadence (…) American culture moves into an era of post-literature".[508] He sees the peak of American postmodern literature in the 1960s and 1970s to be completely different from the literature produced by the 1980s and 1990s. He notes that as postmodernism fades into the history, there is no evidence that any meaningful literary movement will follow it; "American culture generally is becoming increasingly post-literature (…) and at the end of postmodernism we may also be witnessing the end of literature as a mode of culture".[509] De Villa shares the perspective that the project of post-literature will be to return to a common language rather than an inflated metalanguage.[510] He writes, "however altered, it will present a revived interest in the possibilities of narrative (…) it will be a dialectic reaction against new postmodernism". [511] Post-literature will necessarily evolve outside the academy, "correcting the attempt by universities to

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[506] Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp.121.
[507] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp.127.

[508] Solan De Villo, "The Decline of American Postmodernism", *SubStance,* vol. 16, no. 3 (1987): 29-43, online, Internet, 29 June 2021. Available: https://doi.org/10.2307/3685195/.

[509] Ibid., pp. 41.
[510] Ibid., pp. 42.
[511] Ibid.

institutionalize and control literature. it will rely on new technological forms for production and distribution".[512]

Indeed, In "Reader-Oriented Criticism and Television" Robert C. Allen promotes the idea that reading can also describe other activities than simply reading books such as viewing and listening.[513] These examples outline a significant change in audience-oriented criticism, and at the initiation of cultural studies, texts other than literature were "read" and the cultural or social context of the actual readers gradually became the focal point of criticism. Reader-response criticism grew assimilated into Ethnic and Gender Studies, New Historicism and Postcolonial Studies, with the primary goal of building a new, contextualized reader.[514]

This developing approach to literary analysis summarized in the growing interest in the reader's identity is inspired by the various changes in the political and social spheres, as well as the reader's desire for resistance. In a decade marked by Reaganism, the Wall Street boom, globalization, and neoconservatism, when there was a heavy criticism against feminism (according to Susan Faludi), and when fiction and art, in general, were politically, morally, and emotionally tentative, reading often became an oppositional activity.[515] Jonathan Franzen conceives reading during the 1980s and 1990s to be "a form of social opposition (…) a kind of cultural Je refuse!" [516] This is somewhat what was labelled by Judith Fetterley as "the resisting reader". Though this term has been coined and used by Fetterley to describe an approach to reading that moves beyond the prevailing cultural views of patriarchy and female subjugation, the term can also be appropriated out of the feminist discourse. In this regard, the term "resistant reader" may be used to explain the readers' reading habits of late postmodernist

[512] Ibid.
[513] Ibid.
[514] Ibid., pp. 128.

[515] Jonathan Franzen quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp.132.
[516] Ibid.

fiction. In the 1980s, the resisting reader adopts a self-protective position despite various influences. Patriarchy is simply one example; the ideal reader, anti-intellectualism, television and new media are other examples.

Fetterley explains the resisting stance as a self-defensive manual for the female reader lost in the wilderness of American novel. [517] She puts into inquiry the "phallic" nature of the American fiction, and the reading of that fiction by the "phallic" critics. That means that while literature claims to speak to a universal audience, only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted, and that is the reality of the writer's perception (and in the feminist case of the male's perception). Fetterley's argument is based on the assumption that the reader inscribed in most recognized literature is a male reader. Hence, the female reader is obliged to assume the role of a male: "women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny."[518] The female reader consequently has a defined objective: to resist this value system and to authorize a different kind of reading, one that is more tolerable to the female specificities. This act entails liberating the perspective of the narrative. Fetterley sees the purpose of the resistant reader as to create a new understanding of the available literature and to make possible a new effect of that literature on the reader. Consequently, to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the preconditions for changing the culture that literature reflects. [519]

In reviewing Fetterley's book George Monteiro provides an exciting range of questions on what it really means to be a "resisting reader". He asks:

[517] Judith Fetterley, "The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction", (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1978) xi, online, Google Books, Internet, 13 November 2021. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=4pGhgzPbQzcC&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[518] Ibid., pp. xx.

[519] Ibid., pp. xix-xx.

> who is the resisting reader? Is it she who must resist what the tale tells her or what the teller of the tale would tell her? Or is it he, the male reader of this polemic, who is warned from the outset that he must resist the tale told here as well as the teller? [520]

Relating Monteiro's comment to Versluys's anticipatory criticism of Barth, Pynchon, and Sukenicks, and the growth of cultural pluralism, one can suggest that the branding characteristic of the reading and criticism behaviour during the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s was driven by "resistance". The aestheticism, literary analysis, historicism, and the establishment of prototypes and interpretation standards of the 1970s have been replaced with the new vague field of cultural studies. This latter is a manifestation of the Culture War and the variety of resistant readings and criticisms and is based on the formation of a precise niche, which depends on the reader's identity, instead of operating on a larger scale of analysis. The myriad of theories and sub-theories, meadows and valleys, produced a disordered field of literary criticism. Since then we hear of "body studies, disability studies, whiteness studies, media studies, indigenous studies, narrative studies, porn studies, performance studies, working-class studies, popular culture studies, trauma studies, and so on" all in relation to the practice of reading and interpretation. [521]

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[520] George Monteiro, "Review Work: The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction by Judith Fetterley", *Modern Language Studies* , vol. 13, n. 3 (1983): 123-125. https://doi.org/10.2307/3194186/.

[521] In Vincent B. Leitch's Living with Theory, he describes this condition as the "postmodernization of literary studies", a situation characterized by the divide between high and low cultures weakening; the modern autonomy of spheres erodes; crises of representation occur; new social movements (specifically women, gender and civil rights movements) displace traditional political parties as innovative forces; societies become explicitly, sometimes, officially, multicultural; big government, big labour, and big business get downsized (and especially unevenly); the human subject becomes a decentred posthuman cyborg, occupying multiple subject positions; the multiversity replaces the college; new disciplines like women's, ethnic, postcolonial, and cultural studies arise; and grand narratives undergo deconstruction. While the study that we are conducting is itself part of this confusing fashion of cultural studies, as being paranoia studies, the aim is to provide insight into how it could diagnose a particular point in history in respect of the reading behaviour of the American public.

Vincent B. Leitch's quoted in Jeffrey R. Di Leo, "Vincent B. Leitch, Living with Theory", *The Comparatist*. vol. 33. (Gale Literature Resource Centre, 2009): 179 – 185. 184, online, Internet, 3 May 2021. Available: https://go.gale.com/ps/anonymous?id=GALE%7CA201370717&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=01957678&p=LitRC&sw=w/ .

It should be stated, however, that this emerging vague of personalized readings was nevertheless highly criticized. Terry Eagleton argues in *After Theory* that the traditional cultural theory had lost its essence in the emerging cultural studies. The latter was received with great contradiction regarding its personalized terminology and vagueness.[522] For Eagleton Cultural Studies resembles "working on the history of pubic hair while half of the world's population lacks adequate sanitation and survives on less than two dollars a day".[523] In the same line of thought, Herman Rapaport's conceptualization of "playful pluralism" or "theory mess" in literary theory and reading practices. While his book *The Theory of Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse* stresses mainly the repercussions of Derrida's philosophy on the American society, he voices over what he believes to be an "over-proliferation of theoretical modes".[524] Rapaport suggests that the well-ranked American universities have created an "uncontrolled intellectual market expansion"[525], and that modern-day readers were influenced by individuality, promoting their own theories and neglecting the collegial faculty to literary aestheticism.[526] However, what this criticism actually confirms is the ever-growing

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[522] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 168.
[523] Jeffrey R. Di Leo: op.cit., pp. 185.

[524] Harman Rapaport, "The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse" (Columbia University Press, 10 January 2001) xi, online, Internet, Google Books, 10 December 2021. Available: https://books.google.dz/books?id=VNIfLNhRS6cC&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[525] Ibid., pp. xvi.
There still was a noteworthy defensive move in the academy against all this. While literature departments were progressively "reading culture", there was a traditionalist counter-measure emphasizing the importance of canonical literature and conservative criticism. In many instances, it was the Creative Writing departments which supported the articulation of this view.
[526] Ibid.
By the beginning of the new millennium, the frustration with postmodern cultural studies and theory mess was met by a call for retrieving close reading and the traditional reading patterns associated with high culture. Echoing C. S. Lewis's suggestion in An Experiment in Criticism, "if literary scholarships and criticism are regarded as activities ancillary to literature, then their sole function is to multiply, prolong, and safeguard experiences of good reading".
Clive Staples Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) 30.

For that reason, a system that re-centres the literature in operation is especially needed. Critics such as Valentine Cunningham and Steven Carter attempt to re-centre the decentred text. In *Devotions to the Text*, Carter agreed with the suggestion that artistic works exist in an aesthetic vacuum was essentially misleading, and that "students must be taught all over again how to devote themselves to the text – to discriminate in terms dictated not by ideologies brought to the text but by the text itself".

influence of this "playful pluralism", and the refusal of the reader to take a step back to the traditional approaches of criticism.

Although Tartt's novel has been treated as postmodern production as far as its paranoid thematic concerns, it still bears a lot of these critics' perspectives of the resistant reading in many ways. In terms of production, published in the onset of the 1990s, *The Secret History* – as mentioned before in this study – soothes the experimental avant-garde writing style of the post-war decades. It appears at the time of transition from the extremely confusing postmodernist narrative, to the clearer – yet still not-fully-realistic – mode of representation. The language and allusions of *The Secret History* are different from the post-war novels such as Pynchon's, because they portray a visibly different reading atmosphere. Correspondingly, the novel's most important reader belongs to a completely different generation than all other Pynchon characters we have come across thus far. Richard is one of the most obvious readers in the novel, and one that represents the above-explained resisting attitude.

2. Richard As a Resisting Reader

As mentioned formerly in the conversation about *The Secret History* and its distinctive exemplar of paranoia, the intrigue of what seems at first glance a typical college fiction with a classical tone, escalates with the Dionysian practice into dark academia. The multiplicity of voices and perspectives present in the novel is a portrayal of the Culture Wars with special attention given to the importance of universities in shaping the reading patterns. The arc of the narrative switches to the peak as it is revealed that Henry, Francis and the twins have performed a Bacchanal in the forests nearby Francis's mansion and mistakenly murdered an innocent countryman whilst euphoric. Henry being the leader of the

Steven Carter quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 168.

group, the impressively shrewd, the metaphysically oriented, cultivates an inordinate need for differentiation and individuality.

The parallel between Henry's longing for the Bacchanal and several critics longing for the Greek background in Tartt's novel suggest two things: not only is the Dionysian only one of several indicators of *The Secret History*'s intertextuality, but we are also made aware that we have to be on the watch for a reader-character parallel. It is, however, not Henry who continues Oedipa or Slothrop's function to mirror the readers' reading of the novels and to comment on the postmodern reading practices, but the narrator Richard. If Pynchon's novels put us alongside his characters into the post-war postmodern condition, then *The Secret History* transfers us into Richard's America. And if the textual form of *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* worked to raise undecidability, bewilderment, fragmentation and uncertainty, the structure of *The Secret History* rather emphasizes the fading of the experimental style of the postmodernist novel.

Richard constantly maintains a distanced position from the rest of the group. While he appears to be fascinated by Henry's individuality, he does not genuinely engage with his extreme judgments and practices. Born several years after Oedipa and Slothrop who struggled to find their way through complex plots, Richard has been brought up on television, spending most of his time watching movies prior to Vermont. Starting his tale as a viewer instead of a reader, Richard's first resisting stance was his carelessness (compared to the rest of the group) about the Greek class that he chose. He first admits that he picked his class out of chance saying: "since the Greek classes happened to meet in the afternoon, I took Greek so I could sleep late on Mondays. It was an entirely random decision (…)".(S. H. 07) As the story continues, Richard is never about the validity of the choice he made; "did I really want to spend my college career and subsequently my life looking at pictures of broken kouroi and poring over Greek particle?" (S. *H. 77)* which shows him as a sceptical, hesitant, and resistant receiver. His comment on the validity of this study to him as he compares himself to Henry shows that he has

indeed become a resisting reader: "(Henry) brought me pencils and paper, for which I had little use but which I suppose he would be lost without, and a great many books, half of which were in languages I couldn't read and the other half of which might as well have been." (S. H. 139)

Richard is portrayed in many instances to have a fascination for Henry, yet as a resistant reader, he does not approve of his methods and decisions throughout the novel. Even before the beginning of the narrative, Tartt's epilogue opens with the narrator's strange repetition of the phrase "It is difficult to believe". In a flashback relating to the way Bunny's murder was ever so naturally concealed, Richard says that "It is difficult to believe that Henry's modest plan could have worked so well despite these unforeseen events." (S. H. 13) Following that paragraph, he relates that "It is difficult to believe that such an uproar took place over an act for which I was partially responsible, even more difficult to believe I could have walked through it (…) without incurring a blink of suspicion." (S. H. 14) These two mirrored sentences demonstrate the fact that Richard is in a state of denial about what the rest of the group simply accepted and lived with. They also show that he was completely different from these fascinating, amoral rich kids, allied to them only by their mutual educational concerns. Richard sets the tone of the narrative from the very beginning that he is telling about his shame at being seduced to the edge of the cliff and off of it.

Considering Richard as a resistant reader, his character teaches us two things. First, his story and his environment display the significance and struggle of oppositional reading. Second, by frequently disrupting the narrative flow of the novel, he also reminds us of the fact that the story told about the paranoid behaviour of the group is not an objective account of a first-person narrator, but some interpretations told by a character.[527] *The Secret History*, then, seemingly

[527] Critic William Spanos argues that the postmodern reader views the "rigid, deterministic plot of the well-made (realist) fiction (…) as having its source in bad faith". *The Secret History*, whatever confidence it places in art, refuses to be naïve. It does not claim to actually represent the real story, but simply to illuminate it through Richard.

inspires us to do a rebellious reading,[528] which puts the novel's entire composition of paranoia and of its leading comment that "beauty is terror", into question. If the narrative hence deconstructs its own representation of the Greek tradition of the Bacchanal, it similarly exhibits its other features as constructs that are to be suspected. Seeing Richard as a resisting reader and accepting the thought that in him the reader has a model to be trailed, emphasize the notion of an oppositional reading. If he subsequently follows Richard, he would ultimately challenge the text itself and not just the philosophy presented in the text. He therefore would move from merely questioning the paranoid allusions to a questioning of what Conner calls "a vision of forgiveness and reconciliation"[529], with realism, and trustful interpretations.

Based on the analysis that has been done on the novel in the previous chapters, one can regard *The Secret History* as a novel without a hero, which indicates that the characters are not regarded as representing an ideal, exemplary form of human conduct, as established by the conventions of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels. The reader's curiosity is divided between two characters or groups of characters, who through their juxtaposing attitude, can be seen as complementary and even corrective. The narrator's constant endeavour to stimulate the reader's mind through different interpretations of the actions of the characters is sensible throughout the narrative. Richard compels the reader – at times quite openly – to reflect on his own situation. The author in this case creates two images, one of himself, and one of his readers to whom he ascribes a variety

[528] Building on Fetterley's notion of the "resisting reader", Kay Boardman labels this the "renegade reader". This latter denotes a reading position that goes one step further conceptually than Fetterley's resisting reader in its acknowledgement of the potency of the hierarchy of discourse in the unified reading of the classic realist text. The renegade reader not only resists and reads against the grain, but actively constructs a number of alternative readings available from within the text." This reading behaviour amounts to a deconstructive feminist reading: " A renegade reading practice exposes the gaps in the text and attributes significant agency to the reader in the production of meaning and thus breaks through and shatters the spurious 'truth' of the classic realist text", which is, in essence, a postmodernist reading behaviour.
Kay Boardman quoted in Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 135.

[529] Tobias Julian Meinel: op.cit., pp. 167.

of qualities communicated through his narrator. Hence, in whatever scenario the reader will be forced to react to those qualities.[530]

Applying this to the discourse of paranoia at hand, the difference between the reader and the characters is somewhat abridged. Instead of merely seeing through them, he sees his behaviour reflected in them. Therefore, "*the reader realizes that he is similar to those who are supposed to be the objects of criticism*", and so the self-confrontations that pervade the narrative force him to become conscious about his own situation in judging that of the characters. In explaining this Iser writes:

> In order to develop this awareness, the narrator creates situations in which the characters' actions correspond to what the reader is tricked into regarding most appropriate, but whether this decision favours the image of the cynical Frenchman or the infatuated swain, there will always remain an element of doubt over the relationship under discussion. [531]

Indeed the definite view that Richard has suspicions about his relationship with Henry acts as a warning to the reader. As such a final, unambiguous decision still runs the risk of being wrong: "they understood not only evil, it seemed, but the extravagance of tricks with which evil presents itself as good," says the narrator. (S. H. 471) The reader of *The Secret History* is constantly forced to think in terms of alternatives, as the only way in which he can avoid the confusing position of the characters is to reimagine the occasions which they have misjudged. He is

[530] This idea follows the suggestion of W. Booth who pointed out in a discussion on the narrator that:"(…) the same distinction must be made between myself as a reader and the very often different self who goes about paying bills, repairing leaky faucets, and failing in generosity and wisdom. It is only as I read I become the self whose beliefs must coincide with the author's. Regardless of my real beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full." The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.

[531] Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction From Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1974) 764-765.

continuously invited to test and weigh the insights he has reached as a result of the jumble created by Henry and the rest of the Greeks group.

Just as Fetterley articulates the necessity to challenge the engraved male perception, I suggest that *The Secret History* encourages the reader to challenge the re-emerging interest in simple realism. Only in resisting the superficial expression, in opposing the superficial readings will the readers "protect themselves," as Kolodny puts it "from the temptation to oversimplify any text".[532] Indeed, the reader will find 'the tone' of much realist writing to be practically the opposite of postmodernist prose. Postmodernist literature celebrates ambiguity and complexity while realism struggles for clarity and simplicity.[533] Once we recall what Versluys said about returning to the truth, it becomes obvious that a reduction of *The Secret History* to the classical realistic writing falls into the trap of not moving past the superficiality of criticism. The narrative makes the reader part of the experimentation in which he is preoccupied with appearances and comforted into accepting the superficial messages about paranoia. As such, *The Secret History* makes a significant argument about reading.

It is not just realistic literature that can drive people into unthinking and uncritical reception: reading can do the same thing. It can be escapist and likewise supply a demand for simple messages and truthful representations. This shows that simply attributing the cultural decline to the postmodern experimental novel is a limited view. Similarly, the notion of "turning to realism" as a cure to the postmodernist confused representations is also dismantled as naïve and uncreative. What the postmodern literature does constantly is to prevent the reader from passively absorbing the fictional worlds by continuously reminding us that it is a fictional world, that fictional worlds are complicated, and that the way in which

[532] Ibid.

[533] José Lopez, and Garry Potter, *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* (London: The Athlone Press, 2001) 1.

writers deal with fictional worlds may teach us something about the real world.[534] It is clear from the novels' interpretations summarized in the previous chapters that the postmodern fiction constantly challenges the reader. A postmodern text is one which is aware of its own status as something we read, an aesthetic object. It does not imagine that its world is the actual world or that its account is natural, and confirms that we are not able to do so, alluring us to re-evaluate our association with the fictional world that it tells about.[535] To put it in a different way, self-conscious writing yields self-conscious reading.[536] Bran Nicol explains it as such:

> (…) postmodernism in fiction is not simply a matter of how authors write, but how readers read. One way in which we can conceive of postmodern literary theory and practice is as a clarion call, not to writers but to readers to do things differently. Modernist literary innovation is often summed up through the poet Ezra Pound's command to writers to 'make it new'. postmodernism might be characterized by a more implicit but just as insistent demand to 'read in a new way'. *537*

3. Postmodernism Against Escapist Literature

In his essay "What Writers Do: The Value of Literary Imagination," Richard Eldridge – grounded on the Aristotelian theory of mimesis – describes that

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[534] Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* : op.cit., pp. 158.
[535] Ibid., pp. 159.
[536] Brian McHale claims likewise that "postmodernist fiction does hold the mirror up to reality; but that reality, now more than ever, is plural." He also argues that "postmodernist fiction turns out to be mimetic after all, but this imitation of reality is accomplished not so much at the level of its content, which is often manifestly un- or anti-realistic, as at the level of form".
Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*. (London: Routledge, 1987) 38.

According to Richard Poirier, this mode of thinking already defines the self-approving assertion that "cultural dislocations peculiar to this century (require) stylistic and structural evidence of dislocation" in writing and an equivalent level of difficulty in the act of reading. This idea goes in harmony with the claim, typical of avant-garde poetics, that a text's subversive writing is only "authentic" if it is reflected on the level of narrative form. According to this judgement, *The Secret History* would be a conservative novel despite its negotiation of the experimental paranoid fiction, yet, would be radical as such, because, as Raymond Federman claims, "the techniques of parody, irony, introspection and self-reflexive-ness directly challenge the oppressive forces of social and literary authorities".
Poirier and Federman quoted in Gunter Leypoldt, "Recent Realist Fiction and the Idea of Writing" After Postmodernism" ", *American Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2004): 19-34, 25.

[537] Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*: op.cit., pp. 159-160.

fiction is an imitative depiction, in which "the subject matter is presented not simply for the sake of classification and theorizing, but rather for the sake of dwelling in the experience of the subject matter as it matters emotionally to and for an observer or reader".[538] It is reasonably feasible at this regard to consider the reader's relationship to the narrator of the fictional account or the hero on which the narrative revolves, as his own personal avatar. In the case of Pynchon's novels, the reader's mind is dwelling on Oedipa and Slothrop's experiences of being recurrently alarmed and frantic by the meaninglessness and unfathomability of the chaotic surreptitious systems. In the case of Tartt's account, the reader may also be said to be connecting to Richard's experience of being immensely irritated by Henry's intimidating comportment and denouncing the actions that culminated in the crime.

The classification of escapist literature in lexicons and guidebooks generally involves anxieties, boredom, monotonous life, or actual prisons and reformatories. It also gives examples of the instruments of escape; light fiction, musical satires, detective stories, and touching romances. A crucial idea that should be kept in mind, is that the commonly listed samples of escape literature are the reading matter of middle classes, not of paupers, wage slaves, underprivileged outsiders, deprived minorities, refugees, and other victims of pressure and disaster. [539] The reason is that nowhere does escape through reading fiction actually take, and when no deliverance is promised for the desired escape, the escape is internal. Heilman justifies:

> If I am right in arguing that escape reading is for the most part an activity of people who have at least a decent minimal security in the world, and who do not find that world objectively awful or intolerable, then the state of affairs escaped from is inner rather than outer and may even be more intangible than once would attribute offhand to this population

[538] Richard Eldridge, "What Writers Do: The Value of Literary Imagination", *Journal of Literary Theory* , vol. 3, no. 1 (14 December, 2009): 13, online, Internet, 23 December 2021. Available: https://doi.org/10.1515/JLT.2009.002/.

[539] Robert B. Heilman: op.cit., pp. 443.

> of readers (. . .) what we escape from is not some sociocultural condition which may be supposed to be alterable, but the personal and human facts of life that will always be much the same. We escape to a triumph not of position or situation but of being.[540]

The question of the literary escapism was addressed by J. R. R Tolkien in his work "On Fairy-Stories".[541] He demands that fairy tales arouse that appreciation of escape from reality to the Faerie, still, he differentiates two varieties of escape.[542] The legitimate, in which actual enchainment is imposed and physical freedom is desired, and the illegitimate, in which no enchainment is actually imposed, and the longing for escape stems from merely fantastic drives. C. S. Lewis comments as such that the escape in literature is not the issue in itself but the rationality behind that escape. "One of the irresponsible escapist readings is daydreaming and castle-building" because the reader wants to escape from reality, and in order to do so, the imagery "should, in fact, be as convincing as possible". [543] That is the reason why the postmodern narratives can be rejected by such irresponsible readers. The dream can only be accessible if it seems as if it could be real or likely to happen in one's immediate actuality, with as little intellectual effort as possible. In this respect, postmodernist novels actually obstruct irresponsible escapist reading. [544]

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[540] Ibid.

[541] Martha Sammons reflecting on Tolkien's notion of escapism argues that "to attract readers, a fantasy work must first of all be a good story – a straightforward adventure. Action must be compelling, believable, pleasing, exciting, moving, and relevant. However, this goal is unachievable unless the topic is worthwhile and relevant to the human condition". Fantasy fiction is escapist in so far as it provides an escape into imaginary worlds, by drawing an image of perfection and heroism that seduces the reader into inhabiting it. Whereas the postmodernist fiction is semi-realistic in so far as it provides a commentary on the actual world, but at the same time is metafictional and self-reflexive that it is hardly escapist.
Martha C. Sammons, "War of the Fantasy Worlds: C.S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien on Art and Imagination", (ABC-CLIO, 2010) 118, online *Google Books, Internet,* 12 November 2021. Available : https://books.google.dz/books?id=DBdffA0E6oEC&source=gbs_navlinks_s/.

[542] J. R. R. Tolkien, "Tree and Leaf: "On Fairy-Stories"", (1965), online, Archive.org. Internet, 19 September 2019. Available: https://archive.org/details/on-fairy-stories/page/39/mode/2up/.

[543] Clive Staples Lewis: op.cit., pp. 67.
[544] Ibid.

Hence, comparable to Henry's escapist mechanism, the reader of escapist literature, who aims at self-immersion and self-manipulation through travelling into the troops of a highly realistic imitative fiction, and is transported to nowhere but the Wasteland. In his article entitled "The Literature of Escape", Allan Bacon reflects on the numerous variety of escapist fiction that brought the publishing magazines to the level of drugs in addiction. [545] He claims that the world in which the readers obsessed with illusion and fantastic self-absorption, inhabit is "too humdrum, too unutterably lonely and uninteresting and boresome to be endured, and escape from it is offered in the form of this cheap fiction literature – and escape they must!"[546]

Applying the Aristotelian principle the way Eldridge did results in assuming a real fear and anxiety in the reader's psyche as part of the mimesis enterprise. However, this is arguably an unsatisfactory supposition when it comes to the novels at hand, as well as to the postmodern literature altogether. Heilman maintains that "in our time, escapism has been exemplified by the passive mass audience and various groups like the Beats and Hippies, in which the dynamics of escapism rather than the true escape that are at work".[547] This is relevant when speaking of the highly realistic accounts of the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth centuries and even to the modernist era with the "art for art's sake" appeal.[548] Simulated realism, is the escapist literature of that time for it attempts at satisfying the reader by believing in realistic fiction to be actually true. Nevertheless, to assume the appropriation of this inclination to the postmodern literature, especially with regard to its specificities and guises that render fact and fiction hardly separable, is essentially unfitting.

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[545] Allan Bacon: op.cit., pp. 369.
[546] Ibid.

[547] Robert B. Heilman: op.cit., pp. 443.
[548] Ibid.

If escapist literature revolves around the type of fiction that brings about the psychological immersion for every interlocutor based on spotlessly mimicking realist flashes and sympathy-arousing anecdotes, Pynchon and Tartt's novels hardly fall under this categorization. The justification may be simpler than is expected: self-referentiality and confrontation that is highly respected in the works of both writers disable the generalization. From the discussion made about Pynchon and Tartt's novels, one can hardly assume any faith in the credibility of the stories told. Comments either by the author on the protagonist – as it is the case for Oedipa and Slothrop – or by the protagonist himself on the story in which he partakes – as is the case for Richard – flatten any attempt of the reader at losing contact with his rational awareness.

In the exemplar of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, innovative re-visitation of history and science entangles with the excessively paranoid account. This is called historiographic and scientific metafiction. Pynchon embarks on the operative power and counter-power as he rewrites the history and reintroduces science in a way the reader may hardly have imagined possible. Linda Hutcheon considers the mechanism as a "fiction that is once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the text and the contexts of the past".[549] As such, Pynchon's writings offer a hybrid cosmos in which seemingly paradoxical dimensions juxtapose and co-exist together: power and anti-power, history and anti-history, truth and fiction. In doing so, the reader can hardly be immersed in the folds of the tale for both accounts permit a new perspective about the past, and instead of being driven by escape, questions about the ancient systems of power, as well as the current arise, and the drive for criticism and analysis triumphs within the active reader.

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[549] Linda Hutcheon, "Postmodern Paratextuality and History", *Text*, vol. 5, no. 6. McMaster University (1986): 301-312, online, Internet, 12 September 2020. Available: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/9477/1/TSpace0031.pdf/.

In the case of *The Secret History*, Tartt operates not only on the thematic concerns of death, anxiety, and suspicion to construct the postmodern labyrinth, but also on the level of form. The novel starts with an epigraph in which Plato's *Republic II* is quoted "Come then, and let us pass a leisure hour in storytelling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes" (S. H) to set the reader's mind that he is reading a fictional report. The undecidedness of the narrator and the constant episodes in which he steps up to address the reader, justifies the less escapist trait of the narrative. In many episodes, the first-person narrator steps out of the narration process to speak to the reader: "how can I make you see it?", "what should I tell you?" In deploying the tropes of metafiction, Tartt proves another way to provoke critical thinking and to trick the reader's mind into separating the real from the fantastic. He is constantly reminded of the fictional characteristic of the tale he is perceiving which once again renders the immersion, and the loss of rationality inapplicable. In addition to that, excessive is the repetitious deployment of allusion to other literary material of the modernist tradition like Eliot and Fitzgerald as well as of the ancient Greek rhyme and mythology. In *The Secret History*, the disproportionate insertion of epigraphs, lyrics and different literary subdivisions within the description produced a sort of a "disconcerting textual hybrid"; [550] a wobbliness in the narrative as it bounces between the heavily significant and the incomprehensibly irrelevant.

Acknowledged is the fact that intertextuality is often celebrated to give texts meanings beyond the surface, and enrich narratives with referential cyphers that make the reader travel between genres and ideologies. Conversely, the postmodern intertextuality as perceived in *The Secret History* is rather problematic to the reader. In his book entitled *Intertextuality*, Graham Allen argues that intertextuality "can be the cause of a certain ennui or boredom".[551] He strongly proposes that in the postmodern culture -being overly drenched in codes so omnipresent that they grow natural-, the intertextual – deemed as the existence of

[550] Ibid.
[551] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*. (New York: Routledge. 2000) 183.

theses codes within the culture – "can cause a sense of repetition, a saturation of cultural stereotypes, the triumph of the doxa over that which would resist and disrupt it."[552] since postmodernism denies access to authentic reality, it becomes difficult for any intertextual practice to signify anything in particular. As a form of deep style, intertextuality is weakened for "depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth)" as Fredric Jameson puts it.[553] In the late capitalist culture, traditional modes of individuality and communication are replaced by a rootless viewpoint in which neither the norm nor the resistance of that norm appears promising any longer. If intertextuality is employed neither for deep referencing nor for criticism and resistance, it becomes an impeding factor in the interpreting process. Because the new culture imposes no possibility of resistance or parody, the consequence is in Jameson's definition of what he famously labels pastiche:

> In this situation, parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and any conviction that, alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus a blank parody, a statue with a blind eye (…) the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture."[554]

While This point of view appears to be unique and oppositional to the established definition of pastiche, it is limitedly applicable in this regard to Tartt's novel regarding its deployment of a dead language. However, to presume that the use of intertextuality or pastiche in *The Secret History* is particularly impotent or

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[552] Ibid.
[553] Fredric Jameson quoted in Graham Allen: op.cit., pp. 184.

[554] Ibid.

"blank" is refutable. Rather, the excessive repetition of this act can be assumed to confuse the reader about what is more significant than the rest. At some points in the novel, the meaning of intertextuality does not exceed to reach the interpretation of the referred literature; at Bunny's funeral, Henry reads a poem for A.E. Hausman "With My Rue Heart is Laden". As a reader, Richard is consumed by the idea of retrieving meaning from the poem wondering "why he chose that particular one" (S. H., p. 413). Apparently, that poem was simply Bunny's preferred since he was in grade school, of which the rest of the group "*were snobs about such things, had thought this a shameful taste*"(S. H., p. 413). The attachment of the poem hence is rewarding considering how estranged and disconnected Richard and the rest of the group are from their friend, being engrossed only with appearances.

Frequent are the instances likewise of some "disconcerting" allusions and intertextuality that simply complement the reader's misperception. Characters tend to speak in Greek or Latin very regularly; words that are not translated to the reader and occasionally are not comprehended even by each other. At different points in the novel references to Plato, Plotinus, Pythagoras and many more Greek personalities appear with no particular commitment. It is the combination of references that as Graham and Jameson explain that result in an intimidating influence denying the reader any attempt at a deeper examination. Allusions, intertextuality, or pastiche all contribute to destabilising and confusing both the reader and the characters about what is actually meant to be said.

At first glance, Pynchon and Tartt's fiction may appear escapist in its own way; compelling imagery, lengthy description of the settings, and most importantly excessive devotion to the characters' emotional turns and psychological ups and downs in a seductively relatable custom to the reader. Upon scrutinizing the books though, such a hypothesis proves incorrect. Both Pynchon and Tartt's chronicles have communicated a cautionary account of escapism, strategized very courteously to sway the reader into its handsome – and

charismatically stimulating – fable, simply to trouble him while demonstrating how toxic the human addiction and ignorance were.

Framing it this way, escapism as commonly demarcated can be considered on the basis of two outlets. One is the extent to which the novelist permits the reader to disremember the physical realm of his existence including all the hitches and blemishes, and two is the extent to which the novelist permits the reader to disremember that he/she is reading a work of fiction. In a time when traditional literary fiction may prove difficult to draw the reader's attention away from the powerful sensation of involvement and illusion, metafictional – and more largely – postmodern fiction can resist escapism by drawing attention to the text qua text. Pynchon provides a challenging record dishevelled in truths and fibs, in highly technical science and specialized history, that demands constant analysis and often research, to keep up with the plot; hence the impracticality of escape. Tartt on the other hand, provides a pleasurable structure that still, grabs attentiveness for its own narratology.

Surely the matter of escapist literature can never be treated trustfully from a black and white angle, for the debate on the topic grows complicated depending on the mindset by which it is approached. One might argue in this regard, that the deepest of escapism is capable of highlighting a political point about the actual world. The best example is The Earthly Paradise: Apology of William Morris as he tells about an imagery utterly detached from material life complications, yet still pinning them out respectively. However, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *The Secret History* as challenging postmodernist literature, deny the reader any escapist pleasure, while echoing his strong desire for subjective reading and criticism.

4. Conclusion: What Comes Next?

If paranoia, as an anti-conformist reading pattern, could separate the reader from the reading rules which could be considered metanarratives of reading in its methodological nature, resistant reading moves the other way round. By occupying a specific niche of reading and interpretation, the resistant reading maintains in one way or another conformist behaviour to the niche it represents. Therefore, suggesting that paranoid reading, symbolized vaguely in the hype of popular culture and reader-response criticism, was quickly balanced by a reconfiguration of the guidelines that limit the scope of each category of readers. By having a specific niche for feminism, for instance, female readers are framed within the pattern of feminist resistant reading. The same goes for black readers, gay readers, disabled readers, and the list goes on. Simply put, a movement back to re-establishing the reading and interpretation guidelines limits the possibility of having a frameless reading pattern that may be considered in the Lyotardian terms as a non-authoritarian little narrative in the field of reading and literary criticism.

In drawing to a close, there is a need to be reminded that in any epoch events do not fall neatly into the segments of years under scrutiny. While the timeframes isolated for the study were selected according to the publication and reception of the novels in question, they certainly have provided a rough guideline to follow the evolvement of the schools of criticism and the reading behaviours associated with post-war America. Challenged by legacies, rockets, stamps, paintings, sexual engagements, dramas, letters, acronyms, and even doodles on toilet walls; rather forwardly, the characters at hand mirror the real-life reading and interpreting experience of the reader serving as “the reader’s double”. It is in this metafictional posture that the fictional character and the real-life character meet in the meaning-making procedure; reading between the lines, attaching the isolated, and filling in the gaps wishing to achieve a rewarding interpretation.

In the period that follows the publication of the novels at hand, Carlton Smith concludes his analysis of the decline of culture with a declaration that the world of fiction has come out of possibilities approaching the millennium, and that the narrative has reached the absolute destruction.[555] Accordingly, in "Literary Theory Beyond Postmodernism" (2004), Jens Zimmerman argues that "Beyond Postmodernism – one can almost hear a sigh of relief. finally, we can say out loud what a growing number of books admit: postmodernism as a movement of renewal has run its course."[556] On the other hand, and on a less alarming note, Eric Williamson writes about a new wave of writers who believe that there are still dynamic accounts to express and a new realism, accentuating the social and psychological critique. If postmodernism began to lose momentum by the late 1990s, one may ask: what is coming next?

"What was postmodernism? What lies beyond postmodernism?" questions Ihab Hassan in his 2003 article "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust". He lists these characteristics: relativism, fragmentation, hybridity, parody, and pastiche; and declares that "we, in our literary professions, must turn to the truth".[557] Before the beginning of the new millennium, several critical accounts revolving around the question of the turn to realism occupied the philosophical and artistic field. In his book *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*, Phillip Wegner describes the 1990s which range from

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[555] Brian G. Toews, "The End of Postmodernism: Postmodernism is Dead and We Have Killed It", (n.d.) 4.

[556] Jens Zimmerman quoted in Toews, Brian G. op.cit., pp. 5.

[557] Ihab Hassan, "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust", *Modern Greek Studies,* vol. 11 (2003): 303-316.
It should be stated in this regard that Hassan's call for renewing realism does not necessarily denote the reimplementation of the traditional nineteenth-century realistic techniques. Hassan writes in his article "Realism, Truth and Trust in Postmodern Perspective" published in the same year, that realism in the art, is marked by "a fidelity to creation, a quality of attention to experience" which includes trust". (pp 3) He explains that "Mimesis embodies that classic faith … that the world is both real and representable". (4) For this reason, Hassan suggests that literary realism, though it may not suffice, remains indispensable"(11) Hence, his recommendation for realism is still influenced by the postmodernist perspective that the realistic approaches of representation should constantly be renovated.
Ihab Hassan, "Realism, Truth, and Trust in Postmodern Perspective", *Third Text*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2003): 1-13.

the fall of the Berlin Wall to the fall of the World Trade Centre just short of twelve years later, as the period of strange vacuum: an era without a culturally dominant political apparatus.[558]

In many ways, the description provided by Wegner regarding the ideological emptiness mirrors a turning point in the philosophy of postmodernism as a whole. A few years later, critics consider that the world could be still postmodern, or perhaps post/postmodern, for lack of a better name.[559] And although contemporary literature shares many of the tropes noted by its literary predecessors, "we are clearly experiencing a second way of postmodern confusion – a possibility. American fiction, in particular, is a site of the emergent post-apocalyptic sensibility."[560]

[558] Philip E.Wegner, "Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties", (Duke University Press, 10 July 2009) 19, online, *Google Books, Internet*, 2 December 2021. Available: https://books.google.dz/books/about/Life_between_Two_Deaths_1989_2001.html?id=Py4bThEcGxcC&redir_esc=y/.

[559] Carlton Smith quoted in Brian G. Toews, "The End of Postmodernism: Postmodernism is Dead and We Have Killed It", (n.d.) 4.

[560] Ibid.

GENERAL CONCLUSION:

"Everything is post these days, as if we're all just a footnote to something earlier that was real enough to have a name of its own."

MARGARET ATWOOD

This thesis has highlighted some of the fundamental critical concerns of the postmodern philosophy, which continue to undergo revisions in philosophers' works, and has brought these into conversation with selected postmodern texts. In looking closely at Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, this thesis has addressed the nature and position of the paranoid discourse in postmodern literature. By re-engaging the concepts of paranoia and escapism with questions related to postmodern thought, I have demonstrated the way in which they remain important to the reading of post-Second World War literature. The methodological approach of a parallel development of the reading of the postmodern text and the concepts of paranoia and escapism has revealed not only that fiction is significant for our interpretation of the postmodern philosophy but also that the selected works are informed and reinvigorated by the issues raised in the academia about the postmodern culture.

Readers of this study may conclude that they have been led full circle. What started as an explanation of postmodernism's destabilization of the traditional search for certainty, has led back to the reinstatement of what Lyotard labelled the grand narrative of the Enlightenment and modernism. Yet, what this thesis testifies to the most is the relevance, and even the necessity, of considering paranoia as a little narrative aiming towards escapism when reading and interpreting the postmodern paranoid literature. The first part of this study was concerned with providing a general postmodernist framework. In other words, I began by outlining the main concerns of the postmodern viewpoint, especially in relation to the post-Second World War United States. I concluded that postmodernism can be seen as a philosophical and artistic rebellion that originated from and against the transformations that occurred in post-war society. I also highlighted that it is imperative to resist the appealing approach of identifying modernism and postmodernism in restricted categories. Each movement seeks to define what "reality", "knowledge", "truth", and "art" are according to the changing socio-political atmosphere of the time. Certainly, the viewpoints that I outlined do not exhaust all the complexities and diversities of postmodernism, but

they have, in my opinion, enabled us to shape an overall understanding of the postmodernist main perspective.

Following that, the chapters that comprised this thesis offered a gradual examination of postmodernism in relation to paranoia and escapism in Pynchon and Tartt's works. The focus of this thesis on particular texts is for their exemplification as celebrations or manifestations of a type of postmodernism: the creation of a little narrative through paranoia. Starting with examining paranoia as an act of escapism from the real world to the imaginary one, the second chapter identified and established some recurring concerns in the theoretical arena, in order to explore and evaluate the relation of paranoia and escapism to the postmodern text. It also highlighted the relationship between paranoia and postmodernism's extreme occupation with little narratives as individualistic expressions. Chapter three addressed the way in which Pynchon played with the concept of paranoia, relating it to the Lyotardian understanding of the grand and little narratives. The struggle for individualistic expression and subjectivity is a concern that derives from the greater issue of the relationship between the individual and the world. What characterizes this relationship in the postmodern condition is an exaggerated nonconformity.

Thereafter, the chapter on Tartt's *The Secret History* explored the manifestations of the paranoid-escapist transgression in the postmodern text. It confirmed the declining interest in paranoia by portraying a troubling variety of psychological escapism; one that brings about the human demise. Taking into account the conclusions of the previous sections, the last two chapters of this thesis explored in more detail the nature of literary criticism in the postmodern era by examining the reader's response to the text and the role of intertextuality. Eventually, it was no longer possible to rebuff a characteristic which was at least partially true. I had expected to find an escapist behaviour at the reader's response evaluation stage; what I found was a characteristic of the postmodern fiction which differentiates it from any fiction produced before. Accordingly, the postmodern

novel, is a unique form of non-escapist literature, and it may not be completely exhausted as the postmodernists happen to believe.

I have not sought to resolve the problem of defining the postmodern philosophy or movement, nor have I sought to reduce Pynchon and Tartt's writings to a digestible size. Additionally, at no point do the claims of this thesis support a view of these writers' novels as postmodern. Yet, their works, in my view, do engage with methods and ideas that relate to the interests of postmodernism. In this sense, my thesis enhances the postmodern conversation by not taking an overtly postmodern approach and praising, rejecting or fluctuating between common approaches to the postmodernist artefact. Therefore, this thesis has endeavoured to maintain a perceptual distance from the varieties of attitudes associated with the postmodern theory as a whole.

In following Pynchon and Tartt's close reading, this thesis has aspired to relate to the postmodern text in an original fashion and move literary criticism beyond matters of taste to question the development of the paranoid discourse. As such, it contributes to contemporary literary criticism and reinvents the discussion on paranoid fiction. In this, I have recognized that Pynchon's revision and representation of grand and little narratives do not pre-empt and overcast any critique on his work. His paranoid vision seems to breed imagination but leaves us homeless (as in Oedipa's case) or orphaned (as in Slothrop's). Yet, a paranoid vision can also warn us and raise our awareness about the never-ending confusion associated with the postmodern unbending anti-authoritarianism, as seen through Henry's character. Re-examined as a postmodern little narrative, if the paranoid discourse reconstructs a space and a purpose for everything, it carters also creative escapism, which eventually brings about its own deconstruction.

Paranoid fiction may be thought of as maintaining a dialogic characteristic of postmodernism where subjective debates about human conditions become unapologetically voiced. As argued in this study, it does not allow room for what

the postmodern thinkers are united in their rejection of, authority and grand narratives. Paranoia questions centralized, totalized, and conspiratorial closed systems; questions, but does not provide an enduring answer. Hutcheon properly notices that the decentring of our categories of thought always relies back on the centres it questions for its very definition. The vocabulary may differ: "hybrid, heterogeneous, discontinuous, anti-totalizing, uncertain." [561] So may the descriptions. The metaphor of the labyrinth without a centre or periphery might substitute the typically ordered perception that we normally have of a library; "or the spreading rhizome might be a less repressively structuring concept than the hierarchical tree." [562] However, the influence and aura of these new vocabularies and thoughts are always paradoxically originated from that which they contest. Paranoia – as a postmodern discourse – as I have suggested through previous analysis, revolves around this very observation, undermining any approach that seeks to formulate a full understanding through a combination of ground rules. This is the manifestation of the postmodernist thought.

Fundamentally, postmodernism is a revised formula of scepticism. What is problematic though is that its definition and canon are both the blessing and the curse. The chief proposal of the theory is to disarticulate other theories' claims and measures rather than creating a new strategy to promote. This does not necessarily indicate that postmodernism does not have a theoretical program of its own but is rather a by-default one. [563] Whether or not this program proves sustainable, postmodernism did climb to be its own grand narrative.[564] Accordingly, postmodernism – like any other philosophical narrative – is not immune to attack, one that can be nurtured from its own principles.

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[561] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Second Edition (Routledge, 1989) 59.

[562] Ibid.

[563] Steven Connor: op.cit., pp. 14.

[564] Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp. 11.

The critique of postmodernism condensed in this study accepts its anti-foundational revelations, yet rejects the possibility of creating little narratives outside of the foundational boundaries of history, religion and science. From this position, it does not go far enough. To what extent is the strict dethronement of the metanarratives applicable, and how to categorize the new approach of scepticism itself outside the "metanarrative" column, remain unresolved issues.[565] Kellner and Best stress the idea that while a critique of the metanarratives of modernism and the prior isms is in order, the need for metanarratives yet to make sense of any cultural phase is vital. They write:

> It is likely (...) that we are condemned to the narrative in that individuals and cultures organize, interpret, and make sense of their experience through story-telling modes (...) If this is so, it would seem preferable to bring to light the narratives of modernity so as to critically examine and dissect them, rather than to simply prohibit certain sorts of narratives by the Lyotardian Thought Police."[566]

Ideally, and as explained through the example of paranoia, little narratives do not insist on having the resolution to all social drawbacks, instead, they survive simply for as long as they are needed and do not retain any apprehensive authoritarian outlook. Even if the call is not for combating the grand narratives but to stop taking their supervision for granted, presuming that they will subsequently fade away, the inclination that Lyotard subscribes to is utopian to a large extent.[567] The radicality of resisting grand narratives altogether brings about the inconvenience of losing a solid platform for composing value judgements that will be acknowledged by the masses no matter the degree of rationality they manifest.

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[565] Ibid.

[566] Douglas M. Kellner, Douglas M, and Steven Best, "Lyotard and Postmodern Gaming", *Jean-François Lyotard: Critical Evaluations In Cultural Theory*, ed. Victor E. Taylor and Gregg Lambert, vol. 2: Politics and History of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2006): 247-274, 269.

[567] Ibid.

Along with that, it is fairly challenging to consider the postmodern school away from any philosophical platform or simply claim its antifoundational stance, because in embracing little narratives nevertheless, a combination of certain theoretical guidelines inevitably materializes.[568]

Modern thought, for Lyotard, legitimates its position by denoting the metanarratives of emancipation, progress, reason and science, which are in essence ordered by unvarying principles and claim "universal truth". They all lack, consequently, a "heterogeneity of language games" which is fundamentally proposed by the postmodern new awareness.[569] This anti–authoritarian position against universal truth does not take novelty and creativity as its central goal; " (postmodernism) denies itself the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new representations in order to impart a strong sense of the unpresentable".[570] The main aspiration then for the postmodernists, according to Lyotard, is to be "liberal ironists", in the words of Richard Rorty, who engage in a noble war against totality. [571] This makes me ask the same question again: does this "postmodern programme" not assume a universal metanarrative in itself? to put it differently, how can one reject all previous grand narratives and their discourses without universalizing the new one? and most significantly, how can the new narrative exist without other narratives? These are the ideas that Edward Said challenges as he argues that the "postmodern intellectuals now prize competence, not universal values like truth or freedom", and that they are "admitting their own lazy incapacities, even indifference, rather than (implementing) a correct assessment of what remains for the intellectual as a truly vast array of opportunities despite

[568] Ibid.

[569] Lyotard Jean-Francois, "The Postmodern Condition": op.cit., pp. xxv.

[570] Ibid., pp. 81.

[571] Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Post-Modernity", *Praxis International* , no. 4 (1984): 32-44, 32.

postmodernism."[572] Therefore, it would require Lyotard and his followers, as Kellner and Best argue, to adopt a "*large grand narrative*" of postmodernism which encompasses the "plurality" that he advertises.[573]

Jurgen Habermas also criticizes the aspiring postmodernists following the footsteps of Lyotard by suggesting that if we drop the idea of the better argument as opposed to "the argument which convinces a given audience at a given time," we shall have only a "context-dependent" sort of criticism.[574] This is especially relevant when considering the declining interest in the paranoid style by the end of the twentieth century after its peak during the post-war period. The position of these postmodernist thinkers is what Rorty describes as "the intellectual's mission to be an avant-garde", to escape the rubrics, practices and foundations which have been transferred to him in favour of something which will make possible an "authentic criticism".[575] After studying the prospects of paranoia as a little narrative, I find myself obliged to agree with Rorty's criticism of Lyotard's idea as he writes: "Lyotard, unfortunately, retains one of the left's silliest ideas – that (escaping) from such institutions is automatically a good thing, because it ensures that one will not be "used" by the evil forces which have "co-opted" these institutions."[576]

If there is an escape that is as hopeless as the postmodernist's, it is paranoid Oedipa, Slothrop, and Henry's. For all the escapers, following Lewis Sinclair's recommendation that the escaper not only needs a "place from which to flee but a place to which to flee"[577], these characters had no place to escape. Their

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[572] David LeHardy Sweet, "Edward Said and the Avant-Garde", *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 25: Edward Said and Critical Decolonization (Department of English and Comparative Literature, American University in Cairo, 2005): 149-176, 165.

[573] Douglas M. Kellner, and Steven Best: op.cit., pp. 272.

[574] Richard Rorty: op.cit., p. 33.

[575] Ibid.
[576] Ibid., pp. 42.
[577] Lewis Sinclair: op.cit., pp. 641.

escape is not merely circular, but moving ever inward on itself. Whereas the characters' paranoia, as futile as it is, offered a ray of hope (or so they believed), postmodernism completely lacks that redeeming quality. The postmodernists themselves, I believe, even in the process of running away, know well enough that their flight is doomed even before it begins. Still, people nowadays are continually learning to be more modest in their modernity, more cautious in their hopes, and more sceptical about the promises of the future. Debates over the traditions of modernism, late-modernism, postmodernism, and late-postmodernism (as the world is speaking of today) will continue and will resume generating sober reflections on where the world has come from and where it is moving towards.

In literary criticism, the postmodern new awareness rejected the cultural elitism or the high culture of modernism. What is now acknowledged as popular culture was deeply doubted by modernism. This very same response of the postmodern new awareness to modernism's canonization was a re-evaluation of the idiosyncratic popular culture. What I have considered as a reader-character parallel in Pynchon and Tartt's novels is a representation of the cultural crisis or what was identified as "the Great Divide".[578] Following this suggestion, Pop art's first theorist Lawrence Alloway's explanation of this divide stresses the fact that the main goal of the postmodernist new awareness is to escape the boundaries of high culture. He writes:

> The area of contact was mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, and pop music. We felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among most intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact, discussed it in detail, and consumed it enthusiastically. One result of our discussion was to take Pop culture out of the realm of 'escapism', 'sheer

[578] Term coined by Andreas Huyssen in *After the Great Divide* (1986). It essentially refers to the discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture.
John Storey, "Postmodernism and Popular Culture" In Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp. 147.

> entertainment', 'relaxation', and to treat it with the seriousness of art. [579]

Seeing it from this perspective, postmodernism has certainly altered the way art is viewed by escaping the boundaries of what art actually means. In fact, the collapse of the Great Divide between high and popular art may signify that at last, it may be possible to engage the term popular art and mean nothing more than art enjoyed by many people.[580] Therefore, the art and theory labelled postmodernism is not perhaps as revolutionary as their supporters suggested, nor as deconstructive as their opponents argued.

In summary, instead of looking to totalize, this study has tried to interrogate the limits of the postmodernist agenda, by investigating the power of an anti-conventional little narrative: one that points to the consistently problematized issue that I think describes this movement. I agree with Hutcheon that "this art does not emit any clear signals" and that it "tries to problematize and, thereby, to make us question" but without providing answers because it cannot, without betraying its anti-totalizing ideology.[581] I would agree yet again with her response to Habermas's question: "But where are the works which might fill the negative slogan of 'postmodernism' with a positive content?", that they are everywhere in today's art.[582] In regard to paranoia, I would consider it – out of the psychological context – as one of these arts. However, I would also admit that the way paranoid thinking fills the gaps that are left by dethroning the grand value systems does not betray the postmodernist anti-totalizing ideology even if it remains a short-lived attempt. I would also stress the hypothesis that the world is perhaps hoping for a more constructive post-postmodernist movement or a renewed modernist one after the disillusionment of the escape.

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[579] Lawrence Alloway quoted in John Storey, "Postmodernism and Popular Culture" In Stuart Sim: op.cit., pp. 147- 157.

[580] Ibid., pp. 156.

[581] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*: op.cit., pp. 231.

[582] Ibid.

It may be possible to maintain that modernism and postmodernism withstand a cyclical movement in history. There unquestionably have been postmodernisms previously [583], and consequently, there will come again modernisms and postmodernisms in the future.[584] If we can say that the world sloped into postmodernism after WWII and mainly in the 1960s, the 70s, and the 80s; it is possible to suggest that it has progressively leaned towards a 'post-postmodern' epoch since the beginning of the new millennium. Noticing that scepticism has historically been in and out of the philosophical sphere and that the grand narratives today are in the course of refurbishment and reboot, this proposition can be debated. "I do think we are on the verge of something new, or perhaps we are already there", writes Hutcheon, "I don't worry that we don't have a label for it yet: we will. But this feels like something new to me."[585]

Hutcheon's response to the void created by postmodern thought may be optimistic and constructive. She proposes that the "postmodern paradox should not lead to despair or complacency" and that the movement can be regarded as a "vehicle for aesthetic and even political consciousness – raising – perhaps the first and necessary step to any radical change."[586] While I am broadly understanding to the 'view' that refuses to consider postmodernism and its fallouts in negativistic terms, it is hard to imagine any advancement emerging from the "de-centerization" canon of postmodernism. Practically, and as seen through the example of paranoia, postmodern criticism is more static than it aspires to be. Perhaps it is the reason why the movement towards unapologetic "incredulity" is not as alluring as it once was. The problem may not be particularly with the commitment to scepticism and interrogation, but rather the lack of attention provided to the ossification associated with the lack of structure and conclusions.

[583] Figures like Rabelais or Laurence Sterne qualify as postmodernists for Lyotard.

[584] Ibid.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid, pp. 59.

When Hofstadter published his work in 1964, television as a news-distributing medium was in its infancy, the internet was years from even being an idea, and no one could even envisage the reality of social media. Indeed, critics such as Ihab Hassan, Andreas Huyssen, Tom Turner, Raoul Eshelman, Billy Childish, Eric Gans, Robin van den Akker, Charles Thomson, Alan Kirby and many more spoke about the poetics of an after-postmodernism. Some have suggested different terms to describe it such as Eshelman's performatism, Kirby's digimodernism, Turner's post-postmodernism, Gans' postmillennialism, van den Akker's metamodernism, and Childish and Thomson's remodernism.[587] Although each of these terminologies is explained differently by those critics, they all agree on the fact that postmodernism, – even if it was widely unaccepted – has come to an end. [588] For the time being, it will be interesting to see what future critics will label our era, but one thing is clear: postmodernism which sought to end the metanarratives, is ended. Yet it continues to live as we continue to ask the question: what was really meant by postmodernism?

Finally, I would like to conclude that there is no single key which would unlock the nature of paranoia and escapism in the postmodern literature. The study of the postmodern literature of paranoia in post-war and contemporary America must combine both the realist and the symbolist approaches to the paranoid style, through an analysis of the connections between paranoid plots and the grand narratives. It necessitates attention to the historical, political, economic, psychological and artistic influences, in an attempt to understand not only how each of these discourses impinges upon the paranoid style, but also how each of these categories is itself reconfigured by and through the postmodern poetics of incredulity.

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[587] Ag Apolloni, "The End of the Era of Endings", *Eurozine* . vol, 10 (2017): 1-6. 5.

[588] Ibid.

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