

Meaning Deferral, Jungian Symbolism, and the Quest for V. in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

Francisco Collado-Rodríguez
University of Zaragoza

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<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2922-9194>

Abstract:

In Pynchon's second novel, after having fallen in a complex net of uncertain signification, protagonist Oedipa Maas finally realizes that she should escape categorical binary thinking. This article contends that Oedipa's portrait is also informed by Jungian symbolism—an underestimated source of Pynchon's fiction—and by the author's literary quest for V., two factors that merge in the novel with other interpretations to develop a dense search for meaning that eventually announces the coming of social change.

Keywords: *Oedipa Maas, Carl Jung, Henry Adams, energy, reflection*

Introduction: Patterns, Story, V.

Pynchon's second novel draws a picture of California in the 1960s that relies also on the author's parodic representation of Henry Adams's notion of (spiritual) energy as Venus and Virgin, and in Jung's symbolism. The theories of both, the historian and the psychiatrist, add illuminating nuances to the complex literary work Pynchon constructed to herald the coming of a social revolution in the 1960s and to warn readers of the dangers of the Western categorical tendency to understand life in binary terms. Frequently, in his private mythology Pynchon denounces categorical thinking as resulting in the privileged position of some (the Elect) and the social marginalization of others (the Preterite), an issue that clearly becomes one of his main targets in *The Crying of Lot 49*, whose plot is extremely dense, with different layers of meaning and interpretation on the condition of America (Palmieri 985–96; Collado-Rodríguez 486–89).

In *The Crying of Lot 49* the incisive writer combines notions of entropy—in both thermodynamics and information theory—with Christian symbolism and a few personages and events that historiography has validated as authentic, such as the Thurn and Taxis family. But he also counterbalances them with other invented historical characters and events that take protagonist Oedipa Maas and the reader into the territory of the so far invisible preterite, the occult face of America represented by the dark Tristero (FitzPatrick 244–49). Along her journey of discovery in the early 1960s, Oedipa becomes trapped, as happens to narrator and reader, in a systemic necessity to choose between true or false, historically accurate or invented clues. The author's

impressive mixture of discursive layers of multiple signification is strategically accompanied by mise-en-abymic structures that point to the importance that infinite reflection has in the novel as metaphor for an impossible epistemology: the discriminating role played by Maxwell's demon in the field of thermodynamics reflects Oedipa's role as pursuer of true meaning, but from there the game of reflection extends to the Christian teleological promise of the Last Judgment, where the elect will be saved while the preterite will be damned, and finally to the role of the reader, as puzzled recipient in demand of a closed ending that may clarify the "true" meaning of the story. Additionally, all along such reflective processes (an issue amply studied by Pynchon's critics from different angles; see Matthews 90–91 and compare C. Watson 11–19), the story also becomes informed by Jungian symbolism, a strategy closely connected to the author's game with the letter V. *The Crying of Lot 49* tells a story where readers reencounter Pynchon's distinct sardonic voice, a narrator sometimes uncertain or insecure but textually concerned with the thereabouts of a Lady V. (for Venus and the Virgin), here transmuted into somebody called Oedipa Mass, whose role as personification of the living forces of social energy has moved from the last years of World War II in Pynchon's first novel *V.* (1963) to the restless California of the 1960s.

The Quest for V. in Pynchonian California

In the short story "Low Lands" (1960), readers can find some of the earliest references of Pynchon's use of V. as the ever-changing signifier that represents the encompassing element of life that physicists denominate *energy*. At the beginning of the story there is already a reference to Vivaldi, followed by the name of a gypsy seer called Violetta (*Slow Learner* 74). But it is in "Entropy" (1960), the author's most well-known short story, where the first solid intertextual links pointing to the Pynchonian narrators' obsession with V. are established. In "Entropy," narrator Callisto refers to himself in the third person, and his main concern reflects one of the main preoccupations of historian Henry Adams, who also wrote about himself as a third person in his *Education* (1907–1931). The eminent scholar seems to be the first one to understand the impact the Second Law of Thermodynamics or Entropy has for sociological research. The main intertextual connection between the historian's concern to integrate entropy in his dynamic conception of history and the quest for V. in Pynchon's fiction resides in Chapter 25 of the *Education*, named "The Dynamo and the Virgin." There, the historian reflects about the immense power generated by the new dynamos exhibited at the Paris Great Exposition of 1900, believing that the machines are "as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross" (857). Adams ponders, then, about the ways in which the spiritual creative force represented in earlier times by the sexual energy of Venus and the spiritual energy of the Virgin has mutated into the present generation of electric power. Then, he thinks of a purpose for his future research, "he would risk translating rays into faith" (859):

Symbol or energy, the Virgin had acted as the greatest force the Western world ever felt, and had drawn man's activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done; the historian's business was *to follow the track of the energy; to find where it came from and where it went to*; its complex source and shifting channels; its values, equivalents, conversions. (863, emphasis added)

In his first novel, *V.*, Pynchon *follows the track* opened by the American historian and traces different manifestations of energy from the turn of the century, stopping for a while in 1922, the

magic year of modernism, and ending the historical quest in the last part of World War II, when the then-sinister Lady V. is killed by her own faction. At the time, she had already been very close to acquiring vital information about the most devastating manifestation of energy known so far to the human being: nuclear power. In Pynchon's third novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), as critics soon pointed out, V. reappears in the form of the V2 rockets that the Germans fired against Great Britain in an attempt to change the course of World War II (Tanner 47–48). Eventually, Pynchon's magnum opus offers a complex interpretation of the manifestation of energy as nuclear destructive power, resuming his quest in *V.* to trace the human manipulation of energy along the last century. But does Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, play any role in the writer's endeavor to continue Henry Adams's project on the manifestation of energy in modern society? Where, what, or who is V. in this novel set in California in the 1960s? As advanced earlier, along her dense quest for meaning Oedipa also qualifies as the representation of the Lady V. in Pynchon's second novel.

Many articles and some books have been written describing Oedipa as a parodic and archetypal heroine (see Dussere 568–80). She becomes a non-hardboiled detective in the land of the hardboiled detectives, and she is also a seeker who, like Sophocles' Oedipus, tries to reveal an unknown truth (the rejected Tristero), in addition to her well-known role as the *sensitive* that might activate the Maxwell's Demon machine and, therefore, escape from entropy and reach the condition of perpetual life (see Grant 81–95). At a moment when the 1960s revolution is gaining strength and concerns of gender, class, race, and sexual option grow to be centralized in social discourse, Oedipa becomes the manifestation of the political energy needed to change the world, but she does it also as a parodic heroine who follows the steps of Jungian symbolism while becoming Henry Adams's V. for Virgin.

The first clue to show this layer of signification, which adds to the above-mentioned interpretations of Oedipa's roles, is offered by Pynchon's portrait of his protagonist at the beginning of the story as a childless middle-class housewife. From there, with the help of Jungian symbolism and the protagonist's conviction that her life is an existential trap, follows her development into a sensitive V. figure who gradually acquires the capacity to see and empathize with the shadowy preterite, the rejected of contemporary history.

Oedipa's Jungian Quest or How to Approach Reality while Becoming Adams's V. for Virgin

In December 1965 *Esquire* published a preliminary version of the novel as a short story titled "The World (This One), the Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity." By resorting to the Catholic dogma, the title clearly indicates that the figure of Pierce Inverarity may be understood as the Devil who, combined with World and Flesh, conform the Three Enemies of the Soul and give readers an early hint that Christian religion is going to play an important part in the story. However, in the novel Oedipa is progressively changed by the narrator from a fleshy Venus into the virginal bearer of social redemption. In the first lines of the book, she is given an early antiheroic character:

One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Mass came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsh in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the state of one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but

still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary. Oedipa stood in the living room, stared at by the greenish dead eye of the TV tube, spoke the name of God, tried to feel as drunk as possible. (*Crying* 5)

Far from looking like a heroine, she is defined as somebody fond of liquor, a repressed housewife trapped by the domestic universe of plastic and ready to invoke the name of God in vain. The greenish dead eye of the television tube offers a first indication of the power the new technologies exert on human perception to create a simulated reality, best represented in the Californian land of audiovisual dreams—also an early hint of the impact McLuhan’s recently published *Understanding Media* (1964) was to have in the formulation of Pynchonian paranoia (Abernethy 28–29; Daalsgard 159; compare Shoop 51–52). Nevertheless, the first pages of the book also disclose other intertextual clues that foreshadow her future role as the Virgin who brings forth the promise of a new life. She lives in Kinneret-Among-the-Pines, Kinneret being the biblical name of the Lake or Sea of Galilea, a first reverberation of Oedipa’s condition as emblematic V. figure or anima principle.

Jungian symbolism offers some extra hints to clarify the strategies Pynchon used to imbue his protagonist with mythic—even if parodic—features that add to her picture as Adams’s Virgin. Although Pynchon’s Cornell transcript (which is now at the Huntington in the Stephen Tomaske Archive) does not enlighten us in this respect, the fact that Jung’s theories were already a source of Pynchon’s fiction in the 1960s is already noticeable in Stencil’s affirmation in V. that “the pursuit of V. was a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of [. . .] The White Goddess” (61; see Bourke 16–21, on the Jungian quality of Graves’s study of the White Goddess).¹ According to Carl Jung’s theories, as presented in his influential essay “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious” (1934), when religion or culture cannot fulfill their traditional role to soothe our existential or personal anguish, the mind has to initiate a personal quest marked by the assimilation of mental archetypal figures, images, or situations. In his renowned essay, Jung revises the history of the Church and some of the most mysterious images evoked in it, “the Virgin Birth, the divinity of Christ, and the complexities of the Trinity” (“Archetypes” 13). All along the Swiss psychiatrist’s extensive oeuvre a pattern emerges where the Son, as representative of the suffering individual, starts an internal quest of self-discovery by diving into his unconscious to assimilate the first archetype or *shadow*, which symbolizes our instinctual life—“The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one’s own shadow” (21). Interestingly, the shadow is incarnated in Christian theology by the Devil (“Study” 322). From there, the individual progresses toward the archetype of the *anima*, which symbolizes the spiritual but dominant and ambiguous power of the soul, mother but also witch, evocative of a mysterious female principle that resides in all males and has in the Virgin its Christian representation (“Archetypes” 27–31).² This archetype offers interesting connections with Adams’s interpretation of the ambiguous notion of energy as Venus and Virgin that Pynchon has already drawn in his first novel: from charming Victoria Wren to cyborg spy and then to Bad Priest in his first novel, the energy represented by V. is confusing, double-faced, and destructive but also creative. Although the anima “means soul and should designate something wonderful and immortal” (“Archetypes” 27), Jung also warns his readers that everything she “touches becomes numinous—unconditional, dangerous, taboo, magical [. . .] for life in itself is not good only, it is also bad. Because the anima wants life, she wants both good and bad” (28). In addition, Jung also considers the possibility that the seeker be a woman, the second step in her personal quest being then the assimilation of the *animus* or masculine principle that completes and explains life’s *apparent dualities*. Ultimate revelation is accomplished with the manifestation

of the archetype of *meaning* or the Father, which “symbolizes the pre-existing meaning hidden in the chaos of life. He is the father of the soul, and yet the soul, in some miraculous way, is also his virgin mother” (35). The archetype of meaning closes the circle of life or *mandala*’s fourfold division that represents the individual archetypal quest (compare Cowart, *Art* 124). Accordingly, Jung’s understanding of life in his theory of the archetypes celebrates the union of opposites or *coincidentia oppositorum*, an anti-categorical belief that will be welcomed by a disconcerted Oedipa Maas, who finally realizes that excluded middles “were bad shit” (*Crying* 125). The human being, Jung contends,

woke up in a world he did not understand, and that is why he tries to interpret it.

Thus the anima and life itself are meaningless in so far as they offer no interpretation. Yet they have a nature that can be interpreted, for *in all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order*, in all caprice a fixed law, for everything that works is grounded on its opposite. (“Archetypes” 31–32, emphasis added)

Along the pages of his second novel, Pynchon portrays Oedipa as a confused and confusing protagonist who becomes the manifestation of the power of Adams’s energy as Venus-Virgin, a symbolic incarnation of the double-faced and mysterious energy of the world (as the Lady V. and Mara had been in the previous novel). But echoing the readers’ search for textual signification, she is also involved in her own internal quest for knowledge, a path where some intertextual clues reveal Pynchon’s explicit use of the Jungian shadow archetype and of different manifestations of a parodic animus that point to Oedipa’s necessity to find a meaning both for her life and for contemporary America. In the first page of the novel, Oedipa is called into adventure by Metzger’s letter, which names her executrix of Pierce Inverarity’s estate. This early event brings her to remember the last phone call she received from the Californian mogul, in the middle of the night. Then, Pierce’s voice shifted to different tones and accents: “in heavy Slavic tones as second secretary at the Transylvanian Consulate, looking for an escaped bat; modulated to comic-Negro, then on into hostile Pachuco dialect, full of chingas and maricones; [...] finally his Lamont Cranston voice, the one he’d talked in all the way to Mazatlán” (*Crying* 6). The episode stresses the important role played by somebody already dead in Oedipa’s life: comically, he “talks in tongues,” as Christ’s disciples were granted to do at Pentecost, but his Lamont Cranston voice also offers the first hint of Pynchon’s use of Jungian symbols in his novel. Lamont Cranston was the alter ego of the Shadow, the protagonist of a radio serial in the 1930s and first indication that, even if unawares, Oedipa has started a parodic quest for the assimilation of her archetypes: “The shadow waited a year before visiting. But now there was Metzger’s letter” (7). The fact that her former lover is called Pierce Inverarity (pierce in *veritas* or truth) further indicates his guiding role in her personal adventure, but it also recalls another passage from Jung’s “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious” that verbally links the roles assigned in the novel to Pierce and to Maxwell’s Demon. In the passage, the psychiatrist observes that the archetype of the Father is also “*like the anima*, an immortal *daemon* that *pierces* the chaotic darkness of brute life with the light of meaning” (37, emphasis added).

Once this Daemon/Pierce/shadow has called Oedipa into adventure, she remembers her visit to Mexico D.F. with Inverarity, where she saw Remedios Varo’s triptych “Bordando el manto terrestre,” and she imagines herself as the main character in the painting, a girl trapped in a tower, in need of a “knight of deliverance” (*Crying* 13). Her memories of Varo’s work already point to the necessity to assimilate the second Jungian archetype in her quest for meaning: the knight of

deliverance represents a first manifestation of the animus, or masculine energy, that Oedipa needs to assimilate to proceed along her search for signification. Not surprisingly, most characters she encounters along her adventure are males. But they will not aim at helping her to reveal the truth; attracted by her looks—Oedipa as Henry Adams’s Venus—they are mostly interested in having sex with her. Moreover, her memories of Varo’s painting also reveal the first manifestation of an en-abymic structure in the novel.

Looking into the *Mise-en-Abymic* Mirror or Reaching for the Ever-escaping Meaning

Already a classic literary device, since the 1960s the *mise en abyme* has become a relevant stylistic strategy among some postmodern writers. In *The Crying of Lot 49* the device forms part of the basic structure of the novel. Originally taken from heraldry, the *mise en abyme* suggests an exponential extension of the work of art while trapping readers or viewers in a position of infinite reflection by duplicating in the narrative a structure, image, or concept that represents or reflects the whole text or artistic artifact; that is to say, it suggests the existence of consecutive and encompassing mirror frames (see Dällenbach 59–75). The technique plays an extensive reflection/reflective game within the pages of Pynchon’s second novel, being often associated with (mythic) images of still water—namely, lakes—as indication of the protagonist’s need of introspection while also locating her in an imprisoned space of concentric expanding circles. The plot of the novel shows recurrent connections between this en-abymic reality and the protagonist’s quest to assimilate the Jungian archetypes of shadow and animus. Oedipa’s understanding of Varo’s triptych as a reflection of her own condition already discloses her imprisoned standpoint as somebody unsatisfied with her conventional middle-class life, a condition that will extend later to her intense epistemological difficulties to know reality and the very nature of her quest. In point of fact, Varo’s works frequently reflect the painter’s personal difficulties to break from her tower of solipsism but also her endeavors for self-affirmation (Cowart, “Varo” 21–22), which Oedipa also attains as her adventure progresses and she dives into California’s shadowy and repressed “collective unconscious.” Oedipa recalls that in the central panel of “Bordando el manto terrestre,” Varo depicts some girls who are actually embroidering Earth’s mantle from their tower; that is to say, they are projecting the world, a notion that anticipates Oedipa’s self-reflection many pages later (“Shall I Project a World?” 56) and that also finds interesting echoes in Jungian theory:

All the mythologized processes of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective occurrences; rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man’s consciousness by way of *projection*—that is, *mirrored* in the events of nature. (“Archetypes” 6, emphasis added)

The main personage in the three pictures that form the triptych (a self-portrait frequently drawn by Varo in her paintings) wishes to escape from the tower, which she will eventually do in the third part of the painting with the help of a young man (“La huída,” the Escape). The structural use of the *mise en abyme* in the novel jeopardizes the possibility of ever reaching any sound knowledge or, in Jungian terms, assimilating the archetype of meaning. The strategy spreads over the different layers of signification the book uses (scientific, religious, historiographic, communicative) to suggest the human incapacity to ever know reality in objective terms. The device also reappears in the first

manifestation of Oedipa's animus, which links her present condition to Varo's triptych. Her main aim as executrix of Inverarity's state is to sort out his numerous and tangled assets, a task that will require the help of a number of men. As pointed out by David Cowart, in the central panel of "Bordando el manto terrestre," "in one of the folds of the extruded tapestry—out in the world, that is—lurks a tiny, shadow figure, the lover" whom the girl "has engaged in embroidering" to help her find a way out of the tower ("Varo" 22–23). In this way, embroidering an en-abymic image, a *trampa* or "trap door"—as Cowart calls the stratagem—the triptych's protagonist invokes the escape that will come true in the third part of the painting. Similarly, in her role as executrix, Oedipa will attempt to embroider also a way out of her previous life, for which she will encounter a first lover, Metzger, the co-executor of Inverarity's will. As a lawyer who was a former actor, he is the first personage to suggest that California has become the land of a new American dream that never becomes true. Actors abound and are ready to impersonate any role in the gradual process that will transform the Golden State in the capital of contemporary simulacrum. Besides, to start her job as executrix Oedipa has driven a rented car into San Narciso Valley and gotten a room in a motel called Echo Courts; these indications of specular and hearing infinity add to the successive number of visual appearances and fake, empty people that the protagonist has to face to get any substantial clues about the job to be done. But there is nothing of substance in what she encounters in this part of California. Critics soon connected the episode to the impact that McLuhan's interpretation of the myth of Narcissus has in the novel (Abernethy 28), but Jungian theory also offers extra nuances to Oedipa's arrival at San Narciso. The psychiatrist warns us that water "is the commonest symbol for the unconscious. The lake in the valley is the unconscious, which lies, as it were, underneath consciousness," and he adds that

whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because *we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor.* But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face. ("Archetypes" 20, emphasis added)

As corresponds to the Jungian path of introspection, Oedipa experiences the parodic manifestation of this second archetype, which appears as an actor and involves a mirror. She is soon attracted to her co-executor-as-animus: "That night the lawyer Metzger showed up. He turned out to be so good-looking that Oedipa thought at first They, somebody up there, were putting her on. It had to be an actor" (*Crying* 17). But Metzger soon fails her as a reliable collaborator in her official quest because he is mostly interested in having sex with Oedipa, which he finally does after having played the game he names "Strip Botticelli" (23). From a Jungian perspective, Metzger does fulfill his role as animus even if later readers learn that he abandons Oedipa, never to be heard of again. The intertextual implications suggest that after the game is over, Oedipa, by facing her actor animus, has got ridden of her previous mask as repressed middle-class housewife and experiences her rebirth as the new Venus—as painted by Botticelli, coming naked out of the waters that represent her first dive into the unconscious. In addition, it seems clear that the episode becomes also one of the most explicit clues Pynchon offers to suggest that *The Crying of Lot 49* forms part of his project to track Adams's social energy in present times. The game includes an event in which Oedipa goes to the bathroom to put on as many clothes as she can, expecting to postpone her parodic rebirth as a new Venus. However, "accidentally" she hits a hairspray can, an event that allows Pynchon to suggest the powerful links that bind science to religion:

The can hit the floor, something broke, and with a great outsurge of pressure the stuff commenced atomizing, propelling the can swiftly about the bathroom [...] She was scared but nowhere near sober. The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or digital machine, might have computed in advanced the complex web of its travel; but she wasn't fast enough, and knew only that it might hit them at any moment, at whichever clip it was doing, a hundred miles an hour [...] The can collided with a mirror and bounced away, leaving a silvery reticulated bloom of glass to hang a second before it all fell jingling into the sink; zoomed over to the enclosed shower, where it crashed into and totally destroyed a panel of frosted glass; thence around the three tile walls, up to the ceiling, past the light, over the two prostrate bodies, amid its own whoosh and the buzzing, distorted uproar from the TV set. She could imagine no end to it. (23–24)

The episode represents one of the most complex en-abymic instances in the book, foreshadowing the intensity of the last stages in the protagonist's adventure. The hairspray travels in an apparent aimless way till it runs out of energy, as Oedipa will soon think is happening to her. But there is always the possibility that the can/Oedipa are guided by a superior being, "God or digital machine," a notion that underlines the religious layer of significance the novel has but also a critique of the categorical representations of both God—the final Judge who divides the elect from the preterite—and any digital machine that necessarily operates by binary combinations of zeros and ones. The fact that the hairspray crashes against the mirror and that there is always the background uproar coming from the television set produce in only a few lines a condensation of the most relevant themes the novel deals with.

The important role technology and science play in the creation of a simulated reality had already been stressed in a previous episode, when Oedipa sees San Narciso Valley from a slope in the road:

She looked down a slope [...] on to a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together [...] from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. (*Crying* 14–15)

McLuhan's interpretation of human societies as closed circuits with individuals functioning as electrodes offers in this brief passage another example of the pervading use Pynchon does of en-abymic icons in his second novel: reading the book is itself a quest for concealed meaning, as Oedipa's quest is. Human societies are circuits that map the new highways of communication; the only final message might lie in the medium, in the act of reading the story of the quest for a final meaning (compare McLuhan, chapter 1). Oedipa becomes conscious of her capacity to symbolize life (see "Archetypes" 6–7) and, by doing so, finds patterns of similarities between humans and radio machines while, at the same time, diving deeper in her archetypal quest. Soon, she will have a "revelatory" moment when watching an ad on television about a vacation resort comically called Fangoso Lagoons, "printed circuit, gently curving streets, private access to the water, Book of the Dead" (*Crying* 20; see Mendelson 122). The last reference also points to Jung's interest in the Tibetan text on the Dead ("Psychological Commentary" 509–26),³ while the whole episode

mixes the waters of the archetypal unconscious with the simulated reality created in Fangoso Lagoons—"One of Inverarity's last big projects"—also the space where Oedipa meets Manny Di Presso, a former lawyer turned actor turned lawyer again. A subplot that involves cigarette filters and the bones of American soldiers found at the bottom of Lago di Pietà in Italy (*Crying* 40–41) increases the relevance lakes have in the novel, also foreshadowing Oedipa's final role as redemptive Virgin/anima figure. Progressively, the protagonist experiences more symptoms of a reality entrapped in reflective en-abymic structures, and when she meets Genghis Cohen, "she saw him framed in a long succession or train of doorways, room after room receding in the general direction of Santa Monica, all soaked in rain-light" (65).

While her animus, represented by Metzger and other men, help her advance into her role as Venus, indications that Oedipa's quest still involves the necessary assimilation of the dark Jungian shadow proliferate all along her adventure. First impersonated by devilish Inverarity, the shadow is also symbolized in Tristero, as representative of the historical reject, a repressed collective social force that uses WASTE as their acronym. In Jungian terms, Oedipa shall have to *face* the shadow-as-Tristero if she wants to progress along her personal quest. The task will cost her so much effort that Oedipa will doubt her own mental condition but what started as a personal quest ultimately becomes a collective search for social meaning.

In time, the discovery of some clues that point to the existence of Tristero compel Oedipa to depart from her main or visible task of sorting out Pierce's visible assets and become interested in this mysterious society. The members of Tristero are frequently described as dark, sinister, and shadowy beings. Belonging to the category of the "subjective voice of history" (Miller 228–29), this secret society offers the writer the possibility to blur the limits between real events and personages that played a historical part in European politics in the sixteenth century, such as Emperor Charles V or the Thurn and Taxis family, and other invented ones, such as playwright Richard Wharfinger or Tristero's leader, Hernando Joaquín de Tristero y Calavera.

Pynchon's mixture of historical truth and the subjective help in the construction of a quest whose aims eventually dissolve amid the abundant en-abymic strategies the writer uses to increase the difficulties of Oedipa's (and the reader's) search for ultimate meaning. "Beyond its origins," the narrator asserts, "the libraries told her nothing more about Tristero" (*Crying* 112). The dark society will grow, as Oedipa imagines, in the shadows of Europe before crossing the ocean to arrive in the new promised land of America, where she will trace it down thanks to the increasing apparition of small clues.

Wharfinger's play *The Courier's Tragedy* becomes one of the main hints she finds about the Tristero. Being a Pynchonian parody of *Hamlet*, it shares with Shakespeare's tragedy the motif of the play within the play, possibly the most well-known example of a *mise en abyme* in English literature. Furthermore, the representation she attends of Wharfinger's play is Randolph Driblette's adaptation of the apocryphal Vatican manuscript of the original play. This apocryphal version is attributed to the Scurvhamites, a sect that believed that the universe is ruled, in part, by a blind and soulless *demiurge*, "a brute automatism that led to eternal death" (*Crying* 107).

The location en-abyme that Driblette's representation poses—an adapted copy of an apocryphal copy of a manuscript whose originality cannot be attested—adds to all the previous uses of the device while also establishing another connection between Oedipa's personal quest, religion, and science. In traditional mythologies, demon, daemon, or demiurge are terms that refer to a lesser divinity or supernatural creature that helps, transforms, or disguises the true creation of God. The creature is always a mediator, an entity that can move between the real world of divine creation and the created reality of appearances that humans perceive, its significance being associated also to the term "archetype."⁴ Such function of mediation is also given by scientists to some conditions

necessary to develop a thought experiment—that is to say, a scientific hypothesis that still needs non-available resources to be demonstrated.

When, along her quest to find out if the Tristero is real, Oedipa visits John Nefastis—another parodic representation of the animus—Pynchon links her (and the readers’) need to find meaning to a thought experiment devised by real physicist Clerk Maxwell. Cunningly, the author employs the experiment to comment implicitly on the condition of language as an ever metaphoric or non-referential system of communication. However, while the episode condemns Oedipa’s quest for meaning to an apparent failure, it also offers a possible escape from categorical thinking and political conservatism. Oedipa is told that Nefastis has a machine that proves the validity of Maxwell’s thought experiment, known as “Maxwell’s Demon.”

However, as is well known, Maxwell’s experiment posed an important problem; it lacked the basic resource or *demon* because for such a resource to work, it was necessary to send an information input from outside the closed system. That is to say, Maxwell’s formulation demanded an external manifestation to solve the problem established by thermodynamic entropy. In the most complex episode of the novel, Pynchon describes the connection existing between the different ways religion, science, and reading cope with the necessity to come to valid results: all of them are trapped within their own systems of representation, and all try to resort to external manifestations (call them revelations, epiphanies, or hierophanies) to reach the ultimate truth or meaning. But despite Maxwell’s formulation, revelation never comes to Oedipa when she visits Nefastis and tries to activate the demon that resides allegedly in his box. For the demon to function, Nefastis tells her, it needs to receive information from a *sensitive*, a being external to the box that may provide the creature with “something like the same quantity of information” it needs to sort out the hot from the cold molecules (*Crying* 72). That Oedipa fails in her capacity as a sensitive is not surprising; Nefastis is not so much interested in helping her as in having sex on the couch while watching television. “Leave your mind open, receptive to the Demon’s message. I’ll be back,” the engineer tells her before going back to watching television (73). The roaring noise coming from the television set does not allow her to concentrate, and her attempt at creating an area of perpetual movement fails: the demon cannot sort out the molecules, Oedipa cannot communicate with this scientific representation of the Jungian demonic shadow, and she remains, the same as the reader, still longing for meaningful revelation. In addition, to sort out hot from cold particles is an activity that echoes the sorting out of true from false information. It is binary thinking, the human superstructure that reduces God’s Last Judgment to only one possibility: to discriminate the elect from the preterite. Similarly, the digital machine can only combine ones and zeros, and Oedipa in her quest can only try to sort the true from the false because she does not understand yet that, as Jung also contends, opposites should reconcile, a truth that will be revealed to her only when she comes to the end of her adventure, after a mental crisis that again recalls the Jungian assimilation of the shadow.

Trapped in a universe of infinite reflection that impedes any certain knowledge, Oedipa’s personal quest to find out the truth existing underneath Inverarity’s inheritance turns senseless and is maddening her. However, her figure increasingly resonates of other patterns that bring the protagonist much closer to the Pynchonian manifestation of V. for Virgin.

The Virgin Oedipa or the Jungian Anima as Social Leveler

Along her quest for meaning, Oedipa encounters persistent traces of the effects that economic liberalism has brought about in the hands of people such as the devilish Inverarity (Varsava 59–

63). The mogul's connections with the mafia (Tony Jaguar) or the role lawyers play in American business (Metzger or Di Presso, actors with no personal values) add to Oedipa's disappointment after facing a number of men who are never an apparent help to her—Mucho, Dr. Hilarius, Driblette, Nefastis. Finally, her yo-yoing journeys up and down California bring her to the edge of total exhaustion. In traditional mysticism, such a critical condition is represented metaphorically as a dark night, a necessary stage previous to rebirth or final revelation. The notion has been studied by Jung as “the Night Sea Journey” (“Symbols” 210–12), which he also compares to the “dark night of the soul” experienced by mystics such as John of the Cross (“Psychology” 271). After having accomplished the previous stage that transformed her from conformist housewife into Venus, Oedipa also fulfills this second motif of rebirth. Following her visit to Nefastis, she goes through two frantic dark nights. The first one happens in San Francisco. The narrator exposes in a few lines her mental condition, still trapped in categorical thinking:

Either Trystero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up and interpenetrated with the dead man's estate. Here in San Francisco, away from all tangible assets of that estate, there might still be a change of getting the whole thing to go away and disintegrate quietly. She only had to drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix. (*Crying* 75)

Along her drifting night in the “infected city” (*Crying* 80), saturated with Tristero symbols, Oedipa becomes progressively aware of the existence of the preterite. She meets the socially rejected homosexuals at the Greek Way, the dreaming children, the Negroes in the bus, and the deprived poor Mexicans embodied in the figure of Jesús Arrabal, the anarchist named after the Christ who promised that the meek shall inherit the Earth. Meeting Arrabal in the first of her darkest nights, the protagonist remembers their previous encounter in Mazatlán. Then Jesús had offered her some hints about a (possible) political miracle as transcendental revelation: “You know what a miracle is. Not what Bakunin said. But another world's intrusion into this one.” “But your friend,” he also told her referring to Inverarity, “is as terrifying to me as a Virgin appearing to an Indian” (83). In Mazatlán, in a few minutes Jesús had seen Inverarity's inherent power, something that took Oedipa much more time to realize. In her night in San Francisco, after thinking that she has found several clues leading to the existence of Tristero, she also begins to understand that America has left many people out of her dream: “For here were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U.S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery” (86). And it is at that moment, saturated with political implications, just “before the morning rush hour,” that Oedipa begins to experience her second rebirth; following Henry Adams's track, from classic Venus she now progresses to her role as Christian Virgin. She walks toward the Embarcadero, looking terrible, “mouth tasting of old booze and coffee,” and sees “an old man, shaking with grief she couldn't hear” (86), who gives her a letter to be posted, Oedipa guesses, through the Tristero postal system. And then,

[e]xhausted, hardly knowing what she was doing, she came the last three steps and sat, took the man in her arms, actually held him, gazing out of her smudged eyes down the stairs, back into the morning. She felt wetness against her breasts and saw that he was crying again. (87)

The term “crying” offers an indication of that communicative act that may go beyond the power of the Word, therefore escaping from the hierarchies created by binary thinking. Furthermore, the picture—or sculpture—that comes out of the narrator’s description confirms the previous references this article has been tracking: Oedipa is portrayed as Michelangelo’s Virgin of Pietá, a name that recalls Di Presso’s earlier reference to Lago di Pietá and, by Jungian extension, to the importance lakes have in the novel. Following the path opened by Henry Adams, Oedipa’s quest has turned her progressively from young Republican housewife into Venus and then into the Virgin. The episode of the old sailor becomes permeated also by other intertextual references from works with preterite protagonists: Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* comes easy to mind, Oedipa’s “wetness against her breasts” also offering a reference to Rose of Sharon Joad’s act of virginal proletariat empathy at the end of Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. In the middle of her frenzied night, Oedipa expresses her need to “make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night” (81). Her demand is thus actually answered by the crying of the old man whom she nourishes.

Back in San Narciso, in her quest for Tristero she wonders if all could be a big joke framed by Inverarity, a possibility that makes her believe that there “was nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world. They were all on something, mad, possible enemies, dead” (*Crying* 118). But by then, as incarnation of Adams’s spiritual energy and Jungian anima, she is described as a pregnant woman, in anticipation of her final delivery of the new Word or archetypal meaning:

Waves of nausea, lasting five or ten minutes, would strike her at random, cause her deep misery, then nightmares, menstrual pains. One day she drove into LA, picked a doctor at random from the phone book, went to her, told her she thought she was pregnant. They arranged for tests. Oedipa gave her name as Grace Bortz and didn’t show up for her next appointment. (118)

Later, she dreams of disembodied voices, mirrors, and empty rooms, while the narrator asserts that “Your gynecologist has no test for what she was pregnant with” (121).

However, in San Narciso she still has to experience a second darkest night—“her isolation complete” (*Crying* 122). At that episode, her shadow figure Pierce Inverarity becomes manifested again when, drunk, she remembers his now illuminating advice: “‘Keep it bouncing,’ he’d told her once, ‘that’s all the secret, keep it bouncing’” (123). It is, in effect, the revelatory answer that may challenge the static condition of categorical thinking and its social hierarchic results, an answer that stimulates in Oedipa a long mental process that takes her to ponder about the condition of America and conclude that excluded middles “were bad shit” (125).

By the time Oedipa finally decides to attend the auction of the lot of stamps that might reveal the true existence of Tristero, she has been assaulted by so many doubts that, suffocated by the many binary options that are presented to her, revelation reappears as the only possible way out. Presently, she realizes that the visible “America coded in Inverarity’s testament” (*Crying* 124) was not the complete picture, and she remembers all the attempts at communication she has encountered from the hidden Other of America, “who would reveal herself [. . .] whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word” (125).

At the end of the book, the new Word is preceded by an abundant symbolism suggesting that the new Pentecost or revelation of meaning is at hand. The lot of stamps is numbered as 49, seven times seven—the most repeated number in the Book of Revelation—and the auctioneer

and the men inside the auction room look like Tristero members (they “wore black mohair and had pale, cruel faces”) (*Crying* 126). Once the door is closed and Oedipa takes her seat in the auction room—another closed system to sort out the final truth—“Passerine spread his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote culture: perhaps to a descending angel. The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49” (127). Following the quest pattern that has changed Oedipa into a new being, the final symbolic picture becomes clear: Passerine—whose name evokes a specific type of dove (R. Watson 69)—is the descending angel coming to announce the arrival of the new Pentecostal truth, and Oedipa, in her Pynchonian role as Adams’s Virgin and Jung’s archetypal anima, settles back to give birth to the new crying baby: the dispossessed preterite will become visible.

In mythic thinking, the end is also the beginning. Jung’s search for archetypal meaning is represented in the mandala, a circular structure also evoked in the circular patterns of the book that extend even to its title. The last five words of *The Crying of Lot 49* are the ones of the title, a final circular enclosure that again suggests the difficulties to escape from the en-abymic representations of Oedipa’s quest. Notwithstanding its textually undecidable ending, the story’s final symbolism has announced the existence of a *trampa* or trap door, as Varo’s protagonist did by embroidering the image of her knight of deliverance. While affirming that “*Lot 49* is a novel about the possibilities of revolution,” Thomas H. Schaub also points out that of the three California novels written by Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* is the only one that the author composed at the time of the events the book reports (“California” 31, 41), and in 1966 there was still hope for an America opened to everyone, beyond the binaries that construct social hierarchies and discrimination (see Cowart, “Sixties” 7–11; Varsava 62–65; and Baker 136–38). Two years before the novel was published, President Lyndon B. Johnson had signed the Civil Rights Act, a decisive turning point to give political and social visibility to marginalized minorities. However, years later, in *Vineland* (1990) Pynchon had already dismissed the effectiveness of the 1960s revolution. Once those years were over, the social energy symbolized in the Pynchonian V. gave way to bleaker manifestations of political and media control.

These pages have attempted to portray the figure of Oedipa also as Virgin/Anima and claim the recognition of Adams’s “track of energy” and Jungian symbolism in Pynchon’s second novel. However, *The Crying of Lot 49* is much more than those interpretations can offer; the book still puzzles readers for its complex amalgamation of symbols and experimental devices, for its apparent disorder that paradoxically calls for an order. Decades after its publication, it still offers a literary and ironic condensation of our human need for ultimate knowledge. Jung refers to the anima’s “chaotic capriciousness” as the cause for the individual seeker “to suspect a secret order, to sense a plan, a meaning, a purpose over and above her nature.” He contends that

in actual reality we do not have at our command any power of coolreflection, nor does any science or philosophy help us, and the traditional teachings of religion do so only to a limited degree. We are caught and entangled in aimless experience, and the judging intellect with its categories proves itself powerless. Human interpretation fails, for a turbulent life-situation has arisen that refuses to fit any of the traditional meanings assigned to it. It is a moment of collapse. (“Archetypes” 32, emphasis added)

More than thirty years after Jung developed his theories about the power residing in his symbol of the anima, Pynchon published his second novel at a moment in which America and soon the Western world were on their way to their moment of social collapse. Oedipa’s conventional

“intellect with its categories” proved then powerless, trapped in the en-abymic maze built by her creator, but she persisted in her symbolic quest to reach the moment of revelation at the end of the book. Critical interpretations about Pynchon’s impressive literary piece have been growing since its publication in 1966, confirming the book’s resistance to fit into any single one: thermodynamics, history, religion, intertextuality, information theory, Adams’s track of energy, or Jungian archetypes point to the author’s ironic consideration of our human proclivity to symbolize reality. As critics and readers, we inevitably end up suspended in an en-abymic condition of undecidability. Final revelation is always deferred.

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Notes

¹David Cowart has pointed out the existence of Jungian traces in Pynchon’s fiction, although he is concerned mostly about the impact Jung’s theories had on *Gravity’s Rainbow*: “To do justice to the Rilke allusions and their contexts, we shall need to touch on Pynchon’s use of Jungian philosophy. Because it subsumes much of the Eastern and primitive thought, and much of the mandalic, alchemical, and Kabbalistic lore that Pynchon exploits, Jung’s system provides one thread to guide the reader through the labyrinth” (Cowart, *Art* 99).

²“To the men of antiquity the anima appeared as a goddess or a witch, while for medieval man the goddess was replaced by the Queen of Heaven and Mother Church” (“Archetypes” 29).

³Schaub points to the connection between Jung’s interpretation of the Tibetan text and number 49 as anticipatory of Revelation:

Moreover, we read in C. G. Jung’s ‘Psychological Commentary to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*’: ‘Like the Egyptian Book of the Dead, it is meant to be a guide for the dead man during the period of his Bardo existence, symbolically described as an intermediate state of *forty-nine days* duration between death and rebirth. (*Voice* 35, emphasis added)

⁴Jung refers explicitly to this early understanding of the word: “The term ‘archetype’ occurs as early as Philo Judaeus, with reference to the Imago Dei (God-image) in man. It can also be found in Irenaeus, who says: ‘The creator of the world did not fashion these things directly from himself but copied them from archetypes outside himself’” (“Archetypes” 4).

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