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„The Quest in Postmodern Literature: An Analysis of the
Quest in Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* and
Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*“

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Introduction

The term “quest” in literature is commonly associated with the early legends of the quest for the Holy Grail. Literary history, however, provides a wide range of quest narratives, each of which seems to share an essential structure, even when they assume so many different outward forms. The quest can be found throughout the history of literature, ranging from the earliest myths to the most contemporary writing; it can thus be considered one of the most consistent structural patterns of the human storytelling tradition. According to Dieter Schulz, a quest is basically the search for an object or a person; although it is necessary that there be both an agent to do the searching and an object to be found, it is not necessary for the search to be successful in order for it to constitute a quest (6). From this perspective, then, past centuries have provided us with many quest narratives: from Homer’s *Odyssey* to the Arthurian quest for the Holy Grail, to Captain Ahab’s hunt for the white whale.

Quest narratives are especially important to American literature, on account of that country’s particularly adventurous history. The early settlers of America were explorers who left Europe on a quest for new land. In much the same way, the nation’s expansion over the continent was initiated by adventurers who went West in order to explore and ultimately occupy the land. It might thus be said that adventure and a sense of perpetual movement are characteristic of the American soul. This particular aspect of the nation’s history has had a major influence on American literature and its characteristic reliance on adventure and quest narratives.

The quest narrative remained important for American literature throughout the 20th century, and its turn to so-called postmodern literature. One of the ways in which postmodern literature can be distinguished from earlier literature is by its rejection of traditional literary conventions and its development of new forms of creating literature. As a result, the quest’s appearance in postmodern literature comes to deviate from its more traditional form and is often either a parody or a subversion of that form.

In this thesis, it will be argued that the quest pattern is of major

importance to postmodern writers, whose use of that pattern significantly deviates from its traditional form in order to account for the complexities of the postmodern world. That period was witness to major societal changes that greatly impacted the life of the individual. Everyone was confronted with the horrors of WWII, the rise of capitalism and consumerism, the increasingly important mass media and the emergence of post-industrial society. Society's traditional values began to deteriorate. Literature then came to mirror these changes, thus transforming the pattern of the quest along with it. The quest was no longer solely used to provide fictional heroes with a structure for their adventures. Now the quest was also used to pose questions about the world. In the decades directly following WWII and its prevailing sense of uncertainty, literary heroes often set out on quests for meaning. These quests could take place in either the outside world or the inside world and often involved a quest for one's own identity. Questers commonly searched for absolute truth and transcendental meaning. But with the beginnings of the postmodern era and its growing skepticism about conventional belief systems, the nature of the quest was fundamentally changed. While modernist fictional heroes were still rewarded with a moment of epiphany, the heroes of the postmodern quest faced a world dominated by a sense of absurdity and fragmentation, which then made their quests absurd and fragmented. As a result, their quests no longer provided for an experience of unity, but its opposite. In pursuit of his quest, the hero often comes to resemble Sisyphus in his rolling of the stone. No matter how hard these heroes try, the circumstances of their quests become more and more bizarre and they are unable to arrive at their goal. The narration, therefore, often no longer provides a sense of closure, as it once did with conventional realist fiction. These are not, however, the only instances in which the quest in postmodern literature comes to deviate from its more traditional form. Postmodern writers use the pattern of the quest in a deconstructive way, thus recreating the quest's form and allowing for the incorporation of postmodern concerns. It is, therefore, one of the primary aims of this paper to investigate the various forms taken by the pattern of the quest in postmodern literature. It will then be shown how the quest was used to incorporate their concerns within these texts, thereby introducing postmodern

theories within them and thematizing the surrounding postmodern world.

Thus, the pattern of the quest is here analyzed according to how it incorporates such theories as Jean-François Lyotard's criticism of "grand narratives," and Jean Baudrillard's concept of the Simulacrum. The role played by new models of the linguistic sign—as introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida—within postmodern writing will also be examined. Additionally, it will be illustrated how the quest functioned as a means of highlighting postmodernism's critical stance towards dominant structures of Western society like literary realism and logocentrism.

Two postmodern authors who made extensive use of the quest narrative throughout their work are Thomas Pynchon and Paul Auster. In order to account for the importance of the quest within their writing, this paper analyzes two textual representatives of their works, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Auster's *City of Glass*, both of which are widely regarded as quest narratives. Because only two texts are analyzed in what follows, this paper's findings should not be considered valid for all of postmodern literature, but only for those exemplary illustrations of the postmodern quest to be found in these particular texts. As a final movement, however, this paper will then attempt to determine what role these two texts' transformation of the quest pattern play for the postmodern quest in general.

The first part of this paper provides the theoretical background that will be necessary for the subsequent literary analysis. Thus, the first chapter presents the traditional pattern of the quest so as to provide a framework in which the postmodern novel's deviation from this pattern will become apparent. Additionally, the special importance of the quest narrative for American literature will also be demonstrated. The second chapter provides a basic overview of postmodern literature in order to illustrate its chief literary concerns. Those theories that are especially important for this paper's analysis of postmodern literature, like those developed in Lyotard, Baudrillard, and the postmodern anti-detective novel, will then be described in greater detail. Finally, a careful analysis of the novels will then show how each author stages various postmodern concerns within his writing and presents a harrowing account of America's present and future.

1. Defining the quest

The quest is a popular literary pattern whose appearance throughout literary history has often taken various forms and served very different ends. In order to understand the quest's place in American literature, it is instructive to first consider the etymological roots of the word "quest." According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "quest" derives from the Latin "quaerere," which means "to seek or inquire." Although "quest" has several meanings, the following are especially relevant for the term's literary context:

- [...]
1. Any inquiry or investigation made in order to discover some fact; also, the object of such inquiry.
 2. Search or pursuit, made in order to find or obtain something.
 3. In medieval romance: An expedition or adventure undertaken by a knight to procure something or achieve some exploit; the knights engaged in such an enterprise.
- [...] ("quest" 6)

On the basis of these definitions, the quest narrative in literature might be said to consist of the subject of a quest, its object, and the circumstances of the subject in its pursuit of that object. According to Ilana Shiloh, another prerequisite of a quest is "the spatial displacement of the subject in pursuit of the object" (1). Shiloh further notes that traditional literary theoreticians have considered the quest in terms of "a linear, or circular, narrative pattern, reflecting a deep structure of myth and archetype, and associated it with a specific literary genre—the romance" (1). The quest is thus typically linked with the romantic quest. But its most popular representative can already be found several centuries earlier, in the quest for the Holy Grail. In this Arthurian romance, a knight normally sets out on an adventure which requires that several tests, tasks or ordeals be overcome in order for him to prove his heroic qualities:

The *quest* represents the most extended and significant category, with the Grail quest serving as the prototype. Quests also constitute *tests* of those who undertake them: tests of their dedication, of their prowess, of their moral and personal fitness to succeed. After quests and tests, there are *tasks*—errands on which a knight may be sent, sometimes for good reason, sometimes not—and finally, any of these categories may devolve into the fourth, simple *ordeal*. (Lacy 116)

Yet the origins of the quest can be traced back much earlier than the story of the Holy Grail. In the many versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*, it becomes clear that quest has assumed multiple forms throughout literary history.

1.1. Theories of the quest

In spite of the diversity of forms in which the quest narrative can appear, several literary theorists have tried to discern its basic structure. In his influential work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Josef Campbell investigates myth in different literary periods. Throughout his analysis, Campbell uses the term "monomyth" to refer to a mythological adventure which, in his analysis, closely corresponds to the quest narrative. Campbell claims that "[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation-initiation-return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (23). The adventure begins with an initial call of adventure (42) that the hero may or may not answer (49). In answering the call, the hero has to face that which is "unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality [...]; and what formerly was meaningful may become strangely emptied of value" (46). The reader's favorite part of the adventure only begins with the hero's attempt to survive a succession of trials (81), and on his way, the hero is often supported by helpers (211). If the hero succeeds in his adventures, he proves himself "a superior man, a born king" (148). The last step of the adventure consists in either the hero's death or departure (306); but if he survives, the boon of his efforts has the potential to restore the world (211).

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye sets the quest in relation to romance and adventure, and calls the successful quest "the complete form of the romance" (187). Like Campbell, Frye distinguishes three phases within the completed quest:

[T]he stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the

crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both must die; and the exaltation of the hero. We may call these three stages respectively, using Greek terms, the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict. (187)

Frye further describes the quest-romance as dialectical in nature, since it revolves around the conflict between a hero—or protagonist—and an enemy—or antagonist. The hero typically represents those attributes of divinity which set him against the enemy, who represents demonic, mythical qualities (187). Although the enemy is often a dreadful monster, it can just as easily be a simple human being. The form of the quest is often labyrinthine, as when the hero is thrown into the belly of a monster or an underworld populated by monsters. When the enemy is defeated, the hero's own death typically results in his rebirth or resurrection. After having successfully completed his adventure, the hero is finally rewarded, often in the form of a treasure or a bride (187-192).

In his analysis of the quest in English and American romances, Dieter Schulz underlines the importance of the hero's change of location during the quest. The hero leaves behind his familiar surroundings and enters the unfamiliar world of the adventure, which often takes the form of a forest, wasteland, wilderness, the sea, the underworld or a labyrinth. These new surroundings disorient the hero and enable him to leave behind his usual way of thinking and perceive something anew. His disorientation thus functions as a preparatory step in his initiation (10-11). In this sense, the hero's experience comes to resemble those initiation ceremonies that are often found in mythological adventures, in which the hero can only continue if he first dies a symbolic death. This act kills off the hero's former self and leads to a resurrection in which his spiritual rebirth produces a shift in consciousness and identity (8-9).

Although most traditional quest narratives follow the basic structure described by Campbell and Frye, there have always been quest-narratives that deviated from this formula. Edward Mendelson, for example, argues that the romantic quest brought about a change in the pattern of quest narratives. In early versions of the quest narrative, according to Mendelson, the hero's

journey served as a kind of initiation through which the hero would prove himself worthy of achieving his final purpose. What mattered was not the journey itself, but the hero's arrival at his final goal. This formula was transformed by the romantic-quest, in which the goal either disappears or becomes terrifying and obscure (Introduction 12). Similarly, Shiloh claims that the romantic quest was not determined by teleology, but responded to very different demands:

What is valued is not the attainment of a goal, but its deferral. If questing is the self's movement toward the Other, it depends on the separation of subject and object. It grows out of the self's incompleteness and its desire to possess the object—but possession results in rigidity and stasis. Thus quest lasts only as long as it is unfulfilled. The romantic poets had sensed this paradox and preferred the sweetness of desire to the completeness of attainment; the digressive, wandering movement to the direct pursuit of a definite end. (6)

Deviations from the classical formula of the quest narrative were thus part of the earliest history of the literary form. A sense of non-ending and a lack of closure are particularly important for the postmodern quest, where the questing hero hardly ever reaches the object of the quest. But as Mendelson and Shiloh suggest, the quest's unfinished nature is not simply a postmodern invention, but part of the tradition itself.

1.2. The importance of the quest for the American novel

Before tracing the origin of the quest narrative in postmodern literature, the quest's place in American literature will first be identified. In American literary history, the adventure story in general and the quest narrative in particular have always been of great importance. According to Janis P. Stout, some of America's most central and defining works of literature are concerned with quests, such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *Moby-Dick*, and Walt Whitman's poems, particularly "Song of Myself" (99).

One reason for their singular importance is that the American soul is, in theory, fundamentally adventurous and such adventures often assume the form of a quest. "Exploration" and "expansion" are keywords of American culture, whose very foundation was created by the adventures of a few individuals who left Europe and "discovered" a new continent. In the centuries

that followed, people from all over the world moved to the “New World” in order to live in the land of opportunity. This movement was accompanied by that westward expansion of the early settlers which resulted in the appropriation of the entire continent (cf. Minter 11).

In his analysis of the adventure story in American literature, Martin Green calls adventure the “energizing myth of America” (3). In literature, the adventure story was also used to disseminate certain ambiguous ideologies to its readers. On the one hand, these stories were anti-imperialistic in their rebellion against the imperialism of the British Empire; on the other hand, they were used to legitimate the imperialist tendencies of America. In its westward expansion, America assumed the role of an imperialist force through its domination of other peoples and nations, and destruction of the Native American population (3-9). A reading of the American adventure story thus functioned as preparation for going West, insofar as these stories “represented, in attractive and individualized form, the policies and compromises, the punishments and rewards, and the stresses and problems involved in advancing a frontier at the expense of native populations and against natural obstacles” (4).

For this reason, the novel has always played a central role in American identity-formation. This function of the novel was once an explicit concern of the nation. The very idea of The Great American Novel was, according to Gary R. Thompson, formulated by John W. De Forest in 1868 in order to create a novel that would serve as an ideal representation of American identity. Although the idea for such a novel preceded the publication of De Forest’s article, the need for this literary enterprise greatly increased with the article’s popularity. It was said that such a literary creation should exemplify both the national spirit and the essential figures, manners and emotions of American existence. Although De Forest called for great American works of poetry and prose, he qualified his enthusiasm by adding that the time for a work of great American poetry had not yet arrived; he claimed that a great prose work could, however, be realized and suggested the novel as the appropriate form it should take (9-20). It might thus be claimed that the American novel has always been charged with a special mission that is

closely linked with the American soul. This context is particularly important for the following analysis, since American identity is an explicit concern of the novels under investigation here. In these novels, however, characters' identity-formation, as the following chapters will demonstrate, always proceed along the lines set out by postmodernism. In the course of the last century, the identity-formation of characters was of great importance to the American novel. The next chapter will draw out some of the chief characteristics of the 20th century American novel in their relation to the quest narrative.

1.3. The quest in the 20th century American novel

Although the quest narrative remained important to American literature throughout the 20th century, the manner in which it presented itself often differed from its appearance in preceding centuries. This change was partly due to the modernist turn away from literary conventions, which was then further aggravated by postmodern literature and its response to the major changes brought about by the emergence of post-industrial society. According to Stout, the quest of the 20th century only exists in a pared down and fragmentary form; one possible reason for this change is "a modern skepticism regarding the possibility of achieving absolute enlightenment" (99). Additionally, the quest of that time was often characterized by a shift in purpose. According to Stefan Brandt, the quest in post-WWII literature often turned into a search for meaning. At that time, Brandt writes

the notion of *quest* was commonly associated with authors as diverse as Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, Bernhard Malamud, J.D. Salinger, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac, who articulated in their writings the experience of self-discovery in an age of lost ideals and broken promises. Often, the search for truth in postwar texts was also linked to the hidden tensions between the individual and society. (64)

This changed relationship between the hero and his surroundings was also underlined by James Edwin Miller's 1967 investigation of the quest in *Quest Surd and Absurd*, in which he compares the quest in the literature of that time with its place in the literature of the 19th century. Miller introduces a distinction between two forms of the quest: the "Quest Absurd" and the "Quest Surd"

“surd,” in its original sense, means “irrational, without reason”) (viii). Both categories of the quest are characterized by a sense of irrationality:

[b]ut in the Quest Surd the irrationality lies predominantly in the Seeker; in the Quest Absurd, the irrationality lies predominantly in the world where he wanders. [...] It is this real world which has become irrational (unreal, a nightmare) in the Quest Absurd, as exemplified in such modern writers as William Faulkner, Wright Morris, or J. D. Salinger. And as the world of these recent novelists has become more irrational, their visions—the dreams of their searchers and seekers—have become more rational, humble, and human. (viii)

Miller thus identifies, within the literature of his time, a shift from the “Quest Surd,” which was typical of 19th century literature, to the “Quest Absurd.” He describes the former as an “irrational quest in a rational world” and the latter as a “rational quest in an irrational (or absurd) world” (ix). Miller further determines the dominant features of the novel of his time by claiming that they often take place in an “inverted or nightmare world,” in which “the disoriented, disaffected, or alienated hero, [is] suffering a severe sickness of the soul-or spiritual nausea” (11). The hero pursues a quest for identity that is also “a search for a self that is leaking away, disappearing, or lost, or—most horrible of all—non-existent” (11). These heroes often embark on their quest in order to escape a conflict at home, and, in the pursuit of their quest, then discover what is real (33). Miller is quick to point out that these quests are not simply characterized by despair, but that each contains “a thin, frail line of hope” (16).

The new heroes of Miller’s “Quest Absurd” thus embark on a quest through which they become aware of the irrationality of the world surrounding them. In his description of the “ideal text of quest,” Ihab H. Hassan explains why the quest is the ideal form of such an encounter. He thus describes quests as a “movement—personal on one level, socio-political on another—that entails encounters between cultures, values, histories, entails frictions between modes of human existence. Such encounters serve as critiques, implicit or explicit, of contemporary American society.” (79). The form of the quest can thus be considered a particularly important method for incorporating a social-critical stance within the text, since the movements of the questing hero provide him with the possibility of coming into contact with representatives of all social classes. Such a stance can be isolated within

both of the analyzed novels. The quests of these postmodern novels further deviate from the traditional quest of preceding centuries by following the tendencies of postmodern literature in general. To identify those specifically postmodern elements that will resurface in the analyzed texts, the following chapter outlines the basic structure of the postmodern enterprise.

2. Defining postmodernism

Describing postmodernism could be considered a quest in itself. Theorists in various scientific disciplines—such as literary studies, cultural studies, and sociology—have offered their own theories of postmodernism. This has resulted in a multiplicity of definitions and a situation in which a final, clear-cut definition is impossible. In what follows, a basic outline of postmodernism is offered that should provide a general framework for this notion; additionally, those theories that are especially relevant to the topic of this paper, like those of Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, are described in greater detail. Additionally, because the heroes of both *The Crying of Lot 49* and *City of Glass* are often said to resemble the so-called postmodern detective, this genre will also be considered in greater detail.

2.1. Postmodernism – A general introduction

Postmodernism, which might be said to have originated in the 1960s, is described by Gerhard Hoffmann as a cultural phenomena that resulted in “a far-reaching reordering and reevaluation not only of art, music and literature, but of the very notions of what culture and civilization are” (14). As the prefix “post” indicates, postmodernism occurred after modernism. The relationship between these two periods is controversial: Some regard postmodernism as a continuation of modernism that resulted in a heightening and expanding of modernist ideas; others, however, claim there was a fundamental break between these two periods. Both positions have their own grain of truth. In literature, these two eras are joined by their mutual rejection of literary conventions. This rejection, which is born with modernism, then reaches its peak with postmodernism.

According to Arno Heller, this new literary mode that had a major influence on the novel possesses the following characteristics:

Folgende zentrale, immer wieder verschieden abgewandelte Merkmale ergeben sich für den postmodernen Roman: die Wiederentdeckung des Imaginativen, Phantastischen, der Freude am nichtreferentiellen verbalen Spiel; die endgültige Abkehr von der sog. mimetisch-realistischen Tradition;

das radikale Experimentieren mit neuen Formen und die Sprengung herkömmlicher Gattungsgrenzen; sowie eine antiillusionistische, selbstreflektierende oder selbstparodierende *metafiction*, welche die Unmöglichkeit definitiver Sinnfindungen thematisiert. ("Einführung" 29-30)

Another characteristic that warrants mention, since it appears in each of the novels analyzed below, is the appearance of a void. According to Patricia Waugh, postmodern literature mirrors its own historical period, which was "singularly uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic" (6). A common way for postmodern writers to mirror the uncertainties of their time was to incorporate, within their texts, that void whose various forms the following analysis will draw out of each respective novel. As previously mentioned, postmodernism's emergence is inseparable from the social and political situation of its time. In what follows, these socio-political origins of postmodern literature will be further examined.

The decades directly following the Second World War were characterized by wide-ranging social change, as entire nations recovered from a war whose inhumanity provoked a complete reconsideration of the human condition. In the United States, the situation was initially quite unique. According to Arno Heller, in the period directly after the war, the United States was characterized by the euphoria of victory. The nation's undamaged industry and expansions in agriculture resulted in unprecedented prosperity. Its great expectations for the future, however, were soon disappointed by the emergence of new problems ("Einführung" 4-5). The following summary by Eva Manske provides a comprehensive overview of the problematic situation of the America of that time:

Die sechziger und siebziger Jahre waren in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika von einer heftigen Zuspitzung der sozialen Gegensätze gekennzeichnet. Die Verschärfung der allgemeinen Krise des gesellschaftlichen Systems führte zu einem Anschwellen der demokratischen und radikalen Massenbewegungen, der Antwort von Millionen beunruhigter Amerikaner auf die sich in allen Lebensphären manifestierenden Verfallserscheinungen: Rassendiskriminierung, der Krieg in Vietnam, drastische Armut, öffentliche Unordnung und Gesetzlosigkeit und die damit einhergehende Atmosphäre der Angst und des Schreckens, der Abbau von Demokratie und Freiheit, die repressive Funktion des Staates, die weitverbreitete Korruption in führenden Institution der Gesellschaft, die Zerstörung der Umwelt durch Technologie und Industrie, der verehrende Einfluß einer brutalisierenden und enthumanisierenden Massenkultur. Alle diese Symptome einer radikalen Krise des Systems insgesamt bewirkten

Veränderungen im Denken und Weltverständnis vieler Amerikaner und äußern sich in höchst kritischen, aber widersprüchlichen Reaktionen, die sich in der Prosa zahlreicher Schriftsteller der Vereinigten Staaten widerspiegeln. (133)

Feelings of discontent and unrest prevailed in the arts, where writers and literary theorists were searching for a new direction. At the time, theorists like John Barth, Leslie Fiedler, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard reflected upon the status of literature and brought forward several new ideas. Their theories would later be regarded as providing the cornerstone of postmodern literature. In what follows, their work, as well as that of Saussure and Derrida, will be described in its relation to postmodernism.

In 1967, Barth published the influential article “The Literature of Exhaustion,” in which he “wonders how it is possible to continue to write in the face of the knowledge that all the forms of fiction had been ‘used up’ by the moderns” (*Nicol* 15). According to Malcolm Bradbury, it became a “postmodern convention to say that the conventional novel, with its fixed text, chronological development, claim to authority and to authorship, had become exhausted, overwhelmed by the glut of public narrative in the multiplying media, and the plurality of forms and styles available to the late modern writer” (201). The writers of that time handled this “used-upedness” of fictional modes by reassessing literary conventions (Bradbury 201). By trying to create something new, literature subjected itself to a steady stream of literary experiments. Moreover, in 1969, Leslie Fiedler published the article “Cross the Border—Close the Gap,” in which he claims that the gap between high and popular culture should be abolished—an idea that later became a cornerstone of postmodern literature.

Postmodern writers also concerned themselves with the work of other disciplines, which they then incorporated within their writing. Of seminal importance to literature were the emerging linguistic theories of Saussure. According to Martin Klepper, Saussure, in his *Cours de Linguistiques Générale*, which was published in 1916, devised a new theory about the function of the sign, in which the relationship between sign and signifier was regarded as an arbitrary creation of convention (177). Saussure’s theory was further developed by Jaques Derrida, who, according to Carsten Springer

claims “that there has never been a direct correspondence of signifier and signified” (91). Helga Schier summarizes Derrida’s theory in the following way:

Language never refers to a thing, a thought, a concept outside itself; language only refers to itself, words only to other words, texts to other texts in the endless and originless play of ‘différance’, whose meaning always surpasses any attempt to arrest or define it. [...] The concept of ‘différance’ grants language the autonomy of play. Meaning is neither generated by a fixed relation within a normative structure nor by reference to an exterior realm such as reality, truth or the self, but rather by the ever changing interrelations to other meanings within the space of language itself. (24)

Signifier and signified are thereby even further separated from one another. This instability of the linguistic sign and the corresponding processes of meaning-making are frequently thematized by postmodernists and reappear within the analyzed novel.

2.1. Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*

Another work that had a great impact on the cultural world of the time was the work of the French sociologist, philosopher and literary critic Jean-François Lyotard. In 1979, Lyotard wrote *La condition postmoderne*, a book on the status of knowledge in the sciences, in which he “investigates the defining limits and paradoxes of classical knowledge systems” (Martin 38). In this work, Lyotard “use[s] the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative,” (xxiii) and claims that this method of legitimation had reigned throughout the sciences since the Age of Enlightenment. Due to the emergence of post-industrial society and changes in technology, however, Lyotard argues that this strategy for the legitimation of knowledge no longer makes sense. He therefore suggests that new modes of legitimation must be found in the “postmodern” age, which refers in this instance (according to his definition) to the condition of knowledge in the “most highly developed societies” (xxiii). As a consequence, he defines the postmodern as an “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv); the age of postmodernism is then characterized by the replacement of grand narratives

with multiple smaller narratives. Lyotard describes the new status of science in the following terms:

Postmodern science—by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, “*fracta*,” catastrophes and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, non-rectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the world *knowledge*, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown. (60)

According to Steven Connor, the postmodern condition described by Lyotard is, thus, uniquely capable of accounting for the complexities of postindustrial society. Connor further states that the postmodern condition “manifests itself in the multiplication of centres of power and activity and the dissolution of every kind of totalizing narrative which claims to govern the whole complex field of social activity and representation” (8). Those “little narratives” described by Lyotard closely resemble the literary creations of postmodern writers; in the chapters of analysis, the postmodern quest narrative’s relation to this tradition will be further investigated.

2.2. Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum

Another influential concept of postmodernism was coined by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard’s investigation into the way in which signs constitute reality in post-industrial society; they do so, Baudrillard claimed, through the form of the simulacrum. According to Baudrillard, a simulacrum is a signifier without a signified, i.e. an empty sign that does not refer back to reality. In his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard describes the development of those signs that largely determine contemporary society in terms of “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it” (*Simulacra* 1). In the beginning, the relationship between sign and signifier remains intact: Its “representation is of the sacramental order” (*Simulacra* 6), while the image “is the reflection of a profound reality” (*Simulacra* 6). In the next stage, the relationship between sign and signifier is loosened, as signs no longer faithfully represent reality. The image becomes an “evil appearance” (*Simulacra* 6) that “masks and denatures a profound reality”

(*Simulacra 6*). The next stage is characterized by the “absence of a profound reality” (*Simulacra 6*); here the image comes to represent a reality that no longer exists. Thus, the signifier becomes an empty sign. Finally, during the last stage, the sign “has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (*Simulacra 6*). At this stage, signs only provide a simulation of reality; the difference between “true” and “false”, “real” and “imaginary” is thereby threatened (*Simulacra 3*). Once the real loses its authenticity, nostalgia for this original state of the world takes hold, and this craving results in a transition from the real to the hyperreal:

Panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us—a strategy of the real, of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence. (*Simulacra 7*)

Furthermore, in *America*, Baudrillard presents America as the prototypical simulation society, a perfect example of the hyperreal. Baudrillard’s analysis will prove especially productive for the reading of postmodern fiction, as the chapter on Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* will demonstrate.

2.3. The postmodern anti-detective novel

In the act of creating literature, postmodern writers often turned to conventional literary forms in order to recycle them in different ways. One genre that was frequently utilized in this manner was the detective story, which is, according to Brian McHale, “the epistemological genre *par excellence*” (9), and which postmodernist writers used to create the postmodern anti-detective story. In what follows, this transformation from the detective to the anti-detective novel is drawn out in order to better differentiate those aims which belonged to the earlier tradition from those which emerged with the anti-detective novel.

According to Anne M. Holzapfel, the detective novel has its origins in 1841, when Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” was first published. Alongside the stories that followed “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” Poe established the standards of the classical detective novel of the British

tradition (11). The classical detective story followed a clear-cut structure. According to John G. Cawelti, the story must contain an unsolved crime (80) that has “the potential for complex ramifications” (81). Stefano Tani adds that the story must also include a detective who is in the act of trying to solve the crime. But the most important element of the story is the solution to the case, “since it is the final and fulfilling link in the detective novel’s sequence, the one that gives sense to the genre and justifies its existence” (41). For Cawelti, the solved crime is also a way of arriving at that truth which is “the single right perspective and ordering of events” (81). It is the task of the detective to restore the order that has been broken by his antagonist’s crime. By means of his rationalistic mind, the detective is able to solve the crime, and assist in punishing the culprit. In this way, the reader is reassured (Tani 21). Thus, from the beginning, the detective story could be considered intimately related to rationalism; the genre’s invention “comes at the philosophically appropriate moment, corresponding to the nineteenth-century rise of the scientific and optimistic attitude of positivistic philosophy towards reality and human control of reality through the development of technology, [...]” (Tani 11).

While the classical detective novel enjoyed great popularity, it was also held in contempt for being unrealistic and failing to take into account the complexities of real life. In response, a new form of the detective story was developed in 1920s America as a reaction to the British tradition. This new direction in detective fiction was referred to as the “hard-boiled school” and its most important representatives were the American authors Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. This new form aimed to create a more realistic kind of detective story by drastically changing the traditional form of the genre. First of all, the action no longer took place in the idyllic countryside—as it did in the British traditional version—but in the wastelands of American cities (Tani 21-23). In the hard-boiled detective story, the modern city is the embodiment of decadence, as well as the refuge of lost humanity. The cities are represented as fluctuating between sterility and glamour (Cawelti 155-156). In these cities, evil is no longer a matter of individual culprits, as was still the case in the traditional detective story, but is now inherent to the social order as such; in the hard-boiled detective story, evil

“has begun to crumble the very pillars of middle-class society, respectable citizens, the modern metropolis, and the institutions of law and order” (Cawelti 156).

The detective is now a lonely hero who follows that private moral code and idealistic motive which was typical of the romance. He occupies the role of the hero, a “good” knight who has to fight a corrupt society; his undertaking, therefore, always contains a moral and social message (Tani 21-25). According to Cawelti, he is a kind of tough guy who, though accustomed to a violent world, takes a moral stand against this corrupt and amoral world through his crusade to destroy the evils of the urban world (149-152). Solving the case is no longer simply a matter of solving of the riddle, but is now “a quest for truth in a reality far more complex and ambiguous than in the stereotyped ‘fairy tales’ of the British tradition” (Tani 23). The detective’s former reliance on the powers of his rationalistic mind is also undermined:

The detective is no longer a logical mind in a positivistic world as he was in Poe’s tales. His attempts to unravel the mystery often clash against his own impulses and against a “reality” which is no longer explained and constricted within the optimism and rationality of nineteenth-century positivism but rather has been reinterpreted in a questioning fashion by the then recent theories about relativism and the unconscious. This new notion of reality of course defies the neat solutions and simple truths of the too logical and too artificial British detective novel. (Tani 23)

Thus, according to Edward Margolies, the task of the detective has become a “moral, if not metaphysical quest” (84 quoted in Tani 24).

After the Second World War, Tani claims, an increasing sense of moral disorientation influenced the hard-boiled school of detective fiction so profoundly that even the knightly and tough detective was unable to overcome that time’s spiritual void (25). This social situation was also the starting point for the anti-detective novel. Writers like Robbe-Grillet, Borges and Nabokov recycled the conventions of the detective story “with the precise intention of expressing the disorder and the existential void they find central to our time in a genre designed to epitomize the contrary” (34). In the anti-detective novel, the reader must initially believe that he is reading a conventional version of the genre. The novel only reveals its true nature at the

end (42). In its deconstruction of the traditional genre, the anti-detective novel parodies positivistic methods of detection (34) and can thus be seen as taking a stand against the rationalistic and logocentric worldview of Enlightenment society. According to an influential article by William V. Spanos, postmodern detective fiction undermines the positivistic mindset of the Western world; this fiction, Spanos writes, “exists to strip its audience of positivized fugitives of their protective garments of rational explanation and leave them standing naked and unaccommodated—poor, bare, forked animals—before the en-croaching Nothingness” (157).

Patricia Merivale and Susan Sweeney further describe the way in which the anti-detective novel deviates from its predecessor. They refer to this type of detective fiction as a “metaphysical detective story”; it is, they claim, “distinguished, moreover, by the profound questions that it raises about narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge” (1). It thus poses essential epistemological and ontological questions (4). Through various forms, the writers of such stories subvert or parody classical conventions. The text may be self-reflexive (2), and assume the form of a labyrinth, while clues and evidence may become ubiquitous, ambiguous or simply meaningless; the case itself may remain unsolved (8).

The anti-detective story may thus be regarded as a postmodern version of the genre, since it incorporates typical postmodern themes, and presents the decenteredness and fragmentation of a postmodern society “that is marked by political and cultural disorientation and insecurity” (Holzapfel 22). In line with postmodern tropes, the text begins to play with the reader’s expectations that the story may turn out to frustrate. Because the protagonists of Pynchon’s and Auster’s texts are commonly thought to bear some resemblance to the anti-detective, the function of the anti-detective novel within their work is investigated below.

3. An analysis of the quest in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

Although Thomas Pynchon is widely regarded as one of the most important American writers of the second half of the 20th century, very little is known about his personal life. It appears Pynchon took great pains to keep his private life hidden from public view. According to Heinz Ickstadt, Pynchon was born in 1937, studied English Literature and engineering at Cornell University and occasionally worked as a construction assistant for Boeing (“Versteigerung” 107).

Pynchon wrote several novels, short stories and articles. Because most of his novels contain many characteristics of postmodernism, they can be considered prototypical examples of postmodern literature. William Plater, who has studied Pynchon's work from his first stories to *Gravity's Rainbow*, claims that “Pynchon continues to develop the same ideas, dilemmas, and even characters in successive stories” (xiv). Certain motifs—like death, the quest and specific scientific models—recur throughout his work. Plater further explains that a dominant element of Pynchon's fiction is the “sense of duality, [of] paired opposites,” in which “[t]he most important of numerous dualities is the familiar thermodynamic situation of entropy and the disintegration of order into disorder” (xv). These elements are also central to *The Crying of Lot 49*.

In the *Crying of Lot 49* (henceforth abbreviated as *Lot 49*), Oedipa is a California housewife who is married to a disk jockey and is made the executor—or, as she would say, “executrix”—of the property of her ex-lover Pierce Inverarity. To sort out Inverarity's finances and meet with the co-executor, Metzger, Oedipa goes to San Narciso. While living in the Echo Courts Hotel and being seduced by Metzger, Oedipa discovers that Pierce owned nearly all of San Narciso. Shortly thereafter, she notices a sign in the ladies room of the Scope Bar that resembles a muted posthorn. This incident serves as the starting-point for her quest to find out the meaning of the sign. Later, she will learn that it refers to an organization called Tristero. Throughout her quest, Oedipa is overloaded with information about the meaning of the secret system that often points in different directions. She

does not find the ultimate truth she so desperately longs for and is thus left on the verge of madness. After meeting all kinds of characters, she is able to construct a theory about Tristero, according to which it was originally created as a countermovement to the official postal system. Since that time, however, it is said to have had many different meanings; in Oedipa's time, it may refer to an underground postal organization. Oedipa remains uncertain about its true nature as she attends an auction where an anonymous bidder is interested in Inverarity's stamp collection, and hopes for a revelation. Like so much else in the novel, this collection, which contained several stamps of the secret postal system, is ultimately linked to the Tristero. Before the anonymous bidder can reveal his identity, however, the novel ends, and the reader is left in the dark about the meaning of the Tristero system.

Lot 49 contains several defining features of the quest narrative, and is thus an indisputable representative of that paradigm. Like the more traditional forms of the quest narrative, the novel includes a quester, Oedipa, who is in the act of searching for something. In this case, however, the object of the quest is not a physical object, but knowledge about the true nature of the Tristero system. Yet this heroine's quest also greatly deviates from the classical form of the quest and is, therefore, in keeping with its postmodern character, also a parody of the traditional form of the quest narrative. Furthermore, as the following analysis will demonstrate, common characteristics of postmodernism pervade Pynchon's novel and are inserted within the text through Pynchon's use of the quest pattern. In the next chapter, it is shown how Oedipa, by taking up the quest, encounters the "void" constitutive of postmodern society. Next, it will be shown how Oedipa's quest to solve the riddle of the Tristero system resembles that of the detective in postmodern anti-detective novels. Her ultimately futile attempts to solve the case by means of reason function as an indictment of the logocentric worldview of the Western world. Additionally, her search for the ultimate meaning of both the Tristero system and the sign of the muted posthorn comes to illustrate that instability between sign and signifier characteristic of Saussure's and Derrida's theories of the linguistic sign. Her encounters with the physical concept of entropy illustrates the disorder—and, in consequence,

uncertainty—that is inherent to all things. Finally, as her quest provides her with a new awareness of her surroundings, Oedipa begins to see the “disinherited” of America, those who lie outside the so-called American dream. In this way, a social-critical stance is incorporated within the text.

3.1. Escaping the Void - Beginning the Quest

Insofar as her quest is initiated by a call that disrupts her everyday life, the beginning of Oedipa’s quest resembles the traditional form of the quest narrative. The novel’s very first sentence begins with this disruption and quickly places the reader in medias res:

One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity, 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. But this did not work. (*Lot 49 1*)

This paragraph presents an image of Oedipa’s previous life and the task awaiting her. At the beginning of the novel, Oedipa is a typical American housewife passing her time with those Tupperware parties that might be said to embody the commerce of contemporary society: the company itself is based on the idea that social contacts are to be used as channels of distribution. The hostess organizes a party in which products are presented to her guests in order to turn those guests into consumers. In this way, the typically un-commercial nature of friendship is completely commercialized; these parties thus embody the capitalism and consumerism of post-industrial society and foreshadow one of the novel’s major concerns.

In the beginning, Oedipa feels overwhelmed by the task assigned her and turns to those activities that once provided sufficient distraction and companionship. But the television that often allowed her to forget the boredom of her daily routine as housewife no longer provides escape from the seriousness of her present reality. In Tony Tanner’s analysis, such

activities represent “the three substitutes for true religion in the contemporary world: the TV (with no message), the name of God (now an empty word) and drink (which doesn’t work)” (TP 61). It has become clear that it is not only Oedipa’s life as a housewife that is empty, but the world itself, which is now defined by its hyperrealism and signs that are, in a Baudrillarian sense, both empty and meaningless. According to Peter Freese, the Southern California in which Oedipa lives is a wasteland, “a sterile and alienated world” (514), whose civilization is “wrecked by boredom, affluence and a lack of shared values; [it is] the landscape of what once was the last refuge of the American dream” (513). Oedipa is isolated by that post-industrial world in which television serves as a substitute for human contact, religion no longer provides the postmodern individual with faith, and alcohol is used to forget one’s hopelessness.

For Oedipa, the quest soon comes to serve as an escape from everyday life. According to Molly Hite, this initial scene illustrates the heroine’s first transformation and suggests the shape Oedipa’s personal development will assume as she pursues her quest. The call thus, in Hite’s reading, “propels Oedipa upward, out of this banality: like Venus emerging from the sea, she is already rising from a ‘Californicated’ level of existence into a new life. Her quest is a birth-passage, and from the beginning she is directed toward transcendence” (73). Thus, like the heroes of the traditional quest, Oedipa’s pursuit of her quest will require a rebirth, in which leaving home constitutes the first step.

The life Oedipa will leave behind is characterized by that monotony and boredom which is easily discerned by examining one of her typical days:

Through the rest of the afternoon, through her trip to the market in downtown Kinneret-Among-The-Pines to buy ricotta and listen to the Muzak [...]; then through the sunned gathering of her marjoram and sweet basil from the herb garden, reading of book reviews in the latest *Scientific American*, into the layering of a lasagna, [...], 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. (*Lot 49 2*)

Oedipa’s willingness to set out on a quest that might promise a kind of

adventure could thus be understood as an attempt to escape the “more or less identical” “deckful of days” that constitute her life, and serve as her own personal void she fails to face.

When Oedipa feels unable to cope with her appointed task and seeks support from her husband, Mucho, she has little success. Mucho Maas, a DJ for the KCUF radio station, is so sensitive that he is still suffering from his own traumas. In contrast to his present job, Mucho once believed in the cars he worked with in a used car lot. For Mucho, cars constitute “motorized, metal extensions of [their owners]” (*Lot 49* 4), and the lives of the owners are encoded in their cars. When the cars were cleaned, Mucho believed, “you had to look at the actual residue of these lives” (*Lot 49* 5). Although exposure to this trade “had somehow managed to immunize him, he could still never accept the way each owner, each shadow, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else’s life” (*Lot 49* 5). Mucho’s concerns nicely illustrate one of Marshall McLuhan’s theories from *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. There McLuhan regards technology, as well as other material goods, as mere extensions of man. McLuhan refers to the myth of Narcissus in order to describe the results of such “extensions” in our society:

The Greek myth of Narcissus is directly concerned with a fact of human experience, as the word *Narcissus* indicates. It is from the Greek word *narcosis*, or numbness. The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system. (41)

Within the novel, two names refer back to the myth described by McLuhan: the city San Narciso, as well as the Echo Court Hotel, where Oedipa lives during her stay in San Narciso. In this way it is suggested that the city of San Narciso and its citizens are representative of McLuhan’s concept of the material extensions of men, and display the very same numbness that is caused by these “extensions”. The importance of McLuhan’s theory is underlined by Thomas Schaub, who states that because this theme is repeated throughout the novel, “[t]he world of *The Crying of Lot 49* [to be] built

around those 'extensions': word of mouth, letters and postal systems, telephones, television, information encoded in cars and mattresses, the written work in plays and bathrooms, even the configurations of cities and towns" (25). Pynchon thus thematizes the void constitutive of postmodern American society as well as all the ways in which media and material goods are used to fill this void. "In McLuhan's terms," Schaub writes of this numb American culture, "[the] culture has become addicted to the material forms which the American Dream has assumed" (26).

As she answers the quest's call, Oedipa too becomes aware of the void that constituted her previous existence and recalls that her relationship to Inverarity was itself an attempt of escape:

As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix. 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. When it turned out to be Pierce she'd happily pulled out the pins and curlers and down it tumbled in its whispering, dainty avalanche, only when Pierce had got maybe halfway up, her lovely hair turned, through some sinister sorcery, into a great unanchored wig, and down he fell, on his ass. (*Lot 49* 10-11)

But Oedipa's attempt to turn her story into a traditional quest ultimately fails. In *Lot 49*, the distribution of roles does not correspond to that of the traditional quest narrative, wherein the questing hero is frequently male, and the desired object is female. Oedipa herself seems to be aware of this circumstance. In her imagination, she resembles a distressed damsel, held in captivity, who is waiting to be rescued by a heroic knight. But as the passage ironically presents Oedipa's fantasy, it becomes clear that her quest can only be a parody of the conventional quest narrative. Oedipa is not the passive object of a male hero; it is she who must assume the role of an active quester in order to pursue her adventures. It might thus be concluded that, in order to pursue her quest, Oedipa must first become independent, a process of personal development she clearly undergoes during her quest.

As previously mentioned, Oedipa comes to recognize both the absence in her life as well as that threatening void she was earlier unable to identify. Her

increasing awareness of her own isolation is underlined by a memory in which she looked at a painting while on a trip with Inverarity, when they were still a couple:

In Mexico City they somehow wandered into an exhibition of paintings by the beautiful Spanish exile Remedios Varo: 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 this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world. Oedipa, perverse, had stood in front of the painting and cried. [...] 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 escape from? 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. (*Lot 49* 11-12)

The painting, which might be said to serve as a mirror of Oedipa's life, starkly presents the void. Like the women in the painting, Oedipa is, according to Ickstadt, now able to acknowledge that ontological captivity which she once tried to escape from by fleeing into the fictional order of her everyday life ("Versteigerung" 115). Oedipa tried to fill the void in her life with what Tanner calls "self-spun versions of reality" ("V." 41). The routine of the typical American housewife Oedipa once followed was a means to escape the futility that threatens every citizen of postmodern society. It seems that prior to the call that begins her quest, Oedipa was unable to account for both the emptiness of her life and the feelings of discontent such a situation might produce. Already at the beginning of the quest, however, Oedipa appears to undergo a transformation. As soon as she intends to follow her call, she becomes aware that the life she is going to leave behind is devoid of any real meaning. Consequently, answering the call helps her to recognize the emptiness of her postmodern existence.

3.2. Oedipa as an anti-detective

Oedipa first follows the call of her quest to San Narciso in order to sort out Inverarity's assets and meet the co-executor Metzger. At this early point in the novel, she is equipped with "no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning" (*Lot* 49 12); nevertheless, in her attempt to make sense of her surroundings, she resembles a detective from the very beginning. According to Tony Tanner, she thus comes to resemble her namesake: "[Oedipa] is a female Oedipus, who was of course the solver of the riddle in one of the first great detective stories in Western literature" (*TP* 60). Joseph W. Slade, on the other hand, compares Oedipa to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*,

whose protagonist is tormented by the question of man's place in a universe he does not understand. The problems he faces are religious, metaphysical, political, and epistemological. He is forced to make choices, but he never achieves control over his destiny; with none of the problems resolved at play's end he must go on seeking. (108)

In light of these interpretations, it appears that Oedipa becomes a solver of riddles, and it might be assumed that her quest poses some of the most significant ontological and epistemological questions of our time. In her attempt to discover the truth, Oedipa is frequently described as either a detective or—as is appropriate for a postmodern work of literature and the nature of the questions she poses—an anti-detective.

Oedipa's work of detection begins with her arrival at the Echo Courts Hotel in San Narciso. The manager of the hotel, Miles, plays in a band called the Paranoids. There she meets Metzger for the first time and finds him so good looking that she initially concludes that he must be an actor. As it turns out, Metzger worked as an actor during his childhood but is now a lawyer. When they turn on the television, they find that *Cashiered*, a movie in which Metzger appeared as a child-actor, is being broadcast. While drinking a bottle of Beaujolais, followed by a bottle of Tequila, Metzger pressures Oedipa to guess the end of the movie. They play a game that they call Strip Botticelli, wherein Oedipa asks questions about the movie, but has to take off a piece of clothing for each answer she receives. This leads to one of the novel's most comic scenes, in which Oedipa walks into the bathroom, puts on as much

clothing as possible and turns into a “beach ball with feet” (*Lot 49 24*). Afterwards, they finish watching the movie and a sexual encounter between the characters follows, in which Metzger has to first undress Oedipa of every article of clothing she had put on.

This scene is often described as one of the starting-points of Oedipa’s transformation and burgeoning consciousness of her surroundings. At a later point in the novel, when Oedipa is already aware of the object of her quest, the beginning of her transformation is retrospectively described in the following way:

So began, for Oedipa, the languid, sinister blooming of The Tristero. Or rather, her attendance at some unique performance. [...] As if the breakaway gowns, net bras, jeweled garters and G-strings of historical figuration that would fall away were layered dense as Oedipa’s own street clothes in that game with Metzger in front of the Baby Igor movie; as if a plunge toward dawn indefinite black hours long would indeed be necessary before The Tristero could be revealed in its terrible nakedness. (*Lot 49 40*)

Oedipa’s overdressing and subsequent undressing have been interpreted as representing her own personal development. Through her overdressing, Oedipa becomes, according to Tanner, “a grotesque image of an insanely eclectic culture which ‘over-dresses’ itself with bits and pieces of fabrics and fabrications taken from anywhere, and at the same time she reveals a poignant vulnerability, for under the absurd multi-layered ‘protection’ she is oddly defenseless, naked and exposed” (*TP 58*). Her stripping might then be regarded as representing the removal of those protective layers through which she will have to face her existential nakedness (Ickstadt “Versteigerung” 113). According to these interpretations, Oedipa’s transformation enables her to leave behind the doctrines imposed on middle-class housewives like herself. Oedipa thus develops a new sensitivity that allows her to perceive things in her surroundings she had not noticed before. In David Seed words, “[s]he develops an exhilaratingly sharp sense of how even the most trivial things can be charged with potential meaning” (133).

Equipped with her new sensitivity, she comes to more exactly resemble a detective. She does not overlook suspicious facts around her, and is thus eventually led to an encounter with the Tristero system. A letter from Mucho, which contains the misprint, “REPORT ALL OBSCENE MAIL TO YOUR

POTSMASER” (Lot 49 33), provides the first clue. While at the Scope Bar with Metzger, they have a conversation with Mike Fallopian, who mentions the idea of a postal underground network as an alternative to the official system. In the bar’s bathroom, Oedipa sees the sign of a muted posthorn, as well as the WASTE acronym for the first time, which she believes, at first, to “be something sexual” (Lot 49 38). Shortly thereafter, Oedipa has an encounter that provides her with further information about the Tristero system. With Metzger, the Paranoids’ and their girlfriends, Oedipa takes a boat trip on Lake Inverarity in the Fangoso Lagoons where they accidentally meet Manny Di Presso, another actor turned lawyer, and pick him up on their boat. Di Presso is being chased on the lake by one of his clients, Tony Jaguar, who wants to borrow money from him. It turns out that their case is also linked to Inverarity; Tony Jaguar once supplied Inverarity with bones he had collected in the Italian lake Lago di Pietà. The lake was the site of a massacre during the Second World War, in which American soldiers, surrounded by German forces and without the possibility of escape, eventually died. The Germans dumped their corpses in the lake, and Jaguar desecrated their graves in order to collect and sell their bones. Jaguar accused Inverarity of withholding payment for the deal, and Di Presso filed a lawsuit against Inverarity. The bones were partly lowered into the lake to attract scuba divers and partly used to produce cigarette filters. In this way, Inverarity’s business activities are for the first time presented in a way in which they also represent the dubious and dark deeds of a capitalist. Moreover, as this story is being told, one of the girls is reminded of a play the Paranoids and their girlfriends watched a week earlier: a Jacobean revenge play called *The Courier’s Tragedy*, written by the fictional Richard Wharfinger. Unable to overlook any suspicious hints, Oedipa decides to see the play herself and visits the theater with Metzger the following day.

The play’s complex plot turns out to be full of deceit and slaughter. As is typical of stories-within-stories, or plays-within-plays, the plot of *The Courier’s Tragedy* resembles that of the story in which it is embedded. In addition to those bones which appear in both stories, the Tryster, as well as the Thurn and Taxis also make an appearance within the play. Their names are

mentioned for the first time in the following way:

He that we last as Thurn and Taxis knew
 Now recks no lord but the stiletto's Thorn,
 And Tacit lies the gold once-knotted horn.
 No hallowed skein of stars can ward, I trow,
 Who's once been set his tryst with Trystero (*Lot 49* 58).

Oedipa's search finally yields a name: "Trystero. The word hung in the air as the act ended and all lights were for a moment cut; hung in the dark to puzzle Oedipa Maas, but not yet to exert the power over her it was to" (*Lot 49* 58). Immediately after the play, Oedipa goes to Randolph Driblette, the director of the play, to ask him about the bones. While Driblette is showering, Oedipa cannot resist asking him about Trystero and "[a]t the word, Driblette's face abruptly vanished, back into the steam. As if switched off" (*Lot 49* 62). Driblette reacts as most characters in the novel do when Oedipa interrogates them about the Trystero system. Most behave in a strange manner and try to avoid her questions, as though they have something to hide and she has touched a forbidden topic. They thus behave like suspects in a detective novel. In general, *Lot 49* displays many elements characteristic of both that genre, as well as the anti-detective story. Oedipa becomes emotionally involved in a "case" that seems to consume her whole life. In the traditional crime novel, solving the case is of the greatest importance; but in *Lot 49*, it quickly becomes clear that Oedipa's attempts to discover the truth about the Trystero system are doomed to failure. Tanner, who compares the novel to the tradition of the Californian detective story made famous by writers like Ross MacDonald, Raymond Chandler, and Eric Stanley Gardner, claims that *Lot 49* "works in a reverse direction":

With a detective story you start with a mystery and move towards a final clarification, all the apparently disparate, suggestive bits of evidence finally being bound together in one illuminating pattern; whereas in Pynchon's novel we move from a stage of degree-zero mystery—just the quotidian mixture of an average Californian day—to a condition of increasing mystery and dubiety. (*TP* 56)

The conventional crime novel proceeds from not-knowing to knowing. Clues are found and lead to other clues until the case is solved. In *Lot 49*, Oedipa moves from a state of indifference brought about by her life as a Californian

housewife to one of awakened attentiveness once she takes up her quest; yet even with this new attitude, every additional piece of information remains ambiguous and meaningless and only adds to her confusion. Oedipa's relation to information also changes: in the beginning of the novel, she has to actively collect information, but later the process is reversed. She no longer has to actively search for hints, as does the detective of the traditional genre; now revelations "seemed to come crowding in exponentially, as if the more she collected the more would come to her, until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into The Tristero" (*Lot 49* 64).

The anti-detective novel is often used to question the status of rationality in our society. In accordance with doctrines prevalent since the Enlightenment, striving for truth is highly valued and obtaining truth is thought to produce a kind of reassurance. *Lot 49* is critical of this attitude: for Oedipa, it is not possible to solve the riddle of the Tristero system by means of the rational mind. Although several characters provide her with information and theories about the Tristero system, Oedipa nevertheless cannot arrive at the ultimate meaning of the system. Thus gaining more knowledge does not have the desired effect of achieving a greater understanding of one's surroundings. Additionally, clues themselves resist logical deduction. Tanner calls the novel eminently strange because, in it, "the more we learn the more mysterious everything becomes. The more we *think* we know, the less we *know* we know" (*TP* 56). In the beginning, the reader may still believe that the truth about the mysteries of Tristero system will be revealed through one's reading. Indeed, in those conventional detective novels for which solving a case is of the greatest importance, the reader would be right to expect a series of answers to resolve all that is unclear within the text. For the reader of *Lot 49*, however, there will be no solution, but only ambiguity and uncertainty from beginning to end. Oedipa's inability to solve the case thus suggests that not all the world's mysteries can be explained by means of the rational mind. The impossibility of Oedipa's search for absolute truth is also mirrored in her attempt to track down that original textual version of *The Courier's Tragedy* which should, in Seed's words, provide Oedipa with "the textual stability she

longs for” (123).

Oedipa finds several textual versions of the play, but each one deviates from the last. None contain any mention of the Tristero that was included in the play’s performance and one even turns out to be pornographic. Oedipa’s attempt to discover the ultimate truth by finding the play’s original text is, like so much else, doomed to failure. Thus, Klepper argues that the novel should be considered a parody of both science and the rationality of enlightened Western society (9).

Near the end of the novel Oedipa comments that “[s]he had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; [...f]or it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above” (*Lot 49* 150). According to Jeffrey T. Nealon, Oedipa has by this point become aware of “the inadequacy of a constricting ‘either/or’ modernist view of the world” (128). For this reason, she is now better able to recognize the manifold possibilities that present themselves once such a constricting way of categorizing the world is rejected. In this, she might be said to personify one of postmodernism’s major concerns: the diversity constitutive of the postmodern world. Consequently, it can be argued that there is no grand narrative to account for the ultimate truth; instead, and in line with postmodernism’s critique of science, the story turns out to be full of what Lyotard calls “undecidables, [...] catastrophes and pragmatic paradoxes” (60); the novel is, thus, characteristic of what Lyotard terms “little narratives.”

3.3. The quest for the signified

Oedipa’s attempt to discover the meaning of the Tristero is also a more general quest for meaning. Because several signs within the novel fail to establish a clear relationship to any signified, questions about signification and the nature of language in general are clearly posed by the text.

According to Saussure’s and Derrida’s theories of the sign, the relationship between sign and signifier is essentially arbitrary, and Pynchon, like many postmodern writers, demonstrates the instability constitutive of this

relationship through his novel. Oedipa's quest thematizes this instability. At the beginning, her behavior suggests that she still believes in the stable relationship between sign and signifier, where one signifier, such as a word for example, stands in a necessarily fixed relationship to a signified. In this way, she is representative of common opinions about language and the process of signification.

In semiotic terms, the goal of Oedipa's quest is to find the signified that corresponds to a set of mysterious signifiers, like the word "Tristero" and the sign of the muted posthorn. Her failure to establish a stable relationship between signifier and signified is vividly illustrated by a scene that takes place in San Francisco. At this point, Oedipa reflects upon her undertaking and comes to the conclusion that she has two possibilities: either the Tristero really existed, or she has gone mad and has just imagined the whole thing. She then decides to stop all her active efforts and, instead, "drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix" (*Lot 49 88*). But Oedipa has to first change her name, which occurs when a passerby pins an ID badge to her that reads: "HI! MY NAME IS Arnold Snarb! AND I'M LOOKIN' FOR A GOOD TIME!" (*Lot 49 88*). Already at this point, it is indicated that the act of naming always takes place arbitrarily. Afterwards, she is accidentally pushed into a bar called The Greek Way, where she meets a young man wearing a pin in the shape of a muted posthorn. In an attempt to win back her sanity, Oedipa tells him her entire story in the hope that he can clear up all her uncertainties regarding the Tristero. But he cannot provide her with a solution to her problem; for him, the sign of the posthorn refers to an organization, the Inamorati Anonymous, of which he is a member. The organization's purpose is to prevent people from falling in love, which its members consider the worst form of addiction. As she continues her nighttime walk through the streets of San Francisco, she sees the sign of a muted posthorn several times in different contexts: in the window of an herbalist in Chinatown, among ideographs, chalked on a sidewalk, likely as part of a children's game, and tattooed on the arm of an old sailor. The sign thus turns into a signifier that refers to a variety of signifieds and, in this way, demonstrates the arbitrary

nature of language.

Oedipa's pursuit of the Tristero system functions in a similar manner. Gradually, she is able to develop an idea of the Tristero's possible meaning. In the last section of the book, she summarizes all she has found out about the Tristero, a description that spans several pages. In short, the Tristero is an underground postal network that was founded in 16th century Holland in order to rival the official Thurn and Taxis postal system. In the America of the 1960s, it still functioned as an alternative communication network. But various theories about the Tristero's meaning appear throughout the novel and an ultimate understanding is never achieved. Consequently, it cannot be said if the nature of the Tristero is either good or bad because it has shifted between these two paradigms throughout its history. During certain periods, it represented destruction, death, and chaos, according to Peter L. Cooper; while, at other times, it served as an emblem of regeneration, sacred communication and miracles (186). In a similar way, Hite points out that "the Tristero can function as both threat and promise: it may come as redeemer or as exterminating angel; but in either case it signals radical, unimaginable transformation" (82). Those shifts of meaning undergone by the sign of the muted posthorn and the Tristero during the course of the novel underscore the fact that each should be considered a sign that refers to a multiplicity of signifieds. Their refusal to take on one definitive meaning may imply that they have no meaning at all. In either case, Oedipa, who does not give up the belief that there exists a fixed relationship between sign and signifier, will never be able to finish her quest because the one, ultimate signified she is so desperately looking for simply does not exist.

The language-world problem Pynchon thematizes within the novel in a rather mocking manner also reappears within the names of most of its characters. In the literary world, authors sometimes name their characters in such a way that the name comes to reveal something about either the character or the character's relevance for the text. In *Lot 49*, Pynchon provided his characters with names—such as Oedipa Maas, Pierce Inverarity, Metzger, Stanley Koteks and Dr. Hilarius—that evoke specific associations in the reader. But it is often unclear if either the personality or the character's

behavior corresponds to the evoked qualities. In Tanner's opinion, "the wild names [Pynchon] gives his 'characters', which seem either to signify too much (Oedipus [...] indeed!) or too little (like comic-strip figures), are a gesture against naming itself" (*TP* 60). Oedipa's name has been subject to manifold interpretations by literary theorists, and, as has already been mentioned, is often linked to the myth of Oedipus, another solver of riddles. Attempts to link her name to Freud's Oedipus complex, on the other hand, have failed because Oedipa's parents are not mentioned in the novel. The name of the handsome lawyer, Metzger, who has no difficulty seducing Oedipa, is the German word for *butcher*, but on the surface at least, Metzger does not seem to possess any qualities normally associated with that profession. According to Tanner, Inverarity's name can be regarded as denoting "pierces or peers into variety" or as a combination of "inverse" and "rarity" (*TP* 57). Pynchon's act of naming further demonstrates the frailty constitutive of the relationship between sign and signifier and throws into question the inference, so often suggested by literary critics, that the name of a character reveals something about its namesake.

3.4. Discerning entropy in America

The scientific concept of entropy plays a central role in several of Pynchon's works, especially the short story "Entropy," in which the physical concept is introduced in order to pose questions about order and disorder within his texts. According to Ickstadt, the physical concept can be defined in the following way:

„Entropie“ – ein Begriff aus der Thermodynamik, den jedoch auch die Informationstheorie verwendet – bezeichnet die Tendenz zur Selbstaflösung, die jedem System innewohnt: seine unaufhaltsame und nicht umkehrbare Bewegung hin auf einen Zustand der Kontinenz, der radikalen Demokratie und Gleichwahrscheinlichkeit aller seiner Elemente. ("Einleitung" 8)

Oedipa first comes into contact with this scientific model when she talks to Stanley Koteks, one of Yoyodyne's employees, after the company's stockholder's meeting. The company was "one of the giants of the aerospace

industry" (*Lot 49* 15), and Inverarity had owned shares in the company, so Oedipa attends the meeting in an attempt to sort out Inverarity's legacy. When Oedipa walks through the company's huge building, she gets lost, and ends up at the desk of Stanley Koteks, who is doodling the image of a muted posthorn and thus attracts her attention. In the ensuing conversation, Koteks tells Oedipa about the company's patent rights, and also mentions the Nefastis machine. According to Koteks, the machine consisted of a box containing a demon named Maxwell's Demon, who is responsible for sorting out the fast from the slow-moving molecules in the box in order to separate them. In this process, the demon is supported by a "sensitive" outside the box that communicates back to him information about the molecules. The sorting of these two types of molecules creates the box's hot and cold regions and the difference between these regions is then used to power a heat-engine. In this way, the Second Law of Thermodynamics would be violated, since sorting is not work; as a result, you would be "getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion" (*Lot 49* 68). Even Oedipa doubts this theory, as when she ironically comments: "Sorting isn't work? [...] Tell them down at the post office, you'll find yourself in a mailbag headed for Fairbanks, Alaska, without even a FRAGILE sticker going for you" (*Lot 49* 68). Cooper claims that Oedipa's assumption is correct: according to contemporary scientists like Norbert Wiener, obtaining information costs energy, and a process like that described by Koteks could not work without the loss of energy. This further implies that the system in which such a process takes place would have to be an open system, as energy has to be taken from the outside, and therefore could not be a closed system, like that of the Nefastis machine as described in the novel (Wiener 44 quoted in Cooper 117).

Oedipa wants to find out if she is one of the special people called "sensitives" and thus decides to pay Nefastis a visit. Upon her arrival, Nefastis willingly brings his machine from the workroom and provides her with a detailed description of the functioning of the machine, as well as the concept of entropy:

He began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy. The word bothered him as much as "Trystero" bothered Oedipa. But it was too technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this

entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. The equation for one, back in the '30's, had looked very like the equation for the other. It was a coincidence. The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon. As the Demon sat and sorted his molecules into hot and cold, the system was said to lose entropy. But somehow the loss was offset by the information the demon gained about what molecules were where.

"Communication is the key," cried Nefastis. "The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind. There are untold billions of molecules in that box. The Demon collects data on each and every one. At some deep psychic level he must get through. The sensitive must receive that staggering set of energies, and feed back something like the same quantity of information. To keep it all cycling. (*Lot 49 84*)

Oedipa participates in an experiment in which she occupies the role of the potential sensitive outside the box. But the pistons do not move, and she is, therefore, disqualified from being a "sensitive" in Nefastis' terms.

The scientific concept of entropy and its appearance in *Lot 49* has been widely discussed by literary theorists. One aspect of this discussion revolves around Nefastis' and Koteks' mistaken description of the functioning of the Nefastis machine and entropy in general. Frank Palmeri claims that Pynchon, as an engineering student in the late fifties, must have been aware of the inconstancies in the scientific theories elaborated by these two characters (981-982). Palmeri further claims that Nefastis' mistaken presumptions can be inferred from his name, whose Latin meaning is "unholy, unclean, abominable" (982). According to Thomas H. Schaub, it is a mistake to equate the notion of entropy in physics with the concerns of communication theory, since entropy has a different effect in each system: "In both, entropy is a measurement of disorganization, but in information theory disorganization increases the potential information which a message may convey, while in thermodynamics entropy is a measure of the disorganization of molecules within closed systems and possesses no positive connotations" (21).

Because both Oedipa and the Maxwell Demon are involved in some kind of sorting activity, the Demon's sorting process is commonly considered a metaphor for the way Oedipa handles information. According to Nefastis, "Entropy is a figure of speech, then, [...] a metaphor" (*Lot 49 85*) that connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flows. The Demon uses information about molecules to sort them and establish an order that would counter entropy. Similarly, Oedipa has to sort out Inverarity's

inheritance, as well as the information she receives about the Tristero system. She believes that if she can correctly sort this information, she will then be able to make sense of it, and discover the truth about the Tristero system. Yet the novel demonstrates the incorrectness of her assumption, since the more she tries to sort out information about the system, the more confusion she creates. Her sorting activities do not, therefore, resemble those of the Demon in the box, but work in the reverse direction: they do not counter entropy, but increase it. Thus, the uncertainty and chaos of the postmodern world is demonstrated and how it is impossible to order the disorder of this world by means of one's rational mind.

The physical concept of entropy can be further used in social systems to gain insight into the activities and forces that are released in a society. The thermodynamic concept of entropy can thus serve as a metaphor for tendencies toward cultural degradation and dissolution within Western forms of civilization (Kolesch 109). This metaphor is drawn from the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which Wiener describes in the following terms: "As entropy increases, the universe, and all closed systems in the universe, tend naturally to deteriorate and lose their distinctiveness, to move from the least to the most probable state, from a state of organization and differentiation in which distinctions and forms exist, to state of chaos and sameness" (20 quoted in Schaub 22). According to Schaub, this law implies "that everything is running down" (22); the concept's significance for the novel resides in its serving as a metaphor for the rundown state of both America's closed system (27), as well as the American dream (21). The following chapter illustrates this final point.

3.5. The quest for the "other" America

In the course of her quest, Oedipa acquires a sensitivity that enables her to perceive her surroundings in a new way. As she leaves the security of her home, she encounters an America she hadn't known before. For the first time, she comes into contact with an "other" America, the America of the "disinherited" that, according to Tanner's description, consist of "racial minorities, homosexuals, the poor, the mad, the lonely and the frightened"

("V." 43). What is presented to Oedipa in the course of her quest is the "underside of the American dream" (Palmeri 993); Oedipa sees all the negative consequences that result from a dream that was only accessible to a few and excluded a great number of American citizens.

Among literary theorists, it is commonly claimed that Oedipa fails to complete her quest because she does not discover the truth about the Tristero system. Others, however, claim that Oedipa succeeds in her quest because she discovers this alternative America. Cooper claims that one version of *Lot 49*, called "The World (This One), The Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and The Testament of Pierce Inverarity," contains a sentence in which Oedipa "was to have all manner of revelations: Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained: this Republic. It had somehow, before this, stayed away" (quoted in Cooper 104). This sentence underlines the importance Oedipa's encounter with this "other America" plays in the novel. In order to preserve a greater sense of ambiguity, Pynchon revised the passage before publishing *Lot 49* (104).

In its growing sense of alienation and social injustice, the novel mirrors the America of the sixties. In that society, consumer goods and the media became both substitutes for human contact, and one's favorite free-time companion. In the course of the novel, Oedipa has several experiences that introduce her to this alternative America. The Inamorati Anonymous (IA), who Oedipa encounters on her trip through San Francisco, parody the increasing tendency toward lovelessness characteristic of the postmodern world. The organization's members think being in love is the world's worst addiction. Members of the organization, who call themselves "isolates," can call IA's phone number if they find themselves on the verge of falling in love. Another member then sits with the endangered person in order to heal their "addiction." The origins of the organization are similarly ironic: It was founded in the early sixties by an executive at Yoyodyne who was dismissed by the company, replaced by an IBM 7094, and was then left by his wife. This places him in a difficult position: "[h]aving been since age 7 rigidly instructed in an eschatology that pointed nowhere but to a presidency and death, [...] the executive's first thoughts were naturally of suicide" (*Lot 49* 91). Because he

was trained not to make a decision without “hearing the ideas of a committee” (*Lot 49 92*), he then placed an announcement in the newspaper, in which he asked those who had been in a similar situation for a good reason to not follow through with his first thoughts. Although he received several letters through the WASTE system, no one offered a convincing reason for remaining alive. He finally discovered an appropriate way of committing suicide and set himself on fire, like a Buddhist monk protesting government policies in Vietnam. Just as he was about to begin, he heard his wife and another man arriving home. The man turned out to be an efficiency expert at Yoyodyne Company who approached the executive’s wife in order to have sexual intercourse with her, to which she willingly agreed. When they noticed the former executive, who informed them of his intentions, the efficiency expert exclaimed: “Nearly three weeks it takes him [...] to decide. You know how long it would’ve taken the IBM 7094? Twelve microseconds. No wonder you were replaced” (*Lot 49 93*). The Yoyodyne executive’s fate thus serves as an ironic illustration of American society’s deteriorating values. In such a society, humans are replaced by machines and “efficiency” and “maximization of profit” become keywords. Social relationships become interchangeable, marital fidelity no longer exists and love comes to depend upon one’s socioeconomic status. The worldview of the former executive exactly corresponds to the requirements of capitalistic culture; when he falls out of the system, he cannot come up with any alternative to continue his life. In such a situation, not even the Tristero can provide him with a reason to continue.

Additionally, Oedipa is unable to have a fulfilling relationship with men. During the course of the novel, we witness three of her failed relationships. As far as her first failed relationship is concerned, we are given no insight into why things didn’t work out with Inverarity. Her relationship to Mucho is characterized by a lack of communication and Mucho’s inability to support Oedipa on account of his own problems. Mucho repeatedly indulges in short-time affairs with younger women, then completely distances himself from Oedipa by the end of the novel through his participation in an LSD experiment directed by Oedipa’s shrink, Dr Hilarius, during which he disappears into a

drug-induced world that estranges him from Oedipa and the rest of the world. Oedipa's brief relationship with Metzger provides her with pleasure and excitement, but its superficiality is revealed when he leaves her for a teenager. According to Plater, "all the normal forms of love she encounters are either fraudulent, perverted, or both" (180). In the postmodern world of the novel, human contact has become hollow, as Oedipa realizes while pursuing her lonely quest. At the same time, however, Oedipa undergoes a personal transformation in which she develops the ability to care for others. Her new attitude is apparent in her encounter on the streets of San Francisco with an old sailor who has a muted posthorn tattooed on his hand. Doris Kolesch claims that this scene illustrates Oedipa's development from self-centeredness and narcissism to "the realization of irretrievable loss and sorrow about the lost Utopia of a free and just America" (139 my translation). Indeed, in this scene Oedipa is for the first time brought into close personal contact with a representative of the "other" America. The sailor, who suffers from Delirium Tremens, is about to send a letter he has carried around for years through the WASTE system to the wife he left in Fresno a long time ago. Oedipa, who feels the urge to help the old man, agrees to send the letter for him. As she begins to imagine the sailor's death, "all at once [she is overcome] by a need to touch him. [...] Exhausted, hardly knowing what she was doing, [...] she] took the man in her arms, actually held him" (*Lot 49* 102). Overwhelmed with compassion, Oedipa is able to express emotions that are rare in her post-industrial surroundings. When the disoriented sailor is picked up by a companion, Oedipa accompanies them to their run-down dwelling; they proceed through the sailor's small and sparsely furnished room, where "[s]he ran through then a scene she might play. She might find the landlord of this place, and bring him to court, and buy the sailor a new suit at Roos/Atkins, and shirt, and shoes, and give him the bus fare to Fresno after all" (*Lot 49* 103). Ultimately, however, she only hands him a ten-dollar bill, as her initial euphoria dissolves into inaction. When she looks at the sailor's mattress, Oedipa develops a theory about the effects of information theory:

She remembered John Nefastis, talking about his Machine, and massive destructions of information. So when this mattress flared up around the sailor, in his Viking's funeral: the stored, codes years of uselessness, early death,

self-harrowing, the sure decay of hope, the set of all men who had slept on it, whatever their lives had been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress burned. She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process. It astonished her to think that so much could be lost, even the quantity of hallucination belonging just to the sailor that the world would bear no further trace of. (*Lot 49* 104)

According to Baudrillard, as citizens of “our hyper-protected society we no longer have any awareness of death, since we have subtly passed over into a state where life is excessively easy” (*America* 44). This idea might account for Oedipa’s initial behavior; yet her encounter with the sailor also forces her to confront the misery of poor people in America, and impresses upon her the fact of transience. The poor sailor’s mattress is described, in an almost McLuhanian manner, as an “extension” of the man. Yet Oedipa is not so much moved by the death of the sailor, as she is by the destruction of the mattress itself, that object which is encoded with the lives of all those who have slept on it. Her depiction of the object thus demonstrates the exaggerated significance of objects in American society; this significance, moreover, stands in stark contrast to her newly found feelings of compassion. This obsession with objects is extensively described in the novel’s depiction of a society in which, according to Ickstadt, humanity threatens to sink into its own products (“Einleitung” 8).

The exaggerated importance of material goods can be considered a chief characteristic of capitalist society. In the novel, Inverarity might be regarded as the one who embodies American capitalism. In much the same way as the sailor is encoded in his mattress and car owners are encoded in their cars, “Pierce Inverarity,” according to Cooper, “seems somehow encoded into San Narciso” (52), the prototypical capitalist city. Inverarity’s status as a capitalist is further underlined by the circumstance that he owned a bust of the American financier Jay Gould. When Oedipa was still with Inverarity, the bust was kept on a shelf above the bed, and Oedipa “always had the hovering fear it would someday topple on them. Was that how he’d died, she wondered, among dreams, crushed by the only ikon in the house?” (*Lot 49* 1). Oedipa’s perception of the bust may be seen as a metaphorical foreshadowing of the novel’s central concern. The bust embodies capitalism and not only threatens

to disrupt the intimacy between two lovers, but also threatens their very lives. Additional evidence for *Lot 49*'s thematization of capitalism is provided by the novel's title. In this respect, Tanner draws attention "to the fact that any novel about California which refers to '49 is bound to awaken echoes of the Gold Rush of 1849" (*TP* 65). According to Plater, Inverarity, in his role as capitalist, "has lost his humanity to the inanimate—factories, corporations, housing developments" (27). He was driven by a "need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new skylines, personal antagonisms, growth rates into being" (*Lot 49* 148), and thus created the city of San Narciso, an embodiment of capitalism and consumerism, and furthermore, a perfect example of Baudrillard's hyperreal. According to Luis Tyson, many signs in *Lot 49* mark, not the presence of history, art and myth, but their absence. Empty commodity signs are incorporated as non-threatening substitutes for the authentic so that no existential engagement or emotional involvement is required: The Vivaldi Kazoo concerto played in San Narciso's supermarket serves as a trivialized and commercialized replacement of the classical version; in front of the Echo Court Hotel stands a thirty-foot high sheet metal statue of a nymph, whose exaggerated female curves and sexually provocative clothing serve as an empty sign for empty sex (90-91). Thus, the America Oedipa encounters perfectly represents Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal, in which artificial signs replace reality. According to Baudrillard, Americans themselves are fully developed simulations who cannot perceive the world of simulation around them (*America* 28). As Oedipa pursues her quest, however, she develops in a way that allows her to discover the wasteland that hides behind all these artificial signs, and is therefore able to encounter another side of America.

Yet, unlike the traditional questing hero, Oedipa is unable to leave this wasteland after she has met all the quest's obstacles. It matters little if her quest is successful or not. The pursuit of her quest has only made Oedipa aware of the actual conditions of that wasteland of America in which she has always lived. As the reader follows Oedipa's development throughout the novel, one wonders if she is going to fight back against the irrationality of her surroundings. Her realizations about this world could, in keeping with Campbell's model of the monomyth, be considered the "boon" that has the

potential to restore the world. But Oedipa is unable to use her newfound knowledge to improve her surroundings. Her inability to improve the world is apparent in her inability to help the sailor and many other situations. When she meets the swastika salesman Winthrop Tremaine, who displays a strong tendency toward fascist racism, Oedipa is appalled by his right-wing attitude. After having visited his shop

[sh]e left, wondering if she should've called him something, or tried to hit him with any of a dozen surplus, heavy, blunt objects in easy reach. There had been no witnesses. Why hadn't she?
You're a chicken, she told herself, snapping her seat belt. This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. (*Lot 49* 123)

In this scene, Oedipa realizes that she might be responsible for changing things, but still ends up in a state of inactivity. But if it is really the case that America is similar to a closed system, then it follows that, in accordance with the thermodynamic concept of entropy, this closed system contains its own inherent tendency to "run down". It is, therefore, doubtful that it is even possible to make a difference, since an apocalypse would be inevitable.

4. An analysis of the quest in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*

City of Glass is the first part of Auster's *New York Trilogy*. It was first published in 1985 as a separate work and only later combined with the stories *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room* to form the *New York Trilogy*. By that time, the heyday of postmodernism's period of literary experimentation was already over. In the seventies and eighties, according to Bradbury, postmodern writers shifted from an "initial phase of experimentations" (204) to a form of writing concerned with such issues as gender, race and the environment (204). Its tone also became "somewhat graver and less flamboyant" (257). Although Auster's fiction belongs to this modified form of postmodernism, his work nevertheless still contains distinct elements characteristic of earlier forms of postmodern fiction; Brendan Martin has, for example, identified the following postmodern elements within *City of Glass*: "an indeterminate and ironic relationship between character and author; an ambiguous narrative voice; the blurring of fact and fiction; and doppelgangers as a central theme" (1).

The emergence of the quest paradigm in Auster's work was analyzed in Ilona Shiloh's *Paul Auster and Postmodern Quest*, in which she claims that such a paradigm is present throughout all of Auster's work (1). Additionally, she writes, "[a]lthough each one of these books is ostensibly written within the conventions of a different genre, they all share the same formal and temporal structure—the protagonist sets out on a journey he hopes to complete" (1). This also applies to *The New York Trilogy*, each of whose stories contain, as its chief protagonist, a real or amateur detective who is intent on solving a particular case. Because these stories exhibit distinctive characteristics of detective fiction, they are oftentimes regarded as belonging to the genre of crime fiction. Like *Lot 49*, however, Auster's trilogy contains elements that deviate from the traditional conventions of the genre, and can thus be considered anti-detective stories. According to Alison Russel, these stories deconstruct the traditional detective novel conventions, which "result[s] in a recursive linguistic investigation of the nature, function and meaning of language" (71 quoted in Brown 50). Auster himself is aware of his deconstruction of the genre, as becomes clear when he in an interview with

Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory explains:

I have nothing against detective fiction, and I refer to it in the three novels of the [*New York*] *Trilogy*, of course; but I was employing these detective conventions only as a means to an end, as a way to get somewhere else entirely. If a true follower of detective fiction ever tried to read one of those books, I'm sure he would be bitterly disappointed. As you've just implied, mystery novels always give answers; my work is about asking questions. (*Contemporary* 22)

Aside from its linguistic investigations, Auster's work also frequently thematizes that uncertainty characteristic of contemporary life in its effect upon his characters. Auster is well aware of the importance of chance for his work and describes it in the following way:

[W]hat I'm talking about is the presence of the unpredictable, the utterly bewildering nature of human experience. From one moment to the next, anything can happen. Our life-long certainties about the world can be demolished in a single second. In philosophical terms, I'm talking about the powers of contingency. Our lives don't really belong to us you see—they belong to the world, and in spite of our efforts to make sense of it, the world is a place beyond our understanding. (McCaffery, Gregory and Auster *Mississippi* 52)

Many of Auster's characters are stricken by tragedies that often involve the loss of a loved one. Such characters have typically resigned themselves to the senselessness of life and thus acquire a sense of the indeterminacy of their own existence. At the beginning of Auster's novels, such characters are often drifting without aim or direction. This is also the case for Daniel Quinn, the author turned detective protagonist of *City of Glass*. As Quinn sets out on his quest, postmodern elements quickly surface within the text. The following analysis will thus determine the specific form that Quinn's quest assumes as well as the way in which it deviates from traditional models of the quest. It will be shown that Quinn, whose quest consists in his pursuit of a case that does not really exist, firmly belongs to the postmodern anti-detective tradition. Additionally, it will be demonstrated this quest seems to proceed in reverse, since Quinn is not only searching for an object—the solution to the case— but also aims at the dissolution of his self. As this dissolution is expanded upon on the level of narration, metafictional elements are incorporated within the text. The novel also contains another character who is pursuing a quest: Stillman senior, the potential culprit of the story, who is searching for a

language in which the relationship between sign and signifier is still intact. Through Stillman senior's attempts, questions about language in general and semiotics in particular are posed within the novel.

4.1. The detective without a case: analyzing the anti-detective tradition in *City of Glass*

City of Glass is the story of Daniel Quinn, a thirty-five-year-old writer. Little is revealed about either his prior life or his personality. After losing his wife and child by a horrible stroke of fate, Quinn is devastated. He lives an isolated, friendless life with hardly a single social contact; for this reason, nobody seems to have noticed his disappearance. Although withdrawing from life, “[h]e no longer wished to be dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive. But at least he did not resent it. He was alive, and the stubbornness of this fact had little by little begun to fascinate him—as if he had managed to outlive himself, as if he were somehow living a posthumous life” (CG 5). It might be assumed that Quinn initially wished to follow his family into death, but since he, for whatever reason, continues to live, he must confront certain questions about himself in order to overcome his traumatic loss. It seems, however, as though Quinn is not prepared to face these questions in his everyday-life; his writing may very well serve as a means for avoiding such questions. Using the nom de plume William Wilson, Quinn writes mystery novels about a detective named Max Work. According to Mark Brown, “William Wilson” is the title of a short story by Edgar Allan Poe about a schoolboy and his doppelganger (51-52), a theme that also appears in *City of Glass*. Himself an avid reader of mystery novels, Quinn explains his preference in the following terms:

What he liked about these books was their sense of plentitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no world that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence, the centre of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The centre, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has

come to its end. (CG 8)

Quinn has dedicated his life to a genre in which nothing is wasted and everything eventually makes sense. The detective—or mystery—novel has the capacity to create order in an unordered world, and provide an answer to every uncertainty. For Quinn, the detective “moves through his morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them” (GC 8). According to Springer, “the detective embodies the concept of a unified world-view,” (98) and, for this reason, both the heroes of Poe’s more traditional detective fiction, as well as the hard-boiled tradition, are endowed with a stable and unified personality (98). Quinn probably longs to once again possess such a personality, but first he would have to face the disorder that is his real life and create out of it a kind of order. Instead, he pursues this process in his work. By transferring his life onto the fictional plane of the mystery novel, Quinn, as both writer and reader, repeatedly witnesses the process that turns a state of disorder into one of order. In this way, he does not have to face the disorder and pain of his real life, and can avoid that state of pure wretchedness to which he might have been left after the loss of his loved ones.

Another behavior that illustrates Quinn’s attempt to escape from himself is provided by his obsession with walking:

More than anything else, however, what he liked to do was walk. Nearly every day, rain or shine, hot or cold, he would leave his apartment to walk through the city—never really going anywhere, but simply going wherever his legs happened to take him.

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the street, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness. [...] On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things. To be nowhere. (CG 4)

Quinn’s wandering has two results: on the one hand, it helps him forget the reasons for his misery; on the other, it enables him to become conscious of his feelings of forlornness. The anonymity and inexhaustibility of the

postmodern city of New York allows him to experience those feelings he otherwise desperately tries to avoid. Quinn embraces the feeling of being lost because it provides him with “peace” and “salutary emptiness.” It seems, therefore, that a successful quest for Quinn would not involve the discovery of his true self, or a new sense of life; it would be characterized, instead, by a total loss of himself. According to Martin, Quinn “exhibits a nihilistic death wish” (105), a wish that foreshadows the story’s end. Thus, his wandering should not only be considered a way of leaving his apartment, but, as noted by Alford, also a way of leaving behind his sense of self (615). Quinn is well aware of the psychological effects his wandering has on him:

His excursions through the city had taught him to understand the connectedness of inner and outer. Using aimless motion as a technique of reversal, on his best days he could bring the outside in and thus usurp the sovereignty of inwardness. By flooding himself with externals, by drowning himself out of himself, he had managed to exert some small degree of control over his fits of despair. Wandering, therefore, was a kind of mindlessness. (CG 61)

Considering the effect movement has on Quinn, it is not at all surprising that he should answer the quest’s call, as the quest necessarily relies on the notion of movement. Answering that call usually disrupts the hero’s everyday life, which is exactly what Quinn wants.

Quinn’s quest is initiated by a call in the most literal sense: in the middle of the night, he receives a phone call from someone desperate to speak to a Mr. Paul Auster of the Auster Detective Agency. Although Quinn told the caller he had misdialed, once he hung up, “[h]e stood there on the cold floor, looking down at his feet, his knees, his limp penis. For a brief moment he regretted having been so abrupt with the caller” (CG7). This sentence nicely illustrates both the emptiness of Quinn’s life, as well as the way in which the call itself might provide a means for escaping this emptiness. After a few days, a second call follows that Quinn also misses but which nevertheless further piques his interest. When the stranger calls a third time, Quinn answers and claims that he is the much sought-after detective Paul Auster. The caller requires a private investigator, and Quinn agrees to a meeting on the following day. It appears as if Quinn has no choice but to answer this call.

According to Martin, Quinn, like most of Auster's characters, is bound by fate:

The majority of Auster's protagonists are profoundly affected by their reactions to contingent occurrences and cannot dismiss the significance of these random events. The Auster protagonist insists that he or she must seize the opportunity that has been presented. Any other response will result in a dilution of self-worth. The presence of the unexpected often serves as a means of personal salvation. (35)

Although Quinn did not plan on keeping Paul Auster's appointment, he nevertheless makes his way to the agreed upon address on the following day. There he is welcomed by a woman who introduces herself as Virginia Stillman, the wife of the previous day's caller, Peter Stillman. As Peter Stillman appears, his movements remind Quinn of the voice on the telephone, because he moved about "machine-like, fitful, [...], rigid and yet expressive, as if the operation were out of control, not quite corresponding to the will that lay behind it" (CG 15). Stillman, who was imprisoned in a dark room for nine years without human contact when he was a child, has obvious difficulty expressing himself in a straightforward manner, and often indulges in all kinds of wordplay. His father locked him in a room when he was two years old, shortly after Peter's mother's death. A sophisticated graduate of Harvard University, Peter's father was interested in the language of God; in order to determine if a human might develop this language if it never spoke to another, Stillman's father set up this cruel experiment. At the time, Peter could hardly speak and, if he did, his father, who never spoke to him and only provided food, would then beat him for every word he uttered. After a fire broke out in the apartment, Peter was discovered and brought to the hospital. Because he remained at the developmental stage of a baby, he had to be taught everything, from walking, to eating and speaking. But he will never be a normal man; his imprisonment "went on too long for Peter to be right in the head" (CG 17). His father, who is also named Peter Stillman, was brought to trial, deemed insane and imprisoned for thirteen years. His release was scheduled for the day after Quinn and Stillman's meeting. Because the son received a letter in which his father threatened revenge, the Stillmans hoped to employ a private detective to watch Stillman senior, and warn them if he seems poised to take any action against Stillman junior. This is where Paul

Auster—or Daniel Quinn—comes in and willingly agrees to take on the job. Quinn is thus provided with a picture of Stillman senior, a cheque for his services and the time and place of Stillman senior's arrival.

On its surface, the story contains all the prerequisites of a conventional crime—or detective—story: there is a crime, a criminal and a detective who wants to solve the case. Even here, however, the story already begins to deviate from traditional models. Quinn is not a real detective, but only an author who has a good knowledge of mystery novels. The status of the crime is also questionable. The crime Quinn should solve has not yet occurred; it is only a potential crime. The one crime that actually did occur was Stillman senior's locking up his son; but that happened long ago and Stillman senior has since atoned for it through his imprisonment. Even at this early point in the novel, it can be clearly seen that the story will not faithfully follow the conventions of the traditional detective novel; instead, it will pursue the modified form of the anti-detective story.

None of this, however, prevents Quinn from taking up his detective work, and willingly assuming the identity of the detective Paul Auster. After investigating Stillman senior's literary works, Quinn dutifully awaits the older man's arrival at Grand Central Station and reflects upon his new identity:

[...] he reminded himself of who he was supposed to be. The effect of being Paul Auster, he had begun to learn, was not altogether unpleasant. Although he still had the same body, the same mind, the same thoughts, he no longer had to walk around with the burden of his own consciousness. By a simple trick of the intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer. (CG 50)

Many literary theorists claim that Quinn suffers from an identity crisis, wherein his changing identities are symptomatic of a psychological disorder. According to Springer, Quinn's behavior in *City of Glass*

presents a succession of various stages in an identity crisis—from the initial denial of a former identity and the diffusion of identity over various 'selves' via the mistaken assumption of a role and unfitting identification with another person (and this person's way of thinking) to the emptying out and annihilation even of what had been there in the beginning. (105)

Matthew McKean further claims that whenever Quinn no longer functions as one person, he changes his name and turns into another (110). In this way, Quinn's quest can be considered a quest for identity. The identity he is looking for, however, is not his own, as it is for so many questing heroes, especially those who belong to the tradition of the post-World War II American quest narrative. Quinn, by contrast, always assumes new identities in order to provide himself with the physical stability necessary for him to continue living. Like his aimless walks, his changing identities keep him in perpetual motion and allow him to escape that void where the pain of loss might become perceptible. Becoming Paul Auster and protecting Peter Stillman may present a further opportunity for Quinn to escape himself, and further "imagining himself as Auster had become synonymous in his mind with doing good in the world" (CG 51). Quinn may believe that if he can rescue Peter, he might atone for his inability to save his own son, who was also named Peter.

That Quinn's case may not turn out as he expects is already foreshadowed in the very first steps he makes as a private detective, when he tries to find Stillman senior at Grand Central Station. On the basis of a photograph, Quinn identifies Stillman senior without difficulty amidst the crowd of arriving passengers. Shortly thereafter, however, a man who also exactly looks like Stillman senior appears; another convention of the crime novel, the doppelganger theme, is thus incorporated within the story. As each of the two "Stillman seniors" walks in a different direction, Quinn has to decide who to follow. He decides to follow the first man, who is dressed in a rather run-down manner and moves with some hesitation, unlike the second man, who wears expensive clothing and "has a prosperous air about him" (CG 56). Quinn follows the man to a run-down hotel, and takes up a position outside the hotel in order to watch his every step.

The next day, a routine begins in which Stillman senior leaves the hotel early in the morning and takes many different routes through the streets of New York. From time to time, Stillman senior pauses to pick up an object from the ground, which he then examines closely. Initially puzzled by the man's behavior, Quinn wonders if his surveillance makes any sense, since the old man does not appear to have any bad intentions. Quinn records every detail

of Stillman's actions in a red notebook he has especially bought for this purpose. For no particular reason, Quinn draws a map of Stillman's movement and discovers that each of Stillman's routes form a letter. As he continues mapping the man's movements, Quinn finds that the letters, when combined and complemented with several missing letters, spell out the words "THE TOWER OF BABEL". Quinn is uncertain if Stillman senior's movements intend this phrase, or if it is simply a coincidence or even a hoax. If it is intentional, Quinn "also wondered what purpose this writing served in Stillman's mind. Was it merely some sort of note to himself, or was it intended as a message to others?" (CG 71).

After this discovery, Quinn orchestrates several meetings with Stillman senior in order to find out more about the mysteries of his behavior. Stillman, however, does not remember Quinn from one meeting to the next. In their conversations, it becomes obvious that Stillman senior remains preoccupied with language, and wants to create a language in which the relationship between sign and signifier is no longer arbitrary, but of a faithful nature. After their third meeting, Stillman senior fails to appear the next morning, and Quinn discovers that he has checked out from the hotel. Quinn is unable to keep track of him and informs Virginia Stillman about the man's disappearance. Here another typical ingredient of the traditional detective novel disappears, since the story has lost its culprit. As a result, Quinn's "case" threatens to vanish into thin air:

Stillman was gone now. The old man had become part of the city. He was a speck, a punctuation mark, a brick in an endless wall of bricks. Quinn could walk through the streets every day for the rest of his life, and still he would not find him. Everything had been reduced to change, a nightmare of numbers and probabilities. (CG 91)

In desperation, Quinn decides to look for the real Paul Auster in order to ask the detective for help. Although Quinn finds a man with that name in the telephone book, when he visits Auster he finds that he is not a detective but a writer working on a book about *Don Quixote*. Quinn then tells Auster, who has never heard of the Stillmans, the whole story of the case. When Auster's wife and son arrive, Quinn is confronted with an image of family life he himself has lost, and "[h]e felt as though Auster were taunting him with the things he had

lost, and he responded with envy and rage, a lacerating self-pity” (CG 101). After leaving, Quinn realizes that he is again on the verge of losing everything; his self-imposed quest may have reached a dead-end: “Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine” (CG 104). When he tries to reach Virginia Stillman, he finds that the line is busy, and remains so no matter how often he tries to reach her. Quinn is lost in the confusion caused by Stillman senior’s disappearance and his own inability to reach his employers. As his behavior becomes more and more irrational, Quinn imagines a reality that would justify the continuation of the quest he is not yet prepared to stop:

[...] he realized that he had come to a decision about things. Without his even knowing it, the answer was already there for him, sitting fully formed in his head. The busy signal, he saw now, had not been arbitrary. It had been a sign, and it was telling him that he could not yet break his connection with the case, even if he wanted to. He had tried to contact Virginia Stillman to tell her he was through, but the fates had not allowed it. Quinn paused to consider this. Was “fate” really the word he wanted to use? (CG 111)

Quinn again walks the streets of New York, but now his perception of the city has changed. Like Oedipa in *Lot 49*, Quinn seems to have developed a new sensitivity that allows him to see the city differently. He thus becomes aware of the city’s excluded people, its beggars and homeless. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory Auster once said that New York City was “rapidly turning into a Third World city before our eyes” (*Contemporary* 19). In *City of Glass*, New York is similarly described as a “broken” city, which Stillman senior calls “the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap” (CG 78). For Stillman senior, New York epitomizes that contemporary American landscape which, according to William G. Little, “is a scene of cultural decay, environmental degradation, personal isolation, and spiritual anomie” (157). After his quest’s failure, Quinn seems to “open his eyes” for the first time, and what he sees in this

postmodern city shocks him: “Today, as never before: the tramps, the down-and-outs, the shopping-bag ladies, the drifters and drunks. They range from the merely destitute to the wretchedly broken. Wherever you turn, they are there, in good neighborhoods and bad” (CG 107). There are, Quinn continues, many forms of homelessness:

But beggars and performers make up only a small part of the vagabond population. They are the aristocracy, the elite of the fallen. Far more numerous are those with nothing to do, with nowhere to go. Many are drunks—but that term does not do justice to the devastation they embody. Hulks of despair, clothed in rags, their faces bruised and bleeding, they shuffle through the streets as though in chains. Asleep in doorways, staggering insanely through traffic, collapsing on sidewalks—they seem to be everywhere the moment you look for them. Some will starve to death, others will die of exposure, still others will be beaten or burned or tortured. (CG 109)

Through his quest, Quinn, like Oedipa, becomes aware of the “other” America that he likely did not encounter in his every-day life as a writer. In the pursuit of his quest, Quinn not only gains a new awareness of his surroundings, but also travels to places he hasn’t visited before. He thus becomes a witness to the American’s dreams failure to become a reality for all its citizens. According to Werner Reinhart, this topic was especially relevant to the times because the 1980s saw the gap between rich and poor widen under the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Although this gap predated the 80s, Reagan’s abolishment of a system of progressive taxes served to further widen it (14). Social hardship also increased, as Quinn himself witnesses, with the cutting of social aid programs (15).

But it is not only the poor that suffer in this post-industrial society. In *America*, Baudrillard claims that all of New York City is overcome by an unmistakable sense of loneliness. For Baudrillard, “[t]he number of people here who think alone, sing alone, and eat and talk alone in the streets is mind-boggling. And yet they don’t add up. Quite the reverse. They subtract from each other and their resemblance to one another is uncertain” (*America* 18). Baudrillard thus refers to the city as an anti-Ark: in the original Ark every species came in pairs, but in New York “each one comes in alone” (*America* 19). Such a description also applies to Quinn’s character, who sees the

wretchedness of the poor but cannot acknowledge his own loneliness, and thus comes to epitomize the isolated citizen of New York City.

But Quinn's development throughout the novel ultimately finds him among America's "excluded" citizens, thus demonstrating how easy it is to be ejected from this society. Still concerned with protecting the Stillman's, Quinn takes up a position in an alley opposite their building in order to monitor their apartment. To watch the place around the clock, Quinn lives on the streets, in much the same way as the homeless he earlier encountered. In fear of leaving the apartment unmonitored, Quinn learns to live without much food and sleep; as a result, he loses a great deal of weight and soon acknowledges that

[h]e had turned into a bum. His clothes were discoloured, disheveled, debauched by filth. His face was covered by a thick black beard with tiny flecks of grey in it. His hair was long and tangled, matted into tufts behind his ears, and crawling down in curls almost to his shoulders. More than anything else, he reminded himself of Robinson Crusoe, and he marveled at how quickly these changes had taken place in him. (CG 121)

The motif of self-starvation also appears in other Auster novels, such as *The Art of Hunger* and *Moon Palace*. According to Little, "the individual who practices self-starvation seeks to produce an autonomous identity cleansed of impurities inherent in the act of consumption" (135). In this sense, their actions can be considered a way of locking out the outside world in order to acknowledge the inner world, i.e. to find their true identity. Putting oneself at risk is, Hassan explains, an essential element of the "ideal text of quest" (79). In this idealized form, "a self, wounded somehow yet acting willfully or whimsically upon its wound, puts itself at risk. In it, too, risk, physical and spiritual, calls for displacement, strain, a movement toward something other, unknown, numinous, something somehow redemptive" (79). In *City of Glass*, however, the risk of starvation fails to produce anything redemptive. Quinn's surveillance job does not result in any new findings; the Stillman's remain absent, nothing suspicious happens around their building, and Quinn comes no closer to his true identity.

At one point, Quinn's work is threatened because he is running out of money. He then calls Paul Auster, who had offered to clear the cheque Quinn

received from the Stillman's, but which was written out for Paul Auster. Auster informs Quinn that Stillman senior committed suicide two and a half months ago. In this way, the potential culprit completely disappears from the story, and Quinn finally realizes that his quest is completely senseless. At first, he is utterly confused: "it was as though he felt nothing, as though the whole thing added up to nothing at all" (CG 124). Suddenly, he is overcome by the urge to return to his apartment; in this respect, Quinn comes to resemble the traditional quest hero, returning home at the end of his quest—even if it was not crowned with success. There is also no spiritual experience or reward. Unlike the traditional questing hero, Quinn does not undergo a symbolic rebirth that then results in the discovery of his real identity. To the contrary, his pursuit of the quest has only increased his sense of dislocation. After several identity shifts, he is hardly conscious of his true identity any longer.

Quinn's wish to return home can be considered a final attempt to recover his true self. But his last hope quickly comes to nothing; when he arrives at his apartment, he finds that it has been rented to someone else. All his possessions, including the pictures painted by his dead son, are now gone. According to Steven E. Alford, Quinn's apartment "functions as an anchor to his selfhood, a home that is a metaphysical and epistemological place [...]" (623). It is, thus, through his loss of habitation and property that, in Brown's words, "Quinn finally realizes that he no longer has a place in the social world" (44). Not only is Quinn unable to occupy himself with the Stillman case, but his entire material existence has suddenly disappeared. Quinn realizes that "[h]e had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned in him. There was nothing left" (CG 126). With nothing left to distract him, a wish for dissolution begins to dominate his behavior, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

Like Oedipa in *Lot 49*, Quinn is overwhelmed by the inconsistencies and chaos that surround him, and is unable to solve the case. In this way, the detective is no longer a great mind capable of solving every riddle, fighting evil and bringing order to a disordered world. Before the detective of *City of Glass* can clear up all the case's mysteries, the case itself—whose status had always been questionable—simply disappears. As in *Lot 49*, the unsuccessful

quest of *City of Glass*'s hero puts in practice postmodernists' critical stance towards logocentrism.

4.2. The quest for dissolution

Quinn's desire for dissolution and wish to escape the real world is already apparent at the novel's beginning. He frequently mentions that he wants to leave behind both the real world and his real existence. Earlier in the novel, he had described this desire by quoting Baudelaire: "Baudelaire: Il me semble que je serais toujours bien là où je ne suis pas. In other words: It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place where I am not. Or, more bluntly: Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. Or else, taking the bull by the horns: Anywhere out of the world" (CG 110-111).

But Quinn's desire for dissolution is also mirrored on another level in the story. At one point in the novel, his increasing confusion is accompanied by a shift in narrative perspective. After he has lost track of Stillman senior and positions himself opposite the Stillman's apartment, the nature of his quest changes from one of activity to one of passivity. He does not actively watch Stillman senior in the hope of interrogating him to find clues that might lead to solving the case, but passively waits in the alley for something to happen. The narrative voice, which had previously remained in the background, suddenly emerges and, declares:

A long time passed. Exactly how long it is impossible to say. Weeks certainly, but perhaps even months. The account of this period is less full than the author would have liked. But information is scarce, and he has preferred to pass over in silence what could not be definitely confirmed. Since this story is based entirely on facts, the author feels it his duty not to overstep the bounds of the verifiable, to resist at all costs the perils of invention. Even the red notebook, which until now has provided a detailed account of Quinn's experience, is suspect. We cannot say for certain what happened to Quinn during this period, for it is at this point in the story that he began to lose his grip. (CG 114)

The textual stability of realist fiction does not exist in Auster's postmodern novel. Although Auster's fiction cannot be considered an extreme representation of metafictional literature—as represented by writers like Robert Coover and John Barth—metafictional elements, like the change in narrative perspective, nevertheless surface within the text. Just as the

character Paul Auster is said to investigate *Don Quixote* in search of the authorship of “the book inside the book Cervantes wrote, the one he imagined he was writing” (CG 97), so too is the reader of *City of Glass* compelled to wonder who might be telling Quinn’s story. It is not only Quinn’s life that becomes shrouded in uncertainty, but the reader’s own encounter with the narrative voice. Like Quinn’s identity, the stability of the text eventually falls apart; this becomes especially clear in the novel’s last chapter, when Quinn returns to the Stillman’s apartment. When Quinn tries to enter the building, he is not surprised to find that the door to both the building and the apartment are unlocked, and that the apartment is completely empty. Quinn walks into one of the back rooms, puts his red notebook on the floor, undresses and falls asleep. When he wakes up, the surrounding room is completely dark. It might be said that his last identity shift happens here, as he turns into the young Stillman junior, locked up in a dark room. Initially he wonders about the cause of the darkness, telling himself that it is either nighttime or simply dark only in this one room. But he concludes that it does not matter anymore: “Night and day were no more than relative terms; they did not refer to an absolute condition. At any given moment, it was always both. The only reason we did not know it was because we could not be in two places at the same time” (CG 128). With this statement, Quinn himself renounces the idea of absolute truth and turns away from the perspective of logocentrism. In his subsequent reflections upon the past, Quinn realizes that his memories are gradually disappearing.

When he wakes up the next time, the sun is shining and “[t]here was a tray of food beside him on the floor, the dishes steaming with what looked like a roast beef dinner. Quinn accepted this fact without protest. He was neither surprised nor disturbed by it. “Yes, he said to himself, it is perfectly possible that food should have been left here for me” (CG 129). At this point, the reader might become suspicious of the food’s seemingly magical appearance and this break from realist fiction. But this is not the first instance in which a secret force appears within the novel. Earlier, after his phone call with Stillman junior, Quinn reflected upon a mysterious force influencing his actions. Although he did not plan to show up for the appointed meeting, he

seemed to be unconsciously influenced by a secret force that led him to prepare for the meeting. “I seem to be going out,” he says to himself (CG 12). Similarly, at his arrival, he explains, “I seem to have arrived,” (CG 13). The secret force influencing Quinn might be the novel’s author, he who has written Quinn into being. Evidence of the author’s influence may be further adduced from the sudden appearance of the food beside Quinn. On the level of the story, its appearance is illogical. The only logical explanation for the food’s arrival would be to attribute it to hallucinations. If Quinn is not hallucinating, however, its appearance could be considered a way of deconstructing the literary conventions of realism. In the real world, such a magical incident would be impossible; only in a fictional world is such magic possible. Once an event like this occurs, the reader is reminded of the novel’s essentially fictive character.

In the days that follow, Quinn spends his time sleeping, eating the mysteriously delivered food and writing in his red notebook. Quinn realizes that the duration of the darkness is increasing, affording him less and less time to write. Additionally, “[t]his period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook” (CG 131). When he comes to its end, he finds that “[t]he last sentence of the red notebook reads: ‘What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?’” (CG 132). The answer directly follows: because Quinn is, as McKean claims, “essentially writing himself out of existence” (111), the character disappears, completing his quest for dissolution.

The metafictional perspective reaches its most extreme point on the very last pages on the novel, when the narrator steps forward and declares:

At this point the story grows obscure. The information has run out, and the events that follow this last sentence will never be known. It would be foolish to even hazard a guess.

I returned home from my trip to Africa in February, just hours before a snowstorm began to fall on New York. I called my friend Auster that evening, and he urged me to come over to see him as soon as I could. There was something so insistent in his voice that I dared not refuse, even though I was exhausted. (CG 132)

This unknown narrator then visits Auster, who tells him everything he knows about Quinn’s story, and says that he has tried to find him for the past several months. They decide to visit the Stillman’s apartment, where they find Quinn’s

red notebook, but no other trace of Quinn. The narrator keeps the notebook, and closes the novel by saying: "As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now. I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could, and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me. There were moments when the text was difficult to decipher, but I have done my best with it and have refrained from any interpretations" (CG 133). In this way, the narrator declares himself the narrator of Quinn's story, but his own identity remains unclear. According to Brown, the novel's contested authorship and shifts in narration have the effect of disorienting the reader (58). This confusion is aggravated at the novel's end, when it is no longer simply the reader who is on a quest to determine the narrator of the story; a new loop has been created in which the narrator, as well as the reader, are left searching for the character of Quinn. According to Springer, it now becomes clear that "[t]he earlier impression that 'Auster' (or even Quinn himself?) could be the narrator is disappointed" (108). The reader is unable to discover any final truth about these confusing diegetic levels, unclear about the narrative voice and therefore unable to complete his or her quest. In the course of the reader's continually frustrated attempt to make sense of all this, one comes to acknowledge the text's essentially fictive character and learns that a text cannot faithfully represent reality, as the realist literary tradition once claimed, and postmodern critics dispute. Additionally, through the text's many uncertainties, the reader is reminded of those uncertainties constitutive of the postmodern world. The reader is neither provided with a solution to Quinn's case, nor is he allowed to witness a development within Quinn in which he is able to once again achieve a stable personality. Ultimately, the text itself seems to fall apart and almost all literary conventions are dissolved. At the novel's end, therefore, only one truth is left: everything is uncertain.

4.3. Stillman senior's quest for language

The second quest to play a major role in the novel is Stillman senior's search for a new language. Dissatisfied with the unfaithful and arbitrary relationship between sign and signifier in contemporary language, Stillman senior wants to invent a language in which the relationship between sign and signifier would be one of identity so that signs once again correspond to the world. His dissertation, *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World*, contains considerations about language that serve as the basis of his quest. The paper consists of two parts: 'The Myth of Paradise,' and 'The Myth of Babel.' In the first, he describes how the early settlers of America considered the continent a new Eden. In the second part, he writes about the fall of man in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the way in which this fall resulted in the "brokenness" of language:

Adam's one task in the Garden had been to invent language, to give each creature and thing its name. In that state of innocence, his tongue had gone straight to the quick of the world. His words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden records not only the fall of man, but the fall of language. (CG 43)

Stillman senior also mentions a clergyman, Henry Dark, who had lived in the 17th century. But as the novel will later demonstrate, this character never actually existed but is simply Stillman senior's invention. He creates the clergyman in order to make him the mouthpiece of Stillman senior's own theories. According to Stillman senior, in 1690 Dark published a pamphlet entitled *The New Babel*, in which the clergyman

presented the case for the building of paradise in America. Unlike the other writers on the subject, Dark did not assume paradise to be a place that could be discovered. There were no maps that could lead a man to it, no instruments of navigation that could guide a man to its shores. Rather, its existence was immanent within man himself: the idea of a beyond he might someday create in the here and now. (CG 46-47)

Dark argues that because man's fall and the fall of language are linked, it

might be supposed that the recreation of an Edenic language would make it possible for human innocence to be regained. Dark concludes that a new Babel would be built in America in 1960, which will result in a resurrection of the human spirit, and allow everyone to speak the language of God. In this way, Stillman's experiments at recreating a new language might be considered an attempt to recreate an Edenic state, like the one imagined by the fictional character Henry Dark. In his encounters with Quinn, Stillman describes how such a language would look:

'Yes. A language that will at last say what we have to say. For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same. They have not adapted themselves to the new reality. Hence, every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely, distorting the very thing we are trying to represent. It's made a mess of everything. But words, as you yourself understand, are capable of change. (CG 77)

Stillman then explains the method of his experiment. He collects broken objects, and investigates them in order to give them a new name; because the object is broken, it can no longer fulfill its original function, and its original name is thus no longer appropriate. Stillman provides broken objects with new names that take their new condition into account in order to create a more faithful relation between sign and signifier. But before he finishes his experiment, he commits suicide; thus the results of his experiment will never be known. According to Shiloh, Stillman senior's attempt is, like his first experiment with his son, doomed to failure from the beginning because "language can never coincide with reality" (49). Stillman senior is, Shiloh continues, a "terrifying and pathetic figure, [whose] endeavors have backfired brutally. He is looking for man's natural language, but has deprived his son of natural language, of any natural existence. [...] His reasoning is a travesty of logic, which he aspires to reinstate" (49). As in *Lot 49*, Stillman's quest comes to demonstrate the arbitrariness of the relationship between sign and signifier. All attempts to find a language that would faithfully represent reality are presented as madmen's undertakings that will never succeed. The novel thus assumes an anti-realistic stance towards itself: if language cannot offer either a true image of reality or bring about a faithful relationship between sign and

signified, then neither can literature. Stillman's quest could thus be regarded as way of weaving postmodernist concerns into the text.

Conclusion

It was the aim of this paper to analyze the pattern of the quest in selected works of American postmodern literature. For this purpose, two texts were chosen from authors whose work conforms to the pattern of the quest narrative. This paper thus set out from the claim that Thomas Pynchon's *Lot 49* and Paul Auster's *City of Glass* can be considered quest narratives. As this paper has previously demonstrated, however, postmodern writing is characterized by a form of experimentation in which writers make use of traditional literary conventions by recycling them in unconventional ways and for wildly different ends. On this basis, it has been shown how, through these two novels, the quest pattern has undergone a process of postmodern experimentation. This paper then analyzed the specific forms assumed by the quest within these novels, as well as the way in which this transformed pattern worked to incorporate postmodern concerns within the texts.

In order to perform this analysis, it was first necessary to clarify how the pattern of the quest was classically employed through literature. The first chapter thus provided a definition of the quest and worked with the influential theories of Josef Campbell and Northrop Frye on the status and function of the quest. Even a cursory familiarity with the different definitions and theories of the quest make it clear that, although many quest narratives seem to share a similar underlying structure, the forms in which these narratives have appeared throughout literary have varied widely. This tendency toward greater differentiation reaches its peak with postmodern literature, whose heyday was also the source of tremendous literary experimentation. Postmodern writers were united by several concerns each wove into the fabric of their texts. Because one of the purposes of this paper was to determine which of these concerns might be linked to the pattern of the quest, the second chapter provided a definition of postmodern literature and an overview of those of its concerns that would be relevant for an analysis of Pynchon and Auster. The analysis of their novels thus illustrates precisely how the quest appears in their work.

Lot 49 can be called a quest narrative because it includes a hero who sets out on a quest in order to obtain a specific object. Through her attempt to

sort out the inheritance of her ex-lover Inverarity, Oedipa comes into contact with the underground organization of the Tristero and wants to find out the truth about that secret system which seems to be linked to Inverarity's last will and testament. Like the traditional questing hero, Oedipa has to leave home in order to begin her quest. By leaving behind her everyday life as an American housewife, she becomes capable of recognizing the void that is constitutive of postmodern society. Her quest provides her with a means of escaping this void. As she takes up the trail of the Tristero system, she begins to resemble a detective who uses rational means to solve a case. In light of the nature of her quest, however, it is clear that Oedipa's attempts cannot resemble those of a detective in the traditional detective novel. She is unable to make sense of the clues she receives about the Tristero system and discovers that the more she finds out about the system, the more confused she becomes. She is thus unable to finish her quest because she cannot find out the real truth about the secret system. In this way, she resembles the detective of the anti-detective novel, whose work is frustrated by ambiguous clues and is ultimately unable to solve his case. It is commonly assumed that the anti-detective is, like postmodernism, critical of the rationalistic perspective of Enlightenment society. For this reason, Oedipa's inability to solve the case via a rationalistic method can be considered a continuation of the postmodern critique of Enlightenment knowledge. Additionally, through her inability to find clear answers to her questions, she is able to leave behind a dualistic way of thinking and thereby become open to the diversity of the postmodern world as it was described by Lyotard's concept of "little narratives."

Pynchon's novel is also concerned with the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign in a way that mirrors theories of the linguistic sign developed by Saussure and Derrida. In their work, postmodern writers frequently thematize the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. In *Lot 49*, for example, it might be said that Oedipa's unsuccessful quest demonstrates the ultimate instability of the relationship between signifier and signified. She is provided with signifiers, like the word "Tristero" and the sign of the muted posthorn, but is unable to locate the appropriate signifieds for these signifiers. In this way, the arbitrary

nature of human language is illustrated. It might be further argued that the linguistic sign's instability points towards a criticism of the realist tradition in literature and its claim that literature can provide a faithful representation of reality. The invalidity of this assumption is another chief concern of postmodern writers, which Pynchon incorporates within the text in the form of Oedipa's failure to complete her quest.

Oedipa's inability to sort out information about the Tristero system is further underlined by the function of the thermodynamic concept of entropy within the text. According to this concept, all closed systems have an inherent tendency to move towards chaos and become run-down. In the novel, the Maxwell Demon's sorting endeavors, which attempt to counter this tendency towards entropy in systems, can be considered a metaphor for Oedipa's unsuccessful sorting of information about the Tristero system. But her sorting activities do not counter entropy but increase it: the more she tries to make sense of information, the more confused she becomes. The thermodynamic concept of entropy may also be considered a metaphor for the run-down state of America, and the end of the American dream. In this way, another major concern of postmodernism, the criticism of postmodern society, is incorporated within the text.

This critique is also incorporated within the text by the way in which Oedipa frequently wanders about during her quest. As she leaves behind her everyday life as a middle-class housewife, she discovers places she had not encountered before. She thus comes into contact with an "other" America that is constituted by those Americans who are excluded from the American dream. She then becomes capable of seeing that "real" America which is, according to Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal, usually hidden from the common American by artificial signifiers. In her encounters with the excluded, Oedipa, like the traditional questing hero, undergoes a form of personal development. She is able to leave behind her initial narcissism and develop the ability to care for others. In the pursuit of her quest, however, she also becomes aware of the way in which human values have become lifeless and run-down in the post-industrial society that surrounds her. In this society, the values of capitalism and consumerism suppress humanity. As Oedipa

witnesses these circumstances, the novel becomes a social critique of postmodern American society.

Like Oedipa in *Lot 49*, *City of Glass*' Quinn sets out on a rationalistic quest and assumes the role of a detective in order to solve a mystery. For Quinn, however, the quest originates in an attempt to escape the pain of a life ruined by the loss of his wife and child. His detective work serves as a means of keeping him moving so that he does not have to stop and face the problems of his life. Quinn's detective work quickly deviates from the path of the traditional detective. All the necessary components of the classical detective novel disappear as the novel progresses. The culprit Quinn is searching for, Stillman senior, eventually disappears, and with him the case too disappears. Those who employed Quinn to take up the case are similarly unreachable; and Quinn himself eventually dissolves from the story. Like *Lot 49*, *City of Glass* might be considered part of the tradition of the postmodern anti-detective novel and, thus, a critique of the logocentric worldview.

From the start of the novel, it is clear that Quinn suffers identity problems as a result of the losses he has experienced. It might thus be assumed that his quest will be a search for a stable identity, as was common throughout the American literary tradition of the quest in novels following World War II. But Quinn's quest is a reversal of this tradition. In pursuit of his quest, he undergoes several shifts of identity and finally appears to have lost his real identity. All that is left is a wish for dissolution, which is fulfilled when he simply disappears from the novel. This process is repeated on the diegetic level when the narrator presents himself within the text's narrative. Now the reader is sent on a quest to determine the narrator's identity and secure that textual stability *City of Glass* no longer provides. In this way, it is not only Quinn who produces confusion on the level of the novel's narrative, but also those metafictional shifts in narration through which the reader is reminded of both the fictitious nature of the story as well the uncertainty prevailing in postmodern society.

Stillman senior's quest for a language that would faithfully represent reality also demonstrates the essential arbitrariness of all human language. Although he commits suicide before he can complete his experiment, it is

clear that a language that would counter Saussure's and Derrida's theory of the linguistic sign simply cannot exist.

In conclusion, the previous analysis has shown that postmodern writers' use of the quest narrative fundamentally transforms that most ancient of storytelling forms. In postmodern literature, the pattern of the quest is no longer used as a structuring device for a hero who pursues his quest, successfully passes its tests and thus proves himself a born hero. Instead, the postmodern quester occupies the role of an anti-hero whose quest is no longer characterized by a sense of unity, but by a sense of fragmentation. In this paper's analyzed texts, it is clear that while both protagonists are conscious of their goals, their attempts to reach those goals are doomed to failure from the very beginning. Like most postmodern literature, these stories can be characterized by that lack of closure through which literary conventions are typically deconstructed. Postmodern stories do not claim to represent reality, as did realistic fiction. On the contrary, these stories frequently underline the fictive character of their own nature. Therefore, they do not provide the reader with a smooth reading experience but, instead, subject reading to a series of disruptions. As has been demonstrated throughout the analyzed texts, the pattern of the quest presents a suitable means for achieving this effect. A reader who is accustomed to the conventions of realistic fiction will likely find himself frustrated by the ultimately futile attempts he will make to make sense of the text. The reader who accompanies the fictional hero in his pursuit of the quest will be left mystified by that quest's failure. While realist fiction aimed to provide the reader with an understanding of meaning, postmodern texts question how such meaning-making is even possible since the quest for knowledge ultimately ends in a void. Additionally, the postmodern quest does not glorify, but mocks the process of rationalistic meaning-making. The postmodern age, in line with Lyotard's argument, must leave behind that attempt to unify the world which prevailed during previous centuries and, instead, try to account for the diversity of the postmodern world. While the questing-heroes of the realist literary tradition completed their quests and attempted to bring order to the world around them, postmodern questers demonstrate the uncertainty of

the surrounding world. These postmodern questers also become conscious of the negative effects this post-industrial age and postmodern era have on the lives of individuals. Because the American novel is often considered representative of the status quo of American society, it might be argued that the American novel's postmodern quest may serve as a way of identifying all that is wrong in that society and that era.

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die „Quest“ ist eine beliebte Erzählstruktur in der Literatur, die seit den Anfängen der Literaturgeschichte von großer Bedeutung ist. Eine solche „Quest“-Erzählung besteht gewöhnlicherweise aus einem oder einer Suchenden, dem Objekt der Suche und darüber hinaus ist es notwendig, dass der Suchende Anstrengungen unternimmt, um in Besitz des Objekts zu gelangen. Diese grundsätzliche Form der „Quest“ resultiert in einer großen Variation an „Quest“-Erzählungen, wobei diese, abgesehen von einer gemeinsamen Grundstruktur, teilweise stark voneinander abweichen.

Die „Quest“-Erzählung hatte immer schon eine spezielle Bedeutung in der amerikanischen Literatur. Dieser Umstand entspringt aus der amerikanischen Geschichte, da dieses Volk schon seit der „Entdeckung“ Amerikas die Seele eines Entdeckers, Eroberers und Abenteurers innehat, wobei all diese Rollen in enger Verbindung mit einer Suche, und somit der „Quest“, stehen. Daher ist dieses literarische Strukturelement auch weit in der amerikanischen Literatur verbreitet.

Auch in der postmodernen Literatur behielt die „Quest“ ihre Bedeutung in der Literatur, wobei sie hier gewöhnlicherweise in einer anderen Weise, als in den traditionellen „Quest“-Erzählungen verwendet wird. Eine Definition der Postmoderne ist ein schwieriges, wenn nicht gar unmögliches Unterfangen. Grundsätzlich aber kann gesagt werden, dass die Literatur dieser Periode durch eine Abkehr von traditionellen literarischen Konventionen gekennzeichnet ist. Desweiteren ist diese Periode durch literarische Experimente gekennzeichnet, wofür die traditionellen Formen Literatur zu erzeugen, herangezogen wurden und mit diesen weitreichend experimentiert wurde.

Es ist das Ziel der vorliegenden Arbeit, zu analysieren, in welcher Form die „Quest“ in der postmodernen Literatur verwendet wurde und desweiteren, in welcher Weise dieses Strukturelement verwendet wurde, um postmoderne Fragestellungen im Text zu platzieren. Hierfür wurden zwei amerikanische Werke der Postmoderne behandelt und zwar Thomas Pynchons *The Crying of Lot 49* and Paul Austers *City of Glass*. Beide diese Werke können

eindeutig als „Quest“-Erzählungen definiert werden, wobei die Form in welcher die „Quest“ hier auftritt, eigentümliche Formen annimmt.

The Crying of Lot 49 schildert, wie eine amerikanische Hausfrau, mit dem Namen Oedipa Maas, die Aufgabe übernimmt, das Vermögen ihres ehemaligen Geliebten zu verwalten. Im Zuge dieser Aufgabe stößt sie auf ein geheimes Untergrundnetzwerk, welches den Namen Tristero trägt. Daraufhin will sie genauer wissen, worum genau es sich bei diesem mysteriösen System handelt und versucht die Geheimnisse, welche das Tristero umgeben, zu lüften. Doch ohne Erfolg. Sie sammelt mehr und mehr Hinweise, die sich auch teilweise gegenseitig widersprechen und ist nicht in der Lage, die letztgültige Wahrheit über dieses System herauszufinden. In ihren Bemühungen die sie umgebenden Rätsel zu lösen gleicht Oedipa einem Detektiv des klassischen Detektivromans. Da sie aber nicht fähig ist, diese zu lösen, ist sie eher als eine Vertreterin des postmodernen Anti-Detektivs Romans zu betrachten, der eine Parodie des klassischen Detektivroman ist und die Funktion hat, den Logozentrismus der westlichen Welt zu kritisieren, welcher einer der Standpunkte ist, der von den postmodernen Theoretikern und Schriftstellern vertreten wird. Durch ihre Unfähigkeit das Rätsel zu lösen, wird die Romanheldin in diesem Werk zu einer Verkörperung dieser Kritik.

Darüber hinaus wird durch ihre erfolglosen Versuche eine eindeutige Bedeutung des Tristeros zu ermitteln, die Arbitrarität die in unserer Sprache zwischen Signifikat und Signifikanten herrscht, demonstriert. Dadurch wird ein anderes Anliegen der Postmodernen thematisiert. Zeichen können die Welt nicht wirklichkeitsgetreu abbilden und in derselben Weise ist es auch nicht möglich, durch Sprache eine realitätsgetreue Abbildung der Welt darzubieten. Dadurch wird die Annahme der Realisten widerlegt, welche behaupten, in ihrer Kunst die Welt realitätsgetreu darstellen zu können – eine weitere Annahme, die von den Vertretern der postmodernen Literaturrechtung abgeleugnet wird.

Dadurch, dass Oedipa auf ihrer „Quest“ ihr Leben als kalifornische Hausfrau zurücklässt und eine fremde Umgebung beschreitet, kommt sie mit einem „anderen“ Amerika in Kontakt und zwar mit dem Amerika der

Ausgegrenzten, die nicht vom „American Dream“ profitieren konnten. Jean Baudrillard hat Amerika als eine Gesellschaft der Simulation bezeichnet; eine Hyperrealität, wo nichts mehr real ist und die wahre Welt hinter einer Zahl von künstlichen Zeichen versteckt ist. Die Amerikaner seien Bestandteil dieser Konstruktion und deswegen nicht mehr fähig, diese künstlichen Zeichen als solche zu erkennen. Oedipa, die auf der „Quest“ all die Ablenkungen und Betäubungen ihres Lebens als Hausfrau zurücklässt ist letztendlich auch fähig, Teile dieses „wahren“ Amerikas hinter den oberflächlichen Simulationen zu erkennen.

Im gesamten Roman ist es offensichtlich, dass er eine stark sozialkritische Komponente enthält und den Werteverfall des postmodernen Amerikas und in gleicher Weise die herrschenden Ideologien des Materialismus und Kapitalismus anprangert, welches ein weiteres Anliegen der postmodernen Schriftsteller ist.

Auch in Paul Auster's *City of Glass* kommt die „Quest“ in einer stark veränderten Form vor. Der Hauptdarsteller des Romans, Daniel Quinn, hat durch den Verlust seiner Frau und seines Kindes einen schweren Schicksalsschlag erlitten, wodurch er sich komplett vom sozialen Leben zurückgezogen hat. Quinn ist ein Schriftsteller von Kriminalromanen, welche er unter einem Pseudonym schreibt. Durch Zufall erhält er einen Anruf, in dem nach einem Detektiv „Paul Auster“ verlangt wird, welchen der Anrufer als Detektiv anheuern will. Quinn schlüpft in die Rolle dieses Paul Austers und trifft seine zukünftigen Auftraggeber, Virginia und Peter Stillman. In dem Treffen stellt sich heraus, dass Peter Stillman als Kind neun Jahre von seinem Vater in einem dunklen Raum eingesperrt worden war, weil dieser die „Sprache Gottes“ entdecken wollte. Bei einem Brand wurde der Junge entdeckt und in ein Krankenhaus gebracht, wo er jahrelang behandelt wurde. Der Vater wurde eingesperrt und seine Entlassung war für den nächsten Tag geplant. Da Stillman Senior seinem Sohn einen Drohbrief geschrieben hat, soll ein Detektiv die Aufgabe übernehmen, den Vater zu überwachen und in dieser Weise Stillman Junior zu beschützen. Quinn übernimmt diese Aufgabe und wird somit zum Detektiv, der einen Fall lösen muss. Seine Versuche sind aber sehr bald zum Scheitern verurteilt. Nachdem er Stillman Senior tagelang

beim Herumwandern in den Straßen von New York beobachtet und auch einige Male unerkant mit diesem gesprochen hat, verschwindet der Verdächtige plötzlich. Auch seine Auftraggeber sind bald nicht mehr zu erreichen und somit ist auch der Fall nicht mehr länger existent. In dieser Weise kommen alle Elemente des klassischen Detektivromans abhanden. Der Fall kann somit nicht gelöst werden und der Roman stellt sich somit als Vertreter des Anti-Detektivs Romans heraus. In derselben Weise wie Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* kann Quinn die Rätsel, die in umgeben nicht auf rationaler Ebene lösen, wodurch auch in diesem Roman wiederum die postmoderne Kritik am Logozentrismus implementiert wird.

Im Verlauf des Romans unternimmt Quinn mehrere Identitätswechsel. Aber im Gegensatz zu jenen Romanen, in denen die Helden eines Romans eine „Quest“ unternehmen, in der sie letztendlich ihre eigene Identität finden, scheint Quinn diese fremden Identitäten nur anzunehmen, um sich weiter von den Problemen seines realen Lebens zu entfernen. Nachdem sein Fall verschwunden ist, wird er immer verwirrter und der Wunsch sich „aufzulösen“ beginnt sein Leben zu dominieren. Letztendlich verschwindet er komplett aus dem Geschehen des Romans und somit scheint sein Wunsch in Erfüllung gegangen zu sein. Diese zweite „Quest“ Stillmann, sein Wunsch nach „Auflösung“, unterscheidet sich auch stark von der traditionellen „Quest“. Die Erfüllung seiner „Quest“ ist nicht das Auffinden eines Objekts der Suche, sondern ein Auflösen des Suchenden. Auch der Erzähler gibt sich in dieser letzten Phase des Romans zu erkennen und somit wird die diegetische Ebene des Romans entblößt. Der Roman wird somit dekonstruiert und seine fiktionale Natur demonstriert. Dadurch wird der Leser auf die fiktionale Natur des Romans aufmerksam gemacht, was ein weiteres Anliegen der postmodernen Autoren ist.

Wie die Analyse dieser beiden Werke ergeben hat, weicht die „Quest“ in beiden Werken stark von der traditionellen Form ab. Die Verwendung dieses Strukturelements in den Romanen ermöglicht darüber hinaus ein geschicktes Einweben postmoderner Fragestellungen in den Text.

Lebenslauf

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