**Damnosa Hereditas: Sorting the National Will in
Fuentes' *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*, and
Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49***

The University of Leiden was founded in the winter of 1575 under the auspices of the liberator of the city, Prince William of Orange, who asserted in a letter to the Dutch States the character of the university as much as the ideology of its Protestant founders: it was to be an "onderhoudt der vryhey" (defence of liberty). This early modern paean to national liberation—which in 1917 would be elegantly turned into the "Libertatis Praesidium"¹ that we can all see on its seal—was in keeping with the feeling of liberation from Habsburg-Spanish rule that the city has experienced the previous Autumn. This Protestant rhetoric of national "Libertas," emanating from the classical readings of the renaissance was in direct contrast with the apparently senseless fight by Philip II of Spain—and his two successors—to re-establish the "universal

¹ "In zijn diesrede van dat jaar wees hij als oorsprong van de term op de woorden van prins Willem van Oranje in een brief aan de Staten van Holland van 28 december 1574. De prins stelde daarin voor een universiteit op te richten 'tot een vast stuensel ende onderhoudt der vryhey'." In <http://dutchrevol.leidenuniv.nl/Nederlands/spreken/libertatis%20praesidium.htm> 12/05/2003 21:38. From H.J. de Jonge, 'Ouderdome en herkomst van het devies der Leidse universiteit', *Jaarboekje voor geschiedenis en oudheidkunde van Leiden en omstreken* 70 (1976) 143-146.

religion" over an inherited land he had obtained from his father the Emperor Charles. Historians now agree that the Low Countries were a *damnosa hereditas*, a burdensome inheritance, for the Spanish Habsburgs: not only did it harm their prestige through the muscular propaganda that came to be known as the Spanish black legend, most of which was printed north of the Rhine, but it also bankrupted their Mediterranean and American kingdoms, while it radicalised the politics of the Counter Reformation.²

To conjure up these memories may seem a far cry from the contemporary literature that I will be discussing in this essay. Nonetheless, I will use them as the framework for my discussion of nationalism, and the critique of the nation as an inherited commodity in post-modern American literature. It may also help to address the question "how far is America from here?". From Leiden, we can easily point to the Protestant-Catholic boundary that was also projected onto the "cultural geography" of America from very early on. The rhetoric of national liberation used by the Dutch freedom fighters, with its associated cultural, and perhaps even racial, hatred of the Spaniards, would surely have rung in the ears of their guests here in Leiden, the Pilgrim Fathers, as they set off for America.

In his recent remarkable study on the *Dutch Imagination and the New World*, Benjamin Schmidt points to the intimate relation between a nascent Dutch nationalism and its representation of Spanish tyrannies in America:

From the earliest years of their revolt against the Habsburgs, the Dutch formulated an image of rapacious Spanish "tyranny" in America committed at the expense of "innocent" natives. With enormous polemical energy, the rebels exploited this image to blacken the reputation of Habsburg Spain. With still greater geographic ingenuity, their heirs extrapolated from it a projected "alliance" with the Indians [...] to create a moral basis for overseas commerce.³

Interestingly, Schmidt proposes here a critique of the "cultural geogra-

² Charles Petrie, *Don John of Austria*, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967, p. 26, 256. See also John H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716*, London: Penguin, 2002.

³ Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad, the Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. xix.

phies" drafted by the Dutch rebels not only as a way of countering the Spaniards at home but also as a strategic move to colonise America in order to "liberate" it. The imagined geographies of America, in Schmidt's words, "helped [...] to establish the 'imagined community' of the nascent Dutch Republic."⁴ Nationalism at home and colonialism abroad were only two of the many issues at stake in the configuration of European ideas about America at the time, both in Holland and in Spain. In the two novels that I will analyse here, Anderson's concept of the "imagined community" is underscored insofar as there is no real "community" out there, only its "imagining." It is in both novels an evacuated nation, and as in the time of the Habsburgs, a commodified article that can be passed on, auctioned or inherited. In *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, this inheritance is explored by the conscience of the dying man. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the legacy of the nation is perceived as a composite ideological narrative that falls apart as it is comprehended. It is the duplicitous nature of the "nation" and "nationalism" as both agents and enemies of uneven development that I intend to explore in these novels by Fuentes and Pynchon. In both novels we encounter a critique of American and Mexican nationalist discourses and in particular, a critique of their hijacking by the amorphous international corporate state in order to encourage consent. This critique does not promote a return to a mystified unadulterated agrarian nation but rather underscores and denounces the conflation of earlier nationalist discourses with narratives of technological prowess.

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the image of the electronic "printed circuit" is ascertained by the main character, Oedipa Maas, on the San Narciso landscape. Its image is indeed a metaphor for the economic system whose assets the character has to chart as she executes Pierce Inverarity's will. And yet, I detect in Oedipa's search a failure to defy the perceptual predisposition imposed by the educational programming to which she has been subjected. Therefore, the novel aims at unveiling the mechanisms by which national cultures replicate the message of social conformity and compliance to the capitalist mega-machine of internationalised production, aided by the pervasive nationalist consensus. Its conclusion, or apparent lack of it, signifies a pessimistic reaffirmation of the inescapability of such a closed system by any single individual.

⁴ p. xxiii.

Artemio Cruz, the dying revolutionary whose fragmented memories are spread throughout the novel, carries the nation on his shoulders or, rather, the nation hangs around his neck. One of the many lengthy catalogues in the novel exotically summarises the things "Mexican" carried by Artemio: "the red deserts, the hills of prickly pear and maguay, the world of day cactus, the lava belt of frozen craters, the walls of golden domes and rock thrones, the limestone and sandstone cities, the tezontle stone cities, the adobe pueblos, the reed-grass hamlets ..."⁵ This stereotyped Mexican landscape suitably incorporated into the post-revolutionary representation of Mexico, as Sergei Eisenstein's celebratory film *¡Que Viva México!* (1932) and other contemporary productions amply demonstrate, is constantly contradicted in the novel by the country's heterogeneity. Mexico, which "is not one, there are a thousand countries, with a single name" (232/365), is a fragmentary reality on which such homogenising narratives of nation have often been forced. The national project of the Revolution is identified with the dying Artemio Cruz by the interpolative narrative voice that says to the character: "you will carry these with you and they are leaden, they are stone heavy for one man: they have never moved and you have them bound to your neck; they weigh you down, they have entered your guts, they are your bacilli, your parasites, your amoebas. . ." (232/366). The Mexican national discourse breathes and lives in and through the figure of Artemio Cruz. It colonises the character as would a micro-organism, in one of the most striking images of nationalist assimilation in Mexican literature.

Thus, the novel is not only "the first literary attempt to integrate the social, ethnic and geographic totality of the nation,"⁶ as the Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos suggested, but also a successful attempt to integrate the homogenising discourse of that idealised community called Mexico in order to defy its political appropriation by a class. As the "motherland" he inherits—"heredarás la tierra" [you will inherit the earth/land] (233/367)—comes to be identified with Artemio Cruz himself, his death becomes that of the nation. The fragments of the nation are amalgamated in a crucible inside the dying Cruz. It is around this

identification, this symbolic treatment of the nation, that I want to build my discussion of the novel.⁷

Artemio Cruz stands for that entire class of Mexican revolutionaries who institutionalised the Revolution through the constant use of nationalist symbols in order to cement a political consensus and to become the new ruling class. Thus, Artemio's heritage is, among other things, this new social position: "They will accept your legacy: the decency that you acquired for them: they will offer up thanks to bare-foot Artemio Cruz because he made them people of position..." (233/367) And yet "they," Artemio's heirs, will not be able to take refuge in the revolutionary discourse to carry on with the "sanctioned greed": "they will not be able to speak of their battles and captains, as you can, and shield themselves behind glory to justify rapine in the name of the Revolution, self-aggrandizement in the name of the Revolution." (234/367) As Artemio wonders "what justification will they find?" (234/367), it becomes clear that the institutionalised revolutionary discourse is Fuentes's main object of satire.

In the novel, the Mexican Revolution re-establishes the nation as an expression of a *mestizaje* whose epicentre is Artemio Cruz. His duplicity can be seen as one more avatar of the duplicitous nature of the Mexican, a *malinchismo* that cuts both ways: *Malinche* as the originator of the Mexican *mestizo*, the new race, and as the female traitor of the community, both the tyrant and the saviour. The sense that history repeats itself and that the nation continuously betrays its believers and those who sacrificed themselves for its inception is patent in the generation born during and after the Revolution, to which Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz belong. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude* Paz analysed the major contradiction of revolutionary nationalism:

...in a certain sense, the Revolution has recreated the nation, in another sense, it has extended the nation to races and classes that neither the colony nor the XIX century were able to incorporate. [...] [But] the Revolution has not turned our

⁵ *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, José Carlos González Boixo, ed., Madrid: Cátedra, 1998 [1962], p. 232; *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, trans. by Sam Hileman, London: Penguin, 1978 [1964], p. 366.

⁶ Rosario Castellanos, *Juicios Sumarios. Ensayos*. Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1966, p. 125.

⁷ There have been some important critical contributions which have already established Artemio's symbolic role, among others Lannin Gyrulko in his *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz and Citizen Kane*, in *Carlos Fuentes, A Critical View*, ed. by Robert Brody and Charles Rossmann, Austin: University of Texas, 1982, pp. 64-94. In that article Gyrulko compares Welles and Fuentes in this particular use of "characters who function not only as individuals but as national symbols." (66)

country into a community, or even into a hope of a community: a world in which men can see themselves in other men, and where the "principle of authority"—that is, force, whatever its origin and justification—cedes its place to responsible freedom.⁸

The painful realisation of the frustrated attempt of the Revolution at creating a community goes hand in hand with the even more excruciating fact that "nationalist capitalism," as Paz calls it,⁹ is based on the old patriarchal structure of *caudillos* and *caciques*.¹⁰ At this point Paz's and Fuentes's analysis of the Revolution seem to merge with Orwell's cynical look at revolution as a replacement of one oppressive elite by another in *Animal Farm* (1945): Mexican nationalism re-enacts a cycle of social and discursive renewal that ultimately fails to empower the community.

The *chingada* (literally, the "fucked one"), a national "destiny," is described by Fuentes with the image of a chain that joins all Mexicans in the interplay of power politics. This interplay is also applicable to gender relations, as the first "chingada," La Malinche, is both the symbolic ravished mother of the *mestizo* at the time of the European conquest and, by the same token, the first traitor to an impossible indigenous sense of national purity. The general inclusion of all Mexicans inside this pyramidal and patriarchal system becomes contested in the novel through the questioning of the frozen temporal structures, linear or circular, on which it is based. At the centre of the authorial preoccupations behind or inside *The Death of Artemio Cruz* is the subversion of the "unity of destiny," Anderson's "empty time," which characterises the unity of the national state. Such breaking up of the chronological unity of the nation is accompanied by a critique of the patriarchal location of the national discourse. Both the critique of time and gender structures become central themes that give the text its parodic focus.

⁸ All extracts from Paz's works are my own translation unless otherwise indicated. Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, Mexico City: FCE, 1998 [1960], p. 210.

⁹ See p. 217-9.

¹⁰ *Caudillos, caciques*: both words in Mexican Spanish refer to political bosses; the second word comes from the Nahuatl meaning chieftain. In her monograph on the novel, Maria Stoopen has advanced a reading of the novel as the "possibility of making valid, in a fictional universe, the theoretical postulates offered by Paz." Maria Stoopen, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz: una novela de denuncia y traición*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982, p. 11.

Time, in particular the narration of linear time, has been linked with the construction of the narration of the nation. The much celebrated book by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, focuses on four nineteenth-century novels, among them the first Mexican novel, *El Periquillo Sarniento* by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, published in 1816, which he uses to test his theory of the novel as a "device for the representation of simultaneity in 'homogeneous, empty time.'" (25) Anderson is referring here to nineteenth-century realist novels with their temporal linearity that, together with the newspaper, "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation." (25) This "empty time" understood by Anderson as the projection of the "calendric time" in which such fictions were inscribed, is the companion of the nation that also moves linearly towards its destiny, its fulfilment: "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving down (or up) in history." (26) The fragmented narration in *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, as in the case of its modernist predecessors in the English-speaking world, breaks away from that homogeneous, empty time to which nations and traditional novels alike are destined, according to Anderson.¹¹ The fragmentation of the temporal flow in *The Death of Artemio Cruz* has been accurately described by Edna Aizenberg as "a means of interrogating the nation,"¹² but as I argue here, it can also be seen as a means of interrupting the nation's flow into the future empty time of progress.

In *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, the Mexican nation is imagined as a fractured community with the times of the losers, the *chingados* being continuously denied and erased by the official linear times of the *chingones*. Two competing times that conform the Janus-faced failed community as the character's conscience realises: "Always the two times in this double-faced Janus community, so far from what it was, so far

¹¹ Time can be perceived as a gendered metaphor. Even the temporal definition of the imagined community of the nation raises issues of gender and sexuality as Andrew Parker has pointed out in his introduction to *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 5.

¹² Edna Aizenberg, 'The Untruths of the Nation: *Petals of Blood* and Fuentes's *The Death of Artemio Cruz*' in *Research in African Literatures*, 1:4 (Winter, 1990), 85-104 (p. 91). However, I agree with Aizenberg's main thesis, namely that "the novel now combats the very thing it once sought to constitute [the nation]." (86)

from what it wanted to be."¹³ (128) From the outset, there is a distance that both reifies and fragments Cruz into factions and features. Artemio is that "Someone else. Someone in a mirror in front of his sickbed." (12/118) He is always someone else, "another," in a mercurial succession of identities that foregrounds his symbolic status as the Janus-like nation. One of the many indications of Artemio's duplicitous morality in his relationship with American capital. Not just an agent of American colonisation in Mexico through business deals such as his biased newspapers, Artemio himself is said to be colonised by a metropolitan perspective on Mexico: "Forever since you began to be what you are, to learn to appreciate the feel of fine cloth, the taste of good liquor, the scent of rich lotions, all those things [...] You admire their efficiency, their comforts, their hygiene, their power, their strength of will..." (30/138) This stereotypical opposition between the *chingado* Mexican "us" and the triumphal Yankee "them," confirms not only that the new ruling class represented by Artemio has successfully managed to negate the Revolution through its alliance with American capital, but that it has also corroborated through its nationalist discourse of relative inferiority a view of the Mexican self that justifies the imposed, uneven development. Artemio suffers physically from the process of cultural appropriation: "You ache because you know that no matter how hard you try, you can never be what they are but become at most only a pale copy, a near approximation." (30/183)

Faced with the realisation that the future identity of Mexico would be "at most only a pale copy, a near approximation," Artemio's conscience points once again to the benefits of *malinchismo* and the *comunidad jánica*, one that can be cruel and tender at once, permanently fragmented.¹⁴ As many critics and readers have noted, the novel is

¹³ My translation. "Siempre los dos tiempos, en esta comunidad jánica, de rostro doble, tan lejana de lo que fue, y tan lejana de lo que quiere ser." (250) Note the standard translation excludes the reference to the two times represented by the double face. Also "comunidad" is translated for the less fortunate "town".

¹⁴ In the lines of Brushwood's evaluation: "...it does seem that the life of Cruz can be understood as one way of looking at the attitudes of the nation and why they are as they are. If my assumption is correct, Fuentes sees Mexico as having deceived herself by accepting values that will not allow her to realise her potential." John S. Brushwood, *Mexico in its Novel: A Nation's Search for Identity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966, p. 41. Sandra Messenger Cypress also reads Artemio Cruz as a *malinchista* character "in the way he sells out his ideals in order to reap material gain", see

essentially a collection of fragments, a novel about fragmentation that is itself fragmented: its temporal structure, its syntax, and the narrating voices of the protagonist himself.¹⁵

In *Artemio Cruz* the nation is constituted as a purely male foundation that cannot be inherited by his only daughter, Teresa, who continuously expresses her derision for Cruz at his deathbed: "even what he loved, he destroyed" (186/301).¹⁶ Their mutual hatred is also an "incestuous intercourse" of sorts that secures the family bond through a chain of *chingados*. Although Teresa's attack is confirmed by Artemio—"my only love has been material possessions, sensual acquisition" (118/239)—she in turn is seen by him as wingless but waiting for her inheritance by his bedside. As they prey on each other, Teresa for Artemio's will and Artemio on her unfitness as an heir to his media empire, they confirm the pyramidal system of power whose upper places are only reserved for males.¹⁷ Cruz's history is a story of constant duplicity that runs parallel to the nation's flow. After surviving the firing squad at a Villista camp and sacrificing his military honour for his life, he is able to use his acquaintance with the idealist Gonzalo Bernal in order to enter the Bernal family.

Like the lawyers to whom Gonzalo Bernal alludes in his cell, who "want only a half-revolution, compatible with what interests them, their only interest, getting on in the world, living well, replacing Don Porfirio's elite" (164/291), so does Artemio Cruz, whose revolutionary ideals are increasingly blurred in order to survive. His evolution from revolutionary to social climber separates him from "those who wanted a true revolution, radical and uncompromising," and those who "are unfortunately ignorant and bloody men" (164/291), as Gonzalo Bernal laments before his death.

her *La Malinche in Mexican Literature* Austin: U. of Texas P., 1991, p. 153.

¹⁵ See for instance Wendy B. Faria, *Carlos Fuentes*. NY: Frederick Ungar, 1983, p. 47, and Jonathan Titler's chapter in *Narrative Irony in the Contemporary Spanish-American Novel*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984.

¹⁶ See also p. 301, 316.

¹⁷ Irvin D. Solomon wrongly misses the criticism of the novel by summarising it as "based on the notion that females are lesser beings who need to be controlled and dominated." (74) *A Feminist Perspective of the Latin American Novel*: Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, *Hispanófila* 33, no. 1 (97) (1989 Sept.): p. 69-75.

Gamaliel Bernal, father of Catalina and Gonzalo, an aristocratic liberal who stands for the old regime of the Porfiriato, passes his inheritance on to Cruz symbolically by allowing him to marry his own daughter Catalina, once he realises that his time is up and that Artemio represents the new order: "So that was the name of the newcomers who had appeared to dispossess the old order. Unfortunate land, said the old man to himself as he walked slowly back to the library, unfortunate land where each generation must destroy its masters and replace them with new masters equally ambitious and rapacious." (44/155)

In this judgment on the failure of the Mexican Revolution, we can also hear an authorial judgment on the nation, whose "children" have to be destroyed with the coming of a new generation. By symbolically sacrificing Gonzalo Bernal and the Indian Tobías at the Villista camp, Cruz becomes identified with the nation in its latest devouring frenzy. His duplicity is the form of the novel with its constant shifting voices, but it is also the constituting moment of the nation, its "reassuring fratricide," to use Benedict Anderson's terminology. Anderson has pointed to the fact that the nation, that imagined community, is necessarily built on the common fusion through an "emblemata ancestral" of the "asesinos" and the "asesinados."¹⁸ The nation is built on a foundational fratricide, the Revolution imagined as the re-birth, the regeneration of the community, but also as the impossible drama of cyclical destruction: "There you have Mexico's drama" (164/291).¹⁹ The absorption of the idealist Gonzalo by Artemio in this symbolic anthropophagic process makes Cruz feel he is: "Not one man but two, with Gonzalo Bernal's life added to his own, as if Bernal when he died had transferred to him the possibilities of his own interrupted existence. Maybe, he thought to himself, the deaths of others is what lengthens our own life. But he had not come to Puebla to think." (39/149) He only came to Puebla to inherit the land, we could add. Cruz's communion with Gonzalo, or rather his symbolic devouring of him, resembles his assimilation of successive women—Regina, Catalina, Laura. Catalina, Gonzalo's sister, is perhaps the clearest example of a

sacrificial female in the novel, as she becomes part of the *patrimony*, the bridge between the old and the new Mexican nation.²⁰ In the novel, the author's subversion of patriarchy and linear time recasts the official discourses of the nation in a critical, parodic mode. The highly experimental time frame of the novel allows Linda Glanze to describe it as a literary instance of cinematic montage in the style of Eisenstein, a montage that foregrounds the conflict between "recit"—the action of the novel, Artemio's agony and death takes place on the 10th of April of 1959—and the "diegesis" of the dispersed memories spanning seventy years of the character's life, which reach back further still, to his grandmother's birth in the auspicious year of 1821.²¹

México, "un país incapaz de tranquilidad, enamorado de la convulsión," (147) is not then the abstract entity in search of the complacent self-identification suggested by the sacred text of the American Constitution—the site of another imagined community that consecrates the fiction of its plural-unified self from its official birth: "We the people of the United States of America." Such a mirage, eroded in the semiotic excavation of *The Crying of Lot 49*, is the background noise from the North against which Mexican intellectuals have eagerly searched for the defining moment, an origin, while traditions and communities were submitted to a permanent and continuous overhaul in the name of the nation to come. Octavio Paz, perhaps the last in the long line of such intellectuals, timidly announced at the end of his major meditation on Mexico the need for an international or "universal" conscience as the result of the long post-revolutionary introspection: "our nationalism, if it is not a mental illness or idolatry, must culminate into a universal search. We have to start with the awareness that our situation of alienation is that of the majority of the other nations."²² As Mexican nationalism is stripped bare of its many deceiving masks, the essentialist vision of the nation is put into perspective, and even denounced as the colonising

¹⁸ See Anderson's article mentioned above, p. 99.

¹⁹ As Emir Rodríguez Monegal has noted, Fuentes finds in this Kaimite tradition, "the key to Mexico", see his article 'El México alucinado de Carlos Fuentes', in *Narradores de esta América*, Buenos Aires: Alfa, 1974, vol II, p. 259.

²⁰ Due to this duplicity Catalina Bernal is read by Messinger Cypess as an avatar of the Malinche herself, see op. cit. p. 150 ff.

²¹ Linda Glanze, "La distorsión temporal y las técnicas cinematográficas en *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*", *Hispanamérica*, 14 (40), April 1985, 115-120: 116.

²² *El laberinto de la soledad*, p. 233-4.

discourse of the dominant class. Artemio's slow and painful death, rather than announcing the challenges of "yet-to-be nations," as Aizenberg has put it, attests to the contradictions and even the impossibility of such a creation. In his subsequent novel, *A Change of Skin*, Fuentes revisits the dead body of the nation in order not so much to mourn it as try and defuse its resurrection.

In Thomas Pynchon's novel, the commodification of the Californian landscape becomes the obsessive reminder of the social and political cost of undemocratic developmental policies, and the nation is thus presented as a burdensome inheritance, as a will that has to be executed. The quest through this "infected" landscape is based on an extended parody, a direct though subverting textual reference to Sophocles' Theban tragedies: Oedipa Maas, a Republican housewife in her early thirties, has to make sense of the will of a former lover and land tycoon, Pierce Inverarity. As in *Oedipus Rex*, the tragic character has to ascertain the causes of the plague devastating her city as she starts to make sense of her own identity. Her name is an early index that facilitates the decoding of the apparently chaotic network of cultural signs that clutter the text. The classical reference participates in the wholesale carnivalisation of cultural codes, from thermodynamics to philately, in a move to desautomatise their positioning in society. Contrary to Theodore Kharperian, who maintains that "Oedipa, like her ancient namesake, does come to recognize that the responsibility for the political plague is hers,"²³ I will argue that Pynchon's deviation from the Greek myth does not just rest on his feminisation of the classical character but also on the character's inability to assume the responsibility that might commence a new political epoch.

In her quest Oedipa ventures into her everyday world of commodities, parenthetically identified as "This One" in the title to the *Esquire* story. Although it is indeed a familiar world for her, throughout her quest she is exposed to what had, until then, seemed irrelevant, and which slowly becomes a central issue: the social and moral bankruptcy of the US. Exactly how relevant this theme should be for a critical reading of the text is made clear by the swift change in the wording of the magazine

version, revealing some interesting departures from the text of *The Crying of Lot 49* published four months later. In the 1966 Lippincott edition, as in all others after that, the narrator announces early into the novel that "[a]s things developed, she [Oedipa] was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself, but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away." Yet in the *Esquire* version, the same narrator appears to be more punning in the first sentence and finally too explicit: "[a]s things developed, she was to find out a lot. Hardly anything about Pierce Inverarity, or herself, but all manner of revelations about what remained: their Republic."²⁴ The two sentences have undergone a drastic rephrasing in order to defer the disclosure of the US as the revealed truth. In the final version, "it" literally stays away from the readers, not because the quest varies its course, but rather because we are spared such an early announcement. Additionally, multiple layers of meaning arise behind the word "lot," creating a pun in which the serious sense of "way of life," and the simpler synonym "manifold," obviously referring to the saturation of cultural references awaiting the reader, are mixed with the specific allusion to both the novella's title and the "lot" number 49. The entire joke is lost in the rewriting of the paragraph. Oedipa is indeed haunted by a "lot" throughout the novel, which seems to materialise in the "lot 49"—a collection of subversive stamps that demonstrate the existence of the Tystrero, an underground anti-establishment organisation—to be auctioned as a "lot" at the close of the novel.

The traumatic distress at the car lot suffered by Oedipa's husband, Mucho Maas parallels Oedipa's later encounter with the American disinherited during her quest to execute Inverarity's will, and in both cases it points to the Maas as archetypes of the American "little man"²⁵ of which Pynchon had bitterly written in his "A Journey into the Mind of Watts." His description there of the gap between the two "very different

²⁴ Thomas R. Pynchon, "The World, This One, and Oedipa Maas," *Esquire Magazine*, 64 (December 1965), p. 173.

²⁵ Gantner has also studied the relation between these two contemporary texts "Pynchon's description of what lay behind the Watts riots suggests a new reading of one of his most enigmatic novels, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and in particular, a new reading of the novel's mysterious WASTEL/Tystrero conspiracy." G. Gantner, "Rioting, Textuality and *The Crying of Lot 49*," in *Found Object* (1993), Fall: 2, 67-81: 67.

²⁶ Theodore D. Kharperian, *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon*, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990, p. 95.

cultures" used to explain the "mind of Watts" parallels the image of the "two worlds" suggested to Oedipa by the Mexican anarchist Jesús Arrabal in *Lot 49*. For Arrabal, Pierce Inverarity represented "the oligarchist, the miracle" (119) that is, "another world's intrusion into this one" as terrifying "as a Virgin appearing to an Indian." (120) Our lady of Guadalupe, Mexico's national icon is set side by side with another American national icon: the tycoon, Pierce Inverarity who, like Cruz, proves to be the owner of the nation.

Arrabal, like so many of Pynchon's characters, bears a name immediately significant for its many connotations.²⁶ Fernando Arrabal, the Spanish surrealist playwright had successfully staged his *Cementerio de automóviles* from 1959 in Spain, Mexico, and France (as *Cimetière de Voitures*).²⁷ In it, people live in abandoned cars—literally in a scrap yard—, their attachment to the machine being even more extreme than that witnessed by Mucho at the lot, and under the constant fear of repressive forces, reminiscent of Franco's police state. The central character in the play is a young trumpeter called Emanu, aged thirty-three, whose defiant act is to play his trumpet in the open air, but also to have been sharing his bread and fish with the others. The Christian iconography is consistently kept into his foreseeable punishment—towards the end of the play the police measure his arm width. But Arrabal's play reworks the ideological tenets of Christian peaceful subversion in order to parody it, as Emanu repeats a phrase that can be read as a mantra for social adjustment: "Porque cuando se es bueno se siente una alegría interior que proviene de la tranquilidad en que se halla el espíritu al sentirse semejante a la imagen ideal del hombre." [Because when one is good one feels an inner happiness that derives from the peace of the spirit as it feels to be similar to the ideal image of man.] In Pynchon's Jesús Arrabal, both the Christian allegory and its recent theatrical author are conflated in the Mexican anarchist who perceives things about Pierce that Oedipa hadn't, "as if he were, in some unsexual way, competition." (120) The image of the trumpeter muted by the repressive order is adopted by Pynchon and transformed into the Tristero's muted post-horn through which the disinherited try to

communicate with Oedipa. This is obviously the novel's clearest irony.

At this point, the title given to the *Esquire* piece becomes significant again: it openly hints at the "world" in which it is published, in the same way that Arrabal refers to his. Arrabal's definition of a miracle works in both directions, and thus the anarchist miracle consists of "revolutions [that] break out spontaneous and leaderless" (120), reminiscent of the Watts violence described by Pynchon: "far from a sickness, violence may be an attempt to communicate, or to be who you really are." Violence is not, then, that threatening social ill perceived by the middle-class social workers, but perhaps the only way out for a muted population.

In their study of race riots in the US during the 1960s, Joe R. Fagin and Hahn Harlan maintain a similar position when they suggest that the "spreading riot ideology often viewed rioting not only as a method of protest but also as a tactic that might bring actual structural and political change to the cities."²⁸ A structural change to the urban space is seen as the key to breaking through the patterns of racial divide and ghettoisation.²⁹ Watts' blacks live in a space where the rule of law is suspended—i.e. you can be executed at any time—and where life becomes "nuda vita" or "bare life", in Agamben's definition, a life "which dwells in the no-man's-land between the home and the city."³⁰ A Watts black is indeed the epitome of the *homo sacer*, a "human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed," (83) whose death can go unpunished. Watts is an emblem of the political space inhabited by the blacks elsewhere in the US, whom Norman Mailer described as "living in the margin between

²⁶ Joe R. Fagin, Hahn Harlan, *Ghetto Revolts: The Politics of Violence in American Cities*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973, p. 117.

²⁷ Terry Anderson in his *The Sixties*. New York: Longman, 1999, points out the make up of this *de facto* apartheid in the American mid-sixties: "Over 40 percent of nonwhites were below the poverty line, and another study demonstrated that the average combined underemployed and unemployed rate for blacks was almost nine times that of whites. The contrast with white America was startling. A black Watts resident told a white from Los Angeles: 'You've got it made. Some nights on the roof of our rotten falling-down buildings we can actually see your lights shining in the distance. So near and yet so far. We want to reach out and grab it and punch it on the nose.' [...] 95 percent of suburban residents were white, and 80 percent of northern blacks lived in segregated ghettos." p. 75.

³⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1998, p. 90.

²⁸ Coincidentally, *arrabal* in Spanish means "ghetto" or "poor urban periphery."

²⁷ Fernando Arrabal, *Cementerio de automóviles*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1984.

totalitarianism and democracy.³¹ It is not coincidental that Mailer and Pynchon, both white Northeasterners, turn to the discourse of the Civil Rights movement with its critique of WASP values as leaning towards totalitarianism, in search of a response to the "Square" conformity of the fifties against which they also react. But their responses differ. While Mailer identifies his intellectual posture, the Hipster, with the Negro's "existentialist synapses" (341), thus claiming the birth of the White Negro, Pynchon promotes a radical critique of the cultural homogenisation at work in American culture. Like Mailer, Pynchon perceives rioting and revolution as an inevitable form of social exchange between two worlds that have become culturally incompatible, but he does not dwell much on this inevitability. Rather, Pynchon is more troubled by the colonization of the black neighbourhood by a white "unreality" obsessed with averting any future destruction of the status quo, a colonization that would soon be contested by armed movements such as the Black Panthers during the second half of the Sixties.

For Pynchon in "A Journey..." the issue of violence becomes a source of ironic reflection on the hypocritical positioning of dominant values: "among so much well-behaved unreality, it is next to impossible to understand how Watts may truly feel about violence." White residents of Los Angeles are determined to "put the area under a siege of persuasion: to coax the Negro poor into taking on certain white values. Give them a little property, and they will be less tolerant of arson; get them to go in hock for a car or collar TV, and they'll be more likely to hold down a steady job." This act of offering a minimal share of white consumer folly in order to appease an enraged black vitality, part of the process of internal colonisation, is carried out through television, here seen as mainly a political medium, whose counter-image is waste, the other contact point between the two communities. Pynchon notes how in Watts "[i]t's part of their landscape, both the real and the emotional one: busted glass, busted crockery, nails, tin cans, all kinds of scrap and waste." These images of the debris in which the California pariah are immersed, but also of the ways in which their illusory expectations are raised by TV's dreamy displays appear in the novel as muted messages that undermine

the conscience of the white "little man," and of the "little woman," Mucho and Oedipa Maas.

Throughout the years before his marriage to Oedipa, Mucho's unconscious has been cluttered with the image of the waste he had unveiled at the lot: the material remainder of countless disempowered lives. As the car is recycled back into the market, it is cleansed of personal and human waste, "the actual residue of these lives" (13) that can neither be incorporated into Mucho's cognitive system nor into the market place. They have become immersed in Mucho's unconscious in a formless catalogue:

clipped coupons promising savings of 5 or 10, trading stamps, pink flyers advertising specials at the markets, butts, tooth-sly combs, help-wanted ads, Yellow Pages torn from the phone book, rags of old underwear or dresses that already were period costumes, for wiping your own breath off the inside of a windshield with so you could see whatever it was, a movie, a woman or car you coveted, a cop who might pull you over just for drill, all the bits and pieces coated uniformly, like a salad of despair, in a gray dressing of ash, condensed exhaust, dust, body wastes-it made him sick to look, but he had to look. (13-14)

Once characterised as a "salad of despair" by the narrator, the residue of these lives becomes immediately politicised: it signals the entropic tendency of closed systems such as the American Republic.³² Beyond the existential sense of exiles pervading this imagery, there is a calculated satire of the middle-class observer, whose job forces him to "look" but who remains incapable of understanding the nature of the waste. The choice between the violent reality of the black ghetto and the unreal conformity of the suburb are not, then, those "meaningless binary choices"³³ confronting Oedipa in the words of Frank Kermode and other critics. Some of these critics transfer the emphasis from the political contradictions underscored throughout Pynchon's writings, which they come to deem "meaningless," to "the normal hermeneutic activity in

³² A point extensively developed by some critics, among the earliest is Peter L. Abernethy, "Entropy in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 14:2 (1972): 18-33.

³³ Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," in *Advertisements for Myself* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1992), originally published in 1959, p. 340.

³³ Frank Kermode, "Decoding the Trystero," in Mendelson, E. Pynchon, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1978, p. 164.

disease.³⁴ It is precisely in the movement out of the "normal" activity of gazing at the everyday that the conscience of these political contradictions becomes conspicuous but also traumatic and unbearable.

This compulsory viewing of the other world that has tortured Mucho's guilty conscience signifies the breaking down of the physical boundary that had hitherto separated his world, and the world of waste, "the reality of Watts" and "the unreality of Los Angeles." Michael Harrington observes in his *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, that "[t]he problem, then, is to a great extent one of vision. The nation of the well-off must be able to see through the wall of affluence and recognise the alien citizens on the other side."³⁵ For Pynchon, too, the breaking of the visual boundary is a first act that would allow white Americans to cross over to the other side. The need for a change of perspective in order to be able to see and perceive the other side of the country is pointed out in his journey to Watts: the panoramic sense of black impoverishment is hard to miss from atop the Harbor Freeway, which so many whites must drive at least twice every working day. Somehow it occurs to very few of them to leave at the Imperial Highway exit for a change, go east instead of west only a few blocks, and take a look at Watts. A quick look.

Mucho's act of looking has to be read not as a deliberate act ("he had to look") and therefore not as the "beginning" to which Pynchon alludes here, but as a traumatic miracle, an incursion from another world into "his one." In a parallel move, Oedipa's quest can also be said to have an "immediate and important residual effect: the revelation of the disinherited," as Kharperian has pointed out.³⁶ As in the case of Mucho, the key point stressed by the narrator is Oedipa's incapacity to make any sense of such revelation as she drifts into "some paranoia" (182). Oedipa is, like her husband Mucho, unable to process and sort out a meaning behind the human waste that she perceives. As she unveils Pierce Inverarity's awesome legacy, she confronts a reality habitually unnoticed by her. In order for her to see, she would have to deroutinise her sight,

and much of the novel is devoted to this process of breaking through the patterns of vision to which she has been culturally conditioned.

In *The Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison extensively articulates the image of the invisibility of American blacks. The narrator states: "That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition in the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality."³⁷ Ellison's much celebrated equation of marginality and invisibility has also been recreated recently by a Chicana, Gloria Anzaldúa in her *The Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). In her manifesto "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness" she claims: "I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't."³⁸ The use of invisibility to disparage the inclusive image of the melting pot—the ur-narrative of the racial inclusiveness of the post-Civil War American nation—succeeds in bringing it down and exposing it as just a myth. It is not that in the sixties "[t]he country discovered, in short, that its citizens were not all white and prosperous."³⁹ as David Cowart has claimed in his commentary of Pynchon in the sixties. This would imply the existence of a country, a nation, who is by definition white and prosperous, and which all of a sudden realises it is actually not. The use of invisibility is addressed to counter such an argument by emphasising the permanent blindness, the racial "blind spot" of the WASP, but also of those incorporated into the national pot. This is a reminder that race, as language and religion—markedly in the case of Muslims, thus the wave of conversions to Islam among blacks in the sixties and beyond—are closely related in the US to nationhood, and that often citizens who are neither white nor prosperous are not in practice citizens at all.

Oedipa's sight is described at the outset of the novel as faulty, "as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix." (20) Indeed the narrator declines to "fix" the character's

³⁴ Kernmode, 163.

³⁵ Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, New York, 1962, 159.

³⁶ T. Kharperian, p. 88.

³⁷ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, London: Penguin, 1995 [1962], p. 7.

³⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987 p. 84.

³⁹ David Cowart, 'Pynchon and the Sixties' in *Critique*, 41:1 (1999), p. 3-13 (p. 9).

perception of "reality" in order to stress her deficient sight. Most of the apparent ambiguities highlighted by certain critics can be explained by paying attention to Oedipa's perceptual problems. Her quest puts into action some of the epistemological themes and devices distinctive of modernist fiction and identified by Brian McHale in his *Postmodernist Fiction*:

... the accessibility and circulation of knowledge, the different restructuring imposed on the "same" knowledge by different minds, and the problem of "unknowability" or the limits of knowledge [...], the multiplication of and juxtaposition of perspectives, the focalization of all the evidence through a single "centre of consciousness" ...⁴⁰

The paintings of another exiled Spanish surrealist, Remedios Varo, serve as a sort of iconic manifesto at the start of the novel, which addresses the character's defective eyesight. Her wish to be perpetually saddened by the vision of Remedio Varo's "Bordando el manto terrestre" ("Embroidering the Terrestrial Mantle")⁴¹ lurks over the whole narration. In a flashback to her trip to Mexico City with Pierce Inverarity, Oedipa remembers her wish to "see the world refracted through those tears" provoked by the vision of the prisoners in the tower, embrodering the surface of the world. Oedipa's viewing of the painting saddens her as she realises that she has not escaped from her own tower:

Oedipa, perverse, had stood in front of the painting and cried. No one had noticed; she wore dark green bubble shades. For a moment she'd wondered if the seal around her sockets were tight enough to allow the tears simply to go on and fill up the entire lens space and never dry. She could carry the sadness of the moment with her that way forever, see the world refracted through those tears, as if indices as yet unbound varied in important ways from cry to cry. (21)

This first act of crying is directly related to the perspective provided by

the water-tight glasses filled up with tears: as she cries, she also consciously stages a first reaffirmation of her blurred eyesight. Pynchon's use of the green coloured glasses through which to look at the world is reminiscent of Adorno's reference to the use of "stereotypes" that are increasingly "reified and rigid in the present set-up of the culture industry" and that become "clichés that seem to bring some order into the otherwise ununderstandable." "Through these clichés 'people may not only lose true insight into reality, but ultimately their very capacity for life experience may be dulled by the constant wearing of blue and pink spectacles.'" (171) In the case of Oedipa Maas her glasses as well as her crying are two primary ways of dealing with the inescapability of her tower, her manner of circumventing her own responsibility towards the poisonous inheritance that she has to execute.

Oedipa's quest can be said to have an "immediate and important residual effect: the revelation of the disinherited" as Kharperatian has pointed out.⁴² But as in her husband's case, the key point stressed by the narrator is Oedipa's incapacity to make any sense of such revelation as she drifts into "some paranoia" (182). Oedipa is, like Mucho, unable to process and sort out a meaning behind the human waste she perceives. As she unveils Pierce Inverarity's awesome legacy, she confronts a reality habitually ignored by her. In order for her to see, she would have to deroutinise her sight, and much of the novel is devoted to this impossible process of breaking through the patterns of vision to which she has been culturally conditioned.

It is in this context that the Oedipus story becomes immediately useful as a code against which to read hers. The Greek king inadvertently kills his father, marries his own mother, thus fulfilling an old prophecy. Therefore, it is revealed that he is the actual cause behind the plague devastating his city. When he finds out, the reality is overwhelming and Oedipus blinds himself. This act of piercing his own eyes defines Oedipus' moment of awareness as literally blinding, emphasising the character's permanent inability to see: metaphorically first, Tiresias warns him "I say you see and still are blind,"⁴³ and bodily as his face becomes "an eyeless

⁴⁰ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1987, p. 9.

⁴¹ A painting exhibited at the Galeria Copenhagen, Mexico City, in Oct-Nov 1963. See Janet A. Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys: The Art and Life of Remedios Varo*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1988.

⁴² T. Kharperatian, p. 88.

⁴³ *Oedipus Rex* in *The Oedipus Plays of Sophocles*, trans. by Paul Roche, New York: Penguin, 1991, p. 23.

mask." (78) Pynchon's version of the tragic character is devoid of the gruesome mutilation, but it contains a more paining defacement as Oedipa is never delivered of her uncertainties. In a move from tragedy to parody, this Oedipa is incapable of ever reaching "the central truth." As Oedipa's memory is emptied of the "central truth," the reader becomes ever keener to understand what this means. For most of the "compiled memories of clues" refer to the possibility of connections pointing to the network of assets belonging to Inverarity's will, and lurking behind his estate, the hidden meaning of the Tristero stamp collection, the apparent lot 49, unveiling an encyclopaedic history of treason and fight over the delivery of messages. This whole history can be read as the "signal, really dross," the historical waste, the "secular announcement," "destroying its own message irreversibly," and therefore leaving her once again blind to the truth, always unable to realise her own involvement in the plague. At a certain point in her search she concludes that "everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into The Tristero" (81). Like Oedipus, she is unable to see the real connections, her parentage with the inheritors, and therefore unable to ascertain her moral burden, her burdensome inheritance.

The ubiquitous muted post horn, the emblem of the Tristero, is a simulacrum, the "[i]nformation that devours its own content,"⁴⁴ some sort of historical detritus whose escalation brings the loss of communication, confirming *avant la lettre* Baudrillard's third hypothesis about the implosion of meaning in the media: "information is directly destructive of meaning." (79) And what is even more relevant to the truth escaping Oedipa, information "devours communication and the social." (80) It is not then that all Oedipa finds is simulacra but that she is not able to see beyond the simulacra, partly because its connection to reality appears to have collapsed into "unreality," partly because her own perception is culturally jammed. Pynchon's satire of the McLuhanite identification of the medium with the message uses the proliferation of Tristero post horns as an index of the social downfalls of such an equation. His is not so much "a parable of the failure of the humanist desire for 'meaningful communication' and for inter-subjective communion through symbols" as Ganter

suggests,⁴⁵ but rather a caricature of the new era of information. And as a caricature, this paranoia is not Pynchon's alternative political mode but a key to understanding his critique.

My reading of the two novels thus proposes that in Oedipa's and Cruz's exploration of their burdensome inheritance, the republican individual freedoms inscribed in the nation's foundational narratives, have collapsed and reverted to a quasi-feudal time when a community could be passed on, and the will of the nation could be simply executed.

Pedro García-Caro

⁴⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981], p. 80.

⁴⁵ Ganter, 68.