Abstract

Thomas Pynchon is considered one of the key postmodern authors. This BA thesis aims to explore the way his novel *The Crying of Lot 49* reflects contemporary society by utilizing some of the “postmodernities”: the different aspects of postmodernism and key features of postmodern literature. An ultimate definition which would explain postmodernism completely is not possible yet (and perhaps never will be) and so this thesis achieves its aim by studying multiple postmodern theories developed in the second half of the 20th century and applying them to the reading of this novel. The thesis draws primarily upon the work of some of the most important postmodern philosophers and theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon whose ideas about postmodernity correspond greatly with those employed in *The Crying of Lot 49*. The postmodern features which the thesis looks at are those such as the mistrust in metanarratives, ontological plurality and the related notions of conspiracy and paranoia, the simulacrum and the spectacle. The society portrayed in the novel represents a system of power structures and entangled orders of simulacra, driven by commodity fetishism and ruled by a flow of images and advertisements, breaking the boundaries between the real and the non-real. However, the thesis shows that the society depicted in the novel is a reflection of the society outside of the novel: the society that the reader themselves is part of. Oedipa, the protagonist of the novel, ceases to recognize the differences between the real and the non-real while she is trying to discover the legacy of her late ex-boyfriend in order to be able to execute his will. She must navigate her way through the labyrinthine nature of her reality and the present late capitalist society as she searches for coherence within them. The reader finds themselves in a similar position where they search for meaning and coherence within the novel. The inherently textual nature of the reality both inside and outside of the novel causes that the protagonist and the reader are both being tempted to automatically look for patterns in the complex system of signs with which they are being faced – be it the world of the novel, the text of the novel, or, the world of the reader – even though this system might be based on arbitrariness. The historical accuracy of the novel (and of the play within the novel) is itself questioned given the uncertainty of reality and truth, as it is clear that the author too is the projector of his universe. Thus, it is important not to overinterpret and overanalyze the signs pervading *The Crying of Lot 49* when dealing with this novel.