


Untangling the “Secret” of the Trystero

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Abstract

Written in the 1960s, one of the most politically and socially turbulent decades in U.S. history, *The Crying of Lot 49* involves its protagonist Oedipa Maas in a series of quest unearthing and untangling the centuries-old conflict between two mail distribution companies, Thurn und Taxis and the Trystero (or Tristero). Associated with her mythic namesake, Oedipa, a quest avatar, is literally engaged in exploring the riddle of her own identity. The omnipresence of the Trystero symbol, a muted post horn with one loop , pulls Oedipa further and further into the encryption and decryption of the secrecy. Often suspended between polarities--narcissism and paranoia, totalitarian order and chaos, absolute certainty and radical uncertainty—Oedipa designates “her-self” as one who mediates, decodes, or negotiates these extremes. Although indeterminate and somewhat hallucinatory by the novel's end, in probing the entanglements of history, myth, contemporary lifestyles and preterite secrecies, Oedipa has endeavored to challenge and demystify the cherished myths of a male-dominated society. Filled with secret codes, conspiracy, historical and literary allusions, puns, parodies, information, figures of all sorts, *The Crying of Lot 49* will continue to seduce the readers/us into the maze of the unresolved secret of the Trystero. Believing the world is filled with multiple significances and expecting, just like Oedipa, the “cry” of revelation, we might discover that all these “clues” will somehow reveal something about ourselves which has never been illuminated before.

Keywords: Oedipa, Trystero, secret, *The Crying of Lot 49*