‘Useful Prophecy or Bedlamite Entertainment’: Dreams, Heresy, and Sovereignty in Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*

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To my friends, family, and girlfriend.

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Abstract

This dissertation approaches Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* with an interest in the recurring motif of sovereignty. Given *Mason & Dixon*'s governing theme – and trope – of lines and boundaries, sovereignty becomes a question of who or what differentiates and excludes. However, it is also a question of what is bounded, and what lies beyond the boundary or over the horizon – the unmapped. Taking the unmapped as a metaphor for the geographical, temporal, and conceptual unknown, it becomes a question of the way in which sovereignty, (or *the* sovereign), grapples with the unmapped (whether it be that which lies over the horizon and further into the future), and the wistful dreams (or, as will be explained, heresies) that are projected into it: fancies of home, freedom and good futures. The introduction places Thomas Pynchon and his novel *Mason & Dixon* in various historical, cultural, and literary contexts. It focuses on the metafictional qualities of *Mason & Dixon* and the way in which the novel positions itself in relation to 21st -century fiction and the literary. The motif of sovereignty, central to the dissertation, is extracted from this framing discussion.

Chapter One approaches *Mason & Dixon* as a postmodern text, either engaged in an ironic revival of the past as a work of historiographic metafiction, or attempting an aesthetic of cognitive mapping. It also demonstrates how criticism of *Mason & Dixon* has routinely read it as a text which is in some manner other than postmodern. It is demonstrated how this question of something other than postmodern turns on questions of irony, paranoia (or their absence), a relation to the past, and ethics.

Chapter Two focuses on the way in which potentially heretical dreams of freedom and home are introduced in the novel as a form of ideological mapping of the world. It is noted how the tension between heresy and dream functions as a constitutive tension within the novel's poetics. This chapter also demonstrates how the novel depicts these dreams as projected into the future, or over the horizon – outside the demarcated boundary of the mapped and known. In doing so it also explores how *Mason & Dixon*'s representation of this tension is inseparable from its characterization and representation of sovereignty and the ownership of land.

Chapter Three takes an interest in *Mason & Dixon*'s Jeremiah Dixon's attempt to free slaves. It reads this as an attempt at the representation of ethical action, and draws attention to ways in which *Mason & Dixon*'s own poetics qualify the possibility of such ethical action. In doing so, it demonstrates a further constitutive tension, which operates in tandem with the first (described in Chapter Two): a tension which develops when a desire for home becomes opposed yet intertwined with a desire for freedom. In other words, it demonstrates how the desire to be free from the oppression of imposed boundaries clashes with the desire for the safety of those boundaries. In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates how *Mason & Dixon*'s many dreams yearn for a stateless state – a romanticist, or anarchist, Eden.

The conclusion attempts to summarise the previous chapters. It also attempts to follow up, and reassess, the suggestion that *Mason & Dixon* is in some manner other than postmodern.

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Introduction

> Thus in the beginning all the world was America, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as money was any where known.
> John Locke, 'The Second Treatise: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government'[1]

Ideally, this introduction would introduce Thomas Pynchon, his novel *Mason & Dixon*, and ask a question of them. To introduce Pynchon would mean to introduce a reclusive author and his labyrinthian works. This task may be attempted by resorting to the description of the motifs that structure his novels: order, disorder, domination, freedom, paranoia, anti-paranoia, and, famously, the concept of entropy. Or, at the risk of simplification – uncertainty, under the sway of a pervasive irony. Furthermore, one would have to account for the curious paradox of an underpinning Luddite tendency – a perpetual question concerning technology – which haunts the ex-Boeing employee's work.

This Introduction would require an explanation of why *Mason & Dixon* has been singled out, from Pynchon's other novels, but also from other works and authors of a certain literary sensibility. One must bring to the text a governing question that would reciprocally justify the choice of text. Moreover, implicit in the need for such a justification lies a further question – why *fiction*?

To introduce Pynchon is to be uncertain where to begin. Then, to – as Pynchon would put it – single up all lines and commit to a destination (usually, in his novels, death), it would perhaps be best to start with what John Barth, in a foreword to *Lost in the Funhouse*, refers to

[1] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. by Ian Shapiro (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 121.

as ‘dire predictions not only of the death of the novel but of the moribundity of the print medium’.[2] That is to start with, as John Barth notes, the time of the High Sixties’,

> […] a time of more than usual ferment in American social, political, and artistic life. Our unpopular war in Vietnam, political assassinations, race riots, the hippie counterculture, pop art, mass poetry readings, street theater, vigorous avant-gardism in all the arts […][3]

In this Foreword, written in 1987, Barth summarises his earlier essay ‘Literature of Exhaustion’ and justifies his turn away from lengthy novels to the interweaved short stories of *Lost in the Funhouse* in the 1960s. At this time, Pynchon would have been at the beginning of his career, having just published his second novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, and working on *Gravity’s Rainbow*: a novel dedicated to his friend, and counter-cultural hero, Richard Fariña, who died in a motorcycle accident in 1966 (or – as one of Pynchon’s paranoids would put it – that is the official story anyway).[4]

While Pynchon was mourning and putting together his epic on the military-industrial-complex, World War II, and the ongoing Cold War, Barth was discovering the work of ‘the great Argentine Jorge Luis Borges’ and reflecting on the ‘premodern tale’ – ‘the tale cycle, as told by the likes of Scheherazade and Boccaccio’. What was at stake was the ‘way [Borges] regularly turned his narrative means into part of his message’. This metafictional play, already dormant in the frame-tales of Scheherazade and Bocaccio, would – he argued – revitalise the precarious genre of the novel.[5]

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[2] John Barth, ‘*Lost in the Funhouse:* Foreword to the Anchor Books Edition’, in *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: First Anchor Books, 1988), p. viii

[3] Ibid., pp. vii-viii

[4] ‘He’d been riding on the back of a motorcycle on Carmel Valley Road, where a prudent speed would have been thirty-five. Police estimated that they must have been doing ninety, and failed to make a curve. Fariña was thrown off, and killed.’ – Thomas Pynchon, ‘Introduction’, in *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

[5] *Lost in the Funhouse:* Foreword to the Anchor Books Edition., pp. v-vii

In 1997 – roughly three decades later and post-Cold War – Pynchon would publish *Mason & Dixon*. Here, (as always) he continues to indulge in metafictional play. He opens his novel by nesting an unreliable narrator – the Rev[d] Wicks Cherrycoke – and proceeds to disappear, except for the occasional use of the third person, punctuation, framing of the novels dialogue, or in a choice of epigraphs, taken from Cherrycoke's own fictional works *Christ and History* and *Undeliver'd Sermons*. Pynchon sets the frame as follows:

> It has become an afternoon habit for the Twins and their Sister, and what Friends old and young may find their way here, to gather for another Tale from their far-travel'd Uncle, the Rev[d] Wicks Cherrycoke, who arriv'd here back in October for the funeral of a Friend of years ago,– too late for the Burial, as it prov'd,– and has linger'd as a Guest in the Home of his sister Elizabeth, the Wife, for many years, of Mr. J. Wade LeSpark, a respected Merchant active in Town Affairs, whilst in his home yet Sultan enough to convey to the Rev[d], tho without ever so stipulating, that, for as long as he can keep the children amus'd, he may remain,– too much evidence of Juvenile Rampage at the wrong moment, however, and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him, where waits the Winter's Block and blade. (*MD*, 6-7)[6]

We note in this framing narrative a setup by which one may begin to justify the reference to Barth and Borges. Implicit in Pynchon's opening is an allusion to the frame of *The Thousand and One Nights*. As Borges explains in 'Partial Magic in the *Quixote*' the Scheherazadean frame is that of

> the terrible pledge of the king who every night marries a virgin who is then decapitated at dawn, and the resolution of Scheherazade, who distracts the king with her fables until a thousand and one nights have gone by and she shows him their son.[7]

In *Mason & Dixon* the Scheherazadean Cherrycoke is beholden to his Sultan-equivalent brother-in-law J. Wade LeSpark, who 'without ever so stipulating' threatens to, should his tale not be to standard – not decapitate, but evict him from his (LeSpark's) home.

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[6] Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (New York: Picador, 1997), pp. 6-7.
Subsequent citations will be solely in-text as above.

[7] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Partial Magic in the Quixote', in *Labyrinths*, ed. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 228-231 (p. 230).

Unlike Scheherazade, Cherrycoke and LeSpark cannot produce a child. Given the Christmastide setting however, the implied ending would be the birth of Christ, or his return. That is the reason why Cherrycoke is 'back in America':

> Miracles might yet occur, that God might yet return to Human affairs, that all the wistful Fictions necessary to the childhood of a species might yet come true,….a third Testament…. (*MD*, 353)

In America, Cherrycoke runs into the subjects of his tale: the Hamletic Charles Mason (35) and the more congenial ex-Quaker Jeremiah Dixon (31). He had already made their acquaintance aboard the *Seahorse* (*MD*, 35), a ship with the intended destination of Sumatra, where, on the behest of the *Royal Society*, Mason and Dixon were to record the Transit of Venus. Unfortunately, the *Seahorse* is intercepted by the French *l'Grand*. They reroute to the Cape of Good Hope to observe the *astronomical* phenomena in time. In America, the historical figures – semi-historically depicted – guided by their Deistic faith, use their scientific knowledge of astronomy and surveying to map a border between Pennsylvania and Maryland, putting an end to Cresap's War – a long-standing territorial dispute over land which lay between the uncertain boundaries of the two colonies. In short, just prior to the American War of Independence, Mason and Dixon, hired by the proprietors of Pennsylvania and Maryland, surveyed what is known to this day as the Mason-Dixon line. While their fame would fade, the Mason-Dixon line would come to demarcate the North and South of America, and hence, more than symbolically, the line between freedom and slavery.

Documenting the life and work of Mason and Dixon in *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America*, Edwin Danson introduces their partnership as a 'last ditch attempt at ending eight years of acrimony, bloodshed, and

war'.[8] Hired to solve the continual conflict arising out of the uncertain border between Pennsylvania and Maryland, Mason and Dixon are introduced as 'men of science', 'not lawyers or politicians'. They are exemplars of the 'Age of Enlightenment, when intellectuals across Europe and in North America were embracing reason, logic, and the concepts of civil freedom, [and when] mathematicians and astronomers were beginning to make sense of the natural world'. Mason and Dixon's work in America counteracts the forces of 'religion and politics […] pulling it apart'.[9] However, from a different perspective, Mason and Dixon contribute to the becoming of America by interpreting, surveying, and instantiating the decrees of British sovereignty over America soil.

Pynchon's depiction leans this latter way, and, contrasting with the more historically minded Danson, is more interested in what the two did when they were not working – drinking heavily (historically accurate), mingling with famous Americans, and arguing to the point of going their separate ways. While Danson documents to the extent that historical record allows (with the occasional speculation), Pynchon takes every gap in historical record as an opportunity to unwind his yarn.[10] The last section of *Mason & Dixon*, for example, concerns Mason and Dixon's last years post-America, and Mason's occasional visit to Dixon's home and family. In Danson this is reported more factually, as wishful speculation: 'His trek north took him close to Jeremiah Dixon's home in County Durham and it would be

[8] Edwin Danson, *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America*, rev. edn (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), p. 3.
[9] Ibid., p. 3.
[10] Pynchon does this to the extent that he will, on occasion, misremember historical record. One example is his treatment of General Wolfe, as noted by Frank Palmeri in 'General Wolfe and the Weavers: Re-envisioning History in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*'. In 'the course of re-animating this history and demystifying General Wolfe as a hero of empire, Pynchon's account denies Wolfe's own ability to see outside his subject position as a military officer'. Palmeri notes that Pynchon's depicts General Wolfe's handling of the striking weavers ('among the first workers to experience the effects of an early industrializing economy') as far less sympathetic than Wolfe actually was: 'In November 1756, he writes in striking support of the workers' position and their grievances against the clothiers: "the poor half-starved weavers . . . beg about the country for food, because, they say, the masters have beat down their wages too low to live upon, and I believe it is a just complaint.' – Frank Palmeri, 'General Wolfe and the Weavers: Re-envisioning History in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*', in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's Mason & Dixon: Eighteenth-Century Contexts, Postmodern Observations*, ed. by Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2005), pp. 185-198.

nice to think that he might have dropped by for a drink with his old friend'.[11] However, more blatant is Pynchon's decision to occupy *Mason & Dixon* with more *fantastical* characters, such as a talking dog: the Learned English Dog, who by his own description (as he is Learned in English) is one of the many 'tail-wagging Scheherazades […] nightly delaying the blades of [their] Masters by telling back to them tales of their humanity'(*MD*, 22). One already notes the metafictional play at work.

Pynchon flaunts the uncertain veracity of his tale. As Mason and Dixon argue their way across what is rapidly becoming America, they meet a host of historically important figures: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin who 'observes them, one at a time, through the tinted lenses of Spectacles of his own invention' (*MD*, 266). However, they rarely appear in great historical moments; more often they are satirised, as in the case of Benjamin Franklin, who with his bespoke spectacles,[12] and fascination with Leyden Jars, is depicted as a scientifically minded stage-performer – appeasing crowds with tricks of the electrical variety (*MD*, 764-5), or spouting quotable lines: 'Strangers, heed my wise advice, – Never pay the Retail Price' (*MD*, 267).

Mason also meets Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, with whom he discusses that 'Preacher nam'd Cherrycoke. Scribbling ev'rything down', the teller of the tale himself, who was, on occasion, present for the events he recounts from memory:

> "I had my Boswell, once," Mason tells Boswell, "Dixon and I. We had a joint Boswell. […] Have you," twirling his Hand in Ellipses,– "you know, ever...had one yourself? If I'm not prying." (*MD*, p. 747)

Note the play of metafictional infinite recursion. Who is the biographer of the biographer? Mason and Dixon have their fictional Boswell – Cherrycoke – Cherrycoke has Pynchon, and

[11] Danson, *Drawing the Line*, p. 206.
[12] Note the pun on spectacles.

the reclusive Pynchon has us? In this manner, the novel opens further ontological levels. Cherrycoke speaks of Mason and Dixon, and they recount their own fantastical adventures to each other – from hauntings to encounters with Elves living inside a Hollow Earth.[13] As the novel progresses, the distinct levels start to converge seamlessly. This is exemplified by the case of *The Ghastly Fop* – an eroticised Gothic serial – whose reading by J. Wade LeSpark's nephew and daughter (Ethelmer and Tenebrae[14] LeSpark) in a separate room of the LeSpark household, merges into Cherrycoke's narration. The barrier between one fiction and another does not entirely break as much as fade without a trace.

In 'Partial Magic in the *Quixote*' Borges notes a similar pattern in the second part of *Don Quixote*: 'the protagonists have read the first part, the protagonists of the *Quixote* are, at the same time readers of the *Quixote*'.[15] He goes on to note this metafictional stratagem in Scheherazade's narrative. On the six hundredth and second night of the thousand one, she begins to tell the King his own story: 'He hears the beginning of the story, which comprises all the others and also – monstrously – itself'. Monstrously, because, as Borges (referring to the work of Thomas Carlyle) tells us, 'these inversions suggest that the history of the universe is an infinite sacred book that all men write and read and try to understand, and in which they are also written'.[16] The uncertain distinction between fiction and reality, and one fiction and another, extends to include paranoia that one in turn is being written, or lied to. Just as Borges

[13] Pynchon's reference to a Hollow Earth is reminiscent of the esotericist belief in Agartha, an idyllic city located at the Earth's core. The belief in a Hollow Earth, or a mythical lost city, is popular within Western Esotericism, one may recall the belief in (and expeditions in search of) Shambala. These narratives are also popular within fiction, we may recall Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, or Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The Hollow Earth also returns in Pynchon's *Against the Day*, 'The Chums of Chance' (each a pastiche from 19th century boys fiction) enter Hollow Earth through a portal in Antarctica, fight hostile Gnomes, and emerge through a portal in the North – Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006), pp. 107-118.

Within the context of *Mason & Dixon*, the Hollow Earth (or Agartha) represents another example of an idealised lost city waiting to be found and surveyed. As shall be demonstrated, *Mason & Dixon*'s governing motifs revolve around these fantasies.

[14] Note the religious significance of her name; it refers to the last three days of Holy Week – the last three days before the Resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday

[15] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Partial Magic in the Quixote', p. 230.

[16] Ibid., p. 231

did – in 'Literature of Exhaustion' Barth notes that this 'business' of the '602nd night […] isn't in any edition of *The 1001 Nights* [he has] been able to consult'.[17]

In Pynchon, this uncertainty does not manifest itself solely between frame and story but is extended into a question of faith. In the epigraph to Chapter 53 he pulls a quote from Cherrycoke's fictional text *Undeliver'd Sermons'*:

> The Ascent to Christ is a struggle thro' one heresy after another, River-wise up-country into a proliferation of Sects and Sects branching from Sects, unto Deism, faithless pretending to be holy, and beyond,– every away from the Sea, from the Harbor, from all that was serene and certain, into an Interior unmapp'd, a Realm of Doubt, The Nights. The Storms and Beasts. The Falls, the Rapids,…the America of the Soul.
> Doubt is of the essence of Christ. […] The final pure Christ is pure uncertainty. He is become the central subjunctive fact of a Faith, that risks ev'rything upon one bodily Resurrection… Wouldn't something less doubtable have done? a prophetic dream, a communication with a dead person? Some few tatters of evidence to wrap our poor naked spirits against the coldness of a World where Mortality and tis Agents may bully their way, wherever they wish to go… (*MD*, 511)

Here uncertainty between historical fact and fiction turns into a question of faith in the Biblical account of history. Furthermore, catching the minute traces of an allusion to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* it turns into a heretical faith intertwined with colonialism and the 'America of the Soul': a belief in the manifest destiny of America, which provides the grounding of Mason and Dixon's movement westward, mapping the unmapped in the hope of what always lies over the horizon – the Edenic promise of America.

With Borges' reference to Carlyle in mind, one must not forget the Hermetic sensibility which develops and flows through *Mason & Dixon*. In America, Dixon encounters 'The Rabbi of Prague' and is informed that:

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[17] John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', in *The Friday Book* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 62-76 (p. 73).

This situation recalls Borges' short story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', in which a fictional world – imagined, and documented encyclopaedically – starts to become real as it merges with reality.

> Forms of the Land, the flow of water, the occurrence of what us'd to be call'd Miracles, all are Text,– to be attended to, manipulated, read, remember'd."
> "Hence as you may imagine, we take a lively interest in this Line of yours," booms the Forge-keeper, "inasmuch as it may be read, East to West, much as a Line of Text upon a Page of the sacred Torah,– a Tellurian Scripture, as some might say,– (*MD*, 487)

Land and text are a 'secret Body of Knowledge, meant to be studied with the same dedication as the Hebrew Kabbala would demand' (*MD*, 487). In a metafictional and metaphysical sense, the line Mason and Dixon survey and map is the line Pynchon draws across the page – 'As above, so below' (*MD*, 487). In studying *Mason & Dixon*, we study ourselves ascending 'thro' one heresy after another' latching onto, and later disavowing, any 'tatters of evidence' which may make the novel cohere (*MD*, 511). One imagines that Pynchon's perfect reader will someday perform the perfect mapping revealing the novel's *true* secrets and defining its orthodoxy.[18] With the resulting epiphany, the novel's promise of enlightenment will be fulfilled.[19]

In reality, the closest Pynchon depicts Mason and Dixon coming upon a romantic paradise, which would fulfil the Enlightenment or Christian dream, is a brief excursion, sans scientific equipment, into Native American land. Unfortunately, while the land remains

[18] This is not that.

[19] On this note it is pertinent to refer to David Meakin's *Hermetic Fictions: Alchemy and Irony in the Novel.* As the title suggests, Meakin notes the relation between Hermes, 'that tutelary god of alchemists' and 'irony', which, he states (referencing the work of Georg Lukacs and Mikhail Bakhtin), is inherent to the Novel as a form. Not to mention that it is inherently 'attractive to the spirit of modernism'. Meakin notes that the 'first lesson of alchemy – a lesson with considerable resonance for the world of literature that is our real concern here – is: take nothing literally!'. Furthermore, he notes that some describe it as an attempt to 'reproduce in microcosm God's act of Creation, a scaled down cosmogony, so that 'the *magnum opus* is a summary, reduced to a scale of human proportions and possibilities, of the divine Opus'. Although, *ironically*, such an ambition 'could be viewed antithetically as an initiative of ultimate piety or as devil's work, overweening pride'. Alchemy often deals with 'the drive to marry irreconcilable opposites [and] to mediate contradictions'. These descriptions are not far from those which may be applied to Pynchon's novels. Although, as Meakin notes, authors like Umberto Eco acknowledge 'the seductions and excitement of hermetic modes of thought and patterns of belief' but ultimately write novels 'debunking irony'. Which side Pynchon (and post-*modernism*) falls on is debateable – David Meakin, *Hermetic Fictions: Alchemy and Irony in the Novel* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1995), pp. 7-12.

It is also worth recalling that Hermetic (and Gnostic) perspectives were not as divorced from the history of science as is now often assumed. The marriage between an occult or mystic vision and scientific work is a constant of Pynchon's novels.

untrammelled by development, its boundaries are already written in blood and barbarism, and patrolled by Native Americans in possession of European weaponry and scalps (*MD*, 680).

The novel ends with the death of two friends – Mason and Dixon. While they have gone on to certainty, Mason's children renew the promise of an American paradise, the closest depiction Pynchon may afford *Mason & Dixon*:

> "Since I was ten," said Doc, "I wanted you [Mason] to take me and Willy to America. I kept hoping, ev'ry Birthday, this would be the year. I knew next time you'd take us."
> "We can get jobs," said William, "save enough to go out where you were,– "
> "Marry and go out where you were," said Doc.
> "The Stars are so close you won't need a Telescope."
> "The Fish jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick."
> "We'll go there. We'll live there."
> "We'll fish there. And you too." (*MD*, 773)

This ending may be termed, Thomas H. Schaub argues in 'Plot, Ideology, and Compassion in *Mason & Dixon*', as 'nostalgic (or bourgeois) tragedy'.[20] Schaub argues that in Pynchon's previous work 'subjectivity, epistemology, and the creation of history are hitched to plot'. As a result, the process of reading is the process of interacting with such uncertainties.[21] However, in *Mason & Dixon* the plot is carried by two 'largely unwitting and loveable agents of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason'.[22] This critique echoes Joseph Tabbi's reading of Pynchon's previous novel, *Vineland*. Comparing it to Pynchon's previous fiction, Tabbi argues that *Vineland* is too steeped in 'personal warmth' and 'ordinary domestic life', which he interprets as a 'desire to move away from modernist indeterminacy and technical abstraction toward a "grounding in human reality"'. This, Tabbi argues, 'represents a disturbingly reactionary aesthetic' in contrast to Pynchon's previous use of irony that 'was

[20] Thomas H. Schaub, 'Plot, Ideology, and Compassion in *Mason & Dixon*', in *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), pp. 283-296 (p. 295).
[21] Ibid., p. 291.
[22] Ibid., p. 291.

once so powerful as a mode of epistemological and political critique'.[23] Coincidentally, in *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity*, Schaub contrasts Pynchon with John Barth on these terms. The difference between them, Schaub argues, is that while Barth turns inward to metafictional play, Pynchon's use of irony 'preserves a critical distance between private thought and public vision', keeping us 'in an uncertain but engaged equilibrium between the extremes of self and society'. 'His fiction,' Schaub concludes, 'reminds us what a true society would mean, and articulates a society of isolation that already exists'.[24]

If we wish to defend *Mason & Dixon* from accusations of bourgeois tragedy or reactionary sentimentalism, the text in fact presents us with several opportunities. The first is to note Dixon's attempt to free slaves by beating a slave-driver with his own whip, which may be taken as a call for direct action within the world. However, Pynchon undercuts it: Ives LeSpark (J. Wades Brother) questions the veracity of Cherrycoke's recount:

> "No proof," declares Ives. "No entries for Days, allow'd.– but yet no poof." (*MD*, 695)

Such a reading must read itself alongside the ontological uncertainty which pervades the novel. It lies uncertainly between fact and fiction; it must be affirmed.

A second prospect would be to cast *Mason & Dixon* (and *Vineland*) – published post-Cold War but pre-9/11 – as an early example of trends in contemporary literary fiction. In their introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, Daniel O'Gorman and Robert Eaglestone note a 'consensus' that 'postmodernism, the critical paradigm of the late twentieth century arts and culture, has begun to fizzle out gradually, replaced by works that maintain postmodernisms self-reflexive playfulness while also

[23] Joseph Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 124-5.
[24] Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 152.

adhering to an underlying sense of emotional truthfulness'.[25] They note a dissatisfaction with 'the irony and occasional cynicism' that marks postmodern writing – which appears 'self-indulgent in an era in which, for instance, it has become indisputable that humanity will face mass displacement and famine in the absence of urgent and committed collective action against climate change'.[26]

While there is merit to this approach, it does have one flaw. It does not explain the ironic uncertainty that underlies the novel. Therefore, a third option. To evoke it, let us read the reclusive Pynchon from the perspective of a third party. It is not often that someone catches a glimpse of the reclusive Pynchon. Nevertheless, we need not be worried. We may take Salman Rushdie's word that 'Thomas Pynchon looks exactly like Thomas Pynchon should look'. 'He is tall, he wears lumberjack shirts and blue jeans, he has Albert Einstein white hair and bugs bunny front teeth'.[27] Rushdie's opportunity to glimpse Pynchon resulted from the fatwa issued against him by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Alongside more recent events, it is a reminder of the *unstipulated conditions* that Cherrycoke feels he must abide by to remain within the LeSpark household. In *Mason & Dixon* the veracity of Cherrycoke's tale is routinely brought into question. However, one occasion is notably different: Cherrycoke is interrupted not out of a doubt related to the veracity of his tale, but as a result of the sentiment expressed within it. Sultan within his home, the arms-merchant J. Wade LeSpark states:

> "Why, Wicks. You see us as no more than common 'Spielers'? Parasites upon the Fortunes of those willing to Risk all? (*MD*, 422)

[25] Robert Eaglestone with Daniel O'Gorman, 'Introduction' in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, ed. by Robert Eaglestone and Daniel O'Gorman (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-10 (p. 2).
[26] Ibid., p. 2.
[27] Charlotte Higgins, 'Salman Rushdie: living in hiding felt like comedy routine at times', *The Guardian*, 11 August 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/aug/11/salman-rushdie-hiding-comedy-routine> [accessed 16 March 2020].

However, stipulating the unstipulated, he follows up with an invitation to speak without fear of potential eviction:

> Pray you, setting aside whose Hearth you are ever welcome at, tell me all. (*MD*, 422)

It is more than likely that Pynchon had already been working on *Mason & Dixon* prior to 1989. Any connection to the fatwa would be at least pure coincidence, at most a late insertion into the text. However, this invitation to speak – which is at the same time a renewed promise – pervades the entirety of the novel. Just as O'Gorman and Eaglestone noted a trend that wishes to do away with a self-indulgent irony associated with the postmodern, they attempt to characterise and account for the literary. In their attempt to do so, they fall back on Jacques Derrida's interview with Derrick Attridge, in which Derrida talks of that strange institution called Literature: a 'fictive institution which in principle allows one to say everything'.[28] What is absent from their quotation however is that Derrida would go on to tie this institution to a notion of 'democracy to come' – 'the experience of a promise engaged, that is always an endless promise'. Furthermore, prompted by Attridge, Derrida defines his interest in certain literary texts: those that turn back 'on the literary institution'. That is, those that perform 'a thinking about their own possibility'.[29]

This, we argue, is at the heart of *Mason & Dixon*. An ever-present threat that one's right to speak will be revoked by sovereignty. However, it does not stop there. It is also a question of sovereignty over oneself, which arises when we fear we may be written by some other hand. It is a question of sovereignty that arises over an uncertain border between Maryland and Pennsylvania. It is a question of respect for the sovereignty (and display of

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[28] Robert Eaglestone with Daniel O'Gorman, 'Introduction' in *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, p. 6.
Jacques Derrida, '"This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33-75 (pp. 36-8).
[29] Ibid., p. 42.

force) that Mason and Dixon show the Native Americans when they reach the boundary onto their territory. It is a question of the sovereign under whom Mason and Dixon work, despite their status as men of Science. Finally, in the case of Cherrycoke, it is a question of the sovereignty of J. Wade LeSpark, Sultan in his home. Should Cherrycoke's tale fail to keep the peace, should it inspire too many thoughts of 'Juvenile Rampage', then 'Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him, where waits the Winter's Block and blade'. The truest Edenic space that *Mason & Dixon* depicts, may well be the LeSpark household, in which Cherrycoke is always welcome.

However, faced with such an Edenic space, we are still tempted to put forward the paranoid question: Why does J. Wade LeSpark extend such an invitation to Cherrycoke? Is it so that he may continue to keep 'the children amus'd'? Or is LeSpark, like Scheherazade's Sultan, entranced by Cherrycoke's tales of his humanity? What purpose do Cherrycoke's 'wistful Fictions' serve? Are they merely bedlamite entertainment 'necessary to the childhood of a species', or could they be something more? Does LeSpark recognise something of value? Does he recognise useful prophecy?

Chapter 1 - *Mason & Dixon*'s Postmodernism – History, Irony, Paranoia, and Ideology

> So it seems to me that on occasions when he could and *should* have outdone himself in praise of such a fine knight, he passes them over in silence on purpose; this is a bad and ill-conceived practice, since historians should – indeed must be – accurate, truthful and free from passion, and neither interest nor fear, hate nor friendship, should make them stray from the path of truth, whose mother is history – emulator of time, storehouse of deeds, witness to the past, example and counsel to the present, and caveat for the future.
> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*[30]

The description of *Mason & Dixon* as a metafictional novel playing upon the veracity of its narrator's tale leads to the supposition that it may be classified as what Linda Hutcheon has termed historiographic metafiction. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, referring to novels like John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Hutcheon argues that postmodern works ironically re-represent the style and content of history with the intent of making us aware of the context by which we come to know them. She states this while discussing postmodernisms relation to epistemology and ontology:

> Historiographic metafiction asks both epistemological and ontological questions. How do we know the past (or the present)? What is the ontological status of that past? Of its documents? Of our narratives?[31]

[30] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. by Tom Lathrop (Richmond, London: Alma Classics, 2010), p. 56.
[31] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London, Routledge, 1988), p. 50.

Implicit in the above is an understanding of history as something textual. That is, our relation to the past, understood as a process conditioned by the texts through which we receive it: 'History is not 'the past', but a narrative based on documents and other material created in the past'.[32] In *Mason & Dixon* this is most evident in Ives LeSpark's questioning of the veracity of Cherrycoke's tale:

> There are no *Documents*, Wicks? (*MD*, 393)
>
> "No proof," declares Ives. "No entries for Days, allow'd.– but yet no poof." (*MD*, 695)

This is also made explicit when Cherrycoke narrates Mason's interaction with Samuel Johnson and his biographer James Boswell, in a moment already signalled in the Introduction:

> "I had my Boswell, once," Mason tells Boswell, "Dixon and I. We had a joint Boswell. […] Have you," twirling his Hand in Ellipses,– "you know, ever...had one yourself? If I'm not prying." (*MD*, 747)

Pynchon makes the dubious veracity of his tale explicit. His nested narrator informs us of his intention to *play* with 'Facts' in an epigraph (chosen by Pynchon from Cherrycoke's fictional *Christ and History*):

> "Facts are but the Play-things of lawyers,– Tops and Hoops, forever a-spin– Alas, the Historian may indulge no such idle Rotating. History is not Chronology, for that is left to Lawyers,– nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People. History can as little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as claim the Power of the other,– her Practitioners, to survive, must soon learn the arts of the quidnunc, spy, and Taproom Wit,– that there may ever continue more than one life-line back into a Past we risk, each day, losing our forebears in forever,– not a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All,– rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common." (*MD*, 349)

[32] Ibid., p. 99.

The chapter in question begins with Ives LeSpark arguing that '"you look at the evidence. The testimony. The whole Truth.''' Cherrycoke responds with "On the contrary! It may be the Historian's duty to seek the Truth, yet must he do ev'rything he can, not to tell it."' (*MD*, 349).

This ironic stance is key to Hutcheon's theorization of historiographic metafiction as a form of parody. This distinguishes it from what Fredric Jameson refers to as pastiche in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists.[33]

Reading E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Jameson argues that the historical novel 'can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about that past'.[34] If there is 'any realism here, it is a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of […] slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach'.[35] According to Jameson postmodern culture has defaulted to representing nostalgic images of a past which does not exist, whose styles (themselves projected into the past) are used in pastiche (as simulacrum) in a 'desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past'.[36]

Pynchon is susceptible to such a charge. His work often makes use of pastiche. The diction and style of *Mason & Dixon* are identifiable as an appropriation of the varying styles

[33] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 16.
[34] Ibid., p. 24.
[35] Ibid., p. 24.
[36] Ibid., p. 19.

and dialects of the 18th century mixed with the occasional flourish of 20th-century syntax, diction, and style. It becomes one way of identifying characters in *Mason & Dixon*. Dixon, aside from the content of his speech, is identifiable by his use of 'thah', 'huz' and 'eeeh!' – Pynchon's approximation of an 18th Century Geordie accent. This charge extends to his entire oeuvre. *V.*'s third chapter[37] pulls its Egyptian setting out of a Baedeker Guide, and *The Crying of Lot 49* (aside from its parodic depiction of 1960s America) features Pynchon's own Jacobean Revenge play – *The Courier's Tragedy*. *Against the Day* makes use of the fiction of its time by experimenting with the varying styles and content of dime-novels,[38] and *Mason & Dixon* borrows the conventions of 18th-century Gothic, sentimental, satirical, and picaresque novels.[39] It incorporates *The Ghastly Fop*, a Gothic erotic serial. However, despite his construction of the past through its cultural artifacts, it may be said that Pynchon's ironic edge shifts his work from pastiche to satire and parody. Jameson disagrees:[40] 'Pynchonesque fantasies', despite being 'somehow felt […] to convey the feel of the real past better than any of the "facts" themselves' are 'fabulations […] cheered on a by a whole generation of ideologues'. They are 'a costumed charade and misty revels without consequence and without irrevocability'.[41]

On the other hand, Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction stands outside blind pastiche through irony, which 'enables writers to continue working within particular discourses while managing to contest them'.[42] She argues that while 'postmodern art does not offer what Jameson desires, '"genuine historicity" – that is in his terms, "our social,

[37] Thomas Pynchon, 'In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations', in *V.* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 61-94.
[38] In 'Excessive Candour: Aubade, Poor Dad' for Sci-Fi-Weekly, John Clute breaks down the sections of the novel into four clusters ranging from the style of adventure fiction for boys and Western revenge tales to spy novels – John Clute, *Excessive Candour: Aubade, Poor Dad* (2006) <https://web.archive.org/web/20090420000612/http://www.scifi.com/sfw/books/column/sfw14197.html> [accessed 11th June 2020].
[39] Not to mention the brief use of the epistolary form in Chapter 2, *MD*, 12-13
[40] At least up until the publication of *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*: 1989.
[41] Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 368.
[42] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 25.

historical and existential present and past as referent"' or as ""ultimate objects'" – this is not due to a naïve nostalgia for a non-existent past. It is a contestation of the 'possibility of […] being able to know the "ultimate objects" of the past'. Historiographic metafiction bases itself on a recognition that 'the social, historical, and existential "reality" of the past is a discursive reality when it is being used as the referent of art, and so the only "genuine historicity" becomes that which would openly acknowledge its own discursive, contingent, identity'.[43] Against Jameson (and Terry Eagleton), Hutcheon argues that, rather than enacting a fictional representation of the past out of a sense of nostalgia, historiographic metafiction 'critically confronts the past with the present, and vice versa […] the critique of its irony is double-edged: the past and the present are judged in each other's light'.[44] Rather than 'mimesis', fiction is presented 'as another discourse by which we construct our versions of reality', and both the 'constructions' and the 'need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel'.[45]

In 'Contextualizing the Postmodern: Enunciation and the Revenge of "Parole", Hutcheon clarifies what she means by 'discourse'. Citing Timothy J. Reiss' *The Discourse of Modernism*, Hutcheon argues that 'at any given time or in any given place, one discursive model or theory prevails and thus "provides the conceptual tools that make the majority of human practices meaningful". This dominant, in turn, suppresses 'an equally potent discursive practice, a practice which gradually works to subvert the theory by revealing its inherent contradictions'.[46] Since the seventeenth century the dominant 'theoretical model', according to Hutcheon (reading Reiss), has been 'variously labelled as "positivist", "capitalist", "experimentalist," "historicist" or simply "modern".[47] Alternatively, as 'Reiss

[43] Ibid., p. 24.
[44] Ibid., p. 39.
[45] Ibid., p. 40.
[46] Ibid., p. 74.
[47] Ibid., p. 74.

calls it […] analytico-referential discourse'. In this model, 'the order of language (and other signifying systems)' is coincident with the logical ordering of "reason" and with the structural organization of a world given as exterior to both these orders. Its relation is not taken to be simply one of analogy, but one of identity. Its exemplary statement is cogito-ergo-sum […] Its suppressed practice is that of "the enunciating subject as discursive activity" (42).[48] Therefore, Hutcheon argues, postmodernist fictions re-represent the enunciation subject: As "historiographic" metafiction, they present their texts as part of a larger set of Foucauldian discursive practices (defined as bodies of "anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function"[)]'.[49]

The context of the enunciating subject is made evident in *Mason & Dixon* by Ives' probing of Cherrycoke. However, it is also present in the uncertain relationship between Cherrycoke (the enunciating subject) and J. Wade LeSpark. It is also pertinent to recall that *Mason & Dixon* positions itself in relation to modernity, more specifically, the Enlightenment. Edwin Danson's work on the topic makes this clear. In *Drawing the Line*, as noted earlier, Mason and Dixon are referred to as *men of science* whose work put an end to conflicts which arose out of the uncertain disciplines of Religion and Law. *Mason & Dixon* does not present the duo solely in this manner. While Danson acknowledges that the secularity of late-20th and 21st-century scientific work would be foreign to *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon revels in this disjunction. *Mason & Dixon*'s incorporation of Gothic fiction has been noted. However, Pynchon is willing to incorporate the blatantly supernatural too. Dixon recounts his tutelage under William Emerson, who, amongst other things, teaches him to fly

[48] Ibid., p. 75.
[49] Ibid., p. 81.

by Ley-line. There is also the presence of the Learned English Dog (who comments on the efficacy of his and Cherrycoke's tales). Furthermore, Mason is not only haunted by his late wife, he is also prone to miraculous visions. Cherrycoke interprets Mason falling off his collapsing horse (which Danson notes in *Drawing the Line*),[50] as the equivalent of 'Saul who is also Paul, upon his way to Damascus' – 'it being well known that Horses may detect Spirits invisible to human Sensoria' (*MD*, 408). One may also cite Mason's sighting of Comet C/1769 P1:[51]

> "As to the Comet,– I cannot account for how,– but there came this night, to this boggy Miasmatick place, an exceptional Clarity of the Air,..a sort of optickal Tension among the Stars, that seem'd ever just about to break radiantly thro'… And there. In Leo, bright-man'd, lo, it came. It came ahead. And 'twould be but Prelude to the Finger of Corsica,– which now appear'd, pointing down from Heaven. And the place where it pointed was the place I knew I must journey to, for beneath the Sky-borne Index lay, as once beneath a Star, an Infant that must, again, re-make the World,– and this time 'twas a Sign from Earth, not only from Heaven, showing the way." (*MD*, 726)

This comet was observed by Charles Messier in 1769, a week before the birth of Napoleon - 15th August 1769. Pynchon alludes to the biblical magi and describes Napoleon as a Christ-like figure: 'an Infant that must, again remake the World'. This recalls Cherrycoke's wish for America – 'a third Testament'.

Another example of *Mason & Dixon*'s supernatural phenomena is Dixon's tale of Elves living in a Hollow-Earth. Arguably, this encapsulates the novel's relationship to an Enlightenment perspective. Toward the end of the novel, Dixon recounts a trip he took through a 'great northern Portal, upon the inner Surface of the Earth'. The portal leads to a cavern populated by 'thousands'. In this underground society, Dixon is taken to the local 'Academy of Sciences, and introduc'd to the Fellows'. He asks them if they are what people 'up above' hear about in 'Tales of Gnomes, Elves, smaller folk, who live underground and

[50] Edwin Danson, *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America*, rev. edn. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), p. 121.
[51] Danson, *Drawing The Line*, p. 200.

possess what are, to huz, magic Powers?' (*MD*, 740). The underground community of magical beings is described as an ideal one. They inform Dixon that unlike on the convex surface of the earth, where everyone 'is slightly pointed away from everybody else', in the 'Earth concave, everyone is pointed at everyone else,– ev'rybody's axes converge,– forc'd at least thus to acknowledge one another,– an entirely different set of rules for how to behave' (*MD*, 741). However, 'once the necessary Degrees are measur'd, and the size and weight and shape of the Earth are calculated inescapably at last, all this will vanish' (*MD*, 741).

One may note how this refers back to questions which emerge in Foucault's (and Reiss's) reading of modernity in relation to biopolitics and the modern state. The Elves refer to an alternate way of organising (by lines, borders, and laws) the people of a state to ensure that they are peacefully brought together rather than divided. Notably, it is also marked as fiction. The irony is that this dream, which shares so much in common with Enlightenment teleology, is rendered impossible by the Earth's own mapping by Scientists: It will cease to exist once the dimensions of the Earth are measured. This implies that the state is unmappable, it cannot exist within the boundaries of space or time. Likewise, Mason and Dixon's work displaces the promise of America further Westwards – always over the horizon.

Whether the ironic side to such a dream is explicit in the novel – whether these dreams are presented as useful prophecy, or bedlamite entertainment – is to be determined. To follow through this point, it is wise to move beyond the label of historiographic metafiction. Historical fact is just one of many uncertainties that dominate Pynchon's novels. In *Inherent Vice*, for example, entire days are lost to the protagonist's drug-induced highs. In *Against the Day*, Reef Traverse reads a dime-novel about characters who traverse the same novel he does – 'The Chums of Chance at the Ends of the Earth' – after which his father's

corpse speaks to him.[52] In *Bleeding Edge*, potential evidence of government involvement in the events of 9/11 is lost in an internet-mediated flood of unverifiable information (this may be taken as a metafictional comment on Pynchon's dense novels). Pynchon's poetics may also be aligned with those of Miguel De Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, John Fowles *The Magus*, Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, or Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*. It is indeed invested in an ironic relation to the past; however, the broader perspective must not be lost. Pynchon's novels, like many postmodern novels, probe our ability to distinguish between fact and fiction, or fiction and fiction – the narratives we live by, and how they obscure reality.

As in Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, this problem is intertwined with a mobilization of hermetic desire for knowledge – for that one piece of information (hidden in an infinitely intertextually dense 773-page novel) that will unlock all the novel's secrets. Thomas H. Schaub makes a note of this in *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity*. He argues that Pynchon's work[53] aims 'to create suspicion and paranoia not confident conviction and belief'. Their encyclopaedic nature – 'filled with so much knowledge, and flooded with so many facts and their endless relation' – triggers in the reader a 'hopeful expectation that reading them will result in enlightenment'.[54] This has a political and epistemological purpose: 'On the one hand', Schaub writes, 'the attempt to discern the meaning of facts is the source of meaningful connection and freedom from the machinery of political and social systems that would otherwise persist unnoticed'; on the other, 'such rational discernment is an example of those western traditions of analysis which have created the technological systems that keep men organized but separate and threaten all freedom'.[55] Pynchon's novels engage the reader in the

[52] Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006), pp. 209-218.
[53] At the time of writing Pynchon's latest work would have been *Gravity's Rainbow*.
[54] Thomas H. Schaub, *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 116.
[55] Ibid., p. 117.

same *systemic* reading it critiques, only for unavoidable uncertainties to reveal any conclusion as mere conjecture.[56]

Hidden 'political and social systems' shift our interest back to a further staple of postmodernist fiction which unites hermetic sensibility, and ontological and epistemological uncertainty: conspiracy. We return to *Foucault's Pendulum* and Jameson. Like Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum* mobilizes the theme of a conspiracy by positing a secret society or culprit who has orchestrated the events in the novel into the form of a mystery, or puzzle, which must be solved. In *The Name of the Rose* William of Baskerville and Adso[57] attempt to solve the mystery of a series of murders in a fictional Benedictine monastery.[58] Like Pynchon, Eco bases his work on a staggering amount of historical knowledge, reference, and pastiche. But, at the heart of the matter is the question of conspiracy, or a paranoid belief in one.

Jameson notes this trend in postmodern fiction, particularly its manifestation as '"high-tech paranoia" – in which the circuits and networks of some putative global computer hookup are narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the capacity of the normal reading mind'. According to Jameson, this tendency towards 'conspiracy theory' functions as a 'degraded attempt […] to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system'. '[High]-tech paranoia' is explicit in *Bleeding Edge*, *Gravity's*

[56] Ibid., p. 117.
On this point, it is worth recalling the references to David Meakin's *Hermetic Fiction's: Alchemy and Irony in the Novel* made in footnote 19.
[57] William's name is of course a reference to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. William and Adso are a parody of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.
[58] It is pertinent to note postmodern fiction's debts to the detective novel in this regard. This debt may be traced in Pynchon's work too, mostly explicitly in *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*. However, the epistemological questioning and quest-like structure (leading to the grail which will unlock the novel's secrets) may be applied to most of his work, if not all.

Rainbow, or *The Crying of Lot 49*,[59] or in Tom McCarthy's fiction. However, it also makes its way into *Mason & Dixon*: Benjamin Franklin informs Mason and Dixon of a Sino-Jesuit plot involving 'Observatories, flung as a Web, all over the World it seems'. According to Franklin they form a 'Jesuit Telegraph' system: 'instant Communication," – far reaching and free of error, thanks to giant balloons sent to great Altitudes' (*MD*, 287). The irony is that this is not dissimilar to the work of the *Royal Society*, or the British East India Company.[60] This question feeds into Mason and Dixon's concern over who they are working for:

> "I am not a fucking Jesuit, Mason. If Jesuits are manipulating me, then are we two Punches in a Droll-booth, Friend,– for as certainly would it be the East India Company who keep thee ever in Motion." (*MD*, 73)

However, what is at stake here does not limit itself to just a specific 'high-tech' strand of *Mason & Dixon*. As is evident in the mention of the East India Company, what is at stake is the mapping and colonisation of the world, and the flow of information that develops between the various individual units whose work contributes to this process – like Mason and Dixon. Jameson's conclusion is that the recurring themes of paranoia and conspiracy suggest that it forms part of a postmodern crisis rooted in the subject's inability to locate himself within global multinational capital:

> postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its positions in a mappable external world.[61]

This manifests in an 'aesthetic of cognitive mapping', particularly suited for a novel about an astronomer and surveyor.

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[59] Pynchon's novels prior to *Bleeding Edge* (his latest) deal with an original pre-internet variation of high-tech paranoia, as does Jameson.

[60] This is evident in contemporary literature on the topic of the East India Company, such as in David Ashford's 'John Company: The Act of Incorporation' – Ashford, David, 'John Company: The Act of Incorporation', *Countertext*, 6 (2020), pp. 165-183.

[61] Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p, 43.

Following a discussion on postmodern architecture and the postmodern city, Jameson notes 'a most interesting convergence between the empirical problems studied by Lynch [Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*] in terms of city space and the great Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as "the representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence."'[62] Jameson reminds us that

> the positioning of the individual subject, the experience of daily life, the monadic "point of view" on the world to which we are necessarily, as biological subjects, restricted – is in Althusser's formula implicitly opposed to the realm of abstract knowledge, a realm which as Lacan reminds us, is never positioned or actualized by any concrete subject but rather by that structural void called le sujet supposé (the subject supposed to know), a subject-place of knowledge.[63]

'The Althusserian formula […] designates a gap, a rift, between existential experience and scientific knowledge. Ideology has then the function of somehow inventing a way of articulating those two distinct dimensions with each other'. What is at stake in an 'aesthetic of cognitive mapping' is the inventions of aesthetic means of endowing 'the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'.[64]

Conspiracy and paranoia are a staple of Pynchon. We may recall the height of paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Oedipa Maas – housewife-cum-literary hermeneutic-cum-detective, traces the possibility of the ontologically dubious underground *postal system* the Tristero, only to realise that 'access to the Tristero could be traced back to the Inverarity Estate', [65] her late ex-boyfriend's estate whose executor, 'or she supposed executrix', she's made at the beginning of the novella.[66] Oedipa draws four possible conclusions: This was a 'grandiose practical joke' cooked up by her ex-boyfriend Pierce Inverarity; The Tristero is real; A plot has been mounted against her; or she is imagining such a plot, in which case she

[62] Ibid., p. 51.
[63] Ibid., p. 53.
[64] Ibid., p. 54.
[65] Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 131.
[66] Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, p. 1.

is ‘a nut’.[67] As Pynchon’s novella comes to a close, the detective concludes that she’s either crazy or being manipulated. Alternatively, the Tristero is real. The theme of paranoia, and its epistemological questioning, extends into a worry of being manipulated by some organization. In *Mason & Dixon*, Dixon considers that he and Mason are ‘Tools of others, with no more idea of what they are about, than a Hammer knows of a House’ (*MD*, 699). Ostensibly, they are men of the *Royal Society*; however such an institution is not cleared of paranoid projections. Mason and Dixon are suspicious of their associate Dr. Nevil Maskelyne, who assumes the role of Astronomer Royale while they toil away in America. Despite his post, Maskelyne’s contributions to science are eclipsed by the profile of his brother-in-law – the Major General Robert Clive of the East India Company. The implication is that Maskelyne has not earned his post, but that the *Royal Society* presented it to him for the sake of political connections with another force intent on mapping (and colonising) the new world to the East. Pynchon teases out the possibility that Danson’s men of science are not far removed from the religious and political conflicts he claims they set out to solve. However, one should be careful to distinguish between conspiracy and fact. Cherrycoke, proving self-aware, warns us in his epigraph: ‘The Ascent to Christ is a struggle thro’ one heresy after another’, ‘a prophetic dream [or] communication with a dead person [which Mason experiences]’ are ‘Some few tatters of evidence to wrap our naked spirits against the coldness of a World where Mortality and its Agents may bully their way, wherever they wish to go…’ (*MD*, 511). The conspiracies of *Mason & Dixon* remain as unsubstantiated as Dixon’s Elves.

That being said, *Mason & Dixon* follows *Vineland* as a novel whose critical reception marks a shift in Pynchon’s poetics. As has been noted, Joseph Tabbi and Schaub express dissatisfaction with a nostalgic element that appears to have sated Pynchon’s irony. This is

[67] Ibid., p. 131-2.

corroborated by later readings of *Mason & Dixon* which note that paranoid representations of the world, dominant in his work prior to *Vineland*, have receded. Additionally, they interpret the novel as something beyond postmodern. In her introduction to *The Multiple Worlds of Mason & Dixon: Eighteenth-Century Contexts, Postmodern Observations*, Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds reads *Mason & Dixon* away from a Lukácsian understanding of historical fiction, toward something which may be described as a postmodern novel. However, when Hinds notes its postmodern qualities, they are qualified by something other than that. She describes *Mason & Dixon* as less interested in fictionalizing the past than layering 'a postmodern sensibility onto a near factual eighteenth century, creating something beyond the postmodern'.[68] Here Hinds refers to Dennis Lensing's 'Postmodernism at Sea: The Quest for Longitude in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* and Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*', in which he argues that *Mason & Dixon* exceeds Jameson's understanding of the postmodern by engaging in nostalgia only to 'parody its emptiness' or 'satirize its ineffectuality'.[69] Moreover, Lensing quotes Michael Wood's 'Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*',[70] in which Woods states that despite 'hints of orders behind orders, murky involvements of the Jesuits and the East India Company', 'flickers are only flickers', there is no 'overarching conspiracy, or even the steady suspicion of one [which] unites the unravelled strands of the book'.[71] Woods aids Lensing's argument that, by depicting the mapping of the world, Pynchon's novel performs the cognitive mapping Jameson calls for, without resorting to ideological shortcuts that conceal the presence of global multinational capital. Mason and Dixon emerge as two unwitting subjects of the overarching forces of the world.

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[68] Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'Introduction: The Times of *Mason & Dixon*', in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's Mason & Dixon: Eighteenth-Century Contexts, Postmodern Observations*, ed. by Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 3-24 (p. 13).
[69] Ibid., p. 14.
[70] Michael Wood, 'Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*' in *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), pp. 251-60 (p. 258).
[71] Dennis M. Lensing, 'Postmodernism at Sea: The Quest for Longitude in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* and Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*', p. 258.

Following this point, Hinds classifies *Mason & Dixon* as 'what Linda Hutcheon termed' historiographic metafiction. However, once again, she notes that 'historical metafiction […] does not go as far as to finally parse a book like *Mason & Dixon*', as its historiographic play leads to 'an ethical point quite beyond the usual play of most postmodern fiction'.[72] Here Hinds refers to Frank Palmeri's 'Other than Postmodern? – Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics', in which he reads Dixon's attempt to free slaves as emblematic of a change in postmodernist and post-structuralist discourse. According to Palmeri, it represents a movement away from 'the representation of extreme paranoia, toward a vision of local ethic-political possibilities'.[73] He also refers to the work of Donna Haraway and Peter Singer, and contrasts Pynchon's earlier work in which 'hybrid machine-creatures' were 'associated with control, lack of choice, and death' with *Mason & Dixon*, where 'hybrid forms such as mechanical animals […] take on the attributes of living creatures – intelligence, speech, a sense of justice, even a capacity for love'.[74] Notably, Palmeri refers to Schaub, who provides the opposite reading:

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[72] Hinds., p. 18.

[73] Frank Palmeri, 'Other than Postmodern? – Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics', *Postmodern Culture*, 12(1) (2001) <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.901/12.1palmeri.html> [accessed 24th November 2019], par. 5.

[74] Hinds, p. 19.

'Other than Postmodern? – Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics', par. 36.

We have already made note of the Learned English Dog. However, Palmeri's range of reference extends further. It is also worth noting Vaucanson's Mechanical Duck which, in pursuit of love, transcends beyond machine or animal, becoming something almost angelic. The duck is central to David Thoreen's 'In which "Acts Have Consequences": Ideas of Moral Order in the Qualified Postmodernism of Pynchon's Recent Fiction'. Corroborating Hinds' and Palmeri's point, Thoreen argues that Dixon's attempt is emblematic of an anti-postmodern move by Pynchon. It represents an act of 'cause-effect' in opposition to an 'anti-Newtonian reality' (here he refers to Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle which is commonly invoked as analogous to a postmodern view of the world and Pynchon's poetics). Vaucanson's duck features as at a point in the novel Mason wonders whether ''wise Doctors' will 'one day write History's assessment of the Good resulting from this line, vis-à-vis the not-so-good', the duck swoops in to chastise him:

> You wonder? That's all?" One of the Enigmata of the Invisible World is how a Voice unlocaliz'd may yet act powerfully as a moral Center. 'Tis the Duck speaking, naturally, – or, rather, artificially. "What about 'care'? Don't you care?"

Thoreen reads this as Pynchon signalling towards the possibility of establishing an ethics, or moral code which lies outside the grasp of postmodern doubt – David Thoreen, 'In which "Acts Have Consequences": Ideas of Moral Order in the Qualified Postmodernism of Pynchon's Recent Fiction' in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2003) pp. 49-70.

> In a reading that sees *Mason & Dixon* as both critiquing and participating in processes of subject formation, Thomas H. Schaub suggests that the speaking animals constitute futile attempts to speak outside the ubiquitous shaping effects of ideology.[75]

In 'Plot, Ideology, and Compassion in *Mason & Dixon*', Schaub argues that in 'a futile effort to speak outside [Ideology] Pynchon has created voices of the nonhuman, like Learnèd Dog, who comment on [Pynchon, Cherrycoke' and the Learned English Dogs'] role in defining the subject's humanity'.[76] As has been noted, Schaub critiques *Mason & Dixon* from an Althusserian perspective, arguing that unlike Pynchon's earlier works, in which "concepts such as subjectivity, epistemology, and the creation of history are hitched to plot' in such a way that a reader's attempt to make sense of the plot mirrors the questioning of subjectivity and triggers epistemological doubt',[77] *Mason & Dixon*'s plot is carried by two 'largely unwitting and loveable agents of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason'.[78] As a result, Schaub argues, Mason and Dixon, compassionately rendered by Pynchon, are the 'interpellated subject of plot' who 'practice the formation they produce'.[79] In other words, the agents of the Enlightenment that the novel is critiquing (according to Schaub) are too sympathetic. He argues that 'the novel's use of characterization and its corresponding affective claim on the reader's emotions' is a symptom of Pynchon's lack of 'Althusser's confidence (or delusion) that one may speak outside of ideology': The characterization works to 'sentimentalize the Enlightenment and its projects, evoking sympathy in subtle counterpoint to the books critique of reason'.[80]

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[75] 'Other than Postmodern? – Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics', fn. 28.
[76] Thomas H. Schaub, 'Plot, Ideology, and Compassion in *Mason & Dixon*', in *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon,* ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), pp. 283-296 (p. 290).
[77] Ibid., p. 291.
[78] Ibid., p. 291.
[79] Ibid., p. 292.
[80] Ibid., p. 292.

Schaub frames his critique with a quotation from Pynchon's address in *Slow Learner*. Specifically, Pynchon's characterisation of 'writing fiction', in the face of 'the criminally insane who have enjoyed power since 1945', as somewhere on a 'spectrum of impotence' between 'not thinking about it to going crazy from it'.[81] According to Schaub, *Mason & Dixon*'s place on that spectrum has yet to be determined and his article is an attempt at 'an inquiry into the aesthetic mode of the novel's relation to politics and the power to do something'.[82] Recalling Jameson's characterization of Pynchon's work, Schaub's conclusion is that:

> Pynchon's own awareness of ideological complicity, his position on a "spectrum of impotence," has induced in Pynchon a forgiving pastoralism.[83]

This extends to his critique of the novel's concluding lines, which he characterises as 'full of the expectancy of youth', and reminiscent of Frost's 'The Pasture' and Whitman's 'Song of Myself': 'The result may be termed the genre of the nostalgic (or bourgeois) tragedy'.[84] It extends to the presence or lack of paranoia: 'mild, low-profile suspicions'.[85] It also colours Schaub's interpretation of Dixon's attempt to free slaves. He directs us back to 'Mondaugen's chapter' in *V.* which 'vividly presents the colonial ruthlessness of Von Trotha's 1904 genocide of the Hereros'. He compares it unfavourably to 'Dixon's whipping of a slave driver': 'even the quality of anger has diminished'.[86]

Palmeri and Schaub's disagreement rests on the degree to which they interpret Pynchon as presenting the possibility of acting outside of ideology, and against power. However, they do agree on one thing – there is, in some manner, less paranoia represented in

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[81] Thomas Pynchon, *Slow Learner* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), pp. 18-9.
[82] Schaub, 'Plot, Ideology, and Compassion in *Mason & Dixon*', p. 284.
[83] Ibid., p. 293.
[84] Ibid., p. 295
[85] Ibid., p. 291.
[86] Ibid., pp. 294-5.

Mason & Dixon. In the Introduction it was noted that the argument might be made that *Mason & Dixon* exhibits qualities which come to define contemporary fiction, namely a desire to move beyond the irony, paranoia, and overall cynicism that characterises postmodern poetics.[87] However, there is another angle that may be explored, one which incorporates the faint traces of paranoia *and* reintroduces the sovereign figure of J. Wade LeSpark. In her introduction Hinds quotes Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia*: '"Nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or *has never existed*" [Hinds'

[87] One may also consider a more recent debate amongst critics of Pynchon which centres itself on whether Pynchon is *still* a postmodern author. We have already noted this in Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds's introduction; however we may note its resurgence. In Sascha Pohlmann's introduction to *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives* he opens with 'We may have to stop calling Thomas Pynchon a postmodern writer'. Not because he is not postmodern, but because it has led to 'simplification' and the 'unfortunate and careless inference that whatever Pynchon writes is postmodern by default' – Sascha Pohlmann, 'Introduction: The Complex Text', in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, ed. by Sascha Pöhlmann (New York: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 9-34 (p. 9)

On the other hand, in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*'s introduction to 'Postmodernism', Brian McHale (theorist of Postmodernism and Pynchon scholar) responds to Pohlmann and de Bourcier's 'Reading McHale reading Pynchon, or, Is Pynchon still a postmodernist?' – de Bourcier S. (2014) "Reading McHale reading Pynchon, or, Is Pynchon still a postmodernist?", *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*. 2(2). doi: https://doi.org/10.7766/orbit.v2.2.68. – McHale argues that 'Pynchon and postmodernism were literally *made for each other*, for better or worse': While 'millennial-generation critics have begun to advocate that Pynchon be disentangled from the historical nexus of postmodernism', with an interest in 'newer, fresher topics of critical interest – such as sexuality gender, ecology and the world of objects, spirituality, and ethics', 'it is also important to retain a sense of the historicity of Pynchon's novels: 'They really do belong to the era of Postmodernism, and in fact helped to define the era and its poetics'. McHale argues his point by listing the features he deems postmodern, re-reading them against *Gravity's Rainbow* as a litmus test, and then demonstrating their presence in Pynchon's further oeuvre. *Mason & Dixon* features here as exemplary of the 'postmodern spatial turn' (after Jameson), as it contains a 'staggering variety of alternative, parallel, interstitial and paradoxical spaces' such as Dixon's 'Hollow Earth' and those spaces which "might have been" that Mason and Dixon 'project in to the as-yet uncolonized American West'. It also features as exemplary of an ontological plurality which McHale defined as a feature of postmodernism in *Postmodernist Fictions* – Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fictions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

McHale's argument takes a further turn as he argues that the postmodern moment has not ceased. He reads Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* in which the distinction between New York and the World-Wide-Web slowly fades: 'the inexorable penetration of the World Wide Web into our lives, far from signaling the end of postmodernism, actually represents the continuation of postmodernism by other means – postmodernism *realized*' – Brian McHale, 'Postmodernism', in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. by Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 289-298. This is consistent with his opinion in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* that post-9/11 postmodernism is an acceleration of postmodernist tendencies rather than a movement away from them. Here he refers to Jeffrey Nealon's *Post-Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism* – Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

emphasis]'.[88] This suggestion is fruitful. One may note how this fits into Schaub's critique of *Mason & Dixon*'s ending. Mason's children's wish for an idealised America to *live* in:

> "Since I was ten," said Doc, "I wanted you to take me and Willy to America. I kept hoping, ev'ry Birthday, this would be the year. I knew next time you'd take us."
> "We can get jobs," said William, "save enough to go out where you were,– "
> "Marry and go out where you were," said Doc.
> "The Stars are so close you won't need a Telescope."
> "The Fish jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick."
> "We'll go there. We'll live there."

However, one must note the extent to which this nostalgic pattern repeats itself. Dixon's tale regarding Elves may be interpreted as another dream of (or wish for) an Edenic *home* where 'ev'rybody's axes converge'. Similarly, one may note Mason's strained relationship with his parents, children, and late wife. He must leave home to support them financially – by stargazing (*MD*, 199-206). The same may be said of Dixon, whose life comes to an end amongst family members unverified by available historical record.[89] However, beyond the microscale of home and family, one must consider the historical period. Mason and Dixon's work takes place just after the French and Indian War, in which French colonies, allied with Native Americans, fought British colonies over *land*. The unrest following that war resulted in Pontiac's War, in which Native American tribes banded together to drive British soldiers off their *land*. The unrest following this war lead to the uprising of the Paxton Boys, who massacred Native Americans living within the *borders* of Pennsylvania. We must also note the Atlantic Slave Trade's role in uprooting people from their *land* and selling them into new homes as property. Not to mention the American War of Independence, whose interest lay in establishing a state (or the United States) outside British sovereignty.

[88] Hinds, p. 14.
[89] Danson, *Drawing the Line*, pp. 217-18.

Returning to a microscopic perspective, it also applies to Cherrycoke who resides in J. Wade LeSpark's home. Should Cherrycoke's tale displease LeSpark, or inspire too much 'Juvenile Rampage', then he will be *evicted* into 'Winter's Block and blade' (*MD*, 6-7). In the first chapter of *Mason & Dixon* one notes the presence of a sovereign figure who owns the land and may decide who should reside on it. LeSpark later clarifies that Cherrycoke should not fear being evicted: 'Pray you, setting aside whose Hearth you are ever welcome at, tell me all' (*MD*, 422). However, such a promise, while welcome, only serves to highlight the underlying context at hand: It is within LeSpark's power to do so. LeSpark's promise emerges just as Cherrycoke's tale implies that his class may be described as 'Parasites' (*MD*, 422). Neither Schaub nor Palmeri note this. It does not appear when Schaub describes Cherrycoke, the Learned English Dog, and Pynchon as 'nightly delaying the blades of [their] masters by telling back to them tales of their humanity [and not their parasitism]'). As a result of his interest in the formation of the subject, Schaub reads it as an admission of complicity. However, it is perhaps more appropriate to read it within the context of the frame-tale: Cherrycoke's tale must censor itself, or legitimise J. Wade LeSpark's position within the household. Pynchon (and Cherrycoke) may be offering what their audience wish for – idealised dreams of America as a home. It may be that this is what J. Wade LeSpark wishes him to do – prevent 'Juvenile Rampage'.

This is not Cherrycoke's first encounter with sovereign power. In the first chapter of *Mason & Dixon*, Cherrycoke's nephews refer to him as the 'Family outcast', and he describes himself as a 'nomad Parson'. This *homelessness* is a result of Cherrycoke's exile from Britain due to the 'Crimes of [his] distant Youth': Anonymously leaving 'messages posted publickly' – 'Accounts of Certain crimes [he] had observ'd, committed by the Stronger against the Weaker, – enclosures, eviction, Assize verdicts. Activities of the Military' (*MD*, 9-10). These all involve either the taking of land, or the removal of people from their land and homes, by

those who in some form or another find themselves truly sovereign over it (by *lawful* means, or by military force). With this in mind, it may be argued that while *Mason & Dixon* is a novel about borders that divide people, it is also about that which the lines enclose, and often protect: people's lives. Lives that colonisation, decolonisation (as in the case of Africa), human trafficking (such as the Atlantic Slave Trade), war, and (we cannot forget the Luddites) the Industrial Revolution (which followed the enclosers of the 18th Century) uproot and displace.[90]

Mason & Dixon's theological angle must not be forgotten. If one recalls Dixon's encounter with the Rabbi of Prague, one may extend the metafictional metaphor at work. The lines Mason and Dixon survey are plotted on the lines trailed by the stars they observe (like the Biblical Magi), which, in turn, are the lines of Scripture, and the lines of the law ('As above, so below') (*MD*, 487). Cherrycoke tells us that he is 'back in America' hoping that

> Miracles might yet occur, that God might yet return to Human affairs, that all the wistful Fictions necessary to the childhood of a species might yet come true,…a third testament….. (*MD*, 353)

From this perspective, this may be read as a wish for Judgement day – a wish for the sovereign of sovereigns to return and enact Justice – demarcating those who will reside within the borders of Heaven from those who will be excluded.[91] That being said, Cherrycoke warns against such dreams: 'The Ascent to Christ is a struggle thro' one heresy after another'. *Mason & Dixon*'s representations of idealised homes may be 'tatters of evidence to wrap our

[90] It is worth noting that *Inherent Vice's* plot revolves around a private investigator trailing a missing real-estate developer who *coincidentally*, prior to his disappearance, started to consider philanthropic ends for the land he owned. *Bleeding Edge* has similar concerns, only the 'land' in question is digital space.

[91] Here we may recognise an interesting parallel with the closing passage of *The Crying of Lot 49*: Oedipa's last hope is to sit in on an auction in which one of Tristero's agents *may* appear to bid. The auctioneer spreads 'his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote culture; perhaps to a descending angel' Oedipa settles 'back, to await the crying of lot 49'. The final gamble is to place your faith in some other non-human force – Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, p. 142.

poor naked spirits against the coldness of a World where Mortality and its Agents may bully their way, *wherever they wish to go*…' (*MD,* 511).

Mason & Dixon may be read as a novel littered with dreams of a *promised* homeland – whether it is one projected into the past or future; one left behind, or one lost because of some far-off British King's decree. It must not be forgotten that, regardless of who they are working for, Mason and Dixon are interpreting, surveying, mapping, and instantiating the decrees of a British sovereign for the *proprietors* of Pennsylvania and Maryland. Mason and Dixon brought peace to those threatened by Cresap's War. However, *Mason & Dixon*'s concern is of a larger scale, it extends from the individual actions of Mason and Dixon, to the beginning of global multinational capital – often kickstarted by the seizure of land, the surveying and mapping of trade routes, and big dreams.

Following Jameson, we may doubt the presence of a singular sovereign figure puppeteering the movement of capital from the shadows. It is too much of a clichéd postmodern move. However, J. Wade LeSpark's importance should not be forgotten, he represents those whose words have the weight to translate into boundaries both physical and legal. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon provides a pertinent quote from Michel Foucault:

> who is speaking? Who is accorded the right to use language in a particular way? From what institutional sites do we construct our discourses? From what does discourse derive its legitimating authority? From what position do we speak – as producers or interpreters?'.[92]

Pynchon may be said to ask a more conspiratorial question: who benefits from our speaking? After all, Cherrycoke is welcome in J. Wade LeSpark's home 'for as long as he can keep the children amus'd'. However, 'too much evidence of Juvenile Rampage at the wrong moment,

[92] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, p. 84.

however, and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him, where waits the Winter's Block and blade' (*MD,* 6-7). One may wish to ask Cherrycoke why it is the 'Historian's duty to seek the Truth' yet do 'ev'rything he can not to tell it'. (*MD,* 349). Must he tell tales for the sake of his country, his countrymen, or his King?

This chapter has attempted to read *Mason & Dixon* as a work of postmodern fiction. However, it has also been noted that it may exceed the boundaries of the postmodern. Traditionally postmodern and Pynchonesque themes – paranoia, conspiracy, and ironic uncertainty – are interpreted as lacking, or diluted in power. It has also been explained how such criticism has re-centred itself on questions related to cognitive mapping, ideology, and ethics. All of this, we claim, may be read in relation to a question of sovereignty, echoing the relationship between Cherrycoke and J. Wade LeSpark. That is, Cherrycoke's tale lies somewhere between pure ideological dream and fact – useful prophecy and bedlamite entertainment – entrancing his audience, or stirring them into 'Juvenile Rampage'. After all, it is these same dreams that spur Mason and Dixon – America, just over the horizon, waiting to be mapped.

Chapter 2 - Mapping and Line – Dreams, Heresies, and the Sovereign Landowner in *Mason and Dixon*

Now you're a good surveyor, Dixon
But I swear you'll make me mad
The West will kill us both
You gullible Geordie lad

You talk of liberty
How can America be free
A Geordie and a baker's boy
In the forest of the Iroquois….

Now hold your head up, Mason
See America lies there
The morning tide has raised
The capes of Delaware

Come up and feel the sun
A new morning is begun
Another day will make it clear
Why your stars should guide us here…
Mark Knopfler, *Sailing to Philadelphia*[93]

In the previous chapter the link between *Mason & Dixon* and a postmodern poetics was expounded. However, it was also noted that *Mason & Dixon* has often been associated with exceeding the category of a postmodern novel, as described by Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, Frank Palmeri, and Daniel M. Lensing. Hinds notes a desire for home (which simply does not exist)[94] emerging within the work. This echoes the opening description of *Mason & Dixon* which focused primarily on the framing narrative – particularly the relationship between

[93] Mark Knopfler, *Mark Knopfler – Sailing to Philadelphia (An Evening With Mark Knopfler, 2009)*, online video recording, YouTube, 22 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtxuWycNgfo> [accessed 26th June 2020].
[94] Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'Introduction: The Times of *Mason & Dixon*', in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's Mason & Dixon: Eighteenth-Century Contexts, Postmodern Observations*, ed. by Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), pp. 3-24 (p. 15).

Wicks Cherrycoke and J. Wade LeSpark – storyteller and sovereign – that echoes the pre-postmodern pre-novel frame of Scheherazade and the sovereign she must appease with her tales. Lensing, on the other hand, argues that, due to the recurring motifs related to the surveying and mapping of the world *Mason & Dixon* achieves what Fredric Jameson would call a functioning relation to the past. That is, 'the recuperation of voices lost to the postmodern historical consciousness', and therefore a fulfilment of Jameson's desire for a movement beyond the postmodern by means of its own practice of pastiche.[95] Additionally, Frank Palmeri reads *Mason & Dixon* as something that starts to abandon a *paranoid* postmodernism, in favour of something closer to a Posthumanist poetics, specifically in its many hybrid characters – such as the Learned English Dog, Vaucanson's Mechanical Duck (see footnote 74 in the previous chapter), and the Elves in Dixon's tale of travelling into a Hollow Earth. Palmeri also argues that Pynchon's interest has shifted towards the representation of 'ethico-political possibilities', rather than 'paranoia about controlling systems of thought and action with a sceptical resistance to paranoia that can range from the wildly anarchic to the bleakly comic' which functions as a 'crucial feature of high postmodernism'.[96] He argues that this is part of an overarching change within postmodern cultures and post-structuralist theory. For example, he notes that the change in Pynchon may be interpreted as analogous to Michel Foucault's shift from studying the way in which society produces the subject, toward an interest in the way individuals practice on themselves, which he lays out in 'Technologies of the Self'.[97]

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[95] Dennis M. Lensing, 'Postmodernism at Sea: The Quest for Longitude in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* and Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*' in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's Mason & Dixon: Eighteenth-Century Contexts, Postmodern Observations*, ed. by Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2005), pp. 125-143 (p. 141).

[96] Frank Palmeri, 'Other than Postmodern? – Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics', *Postmodern Culture*, 12(1) (2001), par. 5 <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.901/12.1palmeri.html> [accessed 24th November 2019].

[97] Ibid., par. 4-5.

Both Lensing and Palmeri view Pynchon moving away from paranoia, and ascribe a great deal of importance to Dixon, particularly his attempt to free slaves, which they see as a fulfilment of *Mason & Dixon*'s more optimistic poetics. They provide an interesting parallel to Thomas H. Schaub and Joseph Tabbi's critique of *Mason & Dixon* and *Vineland* (respectively), without attributing to it the malaise of a safe bourgeois irony – declawed of its cutting edge. Lensing refers to Michael Woods's 'Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*', in which he notes that there are 'hints of orders behind orders, murky involvements of the Jesuits and the East India Company'; but 'flickers are only flickers', there is no 'overarching conspiracy, or even the steady suspicion of one [which] unites the unravelled strands of this book'.[98] Wood's quotation allows Lensing to further describe how *Mason & Dixon* moves away from representing a paranoid cognitive mapping (which is in turn exposed as untenable), towards a cognitive mapping which does not stabilise itself ideologically. He argues that this is accomplished through Pynchon's poetic use of the historical mapping of the world, which he aligns with capital's conquest of the world. Therefore, while there is no grand conspiracy, the widespread exploitation for the purpose of capital gain may be taken as the overarching crisis underlying the novel. However, it was noted that this does not comply with the framing of J. Wade LeSpark and Cherrycoke's relationship as one of subject and sovereign: 'whilst in his home yet Sultan enough to convey to the Rev^{d}, tho without ever so stipulating, that, for as long as he can keep the children amus'd, he may remain' a guest (*MD*, 6). What should we make of the sovereign if he is not the central figure in a conspiracy which ties *Mason & Dixon* together?

Furthermore, Lensing's perspective fails to address Schaub's critique of Pynchon's aesthetic choice to represent his protagonists so sympathetically, despite their role as

[98] Dennis M. Lensing, 'Postmodernism at Sea: The Quest for Longitude in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* and Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*', p. 258.

representatives of the Enlightenment reason that the novel, according to Schaub, critiques. This chapter will attempt to recuperate the link between this process of global capital and the sovereign, while integrating Lensing's insight without merely arguing that the ideological (as critiqued by Schaub) is actually an affirmation or vice versa. It will attempt to show how the figure of the sovereign becomes synonymous with the figure of the land-owner, and how both become complicit within, as put by Jameson, 'global multinational capitalism'.

This process may start by noting the various ways in which 'ideology' emerges in *Mason & Dixon* as the duo progress in their mapping of the West. Or, in Cherrycoke's words, this will begin by noting how

> The Ascent to Christ is a struggle thro' one heresy after another, River-wise up-country into a proliferation of Sects and Sects branching from Sects, unto Deism, faithless pretending to be holy, and beyond,– every away from the Sea, from the Harbor, from all that was serene and certain, into an Interior unmapp'd, a Realm of Doubt, The Nights. The Storms and Beasts. The Falls, the Rapids,…the America of the Soul (*MD*, 511)

It is pertinent to begin by quoting the most frequently quoted section of *Mason & Dixon*:

> "Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?– in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,– serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that may yet be true,– Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe til the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments,– winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair." (*MD*, 345).

What is being reasserted is the importance of *dreams* and *heresies* in *Mason & Dixon*. Specifically, how (in the second quotation) they are projected forwards in time and space. Heresy comes to mean a false mapping of the world, but also the inverse of the dream – a

false mapping of what the future holds – bedlamite entertainment, not useful prophecy. We are proposing that the motif of surveying in the novel applies both to an internal mapping (through the elimination of heresies, as Cherrycoke advises), and the land which is slowly triangulated into 'the Continent'. However, it is essential to note the distinction between the two quotations. In the first, Cherrycoke takes an explicit stance against heresy, which he classifies as a form of delusion that prevents us from seeing the true state of things. The second quote makes use of the word 'dream', which carries a more positive implication. It presents the possibility that it is the reduction of these dreams to 'the bare mortal World that is our *home*, and our Despair', that 'serve[s] the ends of Governments'. This distinction is a core constitutive tension within *Mason & Dixon*: do the 'Possibilities' which lie in the 'subjunctive' appear as fact or fiction once they are demarcated and made 'declarative'? Do our past dreams of the future hold up with the reality of the present? Furthermore, if they are fictive, should we embrace them regardless, or (like Cherrycoke) abandon them and face 'the coldness of a World where Morality and its Agents may bully their way, wherever they wish to go', that is, 'the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair'. This disagreement has already been demonstrated in the two opposing readings of Palmeri and Schaub. Palmeri sees the hybrid-like creatures as a positive indication of ethical possibilities. Schaub sees them as a failure to speak outside ideology. This reading of *Mason & Dixon* privileges Cherrycoke's perspective, although not completely. It will be argued that dreams, projections, and heresies are themselves either tools used by 'governments' to gain power, land, and capital; or a collective, all too human, delusion which leads *power* (and those subject to it) blindly into the possibilities of the 'subjunctive' unknown.

The epigraph taken from Cherrycoke's *Undeliver'd Sermons* strategically marks the opening of Chapter 53 of *Mason & Dixon*. This is the chapter in which we are introduced to the Chinese Captain Zhang, and his arch-nemesis the Jesuit, The Wolf of Jesus, Padre

Zarpazo. This is significant as, in the following chapter, we learn that what we have read on the page of *Mason & Dixon* is an extract from (the fictional) *The Ghastly Fop*, as read by Tenebrae and Ethelmer LeSpark, in a room separate to the main gathering entertained by Cherrycoke: 'And so off they minuet, to become detour'd from the Rev^{d}'s narrative Turnpike onto the Pleasant Track of their own mutual Fascination, by way of the Captive's Tale' (*MD*, 529). On a first reading, the reader is unaware that what is being read is a fictional text (in a fictional text, introduced by an epigraph from a fictional text).[99] This is reinforced when the two separate texts (*The Ghastly Fop* and Cherrycoke's tale) blur into each other as Zhang meets Mason and Dixon. The demarcations between fact and fiction (and fiction and fiction) dissolve. Once again, questions related to metafiction, historical record, dream, heresy, and ideology echo. However, it is not merely this recognition that the reader has been tricked that raises these concerns, it is also the subject matter of the chapters in question.

Chapter 53 begins with the captive-to-be 'in her Kitchen', in the midst of a 'join'd and finish'd life […] perhaps, that Our Lord intended she live' when 'They came for her'. 'Her Lapse', we are told, 'had been to ignore the surprizing Frailness of secular Life'. She had forgotten 'that turns of Fortune in the given World might depend upon Events too far out of her Power'. What 'twig-fall, Prey's escape, unintended insult, might have grown, have multiplied, until there was nowhere else for them to've come for her?' (*MD*, 512). Pynchon appears to imply that reality and (more particularly) the events that led to this woman's capture, are inherently contingent. Furthermore, this occurs despite the *illusion* of security she had built by imagining her secular life 'to be Christian' (*MD*, 512). Faith, as Cherrycoke has told us, is 'a few tatters of evidence' in doubt. It is not enough to protect us from nature's dice-rolls – weighted or not.

[99] At this point it is pertinent to recall Jorge Luis Borges 'Partial Magic in the *Quixote*' – 'these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers, or spectators, can be fictitious' – Jorge Luis Borges, 'Partial Magic in the Quixote', in Labyrinths, ed. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 228-231 (p. 231).

The captive woman's (Eliza's) fate is to be taken to the Jesuits and placed under the care of the Wolf of Jesus. Having come to America, the Wolf of Jesus notes that 'heresies flow like blood in the blood-stream, keeping [Americans] at the work of their Day as Blood might keep others warm' (*MD*, 522). However, unlike Cherrycoke's opposition to 'heresies' and embrace of uncertainty, the Wolf of Jesus proposes a new model for society which seeks to dominate life by enshrining it in rigorous routine, habit, and law:

> "The Model," the Wolf of Jesus addressing a roomful of students, "is Imprisonment. Walls are to be the Future. Unlike those of the Antichrist Chinese, these will follow right Lines. The World grows restless,– Faith is no longer willingly bestow'd upon Authority, either religious or secular. What Pity. If we may not have Love, we will accept Consent,– if we may not obtain Consent, we will build Walls. As a Wall, projected upon the Earth's Surface, becomes a right Line, so shall we find that we may shape, with arrangements of such Lines, all we may need, be it in a Crofter's hut or a great Mother-City,– Rules of Precedence, Routes of Approach, Lines of Sight, Flows of Power,– (*MD*, 522)

It is pertinent to note the way this quotation makes use of the line, both as a border and as the writing of law: 'Rules of Precedence, Routes of Approach, Lines of Sight, Flows of Power'.

Pynchon provides what initially appears to be a counterpoint to Zarpazo by means of his adversary Captain Zhang, who *appears* to appeal to nature's natural boundaries. Having escaped from under Zarpazo's nose with Eliza, Captain Zhang coincidentally crosses paths with Mason and Dixon (inside, outside, or somewhere in relation to *The Ghastly Fop*). Observing their work he exclaims: '"Terrible Feng-Shui here. Worst I ever saw. You two crazy?"' (*MD*, 542). Mason, 'speaking as to a child', attempts to assure him that nobody will 'live directly upon the Visto': '"The object being, that the people shall set their homes to one side or another. That it be a Boundary, nothing more."' This inspires an extreme response in Zhang:

> "Boundary!" The Chinaman begins to pull upon his hair and paw the earth with brocade-slipper'd feet. "Ev'rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature,– coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks,– so honoring the Dragon or Shan within, from which

> Land-Scape ever takes its form. To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-slash, a long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year 'round to see as other than hateful Assault. How can it pass unanswer'd?" (*MD*, 542)

Further demonstrating his distaste for boundaries, Zhang proceeds to go insane. He becomes convinced that 'P. Zarpazo [Padre Zarpazo, The Wolf of Jesus] has penetrated the Camp and only waits to administer that poison'd Stilleto preferr'd by a Jesuit confronting Error' (*MD*, 545). Zhang, convinced that Zarpazo is present in disguise, can't quite distinguish who he is present as: '"It's got to be an axman," the Captain decides. "They come and go with entire freedom. Each possesses a Rifle and a choice of Blades. It could be Mr. Barnes. It could even be Stig'. (*MD*, 545). In this state of uncertainty he descends into a paranoid frame of mind in which he marks every other person as suspicious. This occurs to the extent that his obsession develops into a re-inscription of the discipline he opposes onto himself: He obsesses over Zarpazo and plays his caricature: ''I shall wear black robes,' he declares, '– if El Lobo de Jesus may, why so shall I.' And he does. Spanish phrases increasingly creep into his Conversation, and a small Beard is one day visible upon his chin."' (*MD*, 548). As Louis Menand describes this occurrence in his review of *Mason & Dixon*, *Entropology*: 'Paranoia about fanatics is a kind of fanaticism'.[100]

However, it must be noted that this only *appears* to be a counterpoint to Zarpazo's position. One may note that Zhang's appeal to nature's natural boundaries – 'coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks' – collapses when exposed to the same uncertainty that Eliza felt would be held at bay by imagining her life to be Christian. Both fail to embrace Cherrycoke's ideal of a doubt so extensive as to place its holder in a space beyond heresy and hope in Christ. His appeal to nature is another heresy, or, potentially, an example of what Jameson

[100] Louis Menand, 'Entropology', *The New York Review of Books*, 1997 < https://masondixon.pynchonwiki.com/wiki/index.php?title=Entropology> [accessed 9th April 2020]

(referring back to Althusser and Lacan) would call an ideologically based cognitive mapping: 'The representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence'.[101] Zhang's feng-shui appears as an ideological attempt at mapping the world. It crumbles when it can no longer provide security (or as it is breached by the 'Real'). Zarpazo corroborates this point: His students reproach him for re-introducing 'Metaphysicks' when 'Chinese Feng shui be forbidden'. (*MD*, 523). Zarpazo replies that feng-shui is forbidden 'Because it works' but 'it is too easy. Not earn'd. Too little of the Load is borne by the Practitioner, too much by some Force'. Reliant, like the belief in a 'Christian' life, too much on some external 'Force', it ceases to provide certainty, protection, and stability when it is needed. This is why Zarpazo seeks to return to a theocratic state – in the name of protection against contingency. Furthermore, he frames it as inevitable: "The Christless must understand that their lives are to be spent in Servitude,– if not to us, then to Christians even less Godly,– the Kings, the Enterprisers, the Adventures Charter'd and Piratickal." (*MD*, 524). This may be read as a variation of mapping. It is an attempt to restrict possibility to predictability. More importantly, note how issues regarding 'Government' and sovereignty arise, as the function of mapping and ideology in *Mason & Dixon* is explored.

This link between sovereignty and ideology recurs as one further investigates the way in which *Mason & Dixon* presents the 'subjunctive'. Mason and Dixon's westering comes to an end as they approach the Native American 'Warrior Path', where, respecting the Native American's *sovereignty* over their land, they turn back. As they move toward the 'Warrior path', its place in time and space takes on a fundamentally uncertain quality. It also becomes subject to Mason and Dixon's projection of a Romanticist ideal on that which lies beyond it – the unspoilt nature of Native American land. They approach the 'Warrior Path' with the

[101] Fredric Jameson, 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' in *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 1-54 (p. 51).

'implied Corollary, that this Path is as far West as the Party, the Visto, and the Line, may proceed' (*MD*, 646). However, Hugh Crawford ('accompanying the Indians' and acting as an interpreter for Mason and Dixon) informs them that this limit will come '"Sort of like Death,– you know it's out there ahead, tho' not when, so you'll ever be hoping for one more Day, at least' (*MD*, 646). He advises Mason and Dixon: 'although on paper it may look like only a few short steps from the Warpath to the River Ohio, I beg you both, be most careful,– for Distance is not the same here, nor is Time."' (*MD*, 647). Additionally, the Native Americans start to take on a romanticised way of life: Mason describes observing an 'Indian slip back into the forest' as 'like seeing a bird take wing'. The 'Indian' moves 'vertiginously into an Element' which 'Mason, all dead weight, cannot enter' (*MD*, 647). Like Dixon's Elves living in a Hollow-Earth, this place exists in an uncertain spatio-temporal zone, within which its inhabitants live in a safety and harmony that precludes the necessity of Zarpazo's theocratic state. However, just as the Elves' home will vanish once the Earth is fully mapped, Pynchon proceeds to obliterate this fantasy. We discover – to Zhang's disappointment[102] – that the 'Indians […] for as long as anyone can remember [...] have observ'd Meridian Lines as Boundaries to separate them one from another' (*MD*, 648). It becomes clear that the Native Americans must also use boundaries, not only to demarcate one tribe from another, but also to establish some conditioned peace. Once again, the boundaryless state projected into the future 'subjunctive', or imagined in the present, appears as an impossibility. Unless one chooses to believe in 'Miracles' or 'a third Testament' (*MD*, 353).

At this point the after-effects of the French and Indian War, and Pontiac's War, re-emerge. Mason and Dixon meet Mr. Ice, who ferries them across a river. Mr. Ice 'proceeds to

[102] Stoking the flames of conspiracy Pynchon has the 'Indians' tell Zhang that they 'learn'd it' from the Jesuits. Alternatively, '"Others believe 'twas not the Jesuits, but powerful Strangers, much earlier."' But Zhang declares them to be "The Same" as those 'who for the Term of their Absence are represented by Jesuits, Encyclopaedists, and the Royal Society' (*MD*, 649). That is, we interpret, those who seek to demarcate, define, and put things into order.

tell ev'ry detail of the Massacre that took his family, in the dread days' of the English General Edward Braddock's defeat at the hands of the 'Indians' during the French and Indian War. As he tells his tale, time and space are disturbed: 'Time, whilst he speaks, is abolish'd. The mist from the River halts in its Ascent, the Frogs pause between Croaks, and the peepers in mid-peep. The great black cobbles of the River-bed stir and knock no longer. The Dead are being summon'd. The Ferryman's Grief is immune to Time' (*MD*, 659). While not excusing colonialism, Mr Ice's story makes clear the history of barbarism which has defined this border*line* of history. Memory manifests as that which haunts a border, threatening to erupt into the violence it recalls. This is reinforced once more when Mason and Dixon reach the point at which they must (respecting the Native American's will) stop westering.

As Mason and Dixon approach the 'Interdiction', they halt on a 'difference of opinion': they must decide whether to respect the 'Indians' sovereignty over their border, or, in the name of whoever's duty they are performing, trespass on someone else's land (*MD*, 678). This difference in opinion does not split evenly between Mason's Hamletic melancholy and Dixon's naïve enthusiasm either; they both consider each possibility:

> Mason, stubborn, wishes to go on, believing that with Hugh Crawfford's help, he may negotiate for another ten minutes of Arc (*MD*, 678)
>
> who [Mason and Dixon] at some point exchange Positions, with Dixon now for pushing on, razzle-dazzling their way among the Indians at least as far as Ohio. "Cheer's the ticket. Let them have more than their daily Ration of Spirits. They'll be Sports (*MD*, 679)

The indecision is settled once Mason, 'from the top of Laurel Hill', looks down upon 'the most delightful pleasing View of the Western Plains the Eye can behold",– the Paradise once denied him by the Mills, now denied him by, he supposes, British American Policy ever devious' (*MD* 679-80). Looking down upon a Romantic Paradise, in a moment of Luddite

belief, he projects it back into a dream of an unspoilt Edenic past back *home* in England before the technological 'Mills' stripped work from the hands of men.

Hoping to experience such a paradise, leaving behind their instruments, Mason, 'Gothickally depressive', and Dixon, 'Westeringly manic', cross the border in secrecy. Dixon 'like a Needle forever ninety degrees out', moves ahead alert, while Mason, who 'might as well be riding backwards', continually looks behind in apprehension. Both are 'certain' that 'they are about to meet an abbreviation of Braddock's Fate' (*MD*, 680). They do not. They are however, 'stunn'd by the beauty' of nature, 'they forget, they linger, they overstay all *practickal Time*'. As a result, they are 'surpriz'd by a Party of Indians in elaborate Paint-Work' carrying 'Lancaster Rifles'. 'Catfish', one of the 'Indians', 'slides the Rifle out and holds it up before' Dixon, informing them that he 'took this Rifle' from a 'White man [he had] wish'd to meet for a long time. He was a very bad man. Even White People hated him'. Dixon asks after the owner. In response Catfish presents him with a 'long Lock of fair European Hair so freshly taken' (*MD* 680-1). While not explicitly stated, it is implied that this may be a lock from Lord Lepton's head, a man whose Mason and Dixon have been acquainted with in their travels across America. They neglect to tell the Indians of their acquaintance. However, they do imagine Lepton still *alive*:

> "I expected he yet liv'd, screaming about the Woods, driven to revenge at any price, a Monomaniack with a Hole in the top of his Head,–
> "– looking for that Rifle back," adds Dixon. (*MD*, 681)

What is of note is that this Edenic *promise*, dream, heresy, or ideological projection, which here takes on a romanticised form of nature, is always undercut or deferred. What is represented in its place is ongoing violence, or a place in which sovereignty remains ambiguous – threatening to erupt into a conflict over land. Furthermore, we note a recurring motif of a haunting which afflicts these sites – whether it is 'The Dead […] summon'd' by

Mr. Ice's tale, or the Ghost of Lepton 'looking for that Rifle back'. A circle of revenge, carried by memory, is made explicit. This may be traced back to *Mason & Dixon*'s opening chapter. The period in which Cherrycoke's narration takes place is introduced as follows:

> Christmastide 1786, with the War settl'd and the Nation bickering itself into Fragments, wounds bodily and ghostly, great and small, go aching on, not ev'ry one commemorated,– nor, too often, even recounted (*MD*, 6)

Here we note the unrest left by the American War of Independence. Furthermore, Cherrycoke himself is described in terms of a haunting:

> And now Mason's gone, and the Rev[d] Cherrycoke, who came to town only to pay his Respects, has linger'd, thro' the first descent of cold, the first drawings-in to the Hearth-side, the first Harvest-Season meals appearing upon the next-best Dishes. He had intended to be gone weeks ago, but finds he cannot detach. Each day among his Devoirs is a visit, however brief, to Mason's grave. The Verger has taken to nodding at him. In the middle of the night recently he awoke convinc'd that 'twas he who had been haunting Mason,– that like a shade with a grievance, he expected Mason, but newly arriv'd at Death, to help him with something (*MD*, 8)

Unable to properly mourn Mason, Cherrycoke haunts LeSpark's abode, until, perhaps, he tells the tale of *Mason & Dixon*. At this point one may recall Cherrycoke's *Christ and History*, presented as the epigraph to Chapter 35: 'History is a 'great disorderly Tangle of *Lines*, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common' (*MD*, 349).

On this note it would not be amiss to quote Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History': 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.[103] Walter Benjamin's intent in 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' is to distinguish between 'historicism', 'historical materialism', and a 'historical materialism' corrupted by the 'services of theology' which gives the illusion that it (historical

[103] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 2007), pp. 253-264 (p. 256).

materialism) 'is to win all the time'.[104] Benjamin wishes to undo this debilitating alliance, arguing that what matters is not the future *promise* of a guaranteed ideal, but looking back towards the 'secret between past generations and the present one': 'Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim'.[105] This crypticity is clarified when one considers Benjamin's distaste for historians who attempt to 'relive an era' by means of '[blotting] out everything they know about the later course of history'.[106] Instead, Benjamin directs our attention to the 'barbarism' that has occurred to create, sustain, and transmit the knowledge of such an era. His interest is in those figures whose sacrifices and failed revolutions have been lost to a history written by its victors. It is essential to practice a 'historical materialism' that grasps the past in relation to the present, exposing the dialectical tension between the promise of the past and the reality of the present.

Mason & Dixon's affinities with Benjamin's philosophy of History may already be seen in its affinities with historiographic metafiction. Particularly the exposition of the transmission of history's documents and its context. However, 'historical materialism' *and* the 'services of theology' must also be understood. This may be done by noting the various dialectical tensions that *Mason & Dixon* puts into play. Note the disjunction between the purpose of the Mason-Dixon line,[107] Dixon's attempt to free slaves, and what it has demarcated since the American Civil War – Northern Free States from Southern Slave States. Furthermore, given its publication in 1997, one *must* consider how issues of freedom, slavery, and national borders *remain* despite the *promises* of Governments, Enlightenment Teleology, and the supposed end of history after the fall of the Berlin *Wall*.

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[104] Ibid., p. 253.
[105] Ibid., p. 254.
[106] Ibid., p. 256.
[107] As has been noted, its purpose was to serve as a boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland, putting an end to Cresap's war.

These *promises* are crucial. One may now re-interpret the various hauntings described, and the continual Edenic promise whose fulfilment is continually deferred, never present in the present. This is the issue of 'theology'. Turning his critique on the 'Social Democrats' of his day, Benjamin remarks that the 'working class' has forgotten 'both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than liberated grandchildren'.[108] They have exchanged the weak messianic power from the past with a *promise* of the future. One which *promises* to be fulfilled naturally as a result of progress, not sacrifice, and revolution. This is put more poetically in the closing section of the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History':

> We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.[109]

History may be read as a series of points in which a 'Third Testament' *may* have occurred. In this light, Jeremiah Dixon, hero of *Mason & Dixon*, grasped the disjunction between the promise of America and the slavery which still underlies it. He makes a doomed attempt to free slaves. This is an example of local-ethical action, but it is also an example of a figure whose actions may have been lost to history, giving the illusion that it could not have run another way, that it was all a matter of progress – humanity and history moving along a preconfigured *line*. Appropriating Benjamin's words, Dixon is a figure who grasped the "state of emergency" which is not 'the exception' but 'the rule', and attempted to bring about a 'real state of emergency', which will 'improve our position in the struggle against

[108] Ibid., pp. 258-60.
[109] Ibid., p. 264.

Fascism'.[110] Appropriating Zarpazo's perspective it may be said that Dixon recognised that 'lives are to be spent in Servitude' and made a hopeless attempt at rectifying it.

However, neither Zarpazo's theocratic state, nor Dixon's desire for the slaves' freedom, come to fruition. Refocusing on Lensing, it is pertinent to note what emerges as he attempts to answer his initial question: Why did two prominent authors associated with postmodernism both take an interest in the Line of Longitude; both publishing books which directly (Eco) and indirectly (Pynchon) tackle the subject within the same decade?[111] Looking for an answer, Lensing turns to the last episode of 'America' (the second section of *Mason & Dixon*). As Mason and Dixon reach the final hours of their work in America, Cherrycoke asks us to consider what may have occurred had they continued West past the boundary set by the Native Americans: 'Suppose that Mason and Dixon and their Line cross Ohio after all' (*MD*, 706). Then, following further exploits, they return to Delaware and visit 'the McCleans at Swedesboro' who ask 'what'll yese do now?'. Dixon replies: 'Devise a way, […] to inscribe a Visto upon the Atlantick Sea':

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[110] Benjamin defines 'Fascism' as something that is not a historical exception born out of a specific moment, but an always present possibility.

[111] Lensing also notes Dava Sobel's book *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time*. That 'Genius' would be John Harrison, whose watch offered the most accurate means of keeping time at sea, and thus the most accurate calculation of a vessel's longitude. Charles Mason and Nevil Maskelyne belonged to a school of thought also attempting to solve this problem by charting the movement of the moon. In *Mason & Dixon* a conflicted Maskelyne is presented testing John Harrison's watch, knowing that it invalidates the work he dedicated his life to:

> "It reach'd its Peak in 'sixty-seven. The B. of L. in its Wisdom kept insisting on one trial after another, finally they hung it around my neck,– new in the job, what was I suppos'd to do, say no?– to oversee trials of the Watch at Greenwich, for G-d's sake, for nearly a d—'d Year." Maskelyne had been observ'd glaring at the lock'd case, to which he held the key, apostrophizing the miserable watch within that could render moot all his years' Trooping in the service of Lunars, with more of the substance of his Life than he could healthily afford, stak'd upon what might prove the wrong Side. "Were Honor nought but Honor's Honor kept," some thought they heard, "All Sins might wash away in Tears unwept–"
>
> "Couldn't believe it," reported the room-steward Mr. Gonzago, "like watching Hamlet or something, isn't it? Went on like that for weeks,– he wanted to break in, he didn't want to break in, he spent hours with scraps of paper, elaborating ways to damage the Watch that would never be detected,– he liv'd in this Tension, visible to all, between his conscience and his career." (*MD*, 728-9)

> "A thoughtful enough Arrangement of Anchors and Buoys, Lenses and Lanthorns, forming a perfect Line across the Ocean, all the way from the Delaware Bay to the Spanish Extre-madura,"– with the Solution to the Question of the Longitude thrown in as a sort of Bonus,– as, exactly at ev'ry Degree, might the Sea-Line, as upon a Fiduciary Scale for Navigators, be prominently mark'd, by a taller Beacon, or a differently color'd Lamp. In time, most Ships preferring to sail within sight of these Beacons, the Line shall have widen'd to a Sea-Road of a thousand Leagues, as up and down its Longitude blossom Wharves, Chandleries, Inns, Tobacco-shops, Greengrocers' Stalls, Printers of News, Dens of Vice, Chapels for Repentance, Shops full of Souvenirs and Sweets,– all a Sailor could wish,– indeed, many such will decide to settle here, "Along the Beacons," for good, as a way of coming to rest whilst remaining out at Sea. A good, clean, salt-scour'd old age. Too soon, word will reach the Land-Speculation Industry, and its Bureaus seek Purchase, like some horrible Seaweed, the length of the Beacon Line. Some are estopp'd legally, some are fended directly into the Sea, yet Time being ever upon their Side, they persist, and one Day, in sinister yet pleasing Coral-dy'd cubickal Efflorescence, appears "St. Brendan's Isle," a combination Pleasure-Grounds and Pensioners' Home, with ev'rything an Itinerant come to Rest might ask, Taverns, Music-Halls, Gaming-Rooms, and a Population ever changing of Practitioners of Comfort, to Soul as to Body, uncritickal youngsters from far-off lands where death might almost abide, so ubiquitous is it there, so easily do they tolerate it here. (*MD*, 712-3)

From Lensing's perspective, this is a vision of 'the completion of the cartographic project' which is 'overtly tied to notorious absolute expansion of capital'. It reflects back onto the late twentieth-century's mapping of the world – on paper and by satellite.[112] Not to mention the

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[112] This topic is raised in John Leonard's review of *Mason & Dixon* in which (like Lensing) he notes the sub-plot of the Royal Society's quest to uncover a method of accurately calculating longitude at sea. Mason and Maskelyne, both 'Lunarians', attempt to calculate a reliable method based on the observation of the Moon. However, as *Mason & Dixon* enters its last section, their work is invalidated by John Harrison's Chronometer. Leonard rhetorically asks, 'for whom is the fixing of marine longitudes such an urgent issue?' The answer is 'The British Navy, for one. The British East India Company, for another. The whole colonial enterprise, for a third'. Leonard also makes the link to Franklin's concern with the 'Sino-Jesuit conjunction', and re-reading Franklin's own description of the 'Jesuit Telegraph':

> "Speaking as Postmaster-General," Dr. Franklin will later amplify, back in Philadelphia, "– I see our greatest problem as Time,– never anything, but Time. For any message to reach its recipient, we must reckon in a fix'd delay,– months by ship, days over Land,– whilst via the Jesuit Telegraph, *they* enjoy their d– 'd Marvel of instant Communication," [Pynchon's emphasis]

– John Leonard, '*Mason & Dixon* Review', *The Nation*, 1997 < https://masondixon.pynchonwiki.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Nation_-_John_Leonard> [accessed 9th April].

This concern is also reflected in Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds' own review of *Mason & Dixon*:

> 'the "They" of *Gravity's Rainbow* has reappeared […] even more dispersed, more global and more untraceably in control'.

The "They" are involved in global trade, whose pathways across land and sea are mapped in part by Mason and Dixon, and the work of the Royal Society. We also note the ironic play, typical historiographic metafiction, in this anachronism. Pynchon's work – even when it occupies itself with the eighteenth-century – is inseparable

new World of the Internet, whose promises and colonisation Pynchon dramatizes alongside 9/11 in *Bleeding Edge*. This is corroborated by the emphasis of the passages on 'Land Speculation Industry' (whose interests rely on predicting, and exploiting, the unmapped future). It is also present in the 'Pleasure-Grounds and Pensioner's Home […] Taverns, Music Halls. [and] Gaming Rooms'. According to Lensing, the sea-road is representative of what Frederic Jameson refers to as the 'cultural logic of late – that is, global – capitalism'.[113] Lensing notes that 'capital is penetrating the farthest corners of the world […] the Quest for Longitude, crucial to the visualisation of earth as a whole, suggest itself readily as a topic of concern in the postmodern moment'.[114] This, according to Lensing, explains Eco and Pynchon's interest. To Lensing this question of cartographic mapping turns into a query of cognitive mapping. Turning to Marx and Jameson, he delves into an argument that *Mason & Dixon*'s use of pastiche enables it to transcend the limits of a postmodern view by mapping the rise of 'global multinational capital' from the perspective of its subjects – Mason and Dixon.

However, something else is at work here. This section of the novel takes place only as a once potential possibility – Mason and Dixon did not go beyond Ohio. It forms part of a chapter in which Cherrycoke recounts from *memory* what *may* have happened had Mason and Dixon continued West. In this once potential past-future, the two *itinerants* make their *home* on the sea-road:

> Tis here Mason and Dixon will retire, being after all Plank-Holders of the very Scheme, having written a number of foresighted Stipulations into their Contract with the Line's Proprietor, the transnoctially charter'd "Atlantick Company." Betwixt

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from a concern, critique, and stylistic imitation of such a world enclosing mass media – From the Gothic romance of *The Ghastly Fop*, to *Vineland's* film industry, to the new world of the internet and Dot-com bubble in *Bleeding Edge* – Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'Making the Rounds of History' *Electronic Book Review*, 1996 < http://www.altx.com/ebr/reviews/rev8/r8hinds.htm> [accessed 9th April 2020].

[113] Dennis M. Lensing, 'Postmodernism at Sea: The Quest for Longitude in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* and Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*', p. 138.
[114] Ibid., p. 138.

> themselves, neither feels British enough anymore, nor quite American, for either Side of the Ocean. They are content to reside like Ferrymen or Bridge-keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless Spectacle of Transition. (*MD*, 713)

They take on qualities of hybridity and spectrality (as Stygian ferrymen, like Mr. Ice). This may lead us to believe that they represent or harbour a revolutionary potential to disrupt boundaries. However, one may note three adjacent factors, which do not exclude the revolutionary possibility, but impose on it certain conditions. One, the word 'Spectacle', is an uneasy one. We need only gesture to Guy Debord's *The Society of Spectacle* and recall that this is a place of "Taverns, Music-Halls, Gaming Rooms', and a transit to 'a Population ever changing of Practitioners of Comfort, to Soul as to Body, uncritickal youngsters from far-off lands where death might almost abide, so ubiquitous is it there, so easily do they tolerate it here', to make our point. Two, Mason and Dixon retire here due to 'foresighted Stipulations into their Contract with the Line's Proprietor' the 'Atlantick Company'. The word 'Stipulations' echoes the 'unstipulated' conditions under which J. Wade LeSpark allows Cherrycoke to reside in his home. On this point, the word 'Plank-Holders' (synonymic with Plank Owner) is a 'term used by the United States Navy […] The Origin of the term is the implication that a crew member was around when the ship was being built and commissioned, and therefore has bragging rights to the "ownership" of one of the planks in the main deck'.[115] Depending on the interpretation of having 'bragging rights' to "ownership", Mason and Dixon have either become landlords, or at worst, tenants under the mistaken impression that what they own (by contract) is theirs.

So far we have not gone beyond what Lensing, reading from a Marxist perspective, would have recognised. However, three, the transition into the completion of capital's

[115] 'Plankowner', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 28 September 2019, 01:52 UTC, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Plankowner&oldid=918311684> [accessed 9th April 2020]. 'Plank Owners, Plan Owner Certificates, and Planking', *Naval History and Heritage Command* <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/heritage/customs-and-traditions0/plank-owners.html> [accessed 9th April 2020].

cartographic projects occurs in two stages. The first stage is prior to the 'Land-Speculation Industry':

> – as, exactly at ev'ry Degree, might the Sea-Line, as upon a Fiduciary Scale for Navigators, be prominently mark'd, by a taller Beacon, or a differently color'd Lamp. In time, most Ships preferring to sail within sight of these Beacons, the Line shall have widen'd to a Sea-Road of a thousand Leagues, as up and down its Longitude blossom Wharves, Chandleries, Inns, Tobacco-shops, Greengrocers' Stalls, Printers of News, Dens of Vice, Chapels for Repentance, Shops full of Souvenirs and Sweets,– all a Sailor could wish,– indeed, many such will decide to settle here, "Along the Beacons," for good, as a way of coming to rest whilst remaining out at Sea. A good, clean, salt-scour'd old age (*MD*, 712)

It is true that the pre-'Land Speculation Industry' vision is already mapped 'at ev'ry Degree' and home to 'Dens of Vice', it also has 'Chapels of Repentance' and 'Shops full of Souvenirs and Sweets' – 'all a Sailor could wish […] as a way of coming to rest whilst remaining out at Sea'. However:

> Too soon, word will reach the Land-Speculation Industry, and its Bureaus seek Purchase, like some horrible Seaweed, the length of the Beacon Line. Some are estopp'd legally, some are fended directly into the Sea, yet Time being ever upon their Side, they persist, and one Day, in sinister yet pleasing Coral-dy'd cubickal Efflorescence, appears "St. Brendan's Isle," a combination Pleasure-Grounds and Pensioners' Home (*MD*, 712)

Like 'some horrible Seaweed' an industry whose practice is *speculating* on the 'subjunctive', comes to own this floating plot of land. It is only then that it turns from a representation of an idealised past ('A good clean, salt-scour'd age') to a representation of desire-fuelled capital: "St. Brendan's Isle," a combination Pleasure-Grounds and Pensioners' *Home*'. The dubbing 'St. Brendan's Isle' is important. In *The Legend of St. Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman Versions*,[116] J. S. Mackley notes that St. Brendan's Island 'appeared

[116] J. S. Mackley's study is focused on how narratives surrounding St. Brendan make use of the 'fantastic': the 'gradual introduction of apparently supernatural elements which are initially explained as plausible'. Possible ground for a comparative study alongside *Mason & Dixon* – J.S. Mackley, *The Legend of St. Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 1.

on maps in the Middle Ages', and is the '*Terra repromissionis sanctorum* – the *Promise* Land of the Saints' which St. Brendan (in a variety of popular narratives from the Middle Ages) reaches at the end of his 'journey across the ocean'.[117] It is impossible to ignore the ironic implications of giving such a name to what amounts to a pseudo-historical pre-figuration of a Las Vegas casino. Pynchon takes the telos of St. Brendan's pilgrimage and turns it into an island of bedlamite entertainment, where Mason and Dixon take on the appearance of hybridity and spectrality. They maintain an uncertain ownership of their home, and the island becomes a shrine to a new form of 'subjunctive' dream: gambling. However, it is important to note how these uncertainties do not necessarily upset boundaries, they take place under the servitude of 'Christians even less Godly,– the Kings, the Enterprisers, [and] Adventures Charter'd and Piratickal' (*MD*, 524). Unlike Zarpazo's theocratic state, St. Brendan's Isle embraces spectacle – those heresies which keep us going, despite the ubiquity of death – pseudo-religious spectacle in the name of the new sovereign enterprisers, land-owner, and one future *promise*: profit.

Reading *Mason & Dixon* alongside Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' underscores the degree to which the novel functions as a warning against utopic visions of the future, which have a habit of always being just over the horizon. They both seek to remind us that what is potential will not necessarily be actual, unless it is made so by man. We recall here J. Wade LeSpark's uncertain *promise* which was associated with a Derridean democratic concern. This promise – to always be welcome at LeSpark's 'hearth' (*MD*, 422) – arises in response to Cherrycoke's implication that merchants are comparable to a 'parasite'. This implication arises in a tale told by Cherrycoke and LeSpark, recalling an occasion when LeSpark met Mason and Dixon at a 'Ridotto' hosted by Lord Lepton, one of LeSpark's customers. Visiting 'potential customers' and 'sources of supply' under 'the protection of a

[117] Ibid.

superior Power,– not, in this case, God, but rather, Business', LeSpark finds himself at a party hosted by the slave-owning iron-monger who fled England to escape his *gambling* debt, Lord Lepton (*MD*, 410-11).

The party extends deep into the night, until 'Somewhere beyond the curve of a great staircase, Gongs, each tun'd to a different pitch, are […] bash'd' (*MD*, 420). The guests make speed toward yet another Wing of Castle Lepton': 'no one at the moment has anything but Gaming of one sort or another in mind' (*MD*, 421). Here 'Gaming' refers to gambling:

> Here is a Paradise of Chance, an E-O Wheel big as a roundabout, Lottery Balls in Cages ever a-spin, Billiards and baccarat, Bezique and Games whose Knaves and Queens live, – over Flemish Carpets, among perfect imported Chippendale Gaming-Tables, beneath Chandeliers secretly, cunningly faceted so as to amplify the candle-light within, they might be Children playing in miniature at Men of Enterprise, whose Table is the wide World, lands and seas, and the Sums they wager too often, when the Gaming has halted at last, to be reckon'd in tears… (*MD*, 421)

This is perhaps a glimpse of hope for the aspiring revolutionary: the great enterprisers, land-owners, and sovereign are subject to a bad roll too. However, a quick observation: it is not entirely clear whose tears will be shed. It may very well be that, like Lord Lepton, they may outpace their debt. Alternatively, the ideological promise of unaided, un-won progress, will encapsulate even those who, at *present*, profit.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how *Mason & Dixon* depicts dreams and heresies, particularly as they play into ideology and the attempt of the individual to position himself in relation to a broader context. For example, it was shown that both Eliza and Captain Zhang project a stability onto their subjective position which does not hold up once they are subjected to reality – which in this case was the violence of a kidnapping, or of the threat of a hidden stiletto. Both Cherrycoke and Zarpazo critique a heretical relationship with the world. However, they demonstrate two opposed responses. Cherrycoke accepts a

fundamental contingency that cannot be controlled, whereas Zarpazo dreams of a state so fixed in architecture and law that contingency may be eliminated.

Furthermore, it was also noted how dreams and heresies function relative to a 'subjunctive' promise. Mason and Dixon project a romanticist fantasy of paradise over the horizon into the 'subjunctive' or unmapped space before them. In turn, Pynchon undercuts this romantic vision by having Mason and Dixon find it already demarcated by the Native Americans. It is also important to note how this pattern is mirrored into teleological conceptions of History. Cherrycoke hints at this in the epigraph from *Undeliver'd Sermons* when he expresses a doubt in the return of Christ (and his Justice) as something predictable. Herein lies a link into Walter Benjamin's reading of History and a preference of weak messianism over theological promise.

This all comes to a head with St. Brendan's Isle in which Pynchon recreates the telos of St. Brendan's pilgrimage in the form of a pre-figuration of modern-day Las Vegas. This is where the sovereign emerges, cast as those who speculate and profit off the land they own. This speculation acquires the theme of gaming and gambling, which Pynchon equivocates to the movement of colonisation and capital across the world – dice rolled on *potential* profits or 'tears'.

Then, returning to the frame-tale of *Mason & Dixon*, what is at stake is whether Cherrycoke's tale of Mason and Dixon functions to raise the haunting memories of the past, generating what Benjamin may term a weak messianism that derives its revolutionary force from the failed opportunities of past attempts. Alternatively, it may function to keep J. Wade LeSpark's guests occupied – entranced by the promise of America, just as Lepton's guests, and St. Brendan's Isle's pleasure seekers game away unaware of their role in the machinations of a far greater game – the machinations of capital – which may suddenly end in tears.

Chapter 3 - The Impossibility of Dream and Heresy in *Mason and Dixon* – Ethics and the Tension between Freedom and Home

> The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
> That I was ever born to set it right!
> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I, 5, 186-187.[118]

> I sat upon the shore
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
> Shall I at least set my lands in order?
> T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, V, ll. 424-6.[119]

This chapter will turn to the work of Frank Palmeri, another figure previously referred to as reading something *other* than postmodern in *Mason & Dixon*. As previously noted, Palmeri takes an interest in the posthuman possibilities implied by Pynchon's various hybrid creatures, who 'unlike most of those hybrid machine-creatures who were associated with control, lack of choice, and death in the earlier novels […] exhibit life, wit, and moral intelligence'. These hybrids represent the 'possibility […] of choosing to act ethically in solidarity with others [which] confirms the moderating of the paranoid vision that dominates Pynchon's earlier novels'. This results in Palmeri's emphasis on a turn towards the representation of ethico-political possibilities. Palmeri turns his attention to Mason and Dixon and notes their 'local ethical action', which does not 'proceed as far as [Michel] Foucault would want in dismantling the humanist subject', but moves 'in the same direction by

[118] Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare, Revised edn. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), I, 5, 186-187.
[119] Eliot, T.S., 'The Wasteland', in *T.S. Eliot Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), V, ll. 424-6.

challenging rather than embracing the oppressive systems of their time'.[120] Palmeri is also aware of Thomas H. Schaub's reading of *Mason & Dixon*. He places himself in opposition to Schaub's claim that the hybrids of *Mason & Dixon* fail to break out of the ideological constraint the two protagonists provide:

> In a reading that sees *Mason & Dixon* as both critiquing and participating in processes of subject formation, Thomas H. Schaub suggests that the speaking animals constitute futile attempts to speak outside the ubiquitous shaping effects of ideology.[121]

In the previous chapter, this opposition was touched upon as it was noted that several hybrid-like creatures (or romanticised descriptions of Native Americans) find themselves associated with a projection into the future or the unmappable. They fit the description of ideological projections or fantasies. This is notable as such projections are routinely undermined. For example, the Native Americans rely on borders (to the disappointment of Zhang), and must defend their borders with violence – as demonstrated by the Indians who greet Mason and Dixon carrying European weaponry. On the other hand, a distinction was made for the category of haunting figures, such as the shade-like Cherrycoke, the dead who rise for Mr. Ice's account, or the imagined haunting of Lepton. All of these appear to represent the potential established borders have to destabilise, because of the recollection of the barbarism that wrote them. That being said, in Cherrycoke's account of Mason and Dixon, they find a state of hybridity at home on 'St. Brendan's Isle', still entirely within the grasp of the sovereignty of their land-owners. Regardless, reading Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', a commitment to a weak 'messianic force' that draws its power from the recollection of past wrongs, and rejects the temptation of 'soothsayers' who offer projections of what the future *may* be, was maintained.

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[120] Frank Palmeri, 'Other than Postmodern? – Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics', *Postmodern Culture*, 12(1) (2001) <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.901/12.1palmeri.html> [accessed 8th April 2020]. Par. 34-6.
[121] Ibid., fn 28.

Assuming that this distinction between the ideological and the spectral quality that destabilises borders holds, and in light of Schaub's scepticism concerning the 'aesthetic mode of the novel's relation to politics and the power *to do something*',[122] what ethical action does the novel demonstrate that is outside the confines of ideology or the sovereign's control? In the previous chapter it was noted that Dixon might be taken as the hero who grasps the disjunction between the promise of America and its reality. He is the one who makes a *doomed* attempt to stop it. The choice of the word doomed is important. What follows will present a case that Palmeri's hopes may be undermined by a closer reading of the context of the ethical action in the novel. It will demonstrate that Dixon's ethical action is inextricable from questions of sovereignty, and, within the context of *Mason & Dixon*, founded upon hopes more akin to bedlamite entertainment than useful prophecy.

It is pertinent to begin with Dixon's ethical action.[123] In Chapter 72 of *Mason & Dixon* Cherrycoke informs us that he is about to tell the tale of 'the moment when Dixon will accost the Slave-Driver in the Street, and originate the family story whose material Focus, for years among the bric-a-brac in Hull, will be the Driver's Lash, that Uncle Jeremiah took away from the Scoundrel' (*MD*, 695). On cue, Ives declares:

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[122] Schaub, Plot, Ideology, and Compassion in *Mason & Dixon*, p. 284.

[123] It is important to note that this interest in Dixon's action is by no means limited to Palmeri and Lensing. In '"*Mason & Dixon*" & the Ampersand", for example, Cohen describes Dixon's actions as 'clearly heroic, and a judgement of the place in which it occurs' – Samuel Cohen, '"Mason & Dixon" & the Ampersand', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 48 (3) (2002), 264-291 (pp. 270-1).

His reading continues on to take the perspective that (recalling the Hollow Earth Elves we previously referred to) *Mason & Dixon* attempts to 'force the realization' that 'we are more concave than convex, more pointed toward each other than away'. That is, that '*Mason & Dixon* insists that history continues, that no telos has been reached, no real war won […] the past is still tied to the future, and utopias imagined and grasped for in the past can still be imagined and grasped for'. Furthermore, he concludes by contrasting Dixon's optimism with the penultimate paranoia of Mason on his deathbed, just before the concluding vision of America's potential, which, unlike Schaub, he gives a more positive spin. – Ibid., pp. 284-8.

A similar occurrence emerges in David Thoreen's 'In Which "Acts Have Consequences": Ideas of Moral Order in the Qualified Postmodernism of Pynchon's Recent Fiction'. Here Thoreen argues that Dixon's attempt is a representative of an anti-postmodern move present in Pynchon's poetics. It represents an act of or 'cause-effect' in opposition to a postmodern 'anti-Newtonian reality' which, far from freeing, represents another form of '"servitude" just as pernicious as systematisation' – David Thoreen, 'In which "Acts Have Consequences": Ideas of Moral Order in the Qualified Postmodernism of Pynchon's Recent Fiction' in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2003) pp. 49-70 (p. 51).

> "No proof," declares Ives. "No entries for Days, allow'd.– but yet no poof." (*MD*, 695)

Cherrycoke defends himself by noting that this story's value derives from its popularity:

> Alas," beams the Revd, "must we place our unqualified Faith in the Implement, as the Tale accompting for its Presence,– these Family stories have been perfected in the hellish Forge of Domestick Recension, generation 'pon generation, till what survives is the pure truth (*MD*, 695)

It has survived due to its *memorability*. One recognises the uncertainty of historical veracity which underlies *Mason & Dixon*, and functions as another of its constituting tensions. However, it is essential to move beyond this point and note a further constitutive tension, which arises in the context of Dixon's act.

Cherrycoke begins describing the 'Driver's Whip' whose purpose is 'purely to express hate with and Hate's Corollary, – to beg for the same denial of Mercy, should, one day, the roles be revers'd. Gambling that they may not be. Or, that they may' (*MD*, 696). Note the language of 'Gambling' and *potential* revolution emerging. Dixon corroborates when confronted by the 'Slave-Driver' in an Inn. The slave-driver is advertising his wares, 'calling them by names more appropriate to Animals one has come to dislike':

> "And so I hope ev'ryone will come down and have a look, dusky children of the Forest, useful in any number o' ways, cook and eat 'em, fuck 'em or throw 'em to the Dogs, as we say in the Trade, imagine Gents, your very own Darky, to order about as you please. You, Sir, in the interesting Hat," (*MD*, 696)

Despite their status as children of the forest, what is at stake is not hybridity but the complete exclusion from the category of humanity. This dehumanisation incenses Dixon, who 'feels the need, strong as thirst, to get up, walk over to the fellow and strike him' (*MD*, 696). However, despite being the 'Sir, in the interesting Hat', he informs the slave-driver that he is '"Not in the Market"', and, upon the slave driver's further insistence, that:

> "Sooner or later," Dixon far too brightly, "– a Slave must kill his Master. It is one of the Laws of Springs." The Herdsman of Humans, who has been staring at Dixon, now looks about for a line of Withdrawal. "Give me Engines, for they have no feelings of injustice,– sometimes they don't exist, either, so I have to invent what I need...," at which point the Enterpriser has edg'd his way as far as the door (*MD*, 697)

Note Pynchon's explicit use of the word 'Enterprisers', and the implicit suggestion of contingency in 'Sooner or later'. One may recall Zarpazo's warning that '"The Christless must understand that their lives are to be spent in Servitude,– if not to us, then to Christians even less Godly,– the Kings, the Enterprisers, the Adventures Charter'd and Piratickal."' (*MD*, 524). Similarly, the sovereign must understand the *potential* of revolution – 'a Slave must kill his Master'.

It appears Dixon's words had an effect. The following day the slave-driver approaches him and complains that Dixon 'fuck'd up [his] Sale'. He proceeds to whip his slaves. Dixon 'stands between the Whip and the Slaves', and 'moving directly, seizes the whip' and turns it on its owner. However, he does not kill him:

> 'Dixon still greatly desires to kill the Driver, cringing there among the Waggon-Ruts. What's a man of Conscience to do? It is frustrating. His Voice breaks. "If I see you again, you are a dead man." He shakes the Whip at him. "And dead you'll be, ere you see again this Instrument of Shame. For it will lie in a Quaker Home, and never more be us'd." (*MD*, 699)

Paradoxically, however, this display of humanity may partly contribute to why one may describe Dixon's attempt as doomed. The second and interrelated reason is that 'A not at all friendly crowd' begins to form:

> With the Driver protesting the usefulness of his Life, the Africans unchain themselves […] A not at all friendly crowd by now having form'd,– "and as we're in the middle of Town, here," the Africans advise him, "Sheriff's men'll be here any moment,– don't worry about us,– some will stay, some'll get away,– but you'd better go, right now." […] "Go back to Philadelphia," someone shouts at Dixon. […] Thrusting the Whip into his red Coat, Dixon steps away, Mason following. At the first brick Prow of a house to block them from View, they take to their Heels, returning by a

> roundabout and not altogether witting route to the Stable where their Horses wait. (*MD*, 699)

Dixon is unable to guarantee their freedom. He only manages to provide them with a *chance*. He himself must flee the scene of his *crime*. This may be more easily interpreted by referring to Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence', specifically the distinction between 'sanctioned force' and 'unsanctioned force', or, alternatively, violence's 'lawmaking function' and 'law-preserving function'.[124] That is, the distinction between violence that justifies itself by means of the law, and violence that justifies itself by appealing to something beyond the law. From a contemporary perspective, Dixon's action is ethical and just, however; from the perspective of the 'not at all friendly crowd' Dixon has broken not only the laws but also the dominant cultural perspective on the humanity of slaves. The significance of this is more easily represented if we move beyond Benjamin to Giorgio Agamben's interpretation and work upon Benjamin. In doing so, the real implications of this crucial moment in the novel, and its relation to the novel's frame – the relationship between our nested narrator Cherrycoke and the sovereign J. Wade LeSpark who may evict him into 'Winter's Block and Blade' – will become evident.

This chapter's concern lies in the intersection between sovereignty, unsanctioned and sanctioned force, and what Benjamin calls the 'state of emergency'. These factors come together in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, in which Agamben reintroduces the Greek distinction between *zoe* and *bios* into modern political thought. As Agamben notes, *zoe* 'expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings', whereas *bios* 'indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or

[124] Walter Benjamin 'Critique of Violence', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (London, Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 236-252 (p. 241).

group'.[125] To be more specific, they denote the distinction between 'private life and political existence, between man as a simple being at *home* in the house and man's political existence in the city'.[126] With this distinction in mind, Agamben takes on Benjamin's call (in 'Critique of Violence') 'to track down the origin of the dogma of the sacredness of life'.[127] That is, to distinguish the myth which gives rise to man as 'sacred' and distinct 'from the life of animals and plants'.[128] This already broaches questions related to the inhumanity of the slaves in the slave-driver's eyes, their humanity in Dixon's, and Palmeri's more optimistic reading of hybrid life in *Mason & Dixon*. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben's interest in *zoe* lies in relation to 'bare life' (life without sacredness) and his clarification of the etymology of *Homo Sacer*, a figure of Roman Law which denotes a person who '*may be killed and yet not sacrificed*'.[129] Agamben traces the etymology of *Sacer* back to it denoting an exclusion from both *ius humanun* and *ius divinum*.[130] That is, referring to someone outside the law, free to be killed, and excluded from the possibility of divine sacrifice. Reading the work of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, Agamben notes that this doubly excluded *Homo Sacer* finds his counterpart in the figure of the sovereign, whose power lies in his ability to 'suspend the law in the state of exception':[131]

> *The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere*. [132]

[125] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, ed. by Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 1.
[126] Ibid., p. 187.
[127] Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 251.
[128] Ibid., p. 251.
Note how this already begins to broach questions related to the inhumanity of the slaves through the slave-driver's eyes, and their humanity in Dixon's.
[129] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 8.
[130] Ibid., p. 82.
[131] Ibid., p. 83.
[132] Ibid., p. 83.

Quoting Schmitt, Agamben defines the 'sovereign nomos' as 'not only a "taking of land"' but also the "taking of the outside," an exception'.[133] This is most easily understood and contextualised in Agamben's reference to Thomas Hobbes. Agamben argues that this exception brought into the inside, is the *physis* (nature) excluded from the Hobbesian state. According to Agamben, reading Hobbes, what is meant by the re-emergence of *physis* within the state is that the sovereign, as a result of being both subject and above the law, may enact violent acts prohibited by the law. This, to uphold the state and its law. In other words, the sovereign may strip his subjects of their rights, placing them back into the context of what Hobbes describes as the state of nature – a 'war of all against all'. These rights are, in turn, those rights the sovereign renders his citizens – through the use of military power – in exchange for his status as the sovereign. The issue at hand is his ability to stand outside his contract or the law – to break his *promise*:

> Sovereignty thus presents itself as an incorporation of the state of nature in society, or, if one prefers, as a state of indistinction between nature and culture, between violence and law, and this very indistinction constitutes specifically sovereign violence.[134]

Agamben turns to Benjamin's distinction between 'constituting power and constituted power ['lawmaking function' and 'law-preserving function] as the relation between the violence that posits the law and the violence that preserves it'.[135] This allows him to turn to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, reinterpreting potentiality and in-potentiality: that, is the sovereign's ability to maintain his potential as sovereign even while he renders it dormant. His sovereign power being that ability to open 'a state of exception' – returning his citizens to a Hobbesian state of nature. It is in this sphere of exception – *the state of exception* – that *Homo Sacer* emerges, stripped of his political rights – as 'bare life'.

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[133] Ibid., p. 19.
[134] Ibid., p. 35.
[135] Ibid., p. 40.

Dixon's encounter with the slave-driver can now be understood anew. Dixon attempts to mobilise his limited constituting power to create a *home* or *state* in which the slaves may live. It is a doomed attempt as he does not possess the constituted power to maintain this state of 'exception'. Furthermore, he also lacks the *inhumanity* to kill the slave-driver. Dixon informs the slave-driver that his whip 'will lie in a Quaker Home, and never more be us'd' (*MD*, 699). He explicitly decides *not* to commit any further violence.

The choice of inhumanity is not inconsequential. This is a Scheherazadean tale. We are 'nightly delaying the blades of [our] Masters by telling back to them tales of their humanity' (*MD*, 22). As has been noted, Agamben argues that the crisis at the heart of modern politics is a result of *zoe* becoming the subject of the law, and therefore included within the realm of *bios*. Reading Hannah Arendt's writing on refugees in 'The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man', Agamben notes that in the declaration of rights following the French revolution, it is 'precisely bare natural life – which is to say, the pure fact of birth – that appears as the source and bearer of its rights':[136]

> "Men," the first article declares, "are born and remain free and equal in rights" (from this perspective, the strictest formulation of all is to be found in La Fayette's project elaborated in July 1789: "Every man is born with inalienable and indefeasible rights").

Reading *Mason & Dixon* it is appropriate to refer to the American War of Independence and the 'Declaration of Independence':[137]

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that *among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.–That to secure these rights, Governments are*

[136] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 126-7.

[137] Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette fought in the American War of Independence, before fighting in the French Revolution. Furthermore, he wrote the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' with Thomas Jefferson's assistance, taking inspiration from the 'Declaration of Independence'. Both documents are influenced by the Philosophy of Natural Rights and Natural Law. In relation to *Mason & Dixon*, it is worth noting that La Fayette was against slavery, but was also *exiled* for supporting the reinstatement of the French monarchy.

> *instituted among Men*, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed – That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness.[138]

As in the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' ('La Fayette's project'), we find a reference to man's 'unalienable Rights' but also the *necessity* of Government to guarantee them. Here we find the constitutive tension present in Dixon's act, and a further constitutive tension of *Mason & Dixon*, which supplants the tension between dream and heresy noted in the previous chapter. Dixon can *free* the slaves, but he cannot guarantee their freedom. To secure the rights of the slaves he has freed, to provide them a *home*, he would have to maintain the violence which first opened this liminal space. In other words, he would have to take on the role of the sovereign, or Government and secure the rights to 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness'.[139] He would have to become like the Native Americans who patrol their borders

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[138] 'Declaration of Independence', *National Archives: America's Founding Documents* < https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript> [accessed 9th April 2020].

[139] This irony is exacerbated by the fact that Pynchon has a drunk Dixon suggest the line 'the pursuit of happiness' to Thomas Jefferson. As they work their way westwards Mason and Dixon on occasion go their separate ways. In one instance they separated as a result of one of their *routine* arguments: Dixon, an ex-Quaker, excommunicated for drinking too heavily, attempts to get the Hamletic Anglican Mason to stop mourning his wife and eat some food (*MD* 391-2). A concern for Mason which backfires into argument: Mason accuses Dixon of wishing for 'an Accomplice in the pursuit of [his] own various fitful Vices' (*MD* 392). As a result of their inability to not argue, they resolve to split up until work on the line is to resume (the uncertainty of the weather permitting). It is at this point that Cherrycoke narrates: "Dixon was first to leave,' the Revd relates […] let us assume that he went first to Annapolis' (*MD* 393). Which triggers Ives to respond: 'How 'assume'? […] There are no *Documents*, Wicks?'. In response Cherrycoke provides a postulate: 'Or let us postulate two Dixons, then, one in an unmoving Stupor throughout,– the other, for Simplicity, assum'd to've ridden […]' (*MD* 393). One of our assumed Dixons finds himself in 'Raleigh's Tavern' just before the 'May session of the Burgesses, the eloquent defiance of Mr. Patrick Henry, and the Virginia Resolutions'. The Virginia Resolutions where a denouncement of the Stamp Act of 1765, and a refutation of Britain's right to tax the American colonies as they had no representation in the British parliament. The Stamp Act of 1765 decreed that material printed in American must be printed on paper produced, and stamped, in London. The intention behind this form of taxation was to recuperate the financial losses suffered as a result of the French-Indian war. The united front resitting Britain's sovereignty presented by the Virginia Resolutions proved to be a key moment leading up to the revolutionary war. Or as Pynchon put it:

> The May Session of the Burgesses, the eloquent defiance of Mr. Patrick Henry, and the Virginia Resolutions,– that Dividing Ridge beyond which all the Streams of American Time must fall unmappable,– lie but weeks ahead.

with European weaponry. However, being a 'man of Conscience', Dixon stops at disarmament and lets the slave-driver live.

Mason & Dixon's true constitutive tension is that which emerges once one realises that 'Liberty' and 'Government' are both opposed and intertwined. To make this clear, let us mirror Dixon's attempt with *Mason & Dixon*'s framing narrative. In the opening chapter, Pynchon nests his narrator as subject to the sovereign J. Wade LeSpark. As noted previously, Cherrycoke is welcome to stay 'for as long as he can keep the children amus'd […] but too much evidence of Juvenile Rampage at the wrong moment, however, and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him, where waits the Winter's Block and Blade' (*MD*, 7). However, LeSpark clarifies the situation. He informs Cherrycoke that he is welcome regardless of the content or outcome of his tale:

> Pray you, setting aside whose Hearth you are ever welcome at, tell me all. (*MD*, 422)

The sovereign LeSpark grants Cherrycoke a *home*. There is no evidence in *Mason & Dixon* that LeSpark will go back on his word. However, LeSpark's power to grant and rescind Cherrycoke's *home* is made explicit. On the other hand, as his guest, Cherrycoke is *free* to leave LeSpark's dominion and set out into 'Winter's Block and Blade'. The beautiful irony of *Mason & Dixon* is made evident when one realises that Cherrycoke's eviction into 'Winter's Block and Blade' is no different from the freedom Dixon wins for the slaves. The only difference is that due to his perceived *humanity* Cherrycoke may find a new home. Due to the

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At this crossroads in history Dixon finds himself in a tavern surrounded by Americans 'standing to toast the King's Confoundment'. 'When it is his own turn to' toast, not wishing to offend his *hosts* nor his *King*, Dixon 'raising his ale can' makes a toast':

> "To the pursuit of Happiness."
>
> "Hey, Sir,– that is excellent!" exclaims a tall red-headed youth at the next table. "And ain't it oh so true.... You don't mind if I use the Phrase sometime?" (*MD* 395)

slaves' perceived *inhumanity*, the only exception to the freedom of 'Winter's Block and Blade' would be death, or, if it proves profitable, their reinstation as a slave-owners property.

How does this constitutive tension between 'Government' (or Sovereignty) and 'Liberty' supplant the constitutive tension between the *promise* of *Mason & Dixon*'s dreams and its heresies? Agamben refers to Carl Schmitt's 'First Global Lines' and demonstrates how the 'state of exception' (in Schmitt's thought) corresponds with 'a zone that is excluded from the law and takes the shape of a "free and juridically empty space" in which the sovereign power no longer knows the limits fixed by the *nomos* as the territorial order'.[140] At this point, Agamben notes that in the '*ius publicum Europaeum*, this zone corresponded to the New World, which was identified with the state of nature in which everything is possible'. He quotes Locke: 'In the beginning, all the world was America'.[141] In Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, such Lockean (or more aptly, Rousseauian) dreams of America correspond with a zone that is excluded from judiciary order as it is *unmapped*. Where Schmitt 'assimilates this zone "beyond the *line*" to the state of exception', Pynchon assimilates this zone with *potential* freedom. However, this unmapped zone is also where the fantasies, dreams, and heresies of *Mason & Dixon* are continually displaced. The *line* in Pynchon is also the horizon. However, it is not simply spatial. It is also temporal and conceptual. We recall Cherrycoke's *Undeliver'd Sermons*:

> The Ascent to Christ is a struggle thro' one heresy after another, River-wise up-country into a proliferation of Sects and Sects branching from Sects, unto Deism, faithless pretending to be holy, and beyond,– every away from the Sea, from the Harbor, from all that was serene and certain, into an Interior unmapp'd, a Realm of Doubt, The Nights. The Storms and Beasts. The Falls, the Rapids,…the America of the Soul.
>
> Doubt is of the essence of Christ. […] The final pure Christ is pure uncertainty. He is become the central subjunctive fact of a Faith, that risks ev'rything upon one bodily

[140] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 36.
[141] Ibid., p. 36.

> Resurrection… Wouldn't something less doubtable have done? a prophetic dream, a communication with a dead person? Some few tatters of evidence to wrap our poor naked spirits against the coldness of a World where Mortality and its Agents may bully their way, wherever they wish to go… (*MD*, 511)

The *promise* of 'the America of the Soul' (Freedom) is a journey into an 'Interior unmapp'd' through 'one heresy after another'. One cannot understate the influence of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* on *Mason & Dixon*. The 'America of the Soul' is the epitome of an idealised dream of the telos of the Enlightenment. However, such dreams are propagated by 'Some few tatters of evidence' which 'wrap our poor naked spirits against the Coldness of a World where Mortality and its Agents may bully their way, wherever the wish to go…'. In *Mason & Dixon* the state of exception is an exception only in the sense that fantasy is the norm. Reality is the Hobbesian 'Coldness of a World' – 'Winter's Block and Blade'.

Our reading of *Mason & Dixon* took its initial force in opposition to Thomas H. Schaub's critique of *Mason & Dixon*'s aesthetics. Particularly the conclusion, which (according to Schaub) appeared to indulge in the most ideological of the American *promise*:

> "The Stars are so close you won't need a Telescope."
> "The Fish jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick."
> "We'll go there. We'll live there."
> "We'll fish there. And you too." (*MD*, 773)

Mason & Dixon closes on these lines. It defers the dream of Freedom *and* Home, without Government, beyond the boundary of the novel. This is *Mason & Dixon*'s unsolvable constitutive tension. How do we interpret it? There is the obvious interpretation that this is a utopian vision; notably one in which technology will be a thing of the past, rather than the future: 'you won't need a Telescope'. In turn, we will no longer need to look to the stars for guidance. Additionally, America presents itself as the home (as Hinds suggested the novel yearns for): 'We'll go there. We'll live there.' Furthermore, implicitly, there is a certain anarchist or romanticist dream of a return to nature. We briefly made a note of Locke and

Rousseau, and Hobbes in contrast. This yearning may also be traced back into various aspects of 1960s counterculture, and, arguably, the revolutionary and anarchistic aspects of Agamben's perspective. However, we must not forget its American roots in the anti-industrialist Transcendentalism of figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau, who advocated living within, and *studying*, unspoilt nature. Not to mention the much more measured Gothic (or Dark Romanticist) vision of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe.[142] Alternatively, a bleaker reading of Pynchon's work may refer to the manifesto (and further writing) of the American domestic terrorist, anti-industrialist, and anarchist, Ted J. Kaczynski.

That being said, something else emerges when we attempt to interpret the line 'The Fish jump into your Arms'. It may be interpreted as a reference to the utopian dream of a return to Eden, prior to the Fall and prior to the original sin which underlies Hobbes' vision of the world in *Leviathan*. On the other hand, we may also argue that it is best understood in relation to Pynchon's fictional representation of Dixon's final years of life. It is often not noted that Dixon comes to spend his last few years in *Mason & Dixon*, having developed gout, fishing near his home in Durham.[143] Living with family he may have had (historical

[142] It worth noting the influence of *Moby Dick* on Pynchon's novels. At the very least one must note the similarity in structure – most explicit in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which V. and the V-2 Rocket function as the ever-elusive white whale – master metaphor and *grail*. This is not to mention the influence of the American frontier and picaresque narrative, some of which finds itself in Melville's work, but also in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. In *Mason & Dixon* the two friends spend much more time travelling on *firm* ground. Although they do get involved in an *unexpected* naval battle.

Mason & Dixon contains a number of allusions to Poe's work. Most explicit is Mason's use of the phrase 'Imps of the Apprehensive' in his letter to Dixon (*MD*, 13) – a reference to Poe's *The Imp of the Perverse'*. As is quickly becoming obvious the intertextuality of *Mason & Dixon* is practically infinite.

[143] Possibly as a result of overinterpretation, one may notice the faintest traces of allusion to Eliot's *The Wasteland* in *Mason & Dixon*. From their visit to a 'clairvoyante'; almost 'death by water' at the hands of the French Navy; The LED, a dog 'that's friend to men'; to the dog, whose 'True Name is one [Mason and Dixon] must guess, who follows them home, dines with them, and in the night as Mason sleeps ''dreaming of America, whose Name is something else, and Maps of which do not exist', whispers into his ear 'The next time you are together, so shall I be, with you."'. (Hollow Men, and The Hanged Man, are of course also a recurring motif in Pynchon) – Noteworthy, but perhaps sporadic at best. Regardless, the themes evoked in these possible allusions reinforce the motifs we have otherwise noted in *Mason & Dixon*.

record is unclear), this fisher king awaits a Percival who may never come. Except, perhaps in the form of his friend Mason who may have visited him (historical record is unclear). However, Mason does not ask him *the* question that would heal him. Instead, he tries to cheer him up.

On one occasion, Dixon, fishing alongside his friend, informs Mason that he was sure that his 'Fate lay in America', and that being 'much more of a Flirtatious Bastard' and 'never one for Duty' he is surprised that he 'would swallow the Anchor and be claim'd' by a life tied to his wife 'Meg' and 'the girls' (*MD*, 754-55). He has dared 'the global waters strange and deep', consorted 'with the highest Men of Science' and 'at the end' returned 'to exactly the same place, us'd,– broken' (*MD*, 755). Having found a *home*, Dixon yearns for *freedom* – 'the America of the Soul'.[144] Mason attempts to cheer him up:

> "You always wanted to be a Soldier, Dixon, but didn't you see, that all our way west and back, aye and the Transits too, were Campaigning, geo-metrick as a Prussian Cavalry advance,– tho' in the service of a Flag whose Colors we never saw ,– and that your behavior in hostile territory was never less than..." […] "… Likely to be mention'd in Dispatches." (*MD*, 755)

Dixon responds positively: '"I'll take it! Gratefully."' Mason continues, expressing a hopeful observation:

> "The only hope, I suppose, is if we haven't come home exactly,– I mean, if it's not the same, not really,– if we might count upon that failure to re-arrive perfectly, to be seen in all the rest of Creation...." (*MD*, 755)

In *Thomas Pynchon; The Art of Allusion*, David Cowart stresses and traces Eliot's influence on Pynchon's work – David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), p. 10.
Would it be a complete exaggeration to call *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon's attempt at *The Wasteland* in novel form? Or his *Four Quartets*?

[144] Note the way in which Dixon's brief recount of his and Mason's adventures frames *Mason & Dixon*'s meandering structure into what may be considered a quest narrative – there (although not quite) and back again, and a desire to go back *there* – chasing 'the America of the Soul'. Naturally, this recalls the allusions to *Moby Dick* and the references T.S. Eliot's poetry (specifically Eliot's own allusions to Arthurian Grail narratives) noted in the previous two footnotes (footnotes 142 and 143).

Dixon is not satisfied: '"Eeh,– I hope thah's not the only hope?"' (*MD* 755).

Why is Dixon not satisfied? The pattern of failing to re-arrive perfectly, which culminates in change 'to be seen in all the rest of creation', may be taken to represent a structural motif present in *Mason & Dixon* noted by Kathryn Hume in her introduction to *Mason & Dixon* for *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*. Hume not only introduces *Mason & Dixon* as a novel but also discusses the way in which one should approach reading *Mason & Dixon*. Surveying *Mason & Dixon*, Hume deconstructs the novel into structuring elements: layers and nodes. Hume notes the various examples of layering in *Mason & Dixon*:

> A fop's Damascus blade evokes comments on the way those famously strong blades were made by twisting and working two sorts of steel together until they become many thin layers. A chef then expounds on lamination as the technique that creates mille-feuille pastries. Other characters invoke gold-beating and "the Leyden Pile, decks of Playing-Cards, Contrivances which, like the Lever or Pulley, quite multiply the apparent forces, often unto disproportionate results." To this list, Cherrycoke adds books (each page a layer) and a printer adds an "unbound Heap of Broadsides" that can be distributed, both phenomena making the accumulation of knowledge or political power possible.[145]

However, Hume's primary interest lies in *Mason & Dixon*'s 'space and time zones', which, she argues, are the layers that construct the novel:[146] *Mason & Dixon* itself is a system of 'layers and networks': 'an in-depth interconnected vision of values and decisions taken around the world at different times that sent America in a particular direction culturally'.[147] From this perspective Mason and Dixon find themselves as part of a larger collection of individual nodes whose interweaving 'local ethical action' forms a pattern 'to be seen in all the rest of Creation…'. In other words, under Hume's interpretation, *Mason & Dixon* is

[145] Hume, p. 61
[146] Ibid., p. 60
[147] Ibid., p. 63.

successful at cognitive mapping, it allows us to conceive of Mason and Dixon's individual actions within the broader context of 'Global Multinational Capital'.

As Hume notes, Pynchon's individual examples are often described as methods of accumulating 'power'.[148] Furthermore, *Mason & Dixon* often associates them with Benjamin Franklin. He made his start as a 'printer'. However, he is better known for the discovery of electricity. *Mason & Dixon* does not present Franklin with his kite and key; instead, it satirises him as a scientifically minded stage performer, fascinated by Leyden Jars,[149] which cause Dixon's hair to spring 'erect each Strand a straight line' (*MD*, 764-5). Leyden Jars are constructed by placing two conductive layers sandwiching an insulative layer in between. They store electricity to be discharged. Effectively they are an early form of the Capacitor. This is, after all, the age of Enlightenment.

It appears that we are distancing ourselves from explaining Dixon's dissatisfaction with Mason's hopeful observation. The relevance of Franklin is made clear by further observation of this pattern: Layers accumulating power. This pattern applies to one of the hybrid creatures noted by Palmeri: Felipe the Surinam Eel. Felipe is introduced into the novel following Cherrycoke and LeSpark's recount of Mason and Dixon at the Lepton Ridotto. After a night of gambling, Mason and Dixon wake up believing that Lepton has 'mark'd the cards. The Dice were of cunningly lacquer'd Iron, the playing-surface magnetickally fiddl'd,– Damme, he owes us twenty pounds,– more!' (*MD*, 423). They resolve to steal one of his many bathtubs. As they make their getaway they encounter Felipe the eel, who comes to occupy the bathtub, and his master 'Professor Voam', 'at present scampering from the King's Authorities'. Felipe's anatomical structure is described as follows:

[148] Ibid., p. 61.
[149] With his assistant 'a gnomelike Stranger nam'd Ingvarr' – his own Igor or Fritz. Benjamin Franklin is depicted as a Gothic mad scientist.

> ‘Disks which are Stack’d lengthwise along most of his over-all length, each Disk being a kind of Electrickal Plate, whose summ’d Effect is to charge his Head in a Positive, as his Tail in a Negative, Sense. ‘Tis necessary then, but to touch the Animal at both ends, to complete the circuit, all allow the Electrickal Fluid to discharge, its Fate thereafter largely contriv’d by the Operator, to *provide* onlookers with a variety of Spectacles Pyrotechnick (*MD*, 432).

The layering of disks functions to generate electrical power, Felipe is a living capacitor. Voam indicates that this repetitive structure also applies to his routine: ‘‘As a condition of Life, Felipe needs Rhythm’:

> “You and I might consider it a repetitive life, routine beyond belief, yet El P. [Felipe] is nothing if not a Cyclickal Creature’ […] Departure and return have been design’d into his life. If he had to live the way we do, worrying about Coach schedules and miss’d appointments […] “believe me, he’d be one unhappy Torpedo. How do I know? I counted. (*MD*, 432).

Palmeri notes that the ‘electric eel […] could kill those who touch him when he is exhibited, but chooses benevolently not to’.[150] The eel is another ‘man of Conscience’. He demonstrates the ethical decision making which Palmeri notes of Pynchon’s hybrids. However, how can we ignore the word ‘exhibited’? After all, Felipe’s relation with Professor Voam is one of master and slave, ‘Operator’ and *machine*, manager and talent – ‘its Fate thereafter largely contriv’d by the Operator, to *provide* onlookers with a variety of *Spectacles* Pyrotechnick’:

> “I can see it’ll take a lot to shock a crowd like this!” cries the Professor. All are pleas’d to hold the same Opinion, and cheer. At a gesture from his Exhibitor, Felipe stands straight up in his Tank and bows right and left. The Professor takes out an Antillean Cigar, bites the end off, produces two Wires, and with a supply of Gum attaches them precisely upon the Animal’s body’. Felipe allows it, though like any train’d beast he will make half hearted lunge now and then toward the busy pair of hands, his Jaws stretching wide enough to allow Spectators to marvel and shiver at the Ranks of Dirk-sharp Teeth (*MD*, 433)

[150] Palmeri, par. 36.

Note how Felipe's 'half hearted lunge', an act of resistance, becomes a part of the show itself. To give the crowd what they want, the 'Professor moves the free ends of the wires slowly together,– suddenly between them leaps a giant Spark […] into which the Operator thrusts one end of his Cigar […] bringing it away at last well a-glow'.[151] In this blinding 'Spark' Mason sees 'an Aperture into another Dispensation of Space, yea and Time, than what Astronomers and Surveyors are us'd to working with' (*MD*, 433).

Felipe serves two purposes: he lights his master's cigarettes; He generates *spectacles* (bedlamite entertainment) of a supernatural realm to his master's profit. We have already encountered spectacles in *Mason & Dixon* – in 'St. Brendan's Isle'. The supernatural or religious promise is inverted into the spectacle of St. Brendan's Isle's 'Pleasure-Grounds'. *Mason & Dixon*'s '*Terra repromissionis sanctorum*' is Lensing's 'completion of the cartographic project' which is 'overtly tied to notorious absolute expansion of capital'.

Dixon expresses dissatisfaction with Mason's hopeful observation as it does not alleviate his fear. It is Dixon who comes to realise that he and Mason may be no more than 'tools of others, with no more idea of what they are about, than a Hammer knows of a House' (*MD*, 609). The 'subjunctive' promise of America, *Mason & Dixon*, and the Enlightenment culminates in 'St Brendan's Isle' with 'ev'rything an Itinerant come to Rest might ask, Taverns, Music-Halls, Gaming-Rooms, and a Population ever changing of Practitioners of Comfort, to Soul as to Body, uncritickal youngsters from far-off lands where death might almost abide, so ubiquitous is it there, so easily do they tolerate it here (*MD*, 712-3):

> Tis here Mason and Dixon will retire, being after all Plank-Holders of the very Scheme, having written a number of foresighted Stipulations into their Contract with the Line's Proprietor, the transnoctially charter'd "Atlantick Company." Betwixt themselves, neither feels British enough anymore, nor quite American, for either Side of the Ocean. They are content to reside like Ferrymen or Bridge-keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless Spectacle of Transition. (*MD*, 713)

[151] Ibid.

As Zarpazo informs us '"The Christless must understand that their lives are to be spent in Servitude,– if not to us, then to Christians even less Godly,– the Kings, the Enterprisers, the Adventures Charter'd and Piratickal." (*MD*, 524). 'What's a man of Conscience to do?' Should we try to intervene as Dixon does? Should we, like Dixon and Cherrycoke, abandon our own well-being, and risk being evicted into 'Winter's Block and Blade', by recounting the suffering of those, not only ghostly, but who remain – despite their corporeality – speechless? Or should we wait, like the Hamletic[152] Mason:

> Say then, that Mason at last came to admire Dixon for his Bravery,– a different sort than they'd show each other years before, on the *Seahorse*, where they'd had no choice. Nor quite the same as they'd both exhibited by the Warrior Path. Here in Maryland, they had a choice at last, and *Dixon chose to act, and Mason not to,– unless he had to,– what each of us wishes he might have the unthinking Grace to do, yet fails to do.* To act for all those of us who have so fail'd. For the Sheep (*MD*, 698). [My emphasis]

This 'unthinking Grace' is, as Zarpazo would put it, too reliant on some external 'Force': 'Too little of the Load is borne by the Practitioner, too much by some Force'. It recalls Cherrycoke's dream of America:

> Miracles might yet occur, that God might yet return to Human affairs, that all the wistful Fictions necessary to the childhood of a species might yet come true,….a third Testament…. (*MD*, 353)

[152] On the topic of *Mason & Dixon* and *Hamlet* it may be pertinent to consult Celie Wallhead's '*Mason & Dixon* and *Hamlet*'. Wallhead focuses on how the intertext opens 'discussions of power, monarchy, conspiracy, potential, comradeship, frustration, failure, love, sadness, death, heritage, and all their interrelated ramifications'. However, she also makes note of the numerous similarities between Mason and Hamlet: 'Mason is endowed with positive and negative characteristics similar to those of the prince: he may not be of the upper classes –indeed, this is one of the bones of contention regarding his professional ambitions– but he is a leader and a man of education and wit, though his metaphysical longings entice him towards madness and suicide, as he is emburdened with a deep melancholy stemming from bereavement, loss of love, the hauntings of a ghost, indecision, even cowardice, and, most acutely, frustrated ambition' – Cecilia Wallhead, '*Mason & Dixon* and *Hamlet*', *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, 2(2) (2014) <https://doi.org/10.7766/orbit.v2.2.57> [accessed 14th June 2020].

A dream that some other 'Force', the Messiah, will return to the world and enact Justice outside the Law.

Whether the potentially prophetic dreams of a third Testament are useful prophecy or no more than the spectacles of bedlamite entertainment – 'Some few tatters of evidence to wrap our naked spirits against the coldness of a World where Mortality and its Agents may bully their way, wherever they wish to go' (*MD*, 511) – is the question *Mason & Dixon* constructs itself around. The inherently unstable simultaneous desire for freedom and home – for Eden – is the dynamo that drives it.

Conclusion

> All this was a long time ago, I remember,
> This set down
> This: were we led all that way for
> Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
> We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
> But that thought they were different; this Birth was
> Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
> We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
> But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
> With an alien people clutching their gods.
> I should be glad of another death.
> T.S. Eliot, *Journey of the Magi*, ll. 32-43[153]

There is a certain folly in attempting to introduce Pynchon. You must adopt one of two strategies: hyper-specificity; or broad strokes, with broad gaps. This work embraced the latter option, with its accompanying risks. It found itself introducing *Mason & Dixon* from a perspective almost four decades its senior – a post-modern countercultural 1960s which felt that the dying novel needed to be revived by referring back (like Borges) to its pre-novel roots in the tales of Scheherazade, Boccaccio, and Chaucer – stories about stories. Chapter One took a step closer to the publication date of *Mason & Dixon* and read it as a postmodern text engaged in an ironic revival of the past as a work of historiographic metafiction, failing to do so entirely as empty pastiche, or succeeding in an attempt at an aesthetic of cognitive mapping – sans ideology. However, in the same chapter it was noted that *Mason & Dixon* is somehow more than a postmodern novel. As Hinds, Lensing, and Palmeri suggest, there is something *other* than postmodern to it. This turned into a question of paranoia, irony (or their absence), sovereignty, and potentially heretical (or delusory) dreams for freedom and home.

[153] Eliot, T.S., 'Journey of the Magi', in *T.S. Eliot Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), ll. 32-43.

Chapter Two took Lensing's perspective and focused on one constitutive tension in the novel – whether the novel's dreams projected into a future 'subjunctive' are good, bad, or just the way things work. We took the cynical path and followed a trail to 'St. Brendan's Isle' where the 'subjunctive' uncertainty of dreams of freedom and home turn into the spectacle of the lived uncertainty of gambling, which plays on a delusory (or heretical) promise of future profit, and potential revolutions. All of this was linked back to the initial setup in *Mason & Dixon* – the relationship between the nested narrator – the Rev[d] Wicks Cherrycoke – and his sovereign landlord brother-in-law J. Wade LeSpark. The third chapter proved more cynical. Following Palmeri's interest in *Mason & Dixon*'s representation of local ethico-political action, it sought to dismantle Dixon's attempt to free slaves. This demonstrated a further constitutive tension – the simultaneous opposition and inter-dependence of freedom and home. Or the simultaneous rejection of, and desire for, borders – such as the Mason-Dixon line. *Mason & Dixon*'s dreams often place themselves beyond such borders – geographically, temporally, and conceptually. This was brought back into the micro-perspective of Cherrycoke and LeSpark, 'St. Brendan's Isle', and finally, a question of action or inaction – Dixon's naivety or Mason's Hamletism. Throughout, the attempt was made never to lose sight of the sovereign – whether they appear as a King, Land-Lord, or Enterpriser.

The issue of *Mason & Dixon*'s postmodernism receded. To conclude, it may be productive to briefly re-open this question of *Mason & Dixon* as something other than postmodern. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*, Brian McHale describes the period between 'the breach of the Berlin Wall' and the events of September 11, 2001,[154] as an 'interregnum'. He notes that with "the breach of the Berlin Wall […] marking the symbolic if not quite the actual end of the Cold War, global postmodern culture seemed, maybe not to

[154] Interestingly, Frank Palmeri's article 'Other than Postmodern' was published that September.

"change tense" exactly, but at least to undergo a decisive reorientation'.[155] This was not a movement 'beyond postmodernism to some kind of "post-postmodernism"'.[156] Rather 'postmodernism seemed, if anything, to come into its own in the nineties' as postmodern 'modes of expression seemed well adapted to capture the decade's volatility and multi-directionality'.[157] It is possible to frame *Mason & Dixon* (published in 1997) in this context. We have described it as a novel brimming with dreams of *potential* futures. Dreams which we have spent several thousand words qualifying. As if Pynchon prophesied it, McHale, referring to the 'interregnum', notes that 'history kept doggedly refusing to end, in Yugoslavia and elsewhere, until it finally came roaring back [like a V-2 rocket] with a vengeance in the terror attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001'.[158] McHale argues that after the events of September 11, 2001, a gradual shift away from the postmodern took place. Seeking to describe it he turns to Jeffrey Nealon's interpretation of postmodern culture in *Post-Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*. He notes that Nealon 'sees twenty-first-century postpostmodernism not as any kind of clean break or reversal of direction, but rather as "an intensification and mutation within postmodernism'.[159] Is this were *Mason & Dixon* comes into its own?

Nealon prefaces his work by stating that he wishes to follow Fredric Jameson in arguing that 'postmodernism is best understood as a historical period of capital development rather than (or, really as the prior ground of) understanding it as a style of artistic practice, or even a kind of zeitgeist'.[160] He states that:

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[155] Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 123.
[156] Ibid., p. 126
[157] Ibid., p. 126.
[158] Ibid., p. 124.
[159] Ibid., p. 177.
[160] Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. x.

> capitalism itself is the thing that's intensified most radically since Jameson began doing his work on postmodernism in the 1970s and 1980's. The "late" capitalism of that era (the tail end of the cold war) has since intensified into the "just-in-time" (which is to say, all-the-time) capitalism of our neoliberal era.[161]

Then, following Jameson, Nealon seeks out his own post-postmodern city to exemplify the logic of "just-in-time" capitalism. He settles on 'Las Vegas'.

Reading Las Vegas, Nealon recalls Jameson's argument that the 'future of capitalism' lies 'in the form of speculation itself': 'making profit by wagering on an anticipated future outcome'.[162] Perfect: we recognise *Mason & Dixon*'s promise of the 'subjunctive', Lord Lepton's gambling hall, or St. Brendan's Isle's 'Land Speculation Industry' and 'Pleasure-Grounds'. However, Nealon is more specific. He quotes Michael Hardt and Antonia Negri's *Empire*:

> Capitalism no longer looks outside but rather inside its domain, and its expansion is thus intensive rather than extensive.[163]

As Nealon describes, 'Capitalism' 'is no longer primarily "extensive" (seeking new markets, new raw materials, untapped resources)'. Having run out of new territories to conquer, 'it has become "intensive."' Turning to the 'Pleasure-Grounds' of 'contemporary' Las Vegas, Nealon notes that it is a place which does not produce 'goods or services' but 'what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call actual and virtual "intensities"':

> Like the booming speculation markets in stocks, futures, and options that fueled its reinvention, Vegas's primary products are two: winners and losers. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, capital of all kinds– phantasmatic, symbolic, monetary–is staked in the hope of producing more.[164]

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[161] Ibid., pp. x-xi. (Regarding Neo-liberalism and (specifically) Pynchon, see Sean Carswell's *Occupy Pynchon: Politics after Gravity's Rainbow.)*
[162] Ibid., p. 26.
[163] Ibid., p. 25.
[164] Ibid., p. 27.

We may recognise *Mason & Dixon*'s '*Terra repromissionis sanctorum',* St. Brendan's Isle, and recall Lensing reading it as a representation of 'the completion of the cartographic project'. It is where the duo come to rest having mapped the world (and finding no promised Elven Hollow-Earth):

> Tis here Mason and Dixon will retire, being after all Plank-Holders of the very Scheme, having written a number of foresighted Stipulations into their Contract with the Line's Proprietor, the transnoctially charter'd "Atlantick Company." Betwixt themselves, neither feels British enough anymore, nor quite American, for either Side of the Ocean. They are content to reside like Ferrymen or Bridge-keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless Spectacle of Transition. (*MD*, 713)

These ceaseless spectacles may be read as Deleuzian 'Intensities' – produced by layers of repetition and difference, page by page, producing *Mason & Dixon*'s *spectacular* visions.

However, unlike our aversion to spectacle in *Mason & Dixon*, Nealon embraces it. True to the Deleuzian undercurrent in his work, he seeks to embrace the deterritorialized flows of capital. He asks how we may move from 'the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion' to a 'post-postmodern hermeneutics of situation',[165] which he defines as a mode of reading 'aimed at offering tools for thinking differently about the present, rather than primarily either exposing or undermining the supposed "truth" of this or that cultural position': a move from '(postmodern) meaning to (post-postmodern) usage'.[166] Nealon invites us to use 'literature's power of the false, its post-postmodern abilities to create other, virtual worlds'.[167] He distinguishes between a weak power of the false, 'the dialectical rival, subverting the other, of philosophical thought',[168] and the '"strong" power of the false in literature […] based on a "decision of nontruth" that nevertheless "produces effects of

[165] Ibid., p. 150.
[166] Ibid., p. 148.
[167] Ibid., p. 158.
[168] Ibid., p. 161.

truth".[169] Drawing on Foucault and Deleuze, Nealon describes the strong power of the false as a mode of reading wherein literature 'takes on a productive function of its own within the dispositive of an "everyday" biopower'.[170] Can *Mason & Dixon* be read this way? Can its *promises* be embraced without irony, evoking the 'more "positive" powers of the false […] outside the purely negative suture of undecidability'?[171]

Thomas Pynchon is adept at generating 'virtual worlds'. And Nealon's vision is not out of place, especially considering todays memetic culture. However, speaking of *today*, there is a blind spot in Nealon's reading. He forgets the individual human subject and his relation to 'Global Multinational Capitalism'. Today, with a continual refugee crisis, and a pandemic that flows deterritorialized through society, we are reminded of how *borders* are deterritorialized *and* reterritorialized. How the human subject of capital's flow may wish to stay *home* for his own good, the market be damned. Pynchon's dreams are conceptual, temporal, *and* spatial – they do not forget that, despite capital's conquering of the world, geopolitics continues to destabilise and remap borders: from the Balkans, the Israel-Palestine conflict, to the Syrian civil war. As McHale put it, 'history kept doggedly refusing to end', beyond *Gravity's Rainbow*'s mapping of the geopolitics of World War II, and the Cold War.[172] Despite its 18th century setting, *Mason & Dixon* remains relevant by representing those dreaming of *refuge* and *freedom* from oppression, and those demarcating it.

In Chapter 35 Cherrycoke begins to recount a tale of surviving a 'Fortnight, Snow-bound' in the 'Indian Queen' inn with 'the Surveyors' (*MD*, 352). Trapped inside, they wait out the fury of 'Winter's Block and Blade' (*MD*, 7) – the 'terrible winter of 'sixty-four-

[169] Ibid., p. 162.
[170] Ibid., p. 162
[171] Ibid., p. 169.
[172] It is pertinent to consult the work of Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger on this subject. Specifically, their *Gravity's Rainbow, Domination and Freedom* and Weisenburger's 'In the Zone: Sovereignty and Bare Life in *Gravity's Rainbow*' – in which he reads *Gravity's Rainbow*'s deterritorialized post-world War II power vacuum as *promising* a romantic, anarchist dream, which collapses back in on itself into the violence of a state of exception.

'sixty-five' (*MD*, 352). Two characters introduced in this section will summarise the constitutive tensions that structure *Mason & Dixon*. Mr Knockwood 'the landlord, a sort of trans-Elemental Uncle Toby, [who] spends hours every day not with Earth Fortifications [unlike *Tristram Shandy's* Uncle Toby], but studying rather the passage of Water across his land, and constructing elaborate works to diver its flow, not to mention his guests' (*MD*, 364). However, Knockwood incessantly informs his guests:

> all that has to happen is some Beaver, miles upstream from here, moves a single Pebble,– suddenly, down here, everything's changed! The creek's a mile away, running through the Horse Barn! Acres of Forest no longer exist! And that Beaver don't even know what he's done!" and he stands glaring, as if this hypothetickal animal were the fault of the patient Listener (*MD*, 364)

In Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Shandy explores language's impotence in relating the entirety of his life's story. His Uncle Toby, on the other hand, attempts to recreate a moment from his past from *memory*, and *documents* left behind. Pynchon's Toby, Mr Knockwood, turns this tension between documentation and reality into the impossibility of mapping a continually shifting landscape. The landlord seeks to appropriate the land for his own purposes, only to be frustrated by its contingencies.

Luckily, Knockwood's Indian Queen proves more resistant to the snow storm, providing a safe haven (or home) from the contingent weather outside. Inside, Cherrycoke re-unites with Mason and Dixon:

> Bickering energetikally, they make their way toward the lights and at length enter the very Inn where your Narrator, lately arriv'd, is already down a Pipe and a Pint,– only to be brought to dumbfounded silence at the Sight of one whom they've not seen since the Cape of Good Hope (*MD*, 363)

This is where the *gnomic* Squire Haligast is introduced:

> for the gnomic Squire, on the rare occasions he speaks, does so with an intensity suggesting, to more than one of the Guests, either *useful Prophecy or Bedlamite Entertainment* (*MD*, 366)

He joins in on the Indian Queen's occupant's discussion on the sandwich:

> "The Lord's long Night of gaming draws to a close," pronounces Squire Haligast, "– the Object in its Journey, comes night, among the excursions of Chance, the sins of ministers, the inscriptions upon walls and Gate-posts,– the birth of the 'Sandwich,' at this exact moment in Christianity,– one of the Noble and Fallen for its Angel! Disks of secular Bread,– enclosing whilst concealing slices of real Flesh, yet a-sop with Blood, under the earthly guise of British Beef, all,– but for the Species of course,– Consubstantiate, thus…the Sandwich, Eucharist of this our Age." (*MD*, 367)

Note the play upon the word 'gaming' and the motif of layering. The 'Lord's' uncertain gaming now draws to a close – approaching certainty in the form of 'the sandwich' – 'Disks of secular Bread […] Eucharist of this our Age'. This is not quite the Justice or Judgement *promised*. Instead it is something with which we may sate our appetite.

Haligast proves prophetic on another occasion. Having joined Mason and Dixon's working party, he intervenes in a conversation on the possibility of meeting a 'Chinaman': ''Pity, really. None of us has seen a Chinaman before":

> "Soon," promises the oracular Squire Haligast, in a Voice so charg'd with passion that immediately all but the most desperate of the Axmen believe him. (*MD*, 474)

The 'Chinaman' Captain Zhang emerges from *The Ghastly Fop* soon after. The ensuing debate on borderlines allows Haligast one last 'ejaculation':

> "Geometry and slaughter!" ejaculates Squire Haligast, "–the future of war, yet ancient as mindless Exactitudes of Alexander's Phalanx." (*MD*, 551)

Borders, War, and History, but also Haligast's style of speech. Could this be read as metafictional commentary on the novel itself? More 'Bedlamite Entertainment' than 'Useful

Prophecy'? Knockwood may be quite pleased to have Haligast as a guest, his interest lies in diverting flows of water, *and* 'his guests' attention:

> constructing elaborate works to divert its flow, not to mention his guests (*MD,* 364)

Is this a self-reflective comment on the novel and its writer? Or, on his nested stand-in Cherrycoke? After all, under LeSpark's reign, Cherrycoke is welcome to stay as long as 'he can keep the children amus'd'. On the other hand, as noted previously 'too much evidence of Juvenile Rampage […] and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him, where waits the Winter's Block and Blade'. As in St. Brendan's Isle, LeSpark's guests may be 'Practitioners of Comfort'.

The novel routinely turns on a suspicion towards itself. It cannot deliver the ending it promises. It can only project it further into the future:

> "The Stars are so close you won't need a Telescope."
> "The Fish jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick."
> "We'll go there. We'll live there."
> "We'll fish there. And you too." (*MD*, 773)

We cannot help but notice how the novel questions its own authority. Like Ives LeSpark, we may lambast the novel:

> "I cannot, damme I cannot I say, energetically enough insist upon the danger of reading these storybooks,– in particular those known as 'Novel' […] Britain's Bedlam even as the French Salpêtrière being populated by an alarming number of young persons, most of them female, seduced across the sill of madness by these irresponsible narratives, that will not distinguish between fact and fancy. How are those frail Minds to judge? Alas, every reader of 'Novel' must be reckoned a soul in peril,– for she hath made a D—l's bargain, squandering her most precious time, for nothing in return but the meanest and shabbiest kinds of mental excitement. 'Romance,' pernicious enough in its day, seems in Comparison wholesome." (*MD*, 350-1)

We fear that the novel's 'Intensities' are nothing more than 'Bedlamite Entertainment' – far more likely to land us in one of Michel Foucault's institutions than save us from them.[173]

Still, as Thoreen, Palmeri, Hinds, and Lensing (and many more) note, *Mason & Dixon* maintains a more positive line. Even if we cannot believe in Elves, Eden, St. Brendan's Isle, or childish fantasies of America, we may believe in Dixon who (allegedly) beat a slave-driver with his own whip, yet, humanely, let him live.

Yet, Dixon's actions turn on a further constitutive tension: a desire for freedom inseparable from government – for a border, for a home. Had he succeeded – had he possessed the sovereign right to maintain the state of exception briefly opened by his actions – what would have come after? Zarpazo's theocratic state? St. Brendan's Isle? Or the romanticist (and sometimes anarchist) dream of a statelessness outside the confines of space and time? This 'subjunctive' dream for the perfect state (or its absence) becomes indistinguishable from Cherrycoke's hope for America:

> Miracles might yet occur, that God might yet return to Human affairs, that all the wistful Fictions necessary to the childhood of a species might yet come true,….a third Testament…. (*MD*, 353)

We find ourselves relying 'too much' on some other 'force' (as Zarpazo would say). We place our only hope in a Messiah who will deliver Justice – by demarcating the saved from the damned. Following this path we will find ourselves within the territory of Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, of which, (and Pynchon) there is more to be said. Yet, one

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[173] On this point it may be worth recalling Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces' in which he describes Heterotopias, specifically those of crisis and deviation: 'those in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' – Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16(1) (1986), pp. 22-27.

Furthermore, one cannot not mention Foucault's first mention of heterotopia in his preface to *The Order of Things*: 'This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.' – Michel Foucault *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. xix.

can only repeat oneself so much (even if one fails to return perfectly). Things must end – we must single up all lines and commit to a destination.

The introduction to this work concluded itself with a promising quotation from Jacques Derrida's interview with Derek Attridge – "This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida'. There we noted Derrida's description of a 'fictive institution which in principle allows one to say everything'.[174] According to Derrida, this institution is 'linked to an authorization to say everything, and doubtless too to the coming about of the modern idea of democracy':

> Not that it depends on a democracy in place, but it seems inseparable to me from what calls forth a democracy, in the most open (and doubtless itself to come) sense of democracy.[175]

That is, a democracy to come, not the 'democracy of a tomorrow, not a future democracy which will be present tomorrow but one whose concept is linked to the to-come [a-venir, cf. avenir, future], to the experience of a promise engaged, that is always an endless promise'.[176]

However, one may find a more promising path to closure by returning to the context of *Mason & Dixon*'s first scene: a Christmastide eve in the home of J. Wade LeSpark. Therefore, it may be most appropriate to refer to Derrida's *Of Hospitality*. Derrida's topic is the incommensurability of the Law and an Ideal *unconditional* Hospitality:

> In giving a right, if I can put it like that, to unconditional hospitality, how can one give place to a determined, limitable, and delimitable – in a word, to a calculable – right or law? How can one give place to a concrete politics and ethics, including a history, evolutions, actual revolutions, advances – in short, a perfectibility? A politics, an ethics, a law that thus answer to new injunctions of unprecedented historical

[174] Jacques Derrida, '"This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33-75 (p. 36).
[175] Ibid., p. 37.
[176] Ibid., p. 38. (Note the influence of Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History')

> situations, that do indeed correspond to them, by changing the laws, by determining citizenship, democracy. International law, etc., in another?[177]

To Derrida (a French-Algerian Jew, a child during the Vichy Government), the questions of hospitality are inseparable from questions of politics, ethics, history, revolutions, boundaries, nationality, and the impossibility of a law which could *promise* to repeatedly, and perfectly, answer 'unprecedented historical situations'. Reading *Mason & Dixon* we have touched upon the same questions, if only briefly and inadequately. We have also touched upon a dream for an ideal law, or form-of-life, that will force us, like the Elves, to 'acknowledge one another': an 'entirely different set of rules for how to behave' that will bring about utopia – the perfectibility of the state, or its absence (*MD*, 741). These dreams may be traced back to their root in questions of hospitality *and* sovereignty. Derrida notes the 'familial despot, the father, the spouse, and the boss, the master of the house who lays down the laws of hospitality'.[178] This is the figure we have attempted to trace in *Mason & Dixon*, most notably as it is represented by J. Wade LeSpark, who, despite the impossibility, attempted to extend an unconditional welcome:

> Pray you, setting aside whose Hearth you are ever welcome at, tell me all (*MD*, 422)

One hopes that this promise ("to come") holds, that Cherrycoke will be welcome even when he does not manage to 'keep the children amus'd' by failing to recount 'the wistful Fictions necessary to the childhood of a species' (*MD*, 361). That is, even when he sets aside useful prophecy and bedlamite entertainment, and reminds us of 'the coldness of a World where Mortality and its Agents may bully their way, wherever they wish to go…' (*MD*, 511).

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[177] Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 147-9.
[178] Ibid., p. 149.

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