

**Discursive Life in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon***

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by

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*As if nature could support but one order of understandings.*

*I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extra-vagant enough,*

*may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience,*

*I desire to speak somewhere without bounds; like a man in a waking moment.*

*--Henry David Thoreau--*

In his *Anatomy of Criticism* Northrop Frye writes that “The culture of the past is not only the memory of mankind, but our own buried life,” and “study of it leads to a recognition scene, a discovery in which we see, not only our past lives, but the total cultural form of our present life” (Frye 346). Thomas Pynchon’s latest historical novel *Mason & Dixon* was certainly conceived in this spirit. Published in 1997, three years before millennial premonitions of the Y2K apocalypse captured the American imagination, the novel focuses upon arguably the very first period of prodigious expectancy in the nation’s history: the American Revolution. The text follows a double temporal perspective that both looks forward to the Revolution from a period of time prior to it and looks backward to it from a position ten years after the event. Thus anticipation and memory--two central modes of experiencing history--are integrated into the novel’s narration. In reflecting upon the historical conditions of the American past, *Mason & Dixon* is very much a comment upon the present day. Yet, implicit throughout the text is a palpable yearning for a better future, invoked in Pynchon’s parodic condemnation of humanity’s past folly. *Mason & Dixon* is by no means a heroic account of national progress through time, but rather a kind of anti-saga, a comedy of human error that presents in its depiction of imperial expansionism, war, slavery, colonization, and land expropriation a brutal catalogue of crimes “committed by the Stronger against the Weaker,” the consequences of which are still resonant in today’s world (MD 7). That the story of Mason and Dixon and their line across America is told

during the Advent season of 1786 by the Reverend Wick's Cherrycoke invokes a potent desire, resonating throughout the text, for some final redemptive denouement, or salvific conclusion to our brutal history and our "bare mortal World." (MD 345).

However, for Pynchon, time is not a story with a beginning, middle, and end. The dichotomy between stories and facts is one of the novel's principal motifs and is manifest in the text's narrative architecture and thematic system. Implicit in this central contrast is the issue of what *is* and what should be, or more precisely, what should *have* been. *Mason & Dixon* is filled with alternative histories and alternative worlds. Brian McHale examines Pynchon's all-pervasive employment of the subjunctive case to posit whole passages of narration that *could have* happened in the world of the novel, but never actually did. This subjunctive "space of wish and desire, of the hypothetical and the counterfactual, of speculation and possibility" is one of the novel's most salient features (McHale, 44). Subjunctive spaces saturate the narrative. Indeed, all of chapter seventy-three speculates on what Mason and Dixon's adventures would have been like had they abandoned their commission and continued the line westward rather than returning east to Philadelphia. Such hypothetical episodes not only foreground the extemporaneous nature of Cherrycoke's story, they also express the unbounded or infinite capacity of the imagined to recreate the actual.

This is not to suggest that in elevating the subjunctive and the imagined, Pynchon is rejecting historiography outright. Many of Mason and Dixon's adventures do correspond to verifiable historical events. The novel is utterly saturated with references to eighteenth century history, compelling the obsessive reader to consult encyclopedias frequently. The story is populated with a host of well known and marginal historical figures like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Johnson and Boswell, David Garrick, and Clive of India, whom Mason and

Dixon encounter on their adventures. Elizabeth Hinds has noted that even the quirky poet Timothy Tox bears striking resemblance to Joel Barthlow, author of the doggerel *Columbiad* (Hinds, 6). One would be hard pressed to find an episode in the text regardless of its apparent absurdity or implausibility that does not have some degree of historical or literary precedent. Formal imitation of documentary evidence like letters, journal entries, field book reports, and unpublished sermons is incorporated into the novel's narrative structure. While the text displays the essential features of traditional historical fiction in its meticulous and accurate description of past events, a host of formal peculiarities call attention to Pynchon's fictional reconstruction of history.

Early in the text-- when Mason and Dixon encounter a talking Norfolk terrier named the Learn'd English Dog, or Fang --it becomes abundantly clear that *Mason & Dixon* is more than a traditional historical fiction. Indeed, the text abounds with all manner of chimerical and bizarre marvels. Pynchon seamlessly incorporates supernatural phenomena into the narrative that are collectively acknowledged by the story's characters as existing in the 'real' world of the novel. Not only dogs, but clocks, yeast, and mechanical ducks all possess the power of speech. The forests of America are inhabited by ghostly apparitions, golems, and were-beavers. Phantasms, extra terrestrials, and otherworldly visitants everywhere inhabit the text. Often, as in the case of the flying mechanical duck and the Learn'd English Dog, these 'magical' elements are modeled after real historical prototypes. In eighteenth century England, street performances often featured miraculous spectacles like talking dogs, and the French inventor Jacques Vaucanson did in fact create a mechanical duck, equipped with its own digestive system no less. Pynchon's elaboration of history reshapes the raw materials of the past to correspond with his own thematic purposes. *Mason & Dixon* is thus comparable to magical realist novels like Gabriel Garcia

Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. This ubiquitous proliferation of the fantastic and the absurd compromises the novel's illusion of verisimilitude, and calls attention to the artificiality of Pynchon's fictive world.

Perhaps the novel's most scandalous disruption of historical realism is the presence of anachronistic elements in the narrative that deliberately collapse the distinction between the past and the present. The twentieth century tends to seep into Mason and Dixon's world, destabilizing any pretense of historicity. Instances of this abound. While at one of the novel's many coffee houses, Dixon orders a "Mount Kenya Double-A, with Java Highland," a fantasy drink alluding to the kind served at any Starbucks today. On board a sixth-rate frigate called the *Seahorse*, twentieth century novelist Patrick O'Brien is given perhaps an appropriate cameo. In possibly the goofiest example, Popeye the Sailor Man appears at the Rabbi of Prague Inn and helpfully translates a Hebrew Bible quote for the reader. With a narrator named Cherrycoke, Pynchon even inserts some product placement into his book, particularly in his ringing endorsement of Herbal Essences shampoo, which evidently has been known to elicit "occasions of God-revealing" (MD 358). How are we to interpret these comical breaches of narrative realism? In the words of the Learn'd English Dog, "'Tis the Age or Reason, rrrf? There's ever an explanation at hand, and no such thing as a Talking Dog, - Talking Dogs belong with Dragons and Unicorns. What there are, however, are Provisions for Survival in a World less fantastick" (MD, 22).

Fang's facetious statement discloses one of Pynchon's principal thematic concerns: representation. By continually flouting the conventions of historical realism with magical and anachronistic elements, Pynchon's narrative depiction of the eighteenth century is deliberately exposed as a fictional representation written in the late twentieth century. This implicitly rejects

the capacity of narratives to perfectly recreate the past, and--more strikingly--suggests that historiography does not necessarily enjoy a more privileged access to reality than fiction writing. Thus, both modes of discourse are ideologically distorted textual representations of an irreclaimable past. In a sense then, disclosing the artificial nature of *Mason & Dixon* is paradoxically Pynchon's chief appeal for the credibility of the text.

Because of this self-reflexive acknowledgement of its composed nature *Mason & Dixon* exhibits the principal characteristics of what Linda Hutcheon has described as historiographic metafiction. According to *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, by "undermining the borders between historiography and fiction, historiographic metafiction self-consciously explores the status and function of narrative as an ideological construct shaping history and forging identity rather than merely representing the past" (216). The conflation of historical writing and fiction in the novel's narrative thus frames both of these discursive modes as intersubjective depictions of reality rather than accurate portrayals of the past. Thus, the question of whether or not a narrative renders a literal truth is preposterous. Consideration must instead focus upon the function of narrative discourse as a vehicle for ideological construction and, as I wish to argue, social integration.

What I am principally interested in are the "Provisions for Survival in a World less fantastick" mentioned by the Learn'd English Dog. Fang claims that dogs "go on as tail-wagging Scheherazades...nightly delaying the Blades of our Masters by telling back to them tales of their humanity" (MD 22). This image of the storyteller suspending destruction through the relation of stories speaks volumes, and directly mirrors the relationship Cherrycoke shares with his own audience. We learn that the Reverend may remain at the home of his relatives "as long as he can keep the children amus'd." Yet if he fails, "'twill be Out with him, where waits the Winter's

Block and Blade” (MD 7). Like Scheherazade and the host of storytellers that populate *The Arabian Nights*, Cherrycoke too must entertain his audience to remain alive. The connection Pynchon makes between stories and survival resonates with significant social--and by extension-- political connotations. Fang seems to be suggesting that stories not only organize and make sense of what it means to be a human being, they also create a sense of common experience and shared mortality, from which ethical systems emerge. More significantly, Fang’s words suggest that storytelling contributes directly to the development of culture and consequently to our evolution as a species. Stories, be they myths, folktales, or histories, all serve the same functions; they confer coherent logic on experience, endow existence with meaning and purpose, and transmit values. They are vehicles of ideology.

Of course, since the dawn of culture, stories have served as instructional tools, and *Mason & Dixon*, for all of its ironic and labyrinthine complexities, is no exception to this principal. After all, the bulk of the story is told by a Reverend who selects his tales “for their moral usefulness” (MD 7). Social activism is certainly the driving force behind all of Pynchon’s fiction, and this agenda is particularly trenchant in his historical novels. Pynchon’s historical works might be considered subversive or counter histories for their strident opposition to virtually all forms of authority and their profound suspicion of technocratic, economic, and governmental power. This is perhaps best typified in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, an apocalyptic vision of the Second World War that depicts a culture of paranoia and death engendered by the nuclear age and powerfully evokes the disintegration of the modern world. Technology and the positivist discourse of the Enlightenment are Pynchon’s principal targets in *Mason & Dixon*. The galvanization of scientific development that occurred in the eighteenth century, in Pynchon’s view, did not generate a rational world order perfectly commensurate with the designs of a clockwork deity,

but rather enabled the European powers to wage protracted wars of empire, establish colonies throughout the globe, and reduce the prior inhabitants of these territories to slavery. That the central action of *Mason & Dixon* is inscribing a Line across America that would prefigure two hundred years of racial conflict and bloody war in the nation's history clearly registers Cherrycoke's moral lesson: that the boundaries we create between class, nationality, gender, and race are imagined. The Line does not merely demarcate physical borders across the landscape; it marks imagined boundaries of difference between groups from which distinct ideologies and consequently oppositional identities emerge. As Captain Zhang predicts, "all else will follow as if predestin'd, unto War and Devastation" (MD 615). The principal agenda behind *Mason & Dixon* is to expose and subvert ideologies that legitimate the development of these imagined boundaries, and advocate an egalitarian global world view.

Any ideological discourse whether or not it establishes social distinction or promotes integration constitutes what Paul Ricoeur calls the "cultural imagination" (Ricoeur, 2). Ideology, according to Ricoeur, is a symbolic representation of reality that is constructed and articulated through discourse. Ricoeur subverts the conventional claim that ideology is always in opposition to social reality, or praxis, and establishes the significant interrelationship between social imagination and social reality: "what is most fundamental is *not* the distortion or dissimulation of praxis by ideology. Rather what is most basic is an inner *connection* between the two terms" (Ricoeur, 10). I believe that the notion of reality understood and recreated through narrative representation is *the* organizing theme of *Mason & Dixon*. Hence the text's conspicuous fusion of the literal and the figurative. Reality, what we presuppose is self-evident truth, is understood and even shaped by discourse. In a letter to his friend Murray, Nathanael McClean writes that he

feels the Line, “speeds its way like a Coach upon the Coaching-Road of Desire, where we create continually before us the Road we must journey upon” (MD 459).

The role of discourse in shaping social reality is thus of central concern in *Mason & Dixon*. This is not only developed in the text’s principal topoi, but is also reflected in its narrative structure, which enacts and dramatizes the development of social discourses, and directly connects these narratives with the consensual ‘reality’ that is represented in the text. A distinctive feature of the novel’s narrative is the proliferation of competing realities or subordinate worlds that are ‘created’ by a grand tableau of both major and minor characters. The novel is not, by any means, organized by Cherrycoke’s narrative alone. *Mason & Dixon* is principally structured as a frame narrative on the order of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* or the *Arabian Nights*. What is particularly interesting is the way that storytelling is directly associated with world creation and social solidarity in the novel. It would seem that *Mason & Dixon* is an argument for the imperative human need to tell tales, not only as a means of entertainment, but as a vehicle of ideological consolidation and sociopolitical development. The narrative architecture of the novel explicitly foregrounds and dramatizes the act of storytelling as a fundamentally social and ideologically transformative dynamic. As previously suggested, narratives do not merely represent ideology; they play a role in *constructing* it.

By dramatizing the socio-ideological evolution of discourse, Pynchon underscores the enormous potential for organized political change that exists not only through dialogue but also in the production and circulation of the printed word. Reverend Cherrycoke says that “the mere presence of Glyphs and Signs can produce magickal Effects, - for the essence of magic is the power of small Magickal Words to work enormous physical Wonders” (MD 286). The above passage registers the author’s belief in the tremendous power of words to shape the contours of

collective consciousness and consequently direct popular will. Of course, one could argue that the novel depicts a grimly unavoidable complicity in the exploitative system of global consumer capitalism mirroring that of the modern world, a dilemma that is left unresolved. However, Ian Copeland perceives that recognition of the constructed nature of our social and political systems is the first step toward changing them. “By not rejecting the form and order which beliefs and ideals give to society we are all responsible for the injustices which result, but by recognizing that fact and provisionality of the ideals and values which define and legitimize them, independent ethical action remains possible” (Copestake, 183). As Cherrycoke insists, the continuing historical “Dance of our Hunt for Christ” is “the Despair at the Core of History, - *and the Hope*” (MD 75 my emphasis). If we “create continually before us the Road we must journey upon,” if we are, all of us, building our world, then we have the power to choose what kind of world we want to make, as long as we keep dancing that is.

McHale notes the horizontal orientation of the novel’s chief images and motifs, and argues that this enacts an ideological and metaphysical commitment to “a resolutely earthbound this-worldliness” (McHale, 60). This horizontal orientation underscores the fundamentally global and populist agenda of the novel. While the ethical problems reflected in the *Mason & Dixon*’s treatment of western imperialism have been well examined, the novel’s thematic focus on ideological evolution through dialogic discourse, and the social and political implications of its narrative structure have yet to be adequately addressed.

In the following, I intend to discuss the political as well as the epistemological issues that inform Pynchon’s interrogation of historical reconstruction in *Mason & Dixon*, examining first the thematic and then the stylistic characteristics of the text that emphasize the indeterminate, constructive nature of historiography. I also consider Pynchon’s thematic emphasis on the form

and function of the novel itself, arguing that the political implications of this genre inform Pynchon's emphasis on it as one of the *Mason & Dixon's* principal motifs. I then discuss how the novel dramatizes the profound potential of discourse, more specifically the imaginative creation and circulation of stories among a people, in shaping and directing social and political reality.

In the first section I will illustrate how Pynchon's epistemological and political scrutiny of discourse is thematically manifest in *Mason & Dixon*, and how his opposition to dominant or official histories is strongly related to the post modern critique of master narratives. I then demonstrate that, on the level of plot and theme, the text undermines the credibility of authoritative historical accounts and promotes communal or local discursive modes like oral histories that develop organically among a people as opposed to being imposed upon them from above. The section will discuss the discursive construction of memory, identity, and history, and examine how these symbolic systems reinforce existing social and political institutions, particularly nationalism.

In the second section I explore the stylistic features that underscore this critique of master narratives. Section two thus examines Pynchon's adoption of narrative pastiche in the novel, and analyzes how this device foregrounds the textual sources from which the author's representation of the past is derived. I then explore the epistemological implications of pastiche, illustrating how the device stylistically suggests that our access to the past, indeed our understanding of the world and our relationship to it, is ineluctably mediated through discourse. Considering that Pynchon's pastiche focuses upon the novel specifically, I then examine the text's thematic emphasis on this literary genre, trace how *Mason & Dixon* itself is a self-reflexive testament to

the novel, and finally address why the formal and functional features of the novel support Pynchon's social and political concerns.

Having analyzed the stylistic methods Pynchon deploys to undermine the epistemological basis of historiography, I then, in the third section, consider the narrative features of *Mason & Dixon* that foreground the social life of discourse and implicitly promote the collective creation and transmission of shared stories which foster solidarity and intersubjectivity within groups. I first detail how a polyphony of voices is organized within the novel through a multi-level frame narrative structure, and next indicate the novel's explicit connection between the circulation of discourse and the collective development of social reality on the level of plot.

The final section will demonstrate how Pynchon's emphasis on discursive life asserts the potential for political organization and change, and connect this theme with the novel's urgent appeal for global justice.

Essentially, I argue that *Mason & Dixon* undermines the distinctions between ideologically driven stories and ostensibly positivist, or objective modes of understanding the world. Reducing all forms of knowledge to historically and culturally contingent discourses, Pynchon invokes how these discourses endow existence with meaning, with the sacred, and shape our notions of social reality. As Cherrycoke says, "We must...change our notions of the Sacred," we must develop new stories that incorporate and celebrate the common humanity of all peoples (MD 386). The novel thus depicts how dialogic interaction generates socio-ideological evolution and integration. This call for solidarity through awareness of our shared horizon is Pynchon's ultimate gesture towards an egalitarian, global vision of our world, one that is mapped without boundaries.

## I

Filled with flying children, vegetable clocks, and swashbuckling adventure, *Mason & Dixon* often reads more like a fantasy by James Matthew Barrie than a conventional historical fiction. This conflation of the historically factual and the fictional certainly does not reject the importance of history, but rather embraces both discursive modes, and draws attention to the constructive nature of discourse. *Mason & Dixon* emphasizes the role of narratives in developing the ideological systems that greatly influence the nature of our social and political institutions. Pynchon thus invites rigorous scrutiny of dominant or official narratives that legitimate the existence of authority. In the following discussion I will introduce the central concepts that inform the thematic and structural characteristics of *Mason & Dixon*. I first discuss how social discourse is the principal means by which cultures construct social memory, identity, and history, and then consider how these symbolic systems reinforce political systems like nationalism. I then introduce Pynchon's advocacy of populist and oral traditions as alternative forms of social memory that are more dynamic and socially transformative than textual constructions.

Pynchon's fusion of fictional and historical discursive modes in *Mason & Dixon* undermines the presupposition that any historical narrative can provide a comprehensive, universally valid account of the past. It has long been established by scholars that narratives, while symbolically representing objects in the real world, do not directly correspond to any objective reality existing outside of discourse. After all, fiction and history are made rather than found. Acknowledgement of their shared status as narrative constructs ineluctably separated from objective reality places all forms of discourse on the same epistemological level. However, this by no means suggests that, as stories, history and fiction are empty or devoid of social meaning. On the contrary,

meaning *is* a product of discourse. The creation and circulation of discourse is the principal vehicle of culture, the fundamental means by which we confer meaning on the world. These ideas not only form the conceptual framework of Pynchon's fiction but also embody the core objective of postmodernism: the critical interrogation of totalizing master narratives. There are countless contending perspectives on reality within and across cultures, and no single one enjoys a privileged access to the truth. As Cherrycoke says, "Who claims Truth, Truth abandons" (MD 350). It must be emphasized that in addition to these epistemological considerations the postmodern critique of positivist or authoritative narratives carries profound social and political implications. If the narratives we construct generate the ideological systems from which we create and sustain our social and political institutions, then critical attention must focus on the kinds of power relationships that are articulated in these discourses.

This connection between discourse and ideology invites deeper scrutiny into the relationship between historical narratives and collective memory. History is the modern world's oracle. How we remember and understand the past has direct bearing on how we navigate the present and anticipate the future. However, histories are ultimately provisional, subjective, and indeterminate, not directly describing the world at a particular time, but rather representing a spatially and temporally bound worldview. Consequently, histories are like any other discourse. They are written in response to both the ideological exigencies of the author and to specific historically-bound social and political conditions. Indeed, the very act of organizing past events into a narrative necessarily involves a process of selection on the part of the author, whereby conscious choices are made concerning what is included and what is discarded from the account. Thus, the critic must ever be wary of the tenuous boundary that divides objective description and selective inscription in any historical narrative. The paranoid implication, of course, is that

historians ultimately decide what is remembered and what is forgotten, and that the texts they produce carry specific ideological agendas, serving particular interests.

These concepts certainly reflect Pynchon's own attitudes towards officially sanctioned historical accounts. A profound suspicion of authoritative history pervades his fiction, and is given particularly powerful expression in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In this novel, Pynchon imagines a Nazi séance, in which the German government continues to consult the dead German foreign minister and business mogul, Walter Rathenau, beyond the grave. Apparently, even after the Nazis had Rathenau murdered for being Jewish, they still need his business advice.

Why do they want Rathenau tonight? What did Caesar really whisper to his protégé as he fell? Et tu Brute, the official lie, is about what you'd expect to get from them-- it says exactly nothing. The moment of assassination is the moment when power and the ignorance of power come together, with Death as validator. When one speaks to the other then it is not to pass the time of day with et-tu-Brutes. What passes is a truth so terrible that history-- at best a conspiracy, not always among gentlemen, to defraud-- will never admit it. The truth will be repressed or in ages of particular elegance be disguised as something else (GR 164).

The paranoid apprehension of conspiracy is certainly a common motif in Pynchon's fiction. However, his theories of corporate and government malfeasance, while impossible to confirm, can never be dismissed. Here, Pynchon implies that those who control history control the memory of a people. Thus, the morally or legally dubious policies that might diminish the political legitimacy of an existing power regime are suppressed, rationalized, or completely expunged from the historical record, and over time the public memory capable of generating a collective oppositional consciousness gives way to the general line of the institutionalized past.

From this perspective, historical ‘facts’ are those collectively shared memories and presuppositions, reinforced by master narratives that form the ideological foundation of an existing social order. Ricoeur agrees with Pynchon, arguing that one of the primary functions of ideology is to legitimate authority. He proposes that, “Ideology moves beyond mere [social] integration to distortion and pathology as it tries to bridge the tension between authority and domination. Ideology tries to secure integration between legitimacy claim [of power] and belief, but it does so by justifying the existing system of authority as it is” (Ricoeur 14). Taken this way, official discourses, if not necessarily webs of lies concocted by conspiracies among gentlemen, are certainly powerful political tools, promoting and indeed sustaining social and political institutions that reinforce existing power relationships.

These ideas are central to Pynchon’s treatment of history in *Mason & Dixon*. In addition to collapsing the traditional boundaries separating fact and fiction, Pynchon launches a deeper interrogation of officially endorsed narratives that establish ‘facts,’ which serve the interests of governments. Cherrycoke expresses these sentiments in his claim that the tales of storytellers, gossips, and comedians have more credibility than authoritative accounts of the past. “History is hir’d, or coerced, only in Interests that must ever prove base. She is too innocent, to be left within the reach of anyone in Power. She needs rather to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiters, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev’ry Radius, Masters of Disguise...nimble enough to keep her beyond the Desires, or even the Curiosity, of Government” (MD 350). History is better created by fabulists and counterfeiters with no interest behind their narratives but to edify and entertain.

However, considering the staggering number of meticulously researched historical references to be found in *Mason & Dixon*, it certainly cannot be said that Pynchon is arguing for the

repudiation of historiography. Cherrycoke himself curiously refuses to invent the contents of a letter Mason wrote to Maskelyne, because, he says, the document somewhere exists (MD 720). There is a material world filled with hard data that must be taken into account. Pynchon's defense of fiction then is not a rejection of history, but rather an interrogation of the notion that any particular kind of discourse necessarily provides a more authentic or privileged understanding of the world. Pynchon recognizes the profound influence that all discourses have on social reality, and thus calls for rigorous critical evaluation of the kinds of worldviews they construct and promote. In the case of history Pynchon is fundamentally concerned with what is remembered, what constitutes American memory and consequently, American identity.

The central issue then is social memory and collective identity: how memory influences the patterns of social behavior-- the values, prejudices, beliefs-- that find expression in both discourse and praxis. In his excellent introductory history of memory and identity in western society, John Gillis argues that the symbolic systems constituting both individual and collective selfhood are directly connected to memory, which is itself socially created and recreated through time. According to Gillis, like discourse, "identity and memory are social and political constructs, and should be treated as such. We can no longer afford to assign either the status of natural object, treating it as 'fact' with an existence outside of language. Identities and memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*" (Gillis, 5). Collective memory is thus inextricably linked with intersubjectivity, and both are transient and fluid, assuming different forms at different times. The point is that since social memory is always changing it only comes to be fixed or preserved when it is organized and recorded in narratives. And by thus preserving social memory in text, a group appropriates, defines, objectifies, and, in a sense, controls it.

Pierre Nora's influential interrogation of historiography establishes a useful dichotomy between history and social memory. He places the oral traditions that organized the quotidian life of rural peasant communities in opposition to historical narratives, and perceives a highly antagonistic relationship between the two. "History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to destroy it...History's goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality has taken place" (Nora 9). According to Nora,

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation...History on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. (Nora 8)

Bereft of social environments that promote this lived, spontaneous memory, the modern world's only access to the past is through what Nora calls *lieux de memoir*, or sites of memory: monuments, manuscripts, heirlooms; the material residue of history. Nora sees the very act of historical reconstruction as emerging from a need for the illusion of permanence and order that narrative confers on memory. When these events are organized in narrative and endowed with the validating stamp of material permanence, memory, unstable, transient, and mutable, is replaced by concrete text. Nora's ideas can be succinctly summarized by Oscar Wilde's brilliant aphorism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "To define is to limit" (DG 200). Because any historical account is ultimately limited to the range of its sources and the historical and ideological position of the author, it is again ultimately subjective, provisional and bounded, "never social, collective, or all encompassing" (Nora, 13). If, as Nora claims, the act of

representing the past in narrative filters collective social memory through the single socio-ideological perspective of the author, from what perspective have histories generally been written?

According to Gillis, those primarily responsible for writing histories were, of course, not the illiterate common people, but the landed elite, who needed genealogical records to support their claims to property and social prestige. In the pre-modern era, “only the aristocracy, the church, and the monarchical state had need of institutionalized memory. Ordinary people felt the past to be so much a part of their present that they perceived no urgent need to record, objectify, and preserve it” (Gillis, 6). Gillis’s distinction between popular memory and institutionalized memory, explicitly connects Nora’s concepts to the social landscape of the pre-modern era, and illustrates the political function of textual histories as means of consolidating elite power:

Popular memory appears to have differed from elite memory in important ways. While the latter attempted to create a consecutive account of all that had happened from a particular point in the past, popular memory made no effort to fill in all the blanks. If elite time marched in a more or less linear manner, popular time danced and leaped. Elite time colonized and helped construct the boundaries of territories that we have come to call nations. But popular time was more local, as well as episodic. (Gillis, 6)

The act of claiming and preserving the past in narrative, according to Gillis’s account, is largely born from the political need to erect a stable aristocratic identity, one that is *bound* by objective genealogical and territorial definitions. In opposition to popular stories created to articulate the social and ritual contours of rural life, institutionalized memory generated an ideological system that legitimated social hierarchy. This political role of discourse can hardly be confined to existing in the pre modern era alone. Discourses articulate the imagined definitions or

boundaries that confer a fixed identity on a people and determine the symbolic systems that define and perpetuate their social order.

Historically, these symbolic definitions have taken a number of forms that are still very familiar: ethnic, cultural, territorial. However, in the modern world all categories of collective identity have, of course, become subsumed under today's supreme system of social and political organization: nationalism. Past scholarship has interrogated the presupposition that nations are natural or rational emanations of some immutable world order. Richard Handler argues that conceiving of national identity as a self evident fact, bound within territorial holdings, is an illusion: "nations are imagined as natural objects or things in the real world. As such, that is, as natural things, they have a unique identity, and that identity can be defined by reference to precise spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries" (Handler, 29). However, the misconception that national identity is a fixed object existing in nature is deeply entrenched in our understanding of the world. The very thought of a world without nations seems preposterous, almost apocalyptic. Even with the ascendancy of economic globalization, nationalism, if strained, still endures as an integral aspect social and political identity.

Yet nations themselves are discursive constructs. The emergence of nationalism in the modern world was precipitated by the circulation of discourses that invented and promoted a common national identity under which disparate peoples from often radically different regions and cultures could unite. In his monumental study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson argues that the democratization of literacy facilitated by print capitalism enabled people to conceive of themselves as citizens of the nation. According to Anderson, discourse, particularly the form of the novel and the newspaper, engendered the "idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous empty time...a precise analogue of the idea of the nation"

(Anderson, 423). These modern discursive forms enable millions of people to imagine themselves as a unified body, an “imagined community” connected by a common cultural and historical destiny. Yet if the newspaper and the novel generated a concept of national present, histories certainly played a crucial role in constructing a national past. As Gillis illustrates, the whole nationalist enterprise relied upon new forms of institutionalized memory that fostered a sense of sameness and common origin among the citizens of the fledgling Republics. The primary task of the historian was thus to develop national histories that enveloped provincial and rural groups as citizens of the nation, even if these peoples had never previously recognized social or political ties outside of their communities.

Nationalism in Pynchon’s fiction is portrayed in the grand Orwellian tradition as a form of social pathology rooted in the chauvinistic impulse of groups to divide across imagined and often antagonistic cultural or ethnic boundaries. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon depicts post war Germany as The Zone, a power vacuum in a temporary state of peaceful anarchy prior to its being occupied and ultimately divided in two by the Allied powers. While touring The Zone, “It seems to Tyrone Slothrop that there might have been a route back-- maybe the anarchist he met in Zürich was right, maybe for a little while all the fences are down, one road is as good as another, the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up” (GR 556). Such sentiments find their apotheosis in *Mason & Dixon*, a novel that focuses on a period in history when all the fences *are* down, during and after the revolution that would result in the American nation. According to the enigmatic Captain Zhang, when power organizes within territorial boundaries and becomes consolidated into warring blocks, the resulting conflict between these peoples legitimates and perpetuates the existence of

government. “To rule forever,” claims Zhang “it is necessary only to create...Bad History. Nothing will produce Bad History more directly nor brutally, than drawing a Line...through the midst of a People, -- to create thus a Distinction betwixt ‘em” (MD 615). Indeed, the boundaries that divide people, according to Pynchon, serve only the interests of power.

*Mason & Dixon* thus subverts the ideological systems, which justify or celebrate cultural chauvinism, nationalism, racism, or any other ideology that divides people across arbitrary lines of power or prejudice. Pynchon’s counter histories shift the narrative focus away from the deeds of government elites and generals to the experiences of “the multitudes who are passed over by God and History”-- natives, slaves, women, the poor, the mad, dipsomaniacs, drug addicts, and disempowered dreamers, including of course commissioned scientists like Mason and Dixon (GR 299). It is characteristic of counter histories--and the historical novel in general-- to portray the profound contributions (or consequences) that these marginalized multitudes have had on history. In *Mason & Dixon* the seemingly meaningless activities of strong and weak alike are depicted as having enormous historical significance. The Mason-Dixon Line is of course emblematic of this. Yet, even more importantly, the novel’s fusion of fact and fiction, and its representation of multiple stories from multiple perspectives invoke an open, panoramic global vision of all humanity, from the wealthy and powerful to the subaltern, the preterite.

Pynchon thus calls for histories that emphasize the second syllable of the word. As “Provisions for Survival in World less fantastick,” the novel focuses upon the potential of stories to arouse emotional sympathy and compassion from which all ethical systems spring. What Cherrycoke calls for then are stories about the past that stir the sentiments of the public, respond directly to their interests and needs: stories that make the past relevant to the present, oral histories that are told *by* the people rather than *for* the people. Before telling the Dixon family

story of Jeremiah's encounter with a slave driver, Cherrycoke elaborates on the virtues of oral traditions. "These family stories have been perfected in the hellish Forge of Domestick Recension, generation 'pon generation, till what survives is the pure truth, anneal'd to Mercilessness, about each Figure, no matter how stretch'd nor how influenced over the years by all Sentiments from unreflective love to inflexible Dislike" (MD 696). It is the very human emotions shaping and reshaping a story over generations that endow it with power and meaning. The story of Dixon wresting the whip from the slave driver provides a moral model in terms of which his descendants will likely identify themselves. Whether or not it actually occurred as told is a moot consideration. Sentiment ultimately is the root of our ethical systems, and it is the stories that act on our conscience that define our common humanity. History in *Mason & Dixon* is the conscience of a people. These notions are invoked in a chapter epigraph that serves as a kind of manifesto for the composition of the entire novel.

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 the Past we risk, each day losing our forebears in forever, - not a Chain of single Links, for one broke Link could lose us All, - rather a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, only with their Destination in Common." (MD 349)

In advocating the art of the quidnunc, spy, and tap room wit, Cherrycoke is arguing for the development of populist histories that represent the stories of people from all social strata; a disordered concatenation of oral traditions from multiple social and cultural perspectives that can resist being co-opted into a single oppressive master narrative. Recognition of a single dominant narrative necessarily effaces the complexity and diversity of other perspectives belonging to other people whose interests consequently are not represented. In *Mason & Dixon* history is neither a single authoritative account of the past, nor a glorious saga celebrating a providential progress of a chosen people, but rather a self-conscious representation of the countless stories people tell one another to make sense of their common and unique experiences.

Having considered the conceptual and thematic framework that informs Pynchon's treatment of discourse as a socially and political transformative act in *Mason & Dixon* it is necessary to examine how these ideas are manifest in the stylistic features of the novel. According to Pynchon, identity, memory and history do not correspond to objective reality but are instead discursive constructs that create and reinforce our ideological worldviews. All of these seemingly objective facts are cultural representations of an otherwise inaccessible and incomprehensible reality. As a means of artistically expressing these ideas, Pynchon adopts a literary device known as pastiche that foregrounds his discursive representation of the eighteenth century by imitating the verbal and generic styles of the period. The following section will briefly examine the characteristics of this device, consider its thematic implications, and discuss its relationship to historiographic metafiction. I will then address Pynchon's emphasis on pastiche of the novel specifically, examine how the novel is itself a principal motif in *Mason & Dixon*, and briefly consider the historical, functional, and political significance of this literary genre.

## II

*Mason & Dixon* is a vast archive of novels, poems, songs, letters, journal entries and so forth all merged into what could appropriately be called a melting pot of discourse. The novel is saturated with textual material of all kinds to the extent that it sometimes reads like an eclectic catalogue of popular culture from the past and the present. In his influential analysis of postmodern culture, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson comments upon the “populist aesthetic” of postmodern art, claiming that through its integration of pop cultural forms, the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture is collapsed. Tracing this characteristic in postmodern literature, he observes 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 (which thereby at once become ‘pop history’)” (Jameson, 79). In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon takes this characteristic to its logical extreme, not only incorporating into the novel a staggering number of literary genres, textual forms, and stylistic conventions from eighteenth century cultural, but also representing and fusing together virtually every mode of verbal expression imaginable from past historical periods to the present day. Pynchon’s reconstruction of the eighteenth century through the representation of past (and present) discursive forms is characteristic of narrative pastiche, a postmodern literary device that registers the same epistemological question implied in historiographic metafiction: how do we access and interpret the past?

Of course the answer to this question is through cultural artifacts, chief among these being texts. According to Jameson, today’s authors of historical fiction must reconstruct the past through “the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture” (Jameson 74). It thus comes as no surprise that so

many of *Mason & Dixon's* characters and motifs are drawn directly from the popular culture of the past. Indeed, Pynchon's adoption of narrative pastiche is essentially a form of textual 'dress up' by which he mimics the styles and conventions of an eighteenth century author. This imitation of past literary styles is most clearly evident in the novel's adoption of eighteenth century syntactical, lexical and typographical conventions reflected in its arbitrary capitalizations, ellipses censoring sacred and profane phrases, and antiquated spelling of words, many of which have fallen out of use today, if they were ever widely used at all. This narrative impersonation is directly reflected on the level of plot.

In the novel, all is a performance, in which characters play different culturally, or rather fictionally proscribed roles. Just as Pynchon is openly impersonating a Henry Fielding or a Lawrence Sterne, the novel's dramatized narrators are themselves fictional personas that impersonate stock character stereotypes from a number of diverse literary genres. Hepsie, one of the text's many oracles, for example is described as "a shockingly young woman" who hides behind "layers of careful Decrepitude" in order to represent an aged Pythia (MD 26). It only becomes known that the Swedish axe-man, Stig, speaks English when he tells his life story, at which point we discover that he is not Swedish at all but belongs to a race of people so white "that you British to us appear as do Africans, to you" (MD 612). Philip Dimdown in disguising himself as a dandy, "is of course not what he seems, as which of us is?" (MD 390). The number of shadowy characters living secret lives even includes Cherrycoke, who acknowledges his own playful pantomiming: "After years wasted...at perfecting a *parsonical Disguise* –grown old in the service of an Impersonation that never took more than a Handful of actor's tricks" (MD, 8). It would seem that the very act of storytelling is reminiscent of cunning role play. Ultimately, identity is another word for performance in the novel. All characters are thus different disguises

Pynchon assumes as author, just as the novel itself assumes the motifs and plot conventions of multiple generic types.

Pynchon foregrounds his mimicry of past texts through his wholesale appropriation of period genres. Rather than portraying a thoroughly researched account of daily life in the eighteenth century, Pynchon models the characters, episodes, and settings of *Mason & Dixon* largely on literature that was popular during the period, representing in the process a grand tableau of eighteenth century culture. For instance, the moralistic oration of Reverend Cherrycoke that often (but certainly not always) assumes the rhetorical characteristics of an eighteenth century Christian sermon is juxtaposed in the text with a host of other literary genres, the most distinct of which is no doubt a pornographic serial novel called *The Ghastly Fop*. The good-natured lycanthropes Lud Oafry and Zepho, in addition to the innumerable ghosts and grotesques that haunt the novel signal Pynchon's appropriation of Gothic Novel topoi. Victor Strandberg has recognized in the *Mason & Dixon's* inordinate length, its global scope, and certain classical analogies the conventions of the Fieldingesque mock epic (Strandberg, 104). Armand's hysterical "Iliad of Inconvenience," resembles both an eighteenth century French Tragedy and the satirical work of Voltaire. Pynchon signals his debt to the literature of the period with Mr. Knockwood, who is described as "a sort of trans-Elemental Uncle Toby," a character in Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (MD 364). The repeated references to spiritual journeys recall seventeenth century British Romances like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

If Pynchon's assimilation of generic fictional categories disrupts any pretense to historical realism, his incorporation of literary genres from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is certainly more scandalous. For instance, he introduces the conspiratorial intrigue of twentieth century spy fiction with the appearance of gentleman-detective Hervé du T, the French secret

agent Captain Dasp, and the undercover Jesuit operative Fr. Christopher Maire. William Morris' *The Well at the End of the World* is alluded to by--if nothing else--a magical well in Ireland, a place that many Englishman would consider the end of the world. When the novel's characters have intimations of otherworldly visitants, it seems as though Pynchon is drawing upon the stuff of science fiction. Lord Lepton's phantom castle, the Worm of Lambton, and numerous allusions to elvish folk certainly bring to mind a twentieth century fantasy novel on the order of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Even the imitation of archaic language is deliberately exposed when Pynchon comically reverts to twentieth century vernacular during a steamy episode with Mrs. Vroom, who "has been trying to unbutton her Bodice...at last with a small growl she grabs both sides of the Garment and rips it in two, or, actually, twain" (MD 87). Nowhere is this anachronistic intrusion of the twentieth century more apparent than when a vignette of domestic slapstick comedy is framed as "the award-winning 'Love Laughs at a Line' episode," bearing striking resemblance to a television sitcom (MD 711). Consequently, the reader is continually reminded that the present is always behind Pynchon's illusion of past.

In addition to literary genres, Pynchon also inserts a wide variety of textual sources within the narrative. These texts include excerpts from Cherrycoke's *Spiritual Day Book*, undelivered sermons, journal entries, excerpts from Mason and Dixon's field book, snippets of an epic poem, and so forth. To a certain extent the presence of these documents in the narrative is rationalized when Cherrycoke's audience demands evidence of whether or not his "Herodotic Web of Adventures and Curiosities" is in fact true (MD 7). Consequently, when he can, Cherrycoke cites passages from the Fair Copy of *The Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon* to reinforce the credibility of his historical account. As David Foreman has observed, this Fair Copy is an actual document that was written by Charles Mason himself (Foreman 148).

However, the majority of these texts--particularly Cherrycoke's journals and unpublished sermons, Mason's 'Foul Copy,' and Timothy Tox's *Pennsylvaniad* --are, of course, Pynchonian inventions. Even though many *Journal* passages are quoted verbatim, the reader is repeatedly made aware of the fact that Pynchon's version of history is filtered through a plenitude of texts, real *and* imagined. Ultimately the documents cited in the novel provide a kind of narrative scaffolding which Pynchon uses to erect his fictional worlds.

Such 'hard' evidence is often incorporated into the novel as points of departure for Cherrycoke's narration. However, it remains an open question whether all of these manuscripts are produced by Cherrycoke during his story, or if some are rather embedded in the narrative by the author, detached from the world of the novel. The documents are frequently represented as epigraphs that provide indirect authorial commentary on *Mason & Dixon*. There is often no indication that the characters have read them or have even been told about them. While in passages immediately following their display, the *contents* of these manuscripts are occasionally under heated discussion by the novel's characters, the texts themselves are never mentioned, and consequently they tend to figure as extra-diegetic text separated from the fictional worlds that they describe. This creates a narrative pattern that recurs to varying degrees of regularity throughout the novel: 'hard' evidence bracketing or enclosing a fictional interior, a fairly accurate metaphor for the book itself. The first of several coded references to this pattern can be found in the description of a "sinister and wonderful Card Table which exhibits the cheaper sinusoidal Grain known in the Trade as Wand'ring Heart, causing the illusion of Depth into which for years children have gaz'd as into the illustrated Pages of Books...along with so many hinges, sliding Mortises, hidden catches, and secret compartments that neither the Twins nor their Sister can say they have been to the end of it" (MD 5). This "illusion of Depth" mentioned

in the above passage is exactly what Pynchon's adoption of narrative pastiche functions to expose.

Pastiche registers the extent to which multiple discourses arising from a variety of different historical and sociopolitical conditions provide the raw materials from which new discourses are constructed. Culture is not made in a vacuum. By foregrounding the plurality of textual sources constituting Pynchon's vision of the past, *Mason & Dixon* does not proffer a single definitive account of the eighteenth century, but rather presents a hybrid narrative amalgamating diverse discourses that are themselves predominantly fictional. According to Gary Thompson, "*Mason & Dixon* resists any categorization because it is a variegated text, both obviously fictional and truer in detail than our previously existing frames of reference prepare us for. The implication is that these frames of reference are also fictions, that we have nothing but fictions to account for the past...this is the 'one truth' tended to by this text, a truth not contained in its covers but arrived at by the reader" (Thompson, 169). While it is tempting to imagine that there exists, somewhere out of our reach, a transparent, universally valid account of history, ultimately the only access we have to the past is mediated through the accounts of other people. As the enigmatic Captain Zhang says "Too many possible Stories. You may not have time enough to find out which is the right one" (MD 552). Regardless of how many sources a historian might discover, there will always be gaps and inconsistencies in the historical record, frustrating any attempt to derive an all encompassing account of the past.

In addition to this frustrating lack of certitude when it comes to historical reconstruction, pastiche also stylistically expresses the extent to which our perception of reality in general is fundamentally mediated through language. This concept is clearly disclosed when Pynchon's characters read the world *as* text. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tyrone Slothrop "gets back to the

Casino just as big globular raindrops...begin to splat into giant asterisks on the pavement, inviting him to look down at the bottom of the text of the day, where footnotes will explain it all” (GR 204). The world as text motif appears a number of times in *Mason & Dixon* as well, and is particularly salient when the surveyors visit a cave during their expedition. The Platonic potential of the episode is not neglected by Pynchon, who frames it as a kind of “Allegory of the Cave” in which Mason, moved by the subterranean stillness of his surroundings, cries, “it is Text, - and we are its readers, and its Pages are the Days turning. Unscrolling, as a Pilgrim’s Itinerary map in ancient Days” (MD 497). In addition to reading the world, Pynchon’s characters read one another. Mason, utterly incapable of understanding his wife, despairs: “Was he supposed to light a pipe, pick her up, settle back, and read her all at one sitting?” (MD 208). The world-as-text motif directly connects discursive representations of the world with how we perceive it. In representing metaphorically the ‘textuality’ of these perceptions, Pynchon expresses the profound impact cultural discourses have on defining or reinforcing our world views, which certainly accounts for his stylistic emphasis on the textuality of *Mason & Dixon*.

As a pastiche, it comes as no surprise that *Mason & Dixon* self-reflexively discloses its intertextuality. Yet Pynchon frequently draws attention to the ‘bookness’ of his book, or more precisely, its status as a novel. We are repeatedly reminded of the fact that its plot conventions and motifs are largely derived from other novels, suggesting that Pynchon is particularly interested in this genre of literature. Certainly, the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century is at issue here, signaled by an ongoing debate throughout the text that concerns the genre’s virtues and vices. Ives LeSpark voices his objection to it, equating novels with feminine hysterics and sentimental fancy: “Every reader of the ‘Novel’ must be reckoned a soul in peril, -for she hath made a D\_\_\_l’s bargain, squandering her most precious time for nothing but the meanest and

shabbiest kinds of mental excitement” (MD, 351). The novel motif thus emblemizes the recurring dichotomy of fact and fiction that saturates *Mason & Dixon*. Aunt Euprenia compares the compositional structure of modern music with the progression of the novel’s plot. According to Euprenia, the musical pattern of “Departure, and sentimental Crisis, --the Sandwich-Filling it seems, --and at last, Return to the Tonick, safe at Home” is like “a Novel in Musick, whose Hero instead of proceeding down the road having one adventure after another...comes rather though some Catastrophe and back to where she set out from,” (MD, 263). Here, that immortal triad the beginning, middle, and end that constitutes the plot sequence of virtually every novel ever written (indeed, the perennial plot progression of all myths and stories since Odysseus returned to Ithaca and before) is represented as a musical departure, a crescendo into emotional climax, and return home, to the tonic.

Pynchon’s allusions to the novel take many bizarre forms. For instance, the most significant gustatory development of the eighteenth century, the sandwich, is a frequent and unusual image in *Mason & Dixon*, and its metaphorical function directly corresponds with Pynchon’s novel motifs. Squire Haligast enunciates the symbolic significance of this most miraculous of aliments: “the birth of the ‘Sandwich,’ at this exact moment in Christianity...Disks of secular Bread,-enclosing whilst concealing slices of real Flesh, yet a-sop with Blood, under the earthly disguise of British Beef, all...Consubstantiate, thus...the Sandwich, Eucharist of this our Age” (MD 367). The secular bread of the sandwich conceals the sacred meat, or *meaning*. This directly mirrors Cherrycoke’s observation that in the Enlightenment, all “Worlds alternative to this one... [are] acceptably folded between the covers of books” (MD 359). A sandwich/book is even pictorially represented in the textual organization of the novel’s second chapter. The chapter essentially consists of a fictional conversation between Mason and Dixon that is literally

sandwiched between two letters that the astronomers wrote to each other (MD 12). Thus, ‘hard,’ factual evidence ‘covers’ a fictional interior. Indeed, the structure of *Mason & Dixon* is modeled after a sandwich/novel. Divided into three books, it is partitioned into beginning middle and end. The astronomers’ departure to the wilderness of America is contained in the second book, and their quiet return home to ‘civilization’ is described in the third. Considering the eighteenth century European would consider America a kind of world alternative to this one, this analogy gains further credence.

Indeed, there is precedence for modeling the structure of books on central, organizing motifs in Pynchon’s fiction. According to Salman Rushdie, the narrative of Pynchon’s first novel *V* is in fact shaped like a V, and *Gravity’s Rainbow* likewise takes the form of a parabola that reflects the ‘rainbow’ made by the flight and descent of a V-2 rocket (Rushdie, 2). In *Mason & Dixon* the narrative is not patterned after flight and descent, but rather departure and return. The novel depicts an epic journey across the globe into alternative worlds of fantasy and possibly, and then follows the astronomer’s back to their quotidian lives of hard human facts. One is reminded of J.R.R. Tolkien’s own departure into the fantasy world of Middle Earth that he dubbed, “There and Back Again.” This flight into the imaginary is particularly evocative in *Mason & Dixon* where we depart from the everyday into the dream space of *discursive* worlds, derived from Gothic, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Spy and Romance novels. That Pynchon literally models his novel *Mason & Dixon* after the novel is a salient expression of self-reflexivity that foregrounds the form and function of this most mammoth of prose genres. And what is the novel but an all encompassing textual representation of a imaginary landscape, anchored in fictional space and time, populated by fictional personas who behave very much like we do. It thus has the capacity to represent whole worlds. Indeed, fantasy novels often provide their own world maps

delineating the phantom topography through which the reader progresses from one adventure to the next. The point is that Pynchon emphasizes the world creating act of novel writing. In deriving his fantasy version of the eighteenth century from the stuff of other novels, he not only foregrounds his representation of different generic types, but more importantly, he draws a direct connection between what has been represented in stories and what is and even can be imagined. Discourse creates and recreates the limitless dimensions of our shared dreams.

There are perhaps deeper political implications to Pynchon's focus on the novel as well, particularly if we consider that the ultimate collective dream in *Mason & Dixon* is America. Anderson's theory of the novel provides an extremely valuable model for understanding the profound impact of discourse on social and political consolidation. Anderson argues that the novel "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (Anderson, 422). Novels follow the adventures of one or more protagonists as they navigate through a populated social landscape, a "world of plurals" that depicts a panorama of recognizable locations and characters all represented as belonging to a single unified collective. The reader is given a bird's eye view of multiple simultaneously occurring subplots that constitute an imagined community, a community that is bound in fictional time and space and populated by textual people all shown to be connected by a grand plot, a common identity. Anderson argues that this narrative simultaneity may actually have contributed to the development of a conceptual perspective from which to imagine the unseen community that is the nation. Thomas Schaub perceives how these ideas are directly relevant to *Mason & Dixon*: "Understanding, 'humanity' as a story we tell ourselves, Pynchon seems to recognize the novel's complicity in the creation of the modern subject" (Schaub, 197). Of course, the modern subject

Schaub describes is the citizen. As Anderson has noted; “the horizon is clearly bounded” in the novel by a national identity that distinguishes between us and them (Anderson, 425).

If the novel traditionally depicted a limited worldview, focusing upon the activity of an ethically, culturally, or nationally homogenous community, it can be said that *Mason & Dixon* gestures beyond these artificial boundaries towards an all-encompassing vision of humanity. On the level of plot this global perspective is clearly reflected in the transcontinental adventures of Mason and Dixon whose epic itinerary spans the Atlantic. Yet, Pynchon expresses this vision on the level of narrative as well by incorporating countless distinct voices into his story spoken from multiple social and ideological perspectives. His dramatization of the dialogic interaction of discourse enacts how these fictional personas are socially connected in this unbounded conception of history, thus suggesting a shared past and common destiny with all human creatures.

Having examined the stylistic methods by which literary and textual discursive modes are organized within the novel’s narrative, and considering the literary and political significance of the novel, I will, in the following section, discuss the author’s treatment of oral narration, demonstrate how spoken discursive life is a distinctive feature of the text, and relate this characteristic to the historical novel’s larger thematic and political concerns. I will also consider how the novel’s dialogue is dramatized as consolidating shared ideology, friendship, and community among the novel’s characters and consider how this emphasis on human relationships registers the larger social and political agenda of the novel.

### III

The capacity of the novel to integrate multiple languages, or socio-ideological worldviews, into its narrative is absolutely essentially for making the illusory worlds they depict almost feel

real. This dynamic interplay of discourse provides the driving force behind the narrative of *Mason & Dixon*. The animation of countless utterances is one of the principal narrative strategies Pynchon deploys to express his global vision. Pynchon's deep suspicion of totalizing master narratives certainly accounts for the "great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong" artfully intertwined in the novel's narrative that constitute a panoply of discourse, seeming, in its dynamic immediacy, to animate the text with living voices. By integrating a host of minor vignettes and subplots into the novel's narrative that enact the dialogues of countless personas, Pynchon gestures beyond the limited confines of a singular, impersonal narrative perspective to one that invokes an all-encompassing vision of humanity in which all voices are represented. During a conversation with Dr. Johnson, Mason eloquently expresses the narrative strategy adopted in the novel: "as all civilized Britain gathers at this hour, how much shapely Expression, from the titl'd Gambler, the Barmaid's Suitor, the offended Fopling, the Gratified Toss-Pot, is simply fading away upon the Air, out under the Door, into the Evening and the Silence beyond. All those voices. Why not pluck a few words from the multitudes rushing toward the Void of forgetfulness?" (MD 747). A great stylistic achievement of *Mason & Dixon* is how it incorporates so many distinct voices, and successfully endows these voices with the illusion of spontaneity and individuality, even when they are completely anonymous.

As a means of integrating multiple speakers into the novel, Pynchon adopts a framed narrative structure composed of heterogeneous diegetic levels or worlds that are created through the act of storytelling. As a frame story, *Mason & Dixon* is a virtual narrative machine that generates worlds within worlds, spheres within spheres like Ptolemy's geocentric model of the cosmos. Thus, as Cherrycoke weaves his tale, the story *descends* a diegetic level into the 'deeper' world

inhabited by Mason and Dixon, who themselves tell stories, and so forth. Hence, the “illusion of Depth” that Pynchon mentions at the novel’s beginning. Pynchon lets the reader know what he is up to with a lengthy catalogue of bizarrely related images that associate power with stacked or layered structures, all of which obliquely refer to his big book and its layering of discourse: the folded steel of Japanese swords, gold leaf, croissant dough, torpedo skeletons, Native American spiritual mounds, Leyden piles, playing cards, books “Contrivances which, like the Lever or Pulley, quite multiply the apparent forces, often unto disproportionate results” (MD, 390). Mason betrays Pynchon’s intentions when he says that “the Principal of all these Structures...is, that you must stack a great many of them, one immediately upon the next, if you wish to produce an effect large enough to be useful in, let alone noticed by, the World’ (MD 286). This narrative architecture confers sufficient order on the novel’s multiple worlds to make the story of Mason and Dixon dominant and generally stable.

The proliferation of sub-narrators populating the novel and the frequent intrusions of the authorial voice in *Mason & Dixon* prevent any single voice from delivering the story. Instead, each narrator creates a world populated by still more potential narrators. The voice of the author is consequently refracted or reflected through a multitude of different voices within each level of narration, especially in many tangential vignettes, within which are dramatized brief dialogues between often random or peripheral characters. Pynchon is certainly interested in this literary ventriloquism. In *Slow Learner* he discloses his fascination with the author’s power to impersonate different languages in fiction, revealing his shock, “to see how at least two very distinct kinds of English could be allowed in fiction to coexist. Allowed! It was actually OK to write like this! Who knew? The effect was exciting, liberating, strongly positive” (SL 7). While Cherrycoke occupies the highest level of dramatized narration in the novel, his story tends to

meander out of his control and become absorbed by the author, or the extra-diegetic narrator, who then surrenders the tale repeatedly to the “often reckless Monologues of others,” (MD 308). In this way, the narrative temporarily focuses upon the perspectives of other personas. In addition to Mason and Dixon, the narrative focus shifts to the likes of Frau Redzinger, Stig the ‘Swedish’ axe man, Armand the French Chef, Mr. Ice the boatman, Thomas Cresap the frontiersman, Cherrycoke’s sister Euprenia, Wade LeSpark and many others, all with their own stories to tell.

By incorporating and juxtaposing diverse voices in the novel, Pynchon directly connects the circulation of narratives with the development of social solidarity among the novel’s characters. A valuable understanding of the implications of the novel’s discursive organization can be found in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose analysis of what he terms heteroglossia, or the incorporation of multiple verbal forms in a text, focuses specifically on the oppositional dynamics that both animate and develop discourse in societies. Language, according to Bakhtin, is always evolving, propelled by the conflicting forces of cultural integration and disintegration. Even as dominant cultural discourses become consolidated, developing “the canonization of ideological systems...[into] a single proto-language,” centrifugal social forces resist this unification, developing distinctive linguistic and ideological systems that contradict and diverge from the cultural dominant (Bakhtin, 271). Consequently, language, like society, becomes stratified through time as the refined culture of the upper classes is rejected by those of lower social standing, thus creating “within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, of verbal-ideological and social belief-systems.”

At the time when poetry was accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political centralization...in the higher official socio-ideological levels, on the lower levels, on the

stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all “languages” and dialects; there developed the literature of the *fabliaux* and *Schwänke*, of street songs, folksayings, anecdotes, where there was no language center at all, where there was to be found a lively play with the “languages” of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others, where all “languages” were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic incontestable face. (Bakhtin, 273)

Thus, at the core of linguistic stratification is social hierarchy. Considering the political connotations of discursive life, it comes as no surprise that heteroglossia is a constitutive feature of Pynchon’s narrative strategy in *Mason & Dixon*, a novel that explicitly promotes the occupations of quidnuncs, ballad mongers, fabulists, and cranks.

Indeed, the narrative of *Mason & Dixon* is riddled with scattered fragments of dialogue and spontaneous apostrophes, usually from minor or anonymous characters who are often themselves merely ciphers of verbal expression. For instance, a lengthy description of life on board the *Seahorse* is interrupted by Slowcombe, the resident fifer, who narrates his life-story before himself being disrupted by the choice insults of Jack “Fingers” Soames. Sometimes minor characters enjoy the spotlight, as when the adventuress, Zsuzsa Szabó performs her Street-Show relating the events of the Battle of Leuthen with “Accordion musick, Dog tricks and Gypsy Dancing, and an automattick miniature or Orrery of Engagement” (MD 536). Ultimately, these characters retreat into silence as the story is once again taken over by the extra-diegetic narrator. Hepsie, Mauve, Captain Smith, Mr. White, Mr. Mead, Lord Anson, Slowcombe and Soames, to name but a fraction of Pynchon’s fictional population, never reemerge. Often the narrative is interrupted by the seemingly spontaneous interjections of unidentified speakers, as is the case when an anonymous Quaker gentleman repudiates the consumption of coffee “bought as it is

with the lives of African slaves, untallied black lives broken upon the greedy engines of the Barbadoes” (MD 329) Such weighty moral messages are sometimes delivered by unnamed personas in the crowd. The narrative is thus a “phantom polyphony” of autonomous voices that represents the “shapely Expression” of distinct personalities with distinct world views. The extraordinary prevalence of these phantom monologues and dialogues is a distinguishing feature of the text’s narrative architecture. Pynchon is gesturing beyond a closed narrative system (in which all minor characters serve explicit functions in the plot as messengers, agents, companions and so forth) to an unbounded narrative that represents their voices, but does not ‘confine’ them within the plot.

What makes *Mason & Dixon* so dynamic is the way that these multiple voices and ideological perspectives interact in varying degrees of compromise or conflict. David Seed has noted how the novel “is deconstructed by contrasting speakers into a process that is viewed from radically different perspectives” (Seed, 85). The genre of novel, according to Bakhtin, is well suited for incorporating and juxtaposing distinct and contradictory languages that reflect the socio-ideological stratification of any society within its narrative: “prose...often deliberately intensifies differences between them (languages), gives them embodied representation and dialogically opposes them to one another in irresolvable dialogues” (Bakhtin, 291). *Mason & Dixon* is a narrative populated with manifold egos or ideological perspectives animated by divergent interests, actively engaged in lively argumentation and negotiation, as is demonstrated in the heated debate between fact and fiction among Cherrycoke’s family, or Mason and Dixon’s disagreement over the respective virtues of Wine and Beer, or Lord Lepton and Dixon’s discussion on the horizontal or vertical orientation of the cosmic order. Perhaps the most conspicuous argument for Pynchon’s systematic adoption of dialogue in *Mason & Dixon* is

Mason and Dixon. Not only does the very title of the novel invoke a dialogic relationship, the text contains a number of character duos and even musical duets: the former including Darby and Cope, Zhang and Zarpazo, Dr Johnson and Boswell, Eliza Fields and Zsuzsa Szabó; the latter occurring between Mason and Florinda, George and Martha Washington, and finally the surveyors themselves. This proliferation of dialogic relationships in the novel invokes the notion that both tensions and harmonies between oppositional categories, like the courtship game of the Coy Milk Maids, keep things dancing. An entry in Cherrycoke's *Spiritual Day-Book* reads, "Whenever the Surveyors separate, they run into Thickets, Bogs, bad Dreams, - united, they pursue a ride through the air, they are link'd to the stars" (MD 440).

Dialogic relationships, according to Bakhtin, animate and propel discursive development. Indeed, he claims that discourse is inherently dialogic. Language, and by extension culture evolves as the world is interpreted and defined by different speakers coming from different socio-ideological positions. An object in the world is consequently delineated by countless, divergent words and ideas animated by distinct intentions all contending and negotiating for a dominant relationship with that object. "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speakers intentions; it is populated, overpopulated- with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 294). This inherent dynamism not only stratifies language, it also engenders the dynamic conditions that induce linguistic evolution. Old metaphors inherited from the past are discarded as new metaphors more relevant to the specific social and historical conditions circulate and become widely adopted. It is through this dynamic interplay of established and novel locutions that discourse lives, driving "socio-ideological becoming" (Bakhtin, 292).

Bahktin's understanding of language as fluid and continually evolving, runs parallel with the notion of social memory proffered by Nora. Both theorists focus upon the organic, collective development of discourse, and connect this process with the creation of ideological systems that define a group and foster the formation of community. Of course this ongoing dialogic process of intersubjectivity creates the potential to *redefine* and *recreate* social reality. Discourse drives social change. Pynchon's narrative emphasis on dialogue in the novel directly parallels other images of motion and change that saturate the text. In *Mason & Dixon* everything is moving. Indeed, the multitudes of people Pynchon describes in the text are never depicted as an inert mass, but a dynamic "Mobility." Pynchon draws attention to the organic dynamism of the earth through repeated references to those awesome primordial forces that exist outside of human control--wind, water, electricity--in order to foreground notions of eternal flux, and juxtaposes these images of ceaseless transition and cyclical change with the transgressive permanence of human constructions, specifically the walls that we build.

Dialogue often drives the novel's narrative, even acting as a kind of conduit between its levels of narration. For instance, chapter four opens with a passage delivered by the voice of the author, or the extra-diegetic narrator, introducing a dialogue between Cherrycoke and the children in 1786. Ethelmer is then introduced (through his murmured cynical comment) and developed by the extra-diegetic voice. The narration then abruptly plunges into a conversation between Mason and Dixon in 1761, who mention Admiral Anson and his navy commanders. Suddenly, the scene shifts to Lord Anson, Mr. Mead, and Mr. White, only to swiftly leap space and time *again to their* topic of discussion, Captain Smith, as he addresses the surveyors on the costs of the voyage (MD 31). Eventually, after wandering through multiple spaces and times the narrative returns to the LeSpark's living room where Cherrycoke continues to spin his tale.

Context clues denoting scene change are provided *after* a different dialogue is introduced, disorienting the reader. Following the utterance, the reader must reconstruct a notion of speaker and setting, only for this setting to be disrupted again by another dialogue introducing yet another scene. The narrative thus meanders from one episode to the next, wandering in and out of the novel's multiple narrative worlds. These transitions are often only related by a common topic being discussed. In this way, a tangled simultaneity that is systematically organized around dialogue replaces any notion of linear, chronological progression. It must be noted that these narrative characteristics are by no means consistent, but rather occur at varying degrees of intensity throughout the novel. Consequently, *Mason & Dixon* seems to depart from conventional narrative progression to almost complete breakdown and then return once again to stability.

If these vertiginous transitions across narrative levels seem to destabilize the boundaries dividing the novel's inset worlds, the effect is further intensified when dialogue from Cherrycoke's world penetrates into the story of Mason and Dixon. This usually occurs when the Reverend's family interrupts the narrative, demanding to see documented evidence that might confirm Cherrycoke's tale (MD 146; 171; 345; 393; 695). However, these inter-diegetic leakages are all the more striking when they happen in reverse; when characters inhabiting a lower narrative level respond to events in the world above. During a conversation between Captain Volcano and Mason concerning the violence committed by the English Government against an uprising of weavers, Cherrycoke is moved: "'Who are they,' inquires the Rev'd in his Day-Book, 'that will send violent young troops against their own people?' 'We shall all of us learn who they are,' Capt. V. with a melancholy Phiz, 'and all too soon'" (MD 408). Captain Volcano answers a Passage in Cherrycoke's Day-Book as though Cherrycoke were asking him a question

directly. Yet there is no indication in the narrative that the Reverend is even present at this discussion. And even if he is, how does Volcano have access to his journal? Not only does Volcano's reply cross diegetic levels, it deliberately flouts any pretense of narrative plausibility. Considering Pynchon's profound distrust of order, it is not surprising that he sometimes breaks down the logic of his own narrative system. Boundaries, it would seem, are meant to be violated in this book.

As they clearly are in chapter fifty-three when, in Pynchon's most alarming act of narrative chicanery, he abruptly swaps the story of the West Line with a serial of the *Ghastly Fop*, in which a certain Eliza Fields is captured by Native Americans and sent to Quebec to serve as a Widow of Christ, or sex slave, for the Jesuit agents stationed there. The only explanation provided for this sudden switching of narrative worlds is a cryptic epigraph from a passage of Cherrycoke's *Undeliver'd Sermons*, suggesting that "Doubt is the essence of Christ." (MD 511). The spontaneous introduction of the "Captive's Tale" into the novel is certainly a bewildering move on Pynchon's part that leaves the reader completely disoriented. This doubt only increases when the voice of a narrator, presumably Cherrycoke himself, intrudes into Eliza's world after a rousing musical number preformed by a chorus of Jesuit Sisters: "Tho' I was not present in the usual sense, nevertheless, I am a clergyman, --be confident, 'twas an utterly original *moment musicale*, as they say in France" (MD 519). Is Cherrycoke also narrating Eliza's story? While, this explanation would rationalize the Captive's Tale within the novel's frame structure, it too is confounded when, in the following chapter, Ethelmer and Tenebrea are depicted reading *The Ghastly Fop* together in Ethelmer's room, presumably while Cherrycoke is narrating his story of Mason and Dixon elsewhere in the house. If the Captive's Tale is in fact being narrated by Cherrycoke, what are we to make of the suggestion that the story is also proceeding from the

cousins' reading of the *Fop*? These narrative inconsistencies are never resolved, and it remains an open question where exactly Eliza's story fits in the novel's frame system.

Even more bewildering, as Ethelmer and Tenebrea read about Eliza's escape from the Jesuit headquarters with the enigmatic Captain Zhang, the two fugitives actually cross into Cherrycoke's story, encounter Mason and Dixon on the West Line, and ultimately even join the expedition (MD 534). Thus, the ontological boundaries separating the stories of the astronomers and Eliza Fields utterly collapse; their seemingly different worlds become one. On one level, the fusion of these two stories draws attention to their fictional nature: because both worlds are verbal constructions, their borders, like the worlds they divide, are imagined, and nothing prevents them from being combined into one composite fiction. However this narrative consolidation seems to register deeper social implications, perhaps suggesting that our own worldviews, as ideological constructions, are not all that distinguishable from the fictional worlds created by the Reverend or those described in the pages of *The Ghastly Fop*. While it is certainly difficult to reach a conclusive interpretation of this bizarre episode, Captain Zhang's off-hand comment, alluding to the interaction of different cultural worlds possibly provides a clue. He speculates on how China may have once been an alien planet that somehow became "embedded into the Earth thro' some very slow collision" (MD 604). Is this image of colliding worlds analogous to the slow merging of Eliza and Zhang's story with the West Line? And if so, does the consolidation of discursive worlds serve as a kind of subtle reference to the interaction of different cultural and ideological worldviews? Considering the sustained connection Pynchon establishes between collectively imagined worlds and ideology in the novel, perhaps, in addition to subverting the structure of his narrative, he is also metaphorically invoking that the walls we

erect between ourselves are just as imaginary as those separating the Captive's Tale from the story of the West Line.

In *Mason & Dixon*, dialogue is the principal means by which ideological walls are broken down. The social life of discourse is dramatized extensively in the text. Indeed, when the novel's characters aren't surveying, or watching the stars, they are remembering their pasts, relating their memories, sharing personal sentiments, exchanging jokes and weaving tales. The novel thus focuses extensively upon the discursive development of common identity and community, portraying, in the actions and events of the narrative, how the circulation of discourse plays a fundamental role in defining and directing social and political organization. Pynchon's narrative emphasis on tall tales, local gossip, folksongs, political debate, indeed the very life of language in all its verbal forms foregrounds the process through which we voice our dreams and manifest our collective destinies.

Pynchon's depiction of discursive life in the novel thus addresses the social interactions that develop discourse. There is a strong emphasis placed on the collective nature of storytelling in the novel that is most clearly expressed in Pynchon's portrayal of audience participation. Like all storytellers, Cherrycoke's first objective is to entertain. This is underscored when he alters the content of his tale to suit the interests of his audience. While describing the feelings Mason develops for Dixon at the end of their travels, Cherrycoke is forced to rephrase what many in the room feel is a homosexual innuendo:

Only now, far too late, does Mason develop a passion for his co-adjudicator, comparable to that occurring between Public-School Students in England.'--

'Oh please Wicks spare us, far too romantick really,' mutter several voices at once.

‘Say then that Mason at last came to admire Dixon for his Bravery, -- a different sort than they’d shown each other years before, on the *Seahorse*, where they’d had no choice.

(MD 698)

Every narrator in the book is speaking to an audience. Even the extra-diegetic voice seems to have one that, strangely enough, emerges in the text as well. When Dr. Vroom is introducing Mason and Dixon to Felipe, his pet Torpedo, this extra-textual audience makes an unusual appearance. “‘If he (Felipe) had to live the way we do, worrying about Coach schedules and missed appointments and Sheriff Thickley,’ –cheers at the local Reference,-- ‘believe me he’d be one unhappy Torpedo’”(MD 432). If this local audience refers a ‘real’ locality, then are we briefly being given a glimpse of the author’s world? These episodes of audience participation or influence are telling in that they portray the fundamentally social nature of storytelling. That everybody directly or indirectly contributes to the content of Cherrycoke’s narration registers Pynchon’s concern with dramatizing the dialogic nature of discursive expression.

In addition to audience participation, the novel also depicts how discourses are received, interpreted, and recreated in a kind of narrative economy. Certain motifs appearing in the novel’s many stories recur in subsequent narratives. Characters are depicted drawing materials for their own stories from past experiences or from other tales that they have previously heard. A conspicuous prevalence of beaver motifs in Cherrycoke’s narrative draws attention to this narrative recycling. The astronomers encounter the innkeeper, Mr. Knockwood, as he is involved in waging a bloody war with the local beavers that keep flooding his land. This motif is then rehabilitated in their encounter with Zepho the werebeaver and later on in a Native American beaver creation myth. After telling an elaborate tale that explains why the British government removed eleven days from the British calendar to a crowd in a London Pub, Mason

recycles many of the Gothic details of this myth into a second story that he relates to Dixon. Stig and Lug Oafrey's legends of underground worlds are also reused by Dixon at the end of the novel in a story he tells Mason about journeying to the center of the earth. Indeed, a free exchange of good story material is so prevalent in the novel that Mr. Ice, who charges customers to hear his gristly stories of Braddock's Defeat, must defend the virtue of his enterprise: "there all of you are, accosting Strangers in Taverns, spilling forth your Sorrows, Gratis. One day...God will seize and shake you like wayward daughters, and you will thenceforward give nothing away for free" (MD 661). This currency of narrative motifs further dramatizes the social evolution of discourse.

As the novel's characters tell their stories, express their beliefs and ideologies, their imaginary worlds have a tendency of being adopted by other characters, and ultimately forms the consensual 'reality' shared by everybody. In this way, the novel portrays the development of a common, integrative vision, or what Paul Ricoeur calls cultural imagination. Through sharing stories, the teller implicitly shares his or her worldview. This is most clearly conveyed in the numerous fantasy and ghost stories that saturate *Mason & Dixon*. A striking number of the novel's characters are haunted by spirits, imaginary creatures, or invisible pursuers that they perceive to be supernatural guardians, lost lovers, or redoubtable foes. Following a near death experience, Peter Redzinger is visited by none other than Jesus Christ. Timothy Tox can summon a Golem defender with his verse. Armand the chef is relentlessly pursued by an invisible, mechanical Duck. Captain Zhang is ever on the lookout for his arch nemesis (and alter ego) Zarpazo. Maskelyne is visited by the ghost of a German soldier, Dieter, and Mason is haunted by his deceased wife, Rebekah. Each character's personal specter represents their individually

distorted perception or solipsistic representation of the world. The ghost of Rebekah is resolute in making it clear to Mason that “I am not she, but a *Representation*” (MD 540).

When the stories about these unseen persecutors are told, they often acquire a kind of existence within the consensual reality of the novel’s characters. For instance, after Armand claims that he fled France for the wilderness of America in order to escape the amorous advances of a flying, mechanical duck, all present during the story watch as the miraculous fowl later rescues the Frenchman from the murderous sword thrust of Philip Dimdown (MD 383). Indeed, the story of the Frenchmen’s duck becomes so popular, that it is soon elevated to the status of myth among the local settlers. “Back inhabitants all up and down the Line soon begin taking the Frenchman’s Duck to their Bosoms, for being exactly what they wish to visit their lives at this Moment, --something possess’d of extra-natural Powers...Soon Tales of Duck Exploits are ev’rywhere the Line may pass” (MD 448). The settlers, living an unstable and difficult life on the Pennsylvanian frontier find that something endowed with “Invisibility” and “Inexhaustible Strength,” even if it is an imaginary duck, provides a temporary escape from a life of toil and uncertainty (MD 448). Having heard Timothy Tox’s story about a Golem the patrons of the Rabbi of Prague Inn witness the creature for themselves: “Out the Window, great Mud Feet are seen to stir, tall as Eaves. Countrymen raise Tankards in their direction” (MD 490). Interestingly, when the astronomers return to the Rabbi of Prague at the end of their expedition, they find that, in a fit of monomania, Tox has asserted that the Golem now solely watches over *him*. “‘He is Mad,’ Countrymen are soon explaining to them. ‘What he now styles ‘*His Golem*,’ does not exist’” (MD, 684). Collective illusions constitute ‘reality,’ while solipsistic illusions signal ‘madness’ in this novel where in addition to death, shared insanity is a fundamental human condition.

Pynchon explicitly dramatizes the discursive creation of shared dreams in *Mason & Dixon*. While under the influence of certain mind altering substances the surveyors imagine together a land of gigantic vegetables that they mutually shape through dialogue. As the two explore this fantasy world of their own invention, Dixon says, “let us further imagine, that where there is a vegetable patch, there must be someone, - some thing,” and sure enough at his very words a group of elvish farmers materializes in the narrative (MD 656). Nor is this by any means the only dream shared by the two. As they reach the end of their journey, the astronomers fantasize about continuing the Line westward, only to be denied further progress by the grim forebodings of a spectral Native American guardian (MD 677). When they are no longer able to sail to Sumatra, Mason and Dixon dream up a fantasy version of the tropical paradise and its female inhabitants in a kind of role playing game, in which “their board is a sort of *spoken Map* of the island they have been kept from and will never see...So they pass, Mason’s women and Dixon’s, with more in common than either Surveyor will ever find out about, for even phantasms may enjoy private lives, - shadowy, whispering, veil’d to be unveil’d, ever safe from the Insults of Time” (MD 57). Dream worlds inhabited by dream women thus provide the astronomers with an imaginative escape from the limits of the real world.

The central theme that places Pynchon’s emphasis on dialogue in a social context is, of course, friendship and community. By dramatizing how the exchange of discourse brings about social solidarity, Pynchon emphasizes the crucial role of communication in connecting people across ideological boundaries. In the following section, I will briefly focus on how this theme of communication forms the basis of Pynchon’s portrayal of the political organization and collective action and connect this depiction of the populist potential of discourse with Pynchon’s appeal for global consciousness.

## IV

While a vital component of all successful fiction, the focus on human interaction in Pynchon's work is always charged with political implications. There is a powerful connection established in the novel between the circulation of discourse, and the development of common purpose and organized change. That political agitation is always depicted in the background of Mason and Dixon's adventures underscores the extent to which themes of social change direct Pynchon's agenda. The Weavers Rebellion, the Jacobite uprising, the March of the Paxton Boys, and, of course, the American Revolution figure prominently in the novel's plot, and there is a clear connection between the rebellious optimism of the Sons of Liberty depicted in the novel and that of the New Left two hundred years later, the success of the former serving to emphasize the failure of the latter. In *Slow Learner*, Pynchon's collection of early short stories, the author diagnoses the failure of the New Left movement as being largely the result of unacknowledged social boundaries existing between college students and blue collar workers that ultimately frustrated any hope of collective action: "One reason was the presence of real, invisible class force fields in the way of communicating between the two groups" (SL 7).

It is possible that Pynchon's own political frustrations are manifest in the numerous depictions of populist organization and resistance that fill the pages of *Mason & Dixon*. The political ferment and debate that initiated the American Revolution are always represented in the background of wherever the astronomers happen to go. Indeed, the America Pynchon renders is a "seething Pot of Politics" that is portrayed as achieving political consolidation and mobilization through the circulation of discourse. (MD 6) Lively depictions of caffeine-stimulated discussions saturate the novel, as in Mary Janvier's where "the Pulse of the Province ever reciprocates, a quid for a quo, a round for a Round. And somewhere sure, the raising of Voices

in debate political” (MD 328). Such thriving debate is artfully illustrated in all the pubs, ridottos, coffee houses, pool halls, taverns, public hangings, all the meeting places of collective life where a great deal of the novel’s action is set. Organized rebellion crystallizes amidst vigorous networks of communication in the novel, particularly through the broadsides and newspapers that were the principal media of the period. As Lieutenant Unchleigh says, “Print causes Civil Unrest...Where are newspapers found? In those damnable Whig Coffee-Houses. Eh? A Potion stimulating rebellion and immoderate desires” (MD 48). Such a statement recalls Anderson’s claim that print capitalism was instrumental in engendering national consciousness, and is particularly resonate, considering *Mason & Dixon*’s focus on the birth of the United States.

The power of communication in directing and coordinating public action is a common theme in Pynchon’s fiction. Indeed, he is fascinated by subversive channels of information that are free from government control. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon imagines a mysterious counter postal service known as the Tristero, or W.A.S.T.E., that handles correspondence between those who dwell in the margins of American society, like dolphin worshippers, voyeurs, soap eaters, racial minorities, and the facially-deformed (CLF 100). In *Vineland*, Frenesi Gates leads a radical student organization that chronicles on film the erosion of civil liberties in America during the sixties. And the circulation of information is certainly a central theme of *Mason & Dixon*. In the novel, a Jesuit global communications device sends messages across the globe with the cunning use of mirrors, lights, and hot air balloons, alluding to the emergence of the World Wide Web. Thus, Pynchon obliquely refers to the information age when he imagines a kind of intelligence race between English engineers and the Jesuits with their “Marvel of instant Communication” (MD 287). Pynchon depicts a dizzying panoramic view of secret information networks coordinating American resistance that Philip Dimdown calls “the Communications.”

seemingly by this to denote, the total Ensemble of Routes by which Messages might in those days pass among Americans, by which Selves entirely word-made were announc'd and shar'd, now and then merging in a plasma, like the Over-soul of the Hindoo, surging to and fro along the lanes, from hillside to bluff, by way of Lanthorn flashes, transnoctial hoofbeats, Sharpies and Snows, cryptograms curl'd among Macaronick Wigs, Songs, Sermons, Bells in Towers, Hat-Brims, letters to the Papers, Broadsheets at the Corners, Criers in the dead of Winter, in the middle of the Night, and shouting, never without the confidence that someone is listening, somewhere, and passing the Message along. (MD 567)

In *Mason & Dixon*, messages are heard. As is so often the case in Pynchon's fiction, central themes are expressed through bizarre episodes. In his visit to the Jenkins' Ear Museum, Mason, at the behest of the cadaverous owner of the establishment, feels compelled to wish Dixon a safe voyage into the eponymous organ, "the Void, and the very anti-Oracle- revealing nothing, as it absorbs everything" (MD 179). Yet this dreary sentiment is contradicted when we learn that Dixon, sitting at The World's End Tavern in Cape Town, actually hears Mason's wish. In a book as profoundly concerned with human interaction as *Mason & Dixon*, The only "Void" one finds is the illusion of emptiness created by snow. Isolated silence is an absurdity in this overpopulated text that, in its every feature, invokes a world teeming with human creatures. The anonymous marginal voices riddling the novel seem ever on the verge of bursting into the foreground of the narrative, and it is thus not surprising that towards the very end of the book, they actually do. In perhaps the most overt disclosure of his populist agenda, Pynchon finally gives the mobility center stage. Evidently, summoned by the verse of Timothy Tox, the outcast multitudes of Philadelphia haunt the living room of LeSpark.

When the Hook of Night is set, and when all the Children are at last irretrievably detain'd within their Dreams, slowly into the Room begin to walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese sailors, the overflow'd from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia, - as if something outside, beyond the cold Wind, had driven them to this extreme of seeking refuge. They bring their Scars, their Pox-pitted Cheeks, their Burdens and Losses, their feverish Eyes, their proud fellowship in a Mobility that is to be, whose shape none inside this House may know. (MD 759)

The connection drawn between the populist verse of Tox and the emergence of these unchosen masses is particularly telling. Here, Pynchon expresses the rousing power of words as they conjure up the suffering of the urban poor. Their description as “a Mobility that is to be” blurs the borders between the eighteenth and the twentieth century, suggesting that these are ghosts from our present day, perhaps seeking redemption in the past. Thus, Pynchon brilliantly gestures toward our future and demands that we consider those inhabiting the margins of our world. This passage resonates with the global vision of humanity that informs much of the thematic and structural composition of the entire novel. If nothing else, behind all of the novel’s peculiar complexities, densely packed information, and vertiginous narrative structure, is a powerful appeal for global justice. In a world where obscene disparities in wealth and labor exploitation are quotidian facts of the global economy, Pynchon’s reconstruction of the period when the forces that constitute today’s world were yet inchoate makes the eighteenth century relevant to our own “Desperate Day” (MD 747). Dixon’s story of the concave world that exists within our own, comically expresses this issue when an inhabitant of this other world observes that “wherever you may stand, given the Convexity, each of you is slightly *pointed away* from everybody else...Here 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 on how to behave" (MD 741). If the suffering of peoples across the globe were immanently a part of our daily lives, perhaps more efforts would be made to address issues of poverty, disease, and warfare. However, anchored to the ground, our sights and consequently our sympathies are very limited indeed.

These sentiments are artfully expressed in Pynchon's metaphorical treatment of mapping and flight. While mapping in the novel is most frequently depicted as a crucial step in the process of surveying, land seizure, and property division, the image also symbolizes the broadening of scope or vision and the development of a deeper understanding of the world by perceiving it 'from above.' This point is made clear when the rather demonic Captain Shelby explains to Dixon that the only way to make out the serpent shape of the Native American Spirit Mound, and apprehend its real significance, is to view it "*from a hundred feet up*" (MD 596). While a student of William Emerson, the scientist and wizard, Dixon is taught that maps are the "*Aides-memoirs of flight.*" As Emerson says, "Earthbound...we are limited to our Horizon, which sometimes is to be measure'd but in inches...Yet aloft, in Map-space, origins, destinations, any Termini, hardly seem to matter, one can apprehend all at once the entire plexity of possible journeys" (MD 505). In a representational sense, looking at a map does give this illusion of flight, and affords the ability to traverse at a glance everywhere upon the earth's surface. Gaining the right perspective on things is all about reaching a high enough altitude. Seen from space, the arbitrary lines that divide the world into a chess board of nations do not exist.

To simulate this power of flight, the narrative often departs from the earth's surface, takes on a panoramic view of the globe, and depicts the activities of people everywhere on earth. Pynchon portrays this universal simultaneity during the Transit of Venus where the narrative

focuses upon an astronomical event occurring “all over the World all day long that fifth and sixth of June, in Latin, in Chinese, in Polish, in Silence, --upon Roof-Tops and Mountain Peaks, out of Bed-chamber windows... observers lie, they sit, they kneel, -- and witness something in the Sky” (MD 97). If we consider Anderson’s claims about the novel’s capacity to foster consciousness of unseen people in unseen places all simultaneously going about their business on the globe, then the significance of the above passage is clear. Pynchon connects these anonymous observers as they all witness Venus’ transit across the sun *together*, at the same time, everywhere on earth.

However, unlike children, adults have forgotten how to fly. Thus, the ultimate expression of humanity’s shared passage through time, that great cycle of departure and return, is our common horizon, in which Cherrycoke finds his ‘inter-pretendary’ solution: “How might I speak of my true “Church,” of the planet-wide Syncretism, among the Deistick, the Oriental, Kabbalist, and the Savage that is to be, --the Promise of Man, the redemptive Point, ever at our God-horizon, toward which all Faiths, true and delusional, must alike converge!” (MD 356)

In conclusion, *Mason & Dixon* enacts the function of discourse as a socially and politically transformative act. The novel depicts and dramatizes how our conceptions of the past, the social order, and even ourselves are created and recreated through the ongoing process of discursive evolution and socio-ideological becoming: history, memory, identity, and government are not fixed emanations of the natural world but are social constructs that are developed and endowed with meaning through narrative constructs that confer a sense of coherence and continuity on a mutable, incomprehensible, and finite temporal existence. The notion that these categories are static and anchored in concrete spatial, temporal, or cultural definitions is an illusion. All are thus ideologies generated by the social imagination of a group and are given expression and

ultimately reified through the collective circulation of discourses. Consequently, discourse plays a fundamental role in articulating the ideological systems that generate and sustain social and political institutions that constitute structures of authority.

Discursive modes, particularly the novel and history were instrumental in initiating the emergence of worldviews that enabled the ascent of the nation as the modern world's supreme form of political organization. This helps explain why *Mason & Dixon* is a historiographic metafiction, a 'postmodernized' historical novel that not only invites consideration of the epistemological indeterminacy of historical re-construction, but also self-reflexively focuses upon the capacity of the novel to create discursive worlds that both simulate the lives of whole populations and promote the development of a collective identification with an imagined community. Two distinctive features of the novel are deployed by Pynchon to undermine nationalism and promote a global worldview: its heteroglossia and its multiple discursive worlds.

Pynchon's opposition to nationalism is manifest in the novel's thematic and structural characteristics that expose the artificial and provisional nature of discourse and undermine the legitimacy claims of any single dominant cultural narrative. He does this by disclosing the representational or derivative nature of his version of the eighteenth century, foregrounding his mimicry of the generic and stylistic conventions of eighteenth century popular culture. More importantly, Pynchon populates his narrative with countless sub-narratives that eschew the limitations of a single authorial perspective in favor of countless dramatized narrators and speakers, all of whom have a story to tell. Pynchon thus artistically represents a model of history that focuses upon the oral traditions, folk stories, and local histories, indeed all those organic forms of social memory, existing beyond the control of governments, which foster community and solidarity.

*Mason & Dixon* explores the symbolic systems we create to define our relationship to each other and the world. Rather than condemning these social constructions and gesturing towards some abstract universal truth, Pynchon evokes the profound human needs, the fears and desires, from which these discourses emerge, and suggests that ultimately they are all we have to go on. The further implication is that we are then ultimately responsible for the social reality that we create. This awareness of common human experience and shared responsibility for our collective destinies promotes an all-encompassing humanitarian ethos anchored in the notion that we are, all of us, connected as human beings, not necessarily according to the cosmic dispensation of a capricious deity, but by our common home and codependence on the finite space of this living planet.

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