The Tongue Schizochronick:

Linguistic Archaism in Thomas Pynchon's Mason & Dixon

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Introduction

"Now they begin the Day sighting into the Sun, and watching their own Shadows at Evening, Surveyor and Tripod and Instrument stretching back, somehow, toward the past, toward more youthful Selves."

—Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke

"And he bigan with right a myrie cheere
His tale anon, and seyde in this manere."

—Chaucer

Thomas Pynchon is one of the leading American novelists of the latter half of the twentieth century. From his first novel, *V.* (winner of the William Faulkner Foundation prize for a debut novel (Kihss 38)), to what many consider his masterpiece, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and with late works like *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon has garnered sweeping praise and contributed substantially to the body of contemporary American literature. *Gravity's Rainbow* won the National Book Award (and was selected for a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction by the award's jury, though, for undisclosed reasons, that year's fiction prize was never awarded (ibid.)), and *The Crying of Lot 49* won the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters (ibid.).

Literary critic Harold Bloom stated in an interview with *The AV Club* that *Mason & Dixon* would "probably be" his choice for "a single sublime work of fiction from the last century." Nonetheless, *Mason & Dixon* remains something of a sleeper hit, even among avid readers of Pynchon's work. It is a long novel, totaling 773 pages, but for all its length it lacks the motorizing force of a central plot—instead, it takes a more picaresque and rhizomatic approach to storytelling: "The different stories all intertwine, and double and triple on themselves.

Characters are forever seeing connections and links and plots, and paranoid parallels," James Wood writes, and the formal decisions in *Mason & Dixon*, he claims, place the novel "in the paradoxical position of enforcing connections that are finally conceptual rather than human."

The book, consisting of nested narratives that at times transgress their boundaries and bleed into each other, primarily takes the form of stories the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke tells members of his extended family in Christmastide of 1786. These stories generally center on Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, heavily fictionalized versions of the historical pair of surveyor and astronomer who mapped out their eponymous Line, dividing Maryland and Pennsylvania, or, more broadly, the American north and south. One reference text on Pynchon notes, "it is impossible to summarize, or even to tell, the plot of [*Mason & Dixon*]" (Bloom), since the novel's meandering, commodious narrative, which terminates in three endings taking place at multiple levels of narrative abstraction, flaunts description, and events often proceed with no meaningful causal relation to each other.

The central idea of the novel is a problem with which Pynchon has grappled in his fiction for decades—entropy versus resurrection. From his early short story "Entropy" on, he has explored the conflict between "Deism and nonbelief" and "God and afterlife… bodily resurrection, if possible" ("Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?"), and how modernity has shifted toward nonbelief from the faith of prior ages. In *Mason & Dixon*, "hugely ambitious" (Kakutani) and stylistically unique among his novels, that battle is waged not only on the level of content, but in the particulars of its form. The novel's modified imitation of eighteenth-century English—auditory, punning, and irregular—subverts the style of the Age of Reason to exhibit characteristics of premodern storytelling in a postmodern context. Its total effect is to bring together the premodern and the postmodern against modernity's entropic systematization.

The Pastiche

Mason & Dixon adopts a new and unusual form, mostly unused in Pynchon's other novels: a pastiche of eighteenth-century English, complete with capital letters initiating many common nouns, archaic use of punctuation, dated slang, and copious songs, poetry, and puns. This is the feature that immediately distinguishes it from the rest of his œuvre, but it has undergone relatively little study, although Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds and William Logan have explored aspects of it. Hinds has written about the "classificatory urge" in the Enlightenment *Mason & Dixon* inhabits (188) and the contrast between the deterritorialization of the novel's puns and the precision of the era's lexicographers. Logan also contemplates the language and structure of *Mason & Dixon*. He argues that the novel is intended to be digested with the care accorded poetry—it is populated with "ideas… [used] the way a poet uses words, as objects of contemplation and gratification" (433). This method of construction, oriented toward savoring each point of consideration, is inimical to plot as modern novels often conceive it, eschewing a propulsive, causally interwoven series of events. Logan's conclusion is that Pynchon's poetic sensibility does not justify the novel's plotlessness, despite his style's benefits: "Here Pynchon's poetics have seduced him: it hardly matters if most poems mean what they say. Poetry is the saying, but fiction… is the having said" (437). Both Hinds and Logan agree that the linguistic quirks of *Mason & Dixon* are rich with meaning. Its constructed style includes both puns and poetic sensibility, but includes other aspects and works for profound purposes relative to readerly experience.

Pastiche is a literary technique of imitation, employed in a variety of ways. Fredric Jameson writes that "[p]astiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" (16), but

“devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists” (ibid.). While pastiche may not inherently possess a parodic impulse or a comparison with everyday language, it can readily be used with each of these in mind. Certain Victorian poets like Alfred, Lord Tennyson and William Morris (Weaver 305) found, in imitations of older forms of English, an entry into the mystic intensity, authority, and aura of accreted time past, while in the twentieth century works like John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Jorge Luis Borges’ “Argumentum Ornithologicum” employed pastiches of antiquated styles for satiric purposes, poking fun at the confidence that each era has had in its own objectivity and rationality.

Mason & Dixon operates in both the satiric and nostalgic registers from its very beginning. Its sprawling, magnificent opening sentence, 128 words long, layers the thick snow of time on a frosty colonial Christmastime, and flashes of more contemporary and Pynchonian material appear momentarily with the first flagrantly brand-name reference to Cherry Coke (6) on the next page. The balance of comic and melancholic haunts *Mason & Dixon* from then on, uniting aspects of a muted and sometimes intense nostalgia with incisive historical humor, each emphasized with the same technique. The same stylistic choices that lend the novel melancholy gravitas also serve to intensify its ridiculousness: it is contingent on the reader’s mood whether “a miracle in that year of miracles, 1759” (35) reads as a comic look at the optimism of a former age, or as a dream crushed beneath centuries of dust.

But the pastiche is not inert, nor does it exert a purely tonal influence on the novel; rather, it provides a valuable avenue by which the text comes into contact with the subject of time. As a historical novel, following rather explicitly in the footsteps of *The Sot-Weed Factor* (Pynchon’s fictitious *Pennsylvaniad* an obvious nod to Barth’s *Marylandiad*), *Mason & Dixon* is concerned

deeply with problems involving the human relation to time. While *Gravity's Rainbow* challenges causality, *Mason & Dixon* integrates that challenge with a large-scale interrogation of temporal progression and its conceptualization—how the present observer views the past and future. "Episodes from the past flick at [Mason] like great sticky Webs" (185) is an example of the novel's temporal instability; the past, relative to Mason, in a flashback, in a story told by Cherrycoke, appears in "episodes," a term whose association with television programs is drawn into focus by the metaphor of hurled webs, an odd touch that seems to refer to Spider-Man (the superhero had, by the time of the novel's publication, been the star of eight television series). The nod to television, like many references and linguistic quirks, causes the reader to lurch forward out of a memory of a reverie in a story told in 1786 and into the present.

The nostalgia that so pervades the text is a function of its model of relation to past time—especially, the view of the past as something that somehow could have been different, the critical invention Pynchon implements that shifts the novel into the uncomfortable territory of the subjunctive. The subjunctive mood is essential to the novel, because of its position in the "hour of infinite plenitude" (Bilton 241) at America's birth. "Subjunctive" here is an adjective meaning "[d]esignating or relating to a verbal mood that refers to an action or state as conceived (rather than as a fact) and is therefore used chiefly to express a wish, command, exhortation, or a contingent, hypothetical, or prospective event" ("Subjunctive, 1.a."). In *Mason & Dixon*, subjunctivity appears in the hypothetical potential of the young nation. "America emerges as the destination and repository of all of Mason and Dixon's thoughts but it remains for them an inchoate imaginary. They will be the ones to render it determinate, to write a defining line upon it," Adam Lifshey writes (121); in this sense, the Line is a metonymy for time, which cancels out unactualized potential and produces a linear series of realized events. Perhaps "ghosts are

double… one walking, the other still" (*Mason & Dixon* 171), and the subjunctive can exist as a memory of free will, even when time refutes all "Worlds alternative to this one" (359). Thus, a handful of passages take place in the liminal zone in which dialogue and whole scenes can "almost" (212) have happened.

The novel's pastiche is not purely accountable in terms of eighteenth-century English. The admixture of contemporary allusions represents the present's view of the past, rather than the past itself. The temporal mingling yields a diachronic outlook via anachronistic references threaded throughout: beginning with "Latitudes and Departures" (3), Cherrycoke (6), "if you must use [marijuana], do not inhale" (10), and "the L.E.D. blinks" (22), such references on through the rest of the novel. These nods to more contemporary realities lift the reader out of the archaic atmosphere, jolting one into consciousness of the actual literary context of the novel, beneath the pretense of its style to age. As such, these moments bring one to a third-person awareness regarding the presented, hypothetical past; one observes the idea of what the past could have been.

Mason & Dixon examines the original promise of America in the language and orthography of the time, albeit with certain tweaks. English in the eighteenth century featured many differences from contemporary style, grammar, and orthography: lengthy sentences; frequent use of capital letters for common nouns, and sometimes even verbs, adjectives, or adverbs; doubling-up of punctuation marks; now-unconventional use of ellipsis; variable spelling; slightly less rigid syntax; and sentence structures built around extended chains of modifying clauses. Eighteenth-century English occupied a transitional period between the high variability and unrefined energy of the seventeenth century's Early Modern English prose and the extreme polish of the nineteenth century's prose, the latter of which Samuel Butler would

attack in "On English Composition": "Bacon tells us, 'Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark'; he does not say, what I can imagine a last century writer to have said, 'A feeling somewhat analogous to the dread with which children are affected upon entering a dark room, is that which most men entertain at the contemplation of death.'" This transitional form of the language also enjoys a permanent association with the great comic novels of the period, including *Tristram Shandy*, *Tom Jones*, *Barry Lyndon*, and *Gulliver's Travels*.

Besides these actual features of the period's language, Pynchon interjects a handful of others, with varying degrees of genuine connection to the past. As shall be seen, key features of the pastiche include a heightened aurality, use of puns, and use of capitalization for emphasis. Aurality, so essential to *Mason & Dixon*'s (sometimes backgrounded) oral performance, is the general form of storytelling before a given culture adopts as standard the strictures of the written word. Apostrophes inserted into words to mark elided syllables (in the general pattern of 'plac'd' for 'placed,') serve as constant reminders of this auditory quality of the text, as they are, primarily, pronunciation guides. While this was a punctuating practice already in use in Early Modern English, it was rarely applied so strenuously as in *Mason & Dixon*, in which the common usage becomes a principle. Puns are a hallmark of Pynchon's style, and this novel abounds in them, both in general narration and in characters' speech. Puns recall an uncodified era of language, as Hinds notes, just after Samuel Johnson published his *Dictionary of the English Language*. They evoke the earlier linguistic paradigm, not yet rationally charted, by providing nonsensical connections between disparate topics, since their concern is with pure phonetic or morphological coincidence. The framework of coincidence is opposed to that of causality, and thus the use of puns is a strategic move against the rationalistic project. Taken

together, these features of the text oppose modernity through their archaism and irrationality, instead gesturing at a meeting point for premodernity and postmodernity.

History

The novel's historical setting is a major aspect of *Mason & Dixon*, with important political and philosophical implications. It takes place in the late Age of Enlightenment, the culmination of a rationalist movement that peaked at the end of the eighteenth century, resulting in "the subjugation of nature by instrumental reason" (Ireton 144). Central themes thus point to a shift from an unmapped to a demarcated world. This shift is represented most prominently through the literal charting of the Mason-Dixon Line through nature. The loss of the age's faith and freedom in light of encroaching reason is a philosophical analog of the process of mapping. Fate is not necessarily expressed as predestination running forward, but rather as certainty running backward, becoming, as Pynchon describes splashes of blood in a taphouse, "Characters Death would know how to read" (119), and the Line's visto is a series of "Tellurick Injuries" (544) inflicted on the land. Likewise, the intimacy of personal communion with God is left behind in quest of a purely rational form of religious experience in deism that excises spiritual consciousness.

Another critical theme in *Mason & Dixon* is the struggle over history. History, in its archaic sense simply 'story,' is, in the novel, something very like what its etymology implies: a tale or network of tales or network of fragments of tales, together producing a vision of the world in the form of a narrative. Pynchon characterizes the 'search' for a single true and universal narrative as a means of shoring up power: the hegemonic spheres of influence, intricately interlocking and mutually propelling, which govern permitted modes of understanding narratives concerning the past, are represented by bad actors in *Mason & Dixon*; they produce a "crisis of

social or moral effectivity" (Thill 54), and "subtexts and counter-discourses" (Ickstadt 558) are the narrative material by which Pynchon combats their mode of history. In *Mason & Dixon*, these power centers are the Dutch East India Company with the Cape Colony's extravagantly capitalistic use of prostitution, the Jesuits with their lupine, rapacious desire to conspire against humanity for the sake of its salvation, the Royal Society full of intrigues and class divisions, and even early patriarchs of the American project, like a conniving George Washington and chillingly pragmatic Benjamin Franklin.

The narratives these organizations and people seek to construct and disseminate are functionally about power dynamics rather than truth values, and about centralizing power rather than democratizing it. Michel Foucault opines in *Madness & Civilization* that the evils undergone in the internalization of power structures, an imposition "of reason in madness" (256) that takes place in psychiatric treatment, are perhaps equal to those suffered in prisons for the mad; because Samuel Tuke, historically regarded to have liberated many of the mad from the asylum's horrors, "is known to have been borne along by a whole current of 'philanthropy,' this gesture is regarded as an act of 'liberation.' The truth was quite different" (254). That portion of the text concerns what Foucault refers to as the classical age, and contains the period in which *Mason & Dixon* is set; it reflects the same concern with institutional power exploiting apparent progress (toward scientific rationalism; toward mercy and moral treatments to the mad).

Genuinely democratic modes of historiography, according to Pynchon, are woven at the margins of power. Pure history quilts narratives, patch by patch, that can guide and sustain those who have lived through them: "History is hir'd, or coerc'd, 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" (350), muses Ethelmer, son of

arms dealer Ives LeSpark. Thus, *Mason & Dixon*'s model of historiography, not institutional or absolute, is an art rather than a science, produced from the lives of a people rather than imposed on them from above.

Critique of Modernity

A third main thread *Mason & Dixon* explores is a complex and nuanced critique of modernity. Modernity, in this sense, is the era in which modernism, the endeavor to construct a single metanarrative capable of explaining the world, dominates discourse and experience. This is not the literary modernism of the early twentieth century, but a much broader trend. Lyotard describes the modern paradigm as "any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse" concerned with its own legitimation, "making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" (xxiii). Modernity began with Enlightenment projects at the end of the Middle Ages, when thinkers like Descartes worked to revolutionize existing worldviews and build rationalistic philosophical systems from minimal a priori assumptions. Sometimes the novel's critique of modernism takes on concrete form, as in the impossibility of laying certain lines which require "a Geometry more permissive than Euclid" (337). Where modernity attains dominance in *Mason & Dixon*, it is always accomplished through conspiracy and violence, accompanied by a sense of compromise or hopelessness.

Time itself is one of the principal weaknesses in rationalistic thought that Pynchon outlines. Because time is instrumental in the construction of narrative meaning, as in the act of reading, "perpetual motion's immanence to experience mitigates the possibility of meaning and understanding" (Huehls 58)—in other words, immanent in meaning is the essential decadence of temporal progression. This is why *Mason & Dixon* has such a complex relation to time; it

recognizes that all beginnings are links in the chain of causality. This metaphor, implicit in the literal chains used to demarcate territory in the act of surveying, makes glancing reference to the 'great chain of being,' a commonplace describing the "cosmic order" of the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Lombardo 37), but adds the concept of providence. The metaphor of a chain, in which each segment of the metaphysical order hangs from God, reflects the categorical theories of medieval theology, which built on Aristotle's methods of differentiating lower and higher modes of being. References to the ontological chain appear from time to time in the novel (141; 194), and in one religiously charged moment the text describes an "Enchainment of Hymns" (263).

Causality as a chain, however, acquires yet another sense—that of restriction. As time moves forward and the systems it governs shed light and heat, "[to] Men of Science… must all days run alike… each proceeding in but one Direction, irreclaimable" (*Mason & Dixon* 27). By applying rationality to time, inquiry universally reveals entropy, and its ultimate end, death; causality (at least in the Newtonian model current to Mason and Dixon) predicates each event absolutely on the last: "The… Planets wait, all but humming, taut within their spidery Linkages back to the Crank-Shaft and the Crank" (95), and the system whose motion is initiated by the Prime Mover ends in the apparition of death "like a Miniature propell'd, in its strange slow Progress, by some invisible Child" (112).

Once *Mason & Dixon*'s critique of the project of modern rationalism is clear, the question arises what Pynchon intends to replace that project with. The answer is a synthesis—or rather identification—of premodern and postmodern thought, once the intervening period of rationalistic ambition is elided. In the practice of both "confabulation" and historiography that comprises *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon acts as a "poststructuralist investigator" (Edwards 22). As a

poststructuralist, his methods of analysis exceed simple semiotics. The fundamental unit of semiotics is the sign, composed of a signifier and its signified. This tripartite system seeks to model how the represented world and the real world (if any) correspond—how language, or symbol, expresses reality. But poststructuralism transgresses the idea of correspondence, and explodes binary oppositions in favor of the idea that "[w]hat *is*, is inseparable from the modes of its perception" (Edwards 22), a radically different outlook from the modern ideas so focused on piercing illusions and abstracting from the material world an ideal parallel governing it.

It is important to treat Pynchon as a writer in the tradition of postmodernism. The most succinct and popular definition for postmodernism remains Jean-François Lyotard's "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv), although the movement possesses a larger and more complex set of attributes. Pynchon is generally classified as a postmodern writer because he is comfortably situated within the milieu of postmodern technique and the movement's topical concerns. Loosely speaking, those techniques and concerns, generally appearing or culminating after the Second World War, emphasize ideas like the limitations of language, its importance in shaping human experience, and, in direct syllogistic procession from the prior two, the limits of perception and knowledge.

In order to embody these topics and those branching off of them, postmodern literary techniques include unconventional, invented, archaic, or heavily altered literary forms, perspectives, and plotlines. Many postmodern novels lack what would traditionally be considered a plot entirely. *Mason & Dixon*, like all of Pynchon's novels, is fairly light on plot and/or action in their traditional senses; it reads more like a picaresque, from the period of that genre's greatest dominance in English (Hume 300), or an encyclopedic novel (Mendelson 1267), or their rare intersection, *Don Quixote*, with its proto-postmodern play with storytelling and

structure. Further unconventional choices mark *Mason & Dixon* too deeply to be ignored: the novel's focus on passing time robbing reality of possibility jars against its threefold ending; its auditory storytelling conceit seems to conflict with interjections of long-form quotations from poetry, song, and even theology; and shifting perspectives and tales concerning things as fictionally normative as ghosts and as universally bizarre as an amorous, invisible, robotic duck and a were-fop haunt the pages, forcibly tearing suspension of disbelief from the reader's hands. These forms of narrative and conceptual play entirely coincide with postmodern norms, but also embrace certain premodern sensibilities, like aurality through oral storytelling, orthographic variability, and polysemy.

Practically, Pynchon's identification between pre- and postmodern thought is not only a similarity by way of their mutual difference from modernity, but a series of related correspondences. These include, but are not limited to, structures of meaning that evade ready categorization, dynamics involving mutual identification or unity in plurality, an embrace of the arbitrary or experiential, and a privation of logocentric modes of thought. In *Mason & Dixon*, puns meet all these criteria, falling as they do outside of most categorical discourse, involving a mysterious unity of unrelated things, being grounded in the arbitrary whims of language, and taking a form undetermined by any but very fleeting logic.

These phenomena of non-modern thought—category transgression, mutual identification, arbitrariness, and displacement of rationality—tend to flow into each other and defy direct explanations and divisions. Not dissimilar to the mystic concept of the Simurgh, the bird-king of *The Conference of the Birds* who is simultaneously each and all its constituents, or of the early Nietzsche's critique of the Apollinian order, the dominant characteristic of this anti-modern paradigm is its challenging of a consistent mathematical logic which undergirds the world. *The*

Crying of Lot 49 calls the law of the excluded middle (the Aristotelian notion that a proposition cannot be neither true nor false) into question: "She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided" (150), draws the breaking of the law into question in a way that would otherwise be absent from readerly consideration; likewise, *Mason & Dixon* evinces a manifest reluctance to limit truths to individuated, exclusive existences. Puns are a way of linguistically providing the mutual identification of disparate objects, just as the aspect of oral storytelling the novel's style presents lends itself to a high degree of extempore variation and embellishment. Thus, *Mason & Dixon*'s pastiche includes auditory, polysemic, and variable stylistic elements in its address of modernity's logocentrism.

Aims

The goal of this study is to ascertain and delineate the attributes and purpose of *Mason & Dixon*'s unique pastiche. As this feature of the novel's text is perhaps the most immediately interesting to any reader, as its relation to the substance of the novel is both complex and profound, and as such a path has not yet been thoroughly trod in scholarship, the process of elucidating this pastiche and its role will provide a reference point for those surveying *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon as prose stylist, and archaism and pastiche in postmodernism. It will demonstrate that the purpose of the novel's pastiche is a critique of modernity, which unifies the premodern and postmodern, in a manner achieved through forms of premodern and modern language existing alongside each other. The former is a haunting presence, which provides an implicit alternative to the hubristic Enlightenment writing within which it makes its appearance.

Methodology

This study will dissect Pynchon's orthography and phraseology to provide specific reference points from which to build out the general argument of this thesis. It will employ close

reading in order to accurately identify the structure of *Mason & Dixon*'s pastiche. While close reading came into vogue under the auspices of New Criticism, here the technique will be used in a manner not especially seeking to emulate the methods of particular schools, but keeping in mind Alexander Pope's dictum, "[a] perfect Judge will read each work of Wit / With the same spirit that its author writ." This here means approaching *Mason & Dixon* on its own terms, reading for small-scale stylistic elements and with an awareness of Pynchon's location within literary history, postmodernity.

Lyotard's brief but seminal text, *The Post-Modern Condition*, outlines a theory of postmodernity, the intellectual paradigm that acceded to prominence on the decline of modernism. Modernism's grand systems of meaning, which sought to rationalize the structure of the world, Lyotard writes, have given way to an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). One technique that retains explanatory power even in an age of skepticism and subjectivity, however, is concern with "language games," here defined as the "pragmatic aspect" of language (9). Without the confidence the great modernist movements had in methods of reaching objective truth, broad currents of thought (across modernist and postmodernist movements (Surkis 703) made a 'linguistic turn'; "[a] linguistic model of the social" (Sewell, qtd. in Surkis 703) underpinned new understandings of the world, extending the importance that language had in areas like philosophy into broader social and cultural concerns, and heightening its pragmatic powers. Strands of thought present in the work of Wittgenstein, Russell, and Moore (Bergmann 417) challenged philosophy's linguistic nature in the shift in focus called the linguistic turn, resulting in a widespread belief that "all philosophical problems are verbal" (418), and it is the "business [of philosophers] to explore the implications of grammar" (419). The ways that

language is used, without necessarily addressing its meaning, is what is meant by ‘language games.’

There are a number of ways in which such linguistic pragmatics make themselves felt in *Mason & Dixon*’s archaic language. In “Pynchon in the Poetic”, William Logan writes that “the comic irritation of the capitals… removes the novel to the bewildering thicket of the past” (426). That Pynchon’s linguistic charade in *Mason & Dixon* is generally concerned with stylistic quanta lends credence to Logan’s idea that its primary substance is small-scale “farthing[s] of meaning” (428). Atomized textual experience, particularly in word-level orthographic shifts (‘physical’ to ‘physickal,’ ‘smoke’ to ‘smoak,’ etc.), emphasizes the distancing effect and intensify microscopic engagement. “Images that might have radiated into ornament become instead the novel’s enterprise” (429) under minute readerly inspection. Logan’s vision of the text’s structure aligns with a Lyotardian view of language and its use in the postmodern paradigm: the texture of every part of the novel is characterized by immediate recognition of the pastiche, whose effects are always felt. Since Lyotard links narrative beats to the “lethal function” of a narrative’s annihilation (22), the deformation of plot seems to be a sort of striving against mortality, encoded within events’ motionlessness. At first reading slows down, but even later cannot shake the style’s initial alienation, intensified by the absence of a proper plot.

Jacques Derrida, like Lyotard, lays out methods of practicing postmodern thought, just as it describes a paradigm of cognition for postmodernity. Among Derrida’s influential theories, deconstructionism’s concept of “trace” is most relevant to the project of understanding *Mason & Dixon*’s pastiche. Trace, according to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, is a function of the fact that “[t]he present… is always complicated by non-presence”—it is the difference of a thing from a second, which is always implicit in the first. Put another way, trace is “perception –

what we see right now – contaminated with memory or the present contaminated with the past." Implementing Derridean trace as a technique to understand *Mason & Dixon* is immediately appealing because of the novel's layered, conflicted relations between form and content. As a late-twentieth-century novel, its concerns are not specifically confined to the events of the mid-to-late-eighteenth century, and as a historical novel, its concerns are not specifically confined to those of the time of its writing, either. The book's style and content pull away from each other, and at the seam of their dissociation is an anti-modern void.

Thus, one example of trace in *Mason & Dixon* is in the conflict between its form and its context. The alienating power of the antiquarian language that incarnates the story arises from the contrast it has with contemporary modes of expression. A readily available conclusion to be drawn from this phenomenon of alienation embedded in style is that its goal is to destabilize the reader's relation to the present. The trace within that idea would rather be its inverse—that the novel's stylistic oddities destabilize the reader's relation to the past, and specifically the portion of the past which it concerns. This process is in line with the way in which Pynchon toys with historiography, combining meticulous research with thematically appropriate falsehood; "a certain fluidity… characterizes the historical situation that is not registered in Pynchon's account" (Palmeri 192)—and vice versa. Frank Palmeri notes that "there is no evidence," for example, "that local J.P's [sic] cut weavers' wages in 1756" (192), despite Mason's assertion to the contrary in the novel (501); there need not be any of this evidence, because the fact in question is illustrative rather than argumentative.

In much the same way, the fantastical procession of *Mason & Dixon*'s oddball characters, aberrations, and prodigies serve to illustrate the novel's ideas. Its wonders include but are not limited to Lud Oafery, were-fop; a wyrm; gigantic flora; surveyor-trainees who can fly; an

invisible robotic duck; a golem; a talking dog; a dowsing-dagger plucked from a dream; sentient clocks; and a perpetual motion machine. While none of these are factual, they illustrate *Mason & Dixon*'s significant ideas. As the text's style takes the form of an eighteenth-century pastiche, the target of destabilization, a process giving rise to interrogation, is the eighteenth century. The historical position occupied by the novel is not to be underestimated—Cherrycoke tells the stories that comprise it in December of 1786, the final month of the final year before the adoption of the Constitution in 1787. The particular temporal zone subject to interrogation and destabilization is that which displays Enlightenment ideals passing—as Venus in its Transit—from the transcendence of rationalism into the immanence of its ultimate political implementation, embodied in the codification of America. Thus, history's function in the novel is symbolic, displaying truths rather than absolute facts.

Examining the Tongue

Ultimately, *Mason & Dixon*'s oddly engineered language is a powerful tool for understanding the intricacies of the novel it so intensely characterizes. Distinguished from a purely philologically accurate archaism by additional quirks, but fundamentally driven by eighteenth-century customs and rules, the pastiche occupies an unusual space in which to mediate between the content of the novel and the context of its publication in postmodernity. This thesis will explore the nature and uses of the pastiche through techniques derived from both Lyotard, who provides the language game framework that will permit a pragmatic analysis of Pynchon's altered language, and Derrida, whose work provides the concept of trace, which will permit a more total analysis of the dynamic between different ideologies and eras in the novel's style. By these means, this thesis will demonstrate the ways in which the pastiche critiques the modern rationalistic project, so deeply entwined with the novel's theme of the imposition of

hegemonic reason, and how it suggests a unity between premodern and postmodern modes of thought, localizing modernist ideology within a specific historical context—and advocating for leaving it there. This study will unpack the critically important aspect of the novel that is its artificial language, and show the complex and hitherto neglected ways in which it ties into the text's central ideas.

The Age of Reason in the Form of Folly

"'Tis the Age of Reason, rrrf? There is ever an Explanation at hand, and no such thing as a Talking Dog,"

—The Learnèd English Dog

A principal aim of the archaic formal choices of *Mason & Dixon* is to undermine Enlightenment rationalism's domination of truth and nature. In *The Post-Modern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard describes the methodology of postmodernism as predicated upon the use of "language games"—"emphasizing facts of language and in particular their pragmatic aspect" (9). The effect on the reader of the pastiche Pynchon employs ought, as a critical feature of a postmodern project, be evident from a pragmatic angle. This effect, in *Mason & Dixon*, serves to destabilize the reader's credulity regarding its modern content. Just as Mason and Dixon "are presented as curiously receptive registers of New World dreaming and, as cutting-edge cartographers, interrogators of the very scientific rationalism they otherwise represent" (Edwards 23), *Mason & Dixon* interrogates its content through its form.

The purpose for this interrogation is to advance a framework of history Pynchon that establishes in his essay "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?", which sets the rational processes of deterministic entropy against the miraculous. The miraculous is a necessary center for history, because any project that aims instead merely to amplify rationalistic power and knowledge will inevitably find entropy, and by extension death. The two specific techniques the novel implements in order to accomplish that demolition of faith in Enlightenment modes of thought are archaism of style and of form, whose contrast with the era's systematizing hubris yields "a humorous commentary on the Age of Reason" (Donahue 71), rebutting that era's zealous rationalism through a satire grounded in archaic design.

Problems with Rationality

Mason & Dixon constitutes an artistic effort rife with what Kathryn Hume describes as a hallmark of the revival of eighteenth-century satiric trends in the twentieth century: the "ironic interrogation of history" (301). This "ironic interrogation" utilizes material possessing a historical appearance, as in *Mason & Dixon*'s use of real historical figures and settings, overlaid with overt fiction, to undermine established narratives about the past. The novel's interrogation of history is twofold: it asks not only what the past is, but how we understand the past. For Pynchon, what constitutes good history is its closeness to the lives of the people it concerns, and its distance from centers of narrative-manipulating power—organizations and institutions that seek to control the past in order to shore up their own power, such as the overlapping networks of the Jesuits, Freemasons, British and Dutch East India Companies, and Royal Society in *Mason & Dixon*. As Lawrence Wolfley writes, "Pynchon's view is 'phenomenological,' in the sense that official pronouncements and the interpretations of establishment historians are meaningless in the face of the reality of the event, the immediate impact on the human organism and its hope for a viable future" (874). Pynchon's model of history, then, uses individuals' experiences, including hopes for the future, to challenge institutional authority's image of the past.

Pynchon expresses an altered form of this idea, with the past replacing the future, in the epigraph to Chapter 35 of *Mason & Dixon*:

> Facts are but the Play-things of lawyers… History is not Chronology… nor is it Remembrance... History can as little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as claim the Power of the other,— her Practitioners, to survive, must soon learn the arts of the quidnunc, spy, and Taproom Wit,— that there may ever continue more than one life-line back into a Past we risk, every day, losing our forebears in forever,— not a Chain of

> single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All,— rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common. (349)

This excerpt, from the fictitious treatise *Christ and History*, by the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, also provides a window into *Mason & Dixon*'s theory of history. The epigraph not only advocates an unorthodox model of historiography, but also, because it is from *Christ and History*, links the novel's ideal method of historiography with its model of history. That model is characterized by the opposition of the miraculous, epitomized by the Resurrection, to the mechanistic, exemplified by death. Christ, the Reverend claims, is the central point on which history converges, or from which it emerges: "History is the Dance of our Hunt for Christ… History is redeemed from the service of Darkness,— with all the secular Consequences, flowing from that one Event, design'd and will'd to occur" (75-76). As the axis of history, Christ serves as the central figure Pynchon uses to symbolize the miraculous.

But in *Mason & Dixon* there are other mysterious points of convergence or emergence in history, which appear to be analogs for Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. "There persists," for example, "along the Company nerve-lines a terrible simple nearness to the Night of the "Black Hole," some Zero-Point of history, reckoning whence, all the Marvels to follow… would elapse as fugitive as Opium dreams, and mattering less" (152). The Black Hole of Calcutta serves a shadowy role for the East India Company; insofar as the Company represents the mechanistic processes of an amoral capitalism, it is possible that the Black Hole is analogous to Christ's death, itself a synecdoche for death in general, the final triumph of the entropic nature of the universe. Justin M. Scott Coe instead understands the relation of the Black Hole to Christ as one of replacement, and the dire consequences of that crime (156). There is yet another

fascinating point of convergence, however, possessing what appears to be a significance opposite that of the Black Hole: "The Loaf, the indispensable point of convergence upon every British table, the solid British Quartern Loaf, [which] is mostly, like the Soul, Emptiness" (204). Just as history emerges from Christ, food, the central mechanical concern of organic existence, converges on bread, whose "carnescent mass" (204) serves as Host to the body of Christ in the Eucharist.

The opposition of the mechanistic to the miraculous is foreshadowed in Pynchon's 1984 essay "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?", which more explicitly describes his model of history. The essay states of the eighteenth century that, "[a]s religion was being more and more secularized into Deism and nonbelief, the abiding human hunger for evidence of God and afterlife, for salvation – bodily resurrection, if possible – remained." The bodily resurrection of Christ is thus the ultimate affirmation of life against death. This is why Christ centers history in *Mason & Dixon*: history is the struggle of miracle against mechanism, the process by which the world moves forward from a space in which "[t]he laws of nature were not so strictly formulated" and into one that has "degenerated into mere machinery" (Pynchon, "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?").

This notion of a Christological history is opposed by scientific materialism's Satanic hunger for knowledge and power, which appears clearly in William Emerson's character. His rebellion against God is introduced when he quotes the possibly apocryphal "*Eppur si muove*" ("Nevertheless it moves") of Galileo (219), which the Italian muttered when told to recant a heretical astronomical discovery by the Catholic Church. This implicitly places Emerson in the position of a scientist ready to challenge God. Emerson's character is further illuminated when he pontificates on how "[e]asy [it is] to see why sea-captains go crazy,— godlike power over realities so simplified" (220), and when Pynchon indicates that scientific knowledge is motivated

by “a passionate resentment” against such offenses of Creation by God as “squand’rings of life and energy” (220). Emerson thus rebels against the entropy that God ordains in the laws of nature. Small wonder, then, that Emerson is associated with all manner of witchery in his domain of the fells, since witchery is a Satanic endeavor concerned with esoteric avenues toward power and knowledge.

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon links Freudian psychoanalysis with the idea of reason triumphing over evil; but he presents rationalism that claims redemptive powers over an entropic universe as fundamentally futile. The psychoanalyst and ex-Nazi Dr. Hilarius, in a confession to the protagonist, says that

> Buchenwald, according to Freud, once the light was let in, would become a soccer field, fat children would learn flower-arranging and solfeggio in the strangling rooms. At Auschwitz the ovens would be converted over to petit fours and wedding cakes, and the V-2 missiles to public housing for the elves. I tried to believe it all. I slept three hours a night trying not to dream, and spent the other 21 at the forcible acquisition of faith. And yet my penance hasn’t been enough. (112)

A core idea of Dr. Hilarius’ Freudian psychoanalytic practice, that bringing the unconscious to the surface results in its healing, is not borne out by experience. Joseph Leo Koerner notes that “[t]his is one of the extravagances of Western thought: to regard death as knowledge’s necessary companion” (52). When the light of reason breaks over darkness, it merely reveals the evils with which it comes into contact, and carries with it an attendant doom; hence, the Enlightenment’s ambitions were misplaced.

Immense, nebulous networks of reasonable agents in *Mason & Dixon*, like the Jesuit-Chinese alliance, the British and Dutch East India Companies, and the Freemasons, demonstrate

the futility of the rationalistic enterprise's goal of remedying evil through reason, and Mason and Dixon themselves serve the Royal Society's orders in producing their eponymous Line and cutting the visto that makes it visible. The visto was the physically cleared space of the line, along which countless trees were cut down. Lee Rozelle, in an ecocritical article on *Mason & Dixon*, writes that the process of old-growth forest-felling for the Line "expose[s], in the felling of old growth trees, a cultural pathology characterized by the desire to reshape imposing landscapes to create for settlers a simulacra of jurisdiction" (155-156). The coordinated efforts of characters and even societies to impose authority over nature and truth cost environmental life, without the gain of actually establishing control.

The notion that rationalism's dominance produces a simulacrum of understanding or control, rather than the reality of either, contrasts the novel's record of the Age of Reason's struggle for "Veracity" and "Power" (*Mason & Dixon* 349). The simulacrum implies that the struggle to employ reason to impose a totalizing dominion over nature (the dimension of power) and over truth (the dimension of veracity) is not only locally unsuccessful in its iterations but also impossible. That implication rises from the inevitable mismatch between cognition and reality—thoughts cannot fully align with things. The "organized grid of human control" (Ireton 142) that the Line represents and the Age's pursuit of "conceptual as well as physical lines of demarcation" (143) are efforts to employ truth in the exercise of power and alter truth through that exercise. The reason this enterprise is fundamentally and universally doomed is that it "stands for the general process whereby we conceptualize things independent of their actual existence" (Ireton 146). In other words, the rational endeavor is an artificial projection, which runs against the grain of nature.

The modern rationalistic project includes all of the means by which mankind seeks to overlay purported truths, through logocentric efforts, on the substance of lived reality. The ideal of ‘mathesis’—a totalizing, multidisciplinary ‘standard model’ that would account for all that can be said to exist (Ireton 142)—appears in the text from time to time, and its practice entails a sort of ontological evil, because *lines* (“Line” being a capitalized word in the majority of its appearances, from “Nerve-Lines of concentrated Light” on page 6 through *Mason & Dixon*’s end) imposed by human disciplines of astronomy, surveying, mathematics, or even religious systems, cannot fully correspond to reality. The true—in other words, all conceivable things, which Pynchon views as perhaps entirely projected—cannot contain the real—all things that exist. Truth stands in the relation of a signifier to the unsignifiable, which, like the sigils of revelation Oedipa Maas believes she finds in her attempts to uncover conspiracy, is “too bright for… memory to hold [, and] must always blaze out, destroying its own message” (76). Exteriority in Pynchon is a dream of desire, as in Derrida: “[d]esire desires exteriority of presence and nonpresence” (167), the latter writes in *Of Grammatology*; Pynchon illustrates the urge toward an exterior truth with the image of “prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spill[s] out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void” (*The Crying of Lot 49* 11). The task of filling the void with a conceptual tapestry, whether historical, scientific, or otherwise, which would somehow account for everything, dooms its laborer to despair.

Stylistic Archaism

Mason & Dixon satirically undermines modern rationalism through a continual practice of stylistic asymmetry that destabilizes logocentric discourse. Persistent aurality and orthographic archaism delegitimize modernity’s hubristic efforts toward the comprehension and

subjugation of reality by exhibiting disjointedness with those efforts. By couching Enlightenment-era language in aural and orthographically unusual stylistic elements, *Mason & Dixon* implies a level of irrationality operating behind the age's logocentric expression. Auditory qualities evoke a storytelling past before the widespread use of the printing press, and Pynchon's use of dated orthography pointedly situates Enlightenment discourse within a specific and circumstantially determined time period. The novel's refusal to bring its language up to date also requires a degree of patience from the reader, whom that style alienates and forces to engage with the text at a remove; this foreignness, too, undermines the eighteenth century's authoritative voice.

Orthography's is the first archaism any reader will note in *Mason & Dixon*. William Logan writes in "Pynchon in the Poetic" that "[t]he comic irritation of the capitals… removes the novel to the bewildering thicket of the past," while "[t]he distancing of the capitals makes pastiche a comedy of form" (426). The deluge of capitals, unfamiliar to the contemporary reader due to a lack of access to early editions of centuries-old literature, orthographically signals where key words lie in sentences. It, along with variant spelling and the elision of e's in various verbs in favor of apostrophes where those e's would not be sounded, floods the reader with a stream of information in a markedly foreign character. Since "Pynchon's local styles and their contexts at any particular moment always play on serious issues" (Vesterman 212), this archaism must somehow 'play on' the Age of Reason whose language it so flamboyantly appropriates. It manages to do this through non-aural wordplay.

Wordplay sometimes crops up through the archaism of orthography itself, rather than aural confusion. The "Wind" on St. Helena, for example, is always the "Wind" and never the "wind"—across dozens of occurrences. This charges the wind with a capacity for uniquely

theological gravity, drawing on the long tradition in English of capitalizing metaphorical stand-ins for God like ‘the Rock’ and even the pronouns associated with ‘Him’. The “Line” that Mason and Dixon will draw into the expanse of America is also endowed with a certain divinity by its capitalization, for while “lines” are not always capitalized, the “Line” nearly always is. This translates the visto-laying party’s action to the realms of the symbolic and transcendent, emphasizing more than just its practical existence. The more comical instance “Penn’s the Friend at court of certain Ferrets” displays the same technique (257), in that ‘friend,’ here meaning ‘member of the Society of Friends, i.e., Quaker,’ could not be relayed except through orthographic means. Thus, capitalization choices heighten the density of meaning in the text. This is part of the “ingenuity in the subatomic realm of the word, the phrase, the sentence” that so memorably characterizes the novel’s pastiche in its blow-by-blow experience (Logan 433). That same ingenuity “is a science in opposition to the science we know” (434); through its very atomic, stylistic inventiveness, Pynchon’s prose exemplifies an mode of writing, and thus thinking, alternative to the dominant discourse that privileges utilitarian, linear narrative.

Mason & Dixon’s copious use of songs demonstrates an unusual aurality of narrative, largely foreign to modernity’s prioritization of the written word. “[D]isallowing translations and quotations,” William Vesterman notes, Pynchon’s “books average over a line of verse for every printed page” (211). *Mason & Dixon* itself has 34 songs and 18 poetic segments. The oral nature of the Reverend’s narration seems to require that, as in many historical storytelling traditions, a set, memorized verse text ground otherwise mostly extempore stories. This tradition, like the interpolation of songs in stories, seems a relic of an archaic and largely preliterate sensibility, which undermines the Enlightenment context of the novel by carrying the premodern into its style.

The aurality of the text is also evident in its execution of textual variety. Interpolations of what presumably are fragmentary manuscripts available where the Reverend's tales are being told, are memorized or ready to hand as he tells stories. Some of the texts used seem to lend special credence to the hypothesis that such manuscripts are lying around, insofar as any cohesive rational explanation of the novel's form is forthcoming. Cherrycoke's *Unpublished Sermons* (94), *Undelivered Sermons* (511), day-book (152-153), and *Spiritual Day-Book* (275; 440; 481) appear to constitute coy nods to resources that only the Reverend would have on hand. Timothy Tox's fictitious epic poems *The Pennsylvaniad* and *The Line* crop up oddly often (15 times)—favorites of Reverend Cherrycoke, it would seem. A section drawn from *The Ghastly Fop* (beginning on p. 529 and fading indeterminately into Mason and Dixon's narrative) being read aloud at the outermost level of the novel's narrative yields evidence that these texts can be incorporated into stories because they are physically present with the speakers.

In Pynchon's work, comical archaism can serve to delegitimize the period whose style is aped. *The Crying of Lot 49* displays a great deal of humorous archaism: the overdone grotesquerie of Jacobean revenge drama is exemplified in *The Courier's Tragedy*, achieving hilarity through its stilted yet ridiculous brutality and convoluted plot; later, Oedipa points out the outmoded orthography of a centuries-old manuscript, and is repulsed by its difficulty to the point of refusing to read it: "It was full of words ending in e's, s's that looked like f's, capitalized nouns, y's where i's should have been. 'I can't read this,' Oedipa said" (129). The comedy of *The Courier's Tragedy* is the effect of a style largely characterized by a verse written in a pastiche of seventeenth-century drama, the other manuscript's a mere description of and reaction to outdated orthography, illustrating its distancing effect. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, long s's occur on a tombstone, clashing ironically with the rather aggressive jab of its inscription, "[d]eath is a

debt to nature due, / which I have paid, and ſo muſt you" (26). Constant Slothrop's old-timey name and his son Variable's appear in the same section (27), a playful pun on mathematical constants, as opposed to variables. In *Mason & Dixon*, humorous stylistic obsolescence mocks the rationalistic project of modernity by locating its purported novelty within unavoidable age—the Enlightenment's style, far less universal and enduring than the movement aimed to be, is locked within its era.

The System of Stories

In the estimation of Cherrycoke's extended family, the forms of music serve to powerfully illustrate worldview. Ethelmer, Cherrycoke, and Euphrenia discuss the Platonic idea that certain variations in music indicate worrisome parallel changes in a given culture (262), and the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke clarifies in turn that Plato was referring to the decadent formal mixing of the Athenian dithyrambists(262). In Aunt Euphrenia's words, the new music of the New World takes the shape of "a Novel in Musick, whose Hero instead of proceeding down the road having one adventure after another, with no end in view, comes rather through some Catastrophe and back to where she set out from" (263). This bears a striking resemblance to the concept of "cyclical time" that Wolfley explains is opposed to the "linear time" of the modern West in the work of Mircea Eliade, whose ideas reached Pynchon via Norman O. Brown (875). Ethelmer's contention that this formal structure in music is "the Elder World, Turn'd Upside Down" (263) and "a lengthy step in human wisdom" (264) is met with voiced displeasure from the Reverend, who sees, in cosmopolitan Ethelmer's reading of that musical structure, "a residue of Worldliness… a step past Deism, a purpos'd Disconnection from Christ" (264). Thus, the hubristic impulse to invert the old world is embodied in the structure of a musical narrative.

Another image of the world turned upside-down is the pentagram, or flipped pentacle, an emblem of Satanism comprised of a five-pointed star, whose central point along its radial axis symbolizes the divine, and whose two sets of paired points symbolize the four elements. The pentacle positions the divine above the four elements, while the pentagram subordinates the metaphysical to the material. That is the “inverted Silver Star” which the “White Horsemen” (101) newly arrived to Cape Town bear on their rifles, and they are “White Horsemen” not merely because they are white but in reference to Death astride the pale horse in the book of Revelation. Ethelmer’s eagerness to invert the form of the world is the Satanic impulse, to be enacted by institutions, as the novel’s records of massacres and cruelty demonstrate, through the application of death on any scale necessary.

The opposite of purposeful acts of destructive rationality would be a meandering pattern of action in a variable form, with much in common with *Mason & Dixon*’s construction. Logan’s reading of *Mason & Dixon* brings out the same principle that Cherrycoke’s relatives ascertain in the new music: “At times it doesn't seem to matter in which direction the novel advances. This indulgence in Keats's negative capability operates within the text as a suspension of alternatives, as if there were no correct or deterministic way in which the fiction was destined to proceed” (433). The novel’s contents are overpoweringly subjunctive; though multiple scenes call attention to their own hypothetical nature, the vast majority of the novel is, on closer inspection, effectively indistinguishable, even within the context of its fiction, from falsehood. Subjunctivity shares common ground with fiction and falsehood—when relocated to the past, assertions that something ‘would’ happen fall flat in light of the fact that it did not; these hypotheticals are necessarily false. The “infinite deferrals” and “postponed consummations” (436) that comprise the novel simply point suggestively at its fundamental formal subversiveness. The hypotheticals

and subjunctives are themselves contained within the tales the Reverend tells, which themselves bear no guarantee of facticity, or (briefly) *The Ghastly Fop* (a Gothic periodical), which makes no claims on truth. In *Mason & Dixon*, as Brian Edwards notes, "saucy Clio[, Muse of history,] has many consorts and many of them write fiction" (22); the novel's structure permits her liaisons with falsehood to flow uncontained.

Beyond the tales Cherrycoke tells, however, Pynchon inserts a degree of uncertainty in the frame itself when its calm familial Christmastide begins to blur into fantasy. "When the Hook of Night is well set in… 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" (759); suddenly, without warning, the walls of the narrative frame become seemingly porous, and much less plausible than before. Events seem to tread beyond literal truth, even in our outermost narrator's recounting of them. Timothy Tox appears, "suppos'd to be either in Chains, or out upon the Roads" (759), but there nonetheless and himself reciting his epic *Pennsylvaniad* from its beginning and from memory (760). It is difficult to believe this strange cadre of visitors is physically entering the LeSpark home, and the incredulity their presence introduces makes the fluid unsteadiness of the text's construction apparent.

The novel's form transgresses comfortable claims of truth in favor of negative capability even further through its interweaving of narrative layers. *Mason & Dixon* exceeds the bounds of a Euclidean formal geometry, folding one level of textual abstraction into another seamlessly, in the case, for example, of *The Ghastly Fop*. Daniel Punday concludes that, since Eliza, a character in the *Ghastly Fop* narrative, also appears in the narrative of the adventures of Mason and Dixon, she "is neither simply an imagined character inserted from the reading of the Ghastly Fop series nor a real character" (253). Setting aside that sharing a narrative layer with Cherrycoke's stories

of Mason and Dixon does not seem to imply reality (as the Reverend's tale of the "Accursèd Ruby of Mogok" does not imply its reality [*Mason & Dixon* 7]), the inability to assign Eliza (or Captain Zhang, her companion) to a specific narrative level reflects a principal problem in interpreting *Mason & Dixon*: the conceptual layers simply will not stay in place. At one point, the Reverend, interrupted by child and audience member Pitt, ends a textual incursion abruptly and never picks it back up. The sentence beginning, "'Our daily lives to distant stars attuned,' [Mason] writes in a Letter to Dixon he then decides not to send,—" (146) is abruptly cut off by conversation that then takes place on the level of the frame tale, and when the narrative resumes the story mentions the letter no more. No level of remove is safe from benign or disruptive incursions from other levels.

The content of the *Pennsylvaniad* is present in the world of the tales the Reverend tells, and he writes the day-book perhaps during the events he narrates (although, since they are fictional[ized], it is also possible that the day-book has come to exist only on the outermost boundaries of the frame story, or in the outermost nested world of occurrences). Mason and Dixon were real historical figures; but nevertheless, the subjunctive, hypothetical, and entirely fantastical detours of their narrative reflect a fictive element invading the account of their adventures. The pair's actual field-book, quoted twice (497; 618), hammers home the problem of characters simultaneously possessing existences on the nested narrative levels of the Reverend's tales, the novel's 'real' world, and the world outside the novel. Pynchon also exercises an "iconoclastic" historiographic outlook when dealing with figures like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin (Cowart 343), whom he endows with sinister and comic traits in the novel, in what may be the mockery of the Reverend. The tinkering with famous figures may, however, instead be an adulteration of characters in the novel's 'real' world (reality on the level of the

frame tale) with fiction (reality on the level of the nested stories). Washington and Franklin exist in Cherrycoke's stories, and in Cherrycoke's America, and likewise in the reader's—but whether their differences from the real Founding Fathers are the Reverend's doing or true to his world is, by design, impossible to ascertain. While Lawrence Wolfley could write of *Gravity's Rainbow* that its formal structure was a "series of Chinese boxes" (873), *Mason & Dixon*'s anatomy is too mutable to permit such a classification.

The subversive nature of the frame story seems to echo *The Taming of the Shrew*'s asymmetric abstraction (the end of *Mason & Dixon* does not occur at the highest level of abstraction, but on the level of the Reverend's narration), although the frequent incursions of frame story into framed stories bespeak a relation of nested fictions akin to the *Arabian Nights*. Pynchon targets the *Arabian Nights* itself for playful mockery, funhouse-mirroring Scheherazade's fear of execution by her rapt husband into Cherrycoke's desire to prolong his stay with relatives. Patriarch Wade LeSpark is "Sultan enough to convey [implicitly] to the Rev^{d}… that, for as long as he can keep the children amus'd, he may remain,—[failing that], however, and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him, where waits the Winter's Block and Blade" (6-7).

These narrative choices reflect a worldview averse to hasty systematizations. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds argues that "Pynchon manufactures with anachronism a synthesis of eighteenth- and twentieth-century cultural historiography so as to fold the ideologies of each into the other" (189). The layers of nested stories, delicately partitioned by traditional storytellers, break apart, and the time of the world outside the novel bleeds into the world purportedly contained within it. The combined effect of these formal choices, which reflect a profound lack of concern with the consistency and overarching systematization that Enlightenment mathesis propounds and

demands in *Mason & Dixon*, is to delegitimize and mock that project and its assumptions. As Heinz Ickstadt writes of Pynchon's work in general, "[w]oven into a dominant discourse of linearity, of decadence and reification… are alternative, i. e., non-linear, conceptions of the world and of narration that allow for the singular and accidental" (557). The chain that binds the present to the past is accompanied by innumerable other chains, so that no formulation can be systematized or imposed uncontestably.

The Anatomy of the Pastiche

"If you look into the square in successive moments, you hear how from act to act the dialogue changes, even if the lives of Melania's inhabitants are too short for them to realize it."

—Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, tr. William Weaver

Mason & Dixon's pastiche is a major part of what determines its importance in Pynchon's body of work. When Harold Bloom writes that "[w]hat is left [for Pynchon after writing the story of Byron the Bulb in *Gravity's Rainbow*] is the studying of new modalities of post-Apocalyptic silence" (9), what he indicates is that from that point forward Pynchon's fiction focuses on the limits of language. Full silence, purely speaking, is not possible for the novelist, because a silence of any length would not constitute a novel. The formal space of writing must exist to permit the content of language and story. What this formal requirement allows for the exploration of silence is play with the boundaries and nature of language. By leaving behind normative linguistic expression through *Mason & Dixon*'s pastiche, Pynchon effects a defamiliarizing process that can delude readers into the sense that they are looking at language from outside. The novel's style thus makes it capable of questioning typical modes of expression in ways foreign to modern rationality. This is particularly critical in the context of *Mason & Dixon*'s previously explored critique of modernity and the logocentric discourse by which modernity self-expresses.

The novel's pastiche pushes readers toward the limits of modern, rationalistic expression in two principal ways: through linguistic variability and polysemy. Variability is instanced in diverse inconsistencies within the text between treatments of grammar and orthography, as well as additions to the English lexicon and altered expressions. The text's variability testifies to a model of language as perpetually fluid and characterized by change, against which centers of

power seek to erect limiting principles. The second is polysemy, or multiplicity of meaning, by which words and phrases take on additional meanings. This polysemy, like variability, reflects a mode of communication opposed to the univocal dictates of institutional standards for language. It frequently takes the forms of puns and anachronisms, the former aligning disparate meanings and the latter juxtaposing two temporal periods. This chapter will explore the pastiche's variability and polysemy, across their diverse portions and aspects, in order to provide grounds for a union of premodernity and postmodernity that will be discussed in the chapter following.

Variability

The principle of variability in language is not to be confused with a simple variety, but a specific multiplication of use-cases of linguistic elements. Just as "each of the formal or stylistic or allusive elements in a work" by Pynchon "is in itself highly mobile" (Poirier 154), so too are the inconsistent details of expression in *Mason & Dixon*. The printed word is not immune, as Mason and Dixon address letters to each other from "Y'r obd't s'v't." (12) and "y'r obdt. Svt." (13), respectively, but usually this multiplication takes place within the narratives given by Cherrycoke, as when Mason reports of Rebecca's death, "[t]hen She has come to me since…she came last night" (165), or in the curious ambivalence regarding obscenity censorship that censors "d——'d" but not "Damme" (132) on the same page, and redacts the center of "D——l" (191) but none of "Bugger" (190) on the page opposite it. This variation flies in the face of Ockham's Razor, which forbids unnecessarily adding machinery to philosophical thought, by producing multiple versions of words where only one is necessary. By extension, it jars against the principles of elegant rationality dominant in Enlightenment thought. Beyond all semblance of necessity, the technique of variance expands the forms which the novel's quanta of expression (whether words or grammatical units) can take. This linguistic miracle of increase in possible

forms exemplifies the polyphony of America in its nascence, demonstrating that “against the forces of definition and containment, Pynchon’s retrospective holds out for diversity” (Edwards 23). Throughout *Mason & Dixon*, he uses linguistic diversity in the realms of orthography, neologism, and archaic slang, and strongly opposes unchanging language.

The linguistic variance most immediately obvious to contemporary readers is orthographic: archaic capitalization, choices in which add layers of meaning to the text. A significant instance occurs in Pynchon’s use of the term “wind,” which is almost always capitalized when it refers to blustery St. Helena’s wind (158-164). The capitalization of “Wind” grants it a level of divine prestige, and may follow in the tradition of the capitalization of “Word” when referring to the Logos. The similarities between the two terms should be obvious, especially given that “wind” is an alternate translation of the Hebrew *rûaḥ* for “spirit” and use as “Spirit” in the Old Testament. Mystical meanings seem to cluster around the subtle shifts from uncapitalized to capitalized words in other cases as well; “Power” (169), referring to the British East India Company, may hold a secondary meaning when elevated to a capitalized noun, particularly when the Ancient Greek “exousiai,” translated “powers” in the King James Version of Ephesians 3:10, refers to members of one of the angelic orders. The attribution of spiritual significance to the East India Company is certainly a common enough theme in *Mason & Dixon* to warrant the hypothesis: the Company outpost at Cape Town is even located by the “D——l’s Garden and the Gates of Chaos” (159), while there “persists along the Company nerve-lines a terrible simple nearness to the Night of the ‘Black Hole,’ [a] Zero-Point of history” (152), which symbolizes the world’s convergence on inevitable death and which took place under the Company’s watch and due to its relations with the colonized populace of Calcutta.

While extra capitalizations generally serve to center focus and emphasis on key words, and sometimes serve to attach particular meanings to capitalized terms, there are also periods of relatively prolonged normal use of capitalization, which can be as long as multiple sentences, and which if anything draw more attention to the pastiche. While the vast majority of sentences in *Mason & Dixon* make sufficient use of period-appropriate or even period-excessive capitalizations, there are a 64-word stretch with no extra capitals and a 186-word stretch with only two (366; 358), and another page sees only 11 (329). These areas, rather than easing the immersion of the contemporary reader into the text and resolving a major alienating factor in the pastiche ("the comic irritation of the capitals" [Logan 426]), summon up a contemporary tone in the midst of the eighteenth-century milieu. They constitute moments that resemble the silencing of a constant background noise, and as such recall the reader to awareness of the otherwise omnipresent capitals, both instancing variability in style itself and reenforcing the impact of that style.

Another notable aspect of the pastiche is Pynchon's invention of entirely new words. The majority of these inventions draw on the Greek and Latin roots in common circulation in English words, although some appear out of the murk of the Anglo-Saxon past. Some of those that use Greek or Latin roots also constitute alternate branches in linguistic development, in that words of similar meanings and similar forms which now exist are rejected in favor of alternatives that never came to be. Among the Greek or Latinate coinages (for which all the following definitions will be drawn from the *Liddell, Scott, Jones Ancient Greek Lexicon*) are "Saccharomanic" (7), a portmanteau of the Greek "saccharon" (originally "a sweet juice distilling from the joints of the bamboo, a kind of sugar," but eventually more generically associated with sweetness in English derivatives) and English "manic," "Schizochronick" (192), from the Greek "schizo-" ("broken")

and “chronos” (“time”), and “Hyperthrenia,” from the Greek “hyper” (“over”) and “thrēnos” (“dirge, lament”). Old English derivations include “mombly” (202), a descendant of “momble,” a dialectal term meaning “a state of confusion or untidiness” (*Merriam-Webster*), and alternate English terms such as “carnescent” (204), a word apparently meaning “carnal.”

These coinages serve to illustrate the guiding principle of variability in language present in so many aspects of the pastiche. Language is fluid, as Pynchon demonstrates by actively creating it anew, and also by re-creating contemporary terms. These terms and phrases, both the newly minted ones and the ones appropriated out of the present argot, are functions of the subjunctive faculty as well; they show ways the world could have been different, and observably was not, echoing the defiant counterfactual posture of the novel as a whole. Just as “Rebekah appears almost at the behest of Mason, almost as a way to give him an opportunity to display and act out his own sense of loss” (Punday 254), Pynchon’s word-making resurrects English’s etymological ghosts, undoing centuries of the language’s entropy. That linguistic necromancy allows him to construct a new form of historiographic expression in which the past is made dynamically perceptible in language. When the novel invents words like “Squireocracy” (221) or plays on Ronald Reagan’s famous dictum, “Thou shalt not speak ill of thy fellow Republican” (Williams; Pynchon 730), the present and past become uniquely porous, charging language with the weight of both contexts.

A handful of eighteenth-century slang terms used in varying ways accentuate the cartoonish local color of the colonial era in *Mason & Dixon*, most notably “fop,” “Nabob,” and “smoke,” although a slew of other terms appear in a similarly overused fashion. “Smoke” (a verb here meaning “to reckon by a sign that something is the case”) appears in guises as unfamiliar to the contemporary reader as “Smoak’d” (“Smoak” and “smoak” being its most common forms).

A "fop" was a person "foolishly attentive to and vain of his appearance, dress, or manners; a dandy, an exquisite," and/or "[a] conceited person, a pretender to wit, wisdom, or accomplishments; a coxcomb, 'prig'" ("Fop, 3"; "Fop, 2"). In *Mason & Dixon*, fops are exclusively British men, though their social standing need not be high-bred because of the era's new social mobility at the dawn of global capitalism; one Durham woman's were-fop son was brought up in the rural country of the fells, but "has memoriz'd several current Theatrickal Music-Pieces, and sings them to [her] thro' the Day[;] He tells Joaks [she does] not understand[;] He quizzes with [her] in Foreign Tongues" (237). The general effect of including casual, frequent slang is to produce the same disorientation as other archaic forms in the novel, as the characters treat their reality in similar ways to those with which the contemporary reader interacts with his or her own. By foregrounding slang in this manner, Pynchon underscores the natural fluidity and change of language, contrasting contemporary readers' era with the text's.

Contrary to variance, linguistic stability connotes an anti-life position as it is revealed in *Mason & Dixon* in the figure of inscribed plates buried along critical points in the American colonies. These plates, planted by French Catholics and explained by George Washington (285-286), bear Chinese ideograms, and function as a kind of spell. They represent the power of language to effect change, even when buried; Cherrycoke interjects that "Seals become of primary Moment, and their precise descriptions, often, matters of Life and Death, for one letter misplaced can summon Destruction immediate and merciless" (286). Burial here represents being left behind in the sediment of time, and an enormous number of other subterranean presences feature in the array of its marvels. Aside from megaflora, there are countless references to underground dragons and to Hell, and specific instances in the tunnels under Durham, the hollow center of the earth, volcanoes, caves, etc. The novel is packed with various

marvels, chock-full of "fantasy thriving on deep mystery" before it is increasingly subjugated by the impositions of "a scientifically-minded age that is dedicated to the advance of Reason and assumes the superiority of geometric straightness over the crookedness and density of Nature" (Ickstadt 561). In this environment, the unchanging, lifeless ideograms which lurk underground symbolically oppose the chaotic vitality of the unknown. Composed of lead, they are also implicitly toxic, underscoring their opposition to life. The underground-ness of both these elements—subterranean life and buried plates—reflects hidden or past operations of history, sedimented under time.

That language is intentionally placed in the palimpsest of the New World demonstrates that the imprint of the word on reality is significant to geopolitics, as the Jesuits of *Mason & Dixon* are portrayed as a distant and dangerous force. In a Canadian college of the Jesuits, "Kite-wires and Balloon-cables rise into clouds, recede into aerial distances, as, somewhere invisible, the Jesuit Telegraphy goes ahead, unabated… Rumors suggest that the Priests are using the Boreal Phenomenon to send Messages over the Top of the World, to receiving-stations in the opposite Hemisphere" (515-516). Their networks of communication are, then, complex, and possibly global in light of Chinese connections; the Society of Jesus co-opts the aurora borealis, perhaps a symbol of heavenly glory, to achieve shadowy earthly aims. At that same Quebec college, Father Zarpazo ominously teaches that "[t]he Christless must understand that their lives are to be spent in Servitude" (524), and Christopher Le Maire not only tacitly agrees with Emerson's accusation that "Jesuits observe devotions so transcendent, while practicing Crimes so terrestrial," but offers Dixon "Authority and Battle" (224). Amidst the goofball nomenclature common in Pynchon's fiction, the Wolf of Jesus is a striking enough label to lend the Jesuits weight, even without their dark conspiracies. Since the Society constitutes a knowledgeable and

serious threat, then, the leaden plates the Society places in American soil illustrate the political importance of stable, institutionally controlled language, as well as such language's capacity to be used for evil.

Just as the leaden ideograms of the Jesuits contrast with the variability of linguistic freedom, *Mason & Dixon*'s polyphonic poetry and *Pennsylvaniad* contrast with *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which explores the failure of an American founding epic poem to come to fruition. Pynchon signals this literary context (apart from by sending *The Sot-Weed Factor*'s author a copy of *Mason & Dixon* inscribed "To John Barth: Been there, done that" [Davies]) by repeatedly invoking the fictitious *Pennsylvaniad* of Timothy Tox. *The Sot-Weed Factor*'s picaresque premise is young Ebenezer Cooke's adventures in colonial Maryland; a poet, he is assigned the task of composing an epic of the New World, the *Marylandiad*, which never materializes, and in whose stead he writes *The Sot-Weed Factor*, a poem satirizing the society he has found in the colonies. Notably, the eponymous poem does, in fact, exist, but *The Sot-Weed Factor* effects its bleak humor partly by means of the fact that "the indictments [Cooke] levels against Maryland… are all disproven by his own testimony" (Micklus 253): i.e., America does not justify Cooke's cynicism. And while the engagement of *Mason & Dixon* with poetry is likewise deeply important to its integrity—as discussed in this study's previous chapter, the novel is characterized by a significant number of textual incursions into the narrated stories, some from long poems (*The Line* and *The Pennsylvaniad*), some from short, and some from prose pieces—all are produced by Pynchon. The latter novel's repeated drawing from the (in-universe) uncontestably complete *Pennsylvaniad* (217; 339; 470; 600) seems to strike a pose opposite that of Barth's novel: not only is the work of epic poetry completed in the New World, it permeates it, cropping up in recitations on multiple narrative levels: Cherrycoke quotes the

Pennsylvaniad in his narrative (339); Tox quotes his own poetry in Cherrycoke's tale (489); and, in the frame story itself, Tox appears and "[p]roceed[s]… to recite the *Pennsylvaniad*, *sotto Voce*" (760). *Mason & Dixon*'s commentary on art follows in *The Sot-Weed Factor*'s footsteps as regards the potential of the epic form for America's founding.

But while *The Sot-Weed Factor* takes a pessimistic view of the potential of heroic expression for the nation's origin, *Mason & Dixon* employs the same methodology of subjunctivity and fiction it applies to its ideas of history and narratology to its own epic poetry. That the *Pennsylvaniad* of *Mason & Dixon* comes into existence in reality is immaterial (as, of course, it does not exist outside the novel). What matters for Pynchon instead is the potential at America's birth, in which the *Pennsylvaniad* is possible. The novel is "countered by phantasmal narratives that (dis)appear before foreign protagonists" (Lifshey 123), in a fatal or historical sense; now that the novel's factual events are in the past, such an epic is no longer permitted existence, but, perceived retroactively, it still possesses the potential to come to being. For Pynchon, the subjunctive is transformative, even if its hypotheticals never materialize; that is why *Mason & Dixon* takes the form of (mostly) fictional stories, and why Pynchon chooses to rewrite Barth's refusal to permit America an epic. "Books," a minor character tells Mason and Dixon, are "some world all of us'd be lucky to inhabit, but do not" (457); a national epic, then, produces in whole or in part an alternate, glorious world for the budding nation. The epic represented by the *Pennsylvaniad* offers the promise of a central interconnecting historical work of literature that would describe the gestating country's promise, and in enduring language set forth the atmosphere of a dawning world. But despite its status as a linguistic monument the *Pennsylvaniad* does not, like the Jesuit plates, exert a univocal influence: when Tox recites it to

Cherrycoke and Ives, “he wanders the Room, among the others, the untold others” (760), the disenfranchised peoples of the New World, amidst whose polyphony he is at home.

Because of the need for foundational literature to establish variability among the voices of America, the verse Pynchon includes in *Mason & Dixon* is by no means limited to the *Pennsylvaniad*. Fictional Timothy Tox’s other works, a long poem, *The Line* (257; 673; possibly 759), and a shorter narrative, “The Siege of Philadelphia, or, Attila Turn’d Anew” (310), as well as the countless songs scattered throughout the book (the majority, presumably, unpublished; many seemingly improvised) contribute to the poetic milieu of early American history in *Mason & Dixon*. The refusal to confine the importance of the founding narrative to a single finished piece of poetry mirrors the failure of such a piece of poetry to come into being in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, but, in characteristic fashion, Pynchon permits polyphony to determine literary as well as literal history. Existentially, there are consequents for Pynchon’s aesthetic views, particularly when viewed in contrast to Barth’s; the latter’s protagonist, “Cooke[,] chooses to create the absolutes he will henceforth build and rely upon, a decision which puts him into the favorable position of someone who is no longer forced to cope with ‘fundamental’ and ‘ultimate’ values, but rather with the technicalities of what follows from his first, arbitrary choice” (Puetz 455).

Contrariwise, Pynchon’s protagonists struggle, unmoored from their traditional values and immersed in a multivocal world whose immense variability and lack of central, unchanging axioms, means that they “apprehend God” only “as a Force they are ever just about to become acquainted with” (273). In *Mason & Dixon*, there is no single canonical Scripture reserved for the New World to chart the course of a life or story by; rather, the historical vision the novel’s proliferation of texts provides of colonial America yields an image like that of “Ghosts… at Ghost Ridottoes, [which would] require… Musick [with] Sentiment ever held back, ever at the

Edge of breaking forth, in Fragments, as Glass breaks" (273). Completion would mean an exclusive ending, and exclusivity is inimical toward Pynchon's project of linguistic and thus conceptual variation.

The interplay of the mechanics of linguistic variability in *Mason & Dixon* resists such closure in paragraphs like the following:

> "Hey? Genders? Very well,— of Genders they have three,— Male, Female, and the Third Sex no one talks about,— Dead. What, then, you may be curious to know, are the emotional relations between Male and Dead, Female and Dead, Dead and Dead? Eh? Just so. What of love triangles? Do they automatically become Quadrilaterals? With Death no longer in as simple a way parting us, no longer the Barrier nor Sanction that it was, what becomes of Marriage Vows,— how must we redefine Being Faithful?" By which he means (so the Rev^{d}, who was there in but a representational sense, ghostly as an imperfect narrative to be told in futurity, would have guess'd) that Rebekah's visits at St. Helena, if sexual, were profoundly like nothing he knew,— whilst she assum'd that he well understood her obligations among the Dead, and would respond ever as she wish'd. Yet how would he? being allow'd no access to any of those million'd dramas among the Dead. They were like the Stars to him,— unable to project himself among their enigmatic Gatherings, he could but observe thro' a mediating Instrument. The many-Lens'd Rebekah. (195)

Immediately notable is the use of capitalization to emphasize the name of the Dead. This capitalization, along with the others in the passage, has its greatest impact at the beginning, when the dead are compared with the male and the female, and dwindles to nothing by the 53 words between "Faithful" and "Dead" (excepting those for which capitalization is warranted by modern

grammar), by which time the impact has worn off. This contrast between intervals of heavy and of lacking emphasis highlights the intensity and subsequent ease of reading occasioned by the variance in capitalization custom. The newly coined epithet "many-Lens'd" reflects Pynchon's combinatory fervor in the production of terms. While the capitals control emphasis through the passage, modulating the intensity of points of focus and emotion as they fade from humorous highs into mellow mourning, they also contrast the intensification of an archaic linguistic style with the contemporary comfort of a more twentieth-century grammar. "[M]any-Lens'd" drives the paragraph home with a spark of linguistic creativity. Altogether, the pieces of this passage illustrate the principle of variance as it manifests in *Mason & Dixon*'s pastiche: it builds fluidity into the language, challenging less complex and dynamic linguistic structures with the vibrancy of new life.

Polysemy

Polysemy is perhaps a slipperier topic than variability of language. While variability as a principle manifests in an assortment of somewhat predictable ways that involve lack of consistent adherence to various linguistic rules, polysemy does not necessarily need to break rules. It is a kind of linguistic alchemy that allows meanings to flow freely, just as variability loosens the forms of words. While variations and inconsistencies alter the externals of the pastiche, the contents of terminology are more deeply shifted through the alchemical processes of polysemy, by which meanings are linked or multiplied. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon's polysemic activities intersect with his interests in both Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, as well as *Finnegans Wake*, in ways that illuminate the form of the novel's pastiche.

Bloom describes Pynchon's work as implementing overdetermination (2), a technical term in Freudian psychoanalysis that describes a model of how objects in dreams are created.

Overdetermination is the idea "that an event can have more than one set of independently sufficient causes" (Bunzl 134). It is intricately bound up with condensation, the convergence of symbolic data into units in Freudian dream interpretation. While a sword may, for example, be theorized to be a phallic symbol, it may also be taken as a symbol for death, or for a symbol of efficiency, or of division, or of coldness because of its metal, or of ferocity, but condensation can unite these widely disparate concepts in single metaphors. Thus, the sword might symbolize one, three, or all of those ideas. Overdetermination is a causal analog of condensation; where associations converge in condensation, causes converge in overdetermination. Bloom takes a Gnostic view of Pynchon's use of overdetermination, arguing that "the System… is in some sense irresistible," packing causes and hence meanings densely around the hero like Archons, the servants of the Demiurge, the evil Creator God (2). In *Mason & Dixon*, that "System" is any or all of the Jesuits, East India Company, Royal Society, the Chinese, Mason and Dixon themselves, and whatever else falls under the general umbrella of "Death's thousand metaphors in the world" (172). Puns connote moments of synchronicity, which in Jungian psychoanalysis is "a kind of simultaneity… where something other than the probability of chance is involved" (Jung 93). The particular acausal form at work in puns is either auditory or orthographic, rather than rational. Like overdetermined and condensed data, synchronicities constitute instances of convergent meaning and hence polysemy. By adopting a pastiche characterized by overdetermination, condensation, and synchronicity, and as the three processes manifest polysemy, Pynchon challenges the logocentric dominance of the conscious mind through linguistic dream-logic.

Finnegans Wake appears to leave similar traces of its own particular techniques that express dream-logic. The novel, which charts a night's sleep in a sprawl of near-

incomprehensible puns, appears to have influenced Pynchon's creative linguistic techniques, particularly in the realms of punning and word-creation. That he had read at least some of the *Wake* is incontestable, as the "Chums of Chance" in *Against the Day* reveal; in the *Wake*, the phrase "chuck a chum a chance" (85) appears verbatim, clearly appropriated and tailored for Pynchon's text. In *Mason & Dixon*, one frequently used pun appears to be lifted directly from the *Wake* as well—the "Mobility" (235). The Mobility, in *Mason & Dixon*, represent a class of non-nobles who have taken advantage of a new level of social mobility to rise in society, much like Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon themselves. A link between the novels now established, what their models of punning share remains to be explored.

Finnegans Wake is a frequently incomprehensible tapestry of puns, and a linguistic history (theoretically or ideally) spanning all of time, all stories and structures, and all languages. Despite the more limited scope of Pynchon's linguistic play, *Mason & Dixon* possesses similarities in the way it toys with language. Samuel Beckett writes of the *Wake* that it follows in Giambattista Vico's footsteps, who believed in "the natural and inevitable growth of language" (10); there is a living quality in the variability of the language, but also in the ways in which polysemy runs fluidly through morphemic and phonemic distortion, knitting together sets of coherent secondary or even tertiary meanings. In *Mason & Dixon*, words are coined much less frequently, but stylistic elements like the pastiche help concentrate meaning to achieve a similarly dynamic quality. Joyce's monstrous progeny features linguistic units growing into each other, and in a similar fashion, albeit with much lower punning frequency and portmanteau creations, "Pynchon insists on the not-so-scientific lived experience of language that spills over the lines drawn by Johnson's *Dictionary*" (Hinds 191).

As Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds notes, variability of language in *Mason & Dixon* signals its position at the end of a pre-demarcated era, after which the systematization of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* would attempt to cement the vocabulary of English into a kind of orthodoxy. Though Johnson himself gave up on the project of fixing the language in place properly, "the pun… fell out of favor" (190) because of its inherent opposition to simplistic demarcations. A pun blurs the lines between multiple meanings and thus defies the efforts of lexicographers toward absolutely charted denotation. Puns represent a kind of arbitrary linguistic confusion that other forms of expression avoid, often completely. Thinking too deeply about certain jokes in *Mason & Dixon* like "in-Tree-guing, as the Monkey said" (252), produces lines of inquiry to which there might be no satisfactory answers—why, for example, an entirely aural pun might be used here, while, for a play on the French and English canards (374), the joke only works in print. A major purpose of the novel's puns is that their compression of meanings in a polysemic and groundless relation attacks the notion that language is an ordered apparatus, which should (or even can) be constrained to operate toward rational ends.

In a related manner, contemporary slang in the novel undergoes an irrational process of variation, by which terms and expressions alien to the colonial era appear in altered forms, uniting them with unusual contexts in meaning enlarged by their relation. "Shawl Hair" (91) for hat hair, "gannin straights" (239) for going steady, and "Proclamation-Shmocklamation" (277) for the casual "thing-shming" expression illustrate this process. Like the passages in which markedly fewer capitals occur, the moments in which these phrases are used carry a certain comfortable familiarity for the reader. But the manner of the phrases' transposition into a former age also carries the alienation that the pastiche is so rife with; they are not permitted to appear in the past exactly as they are perceived in the present, and thus, like Pynchon's invented words,

have a kind of dream-logic which reassigns their meanings to the language of an era that did not originate them, and whose style ought to have no claims on their form. "To make meaning from time's perpetual motion, Pynchon employs a temporally parallactic narrative form (different narrators deliver the story from ostensibly different moments in time)" (Huehls 25), but, further, the yoking together of elements of present and past language contributes to *Mason & Dixon*'s experientially bizarre form, which reflects the general problem of American historical thought: "what happens next still depends on what came before, but history moves too quickly for anyone to determine what the past means[, which] requires sacrificing some component of the subject's perspective" (28).

The novel inverts its polysemic impulse through the use of slang. The repetitions of its various terms ("fop"; "smoak"; "Nabob"; "tha"; "damme") show a reliance on language so remote from contemporary vocabulary that the arbitrariness and thinness of those terms' broad application are evident to the reader. The concepts themselves, in many cases, are far enough removed from current affairs that their repeated casual mention is an oddity: "Nabobs" can no longer exist, nor can "fops," because the context in which they could germinate is past. Just as polysemic intensification brings depth and density to language by accumulating meanings around words, so too does the overuse of certain terms squeeze out the level of meaning already present in them; if language is a country, then broadly distributed and popular slang, like colonial enterprises and intellectual Prometheanism, demonstrates "rationalism's putting its mark on a land once consecrated to multiple perspectives" (Cowart 344) by covertly standardizing usage, for as long as it lasts. Using terms that have freshness for the modern reader and then rapidly devaluing their uniqueness illustrates the problem of entropy so central in Pynchon's œuvre. The contrast of the density language acquires through anachronistic expressions and puns with this

degradation of meaning displays *Mason & Dixon*'s remarkable polysemic process of toying with meaning.

Conclusion

Mason & Dixon's pastiche is a highly complex, "many-Lens'd" instrument (195) of expression, which suggests the possibilities and the limits of language. Struggling against traditional stylistic constraints, the novel's verbal texture embodies the principles of variability and polysemy that undermine the hard categorizations popularly perceived as salvific in the Age of Enlightenment which *Mason & Dixon* lampoons. Changes in the linguistic techniques used and rules established result in sharp points of meaning-dense capitals, fields of comfortably contemporary lowercases that nonetheless are not quite at home in the eighteenth-century milieu, the invention of a plethora of new words, and other means of challenging that notion that language is set in stone (or lead, or verse, as the case may be). Pynchon condenses meaning through puns and anachronisms; inversely, he diffuses meaning by overusing slang to emphasize the novel's eighteenth-century-ness and to dilute areas of its prose. This condensation and dilution result in a unique style that tests the boundaries of language. As the following chapter will demonstrate, *Mason & Dixon*'s pastiche negotiates an identity between premodernity and postmodernity through the use of the paired principles of linguistic variation and polysemy which have been explored in this chapter.

Fragments of a Magic

"Across what distances in time do the elective affinities and correspondences connect?"

—W.G. Sebald

"Again are the Party returning Eastward, into Memory, and Confabulation."

—*Mason & Dixon*

The pastiche *Mason & Dixon* employs operates through a variety of mechanisms, each in turn working on multiple levels, to effect a particular subtext in the novel. This subtext isolates and critiques modernity, but more than that, it joins together the pre- and postmodern modes of thought, offering the project of reconstituting, in whatever way now possible, "the poor fragments of a Magic irreparably broken" (612). The reason this magic is now shattered is presented as the modern tendency to pursue rationalistic perfection. The right line, in the novel, is a potent symbol of modernity's Promethean ambition, and is "the very Shape of Contempt" (615). Following Euclid's principle that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, that line signifies optimal abstract efficiency. Instead of acting with univocality, Pynchon employs multivalent language, in whose emblematic strength, as in Dixon's mapmaking mark, "'tis important ever to keep Faith… for an often enormous [sic] Investment of Faith, and Will, lies condens'd within, giving it a Potency in the World that the Agents of Reason care little for" (688).

Pynchon's identification of common ground between premodernity and postmodernity operates through all three principal aspects of the pastiche: aurality, variability, and polysemy. The auditory nature of *Mason & Dixon*'s affected style is a meeting ground between premodern, pre-literate linguistic features, not yet standardized in influential Enlightenment projects, and postmodern experiments with form that attempt to exceed literacy—to break beyond the silently

read quality of prose narrative by preserving oral elements. In variability, the novel once again seeks to reestablish a relation to language that existed prior to mass standardization efforts, and which does not adhere to logocentric efficiency, instead broadening the scope of historical facts, unwilling to sacrifice the fragments of the past. Finally, in its polysemic aspect the pastiche reaches back in postmodernity to a world prior to demarcation where meanings bled into and out of one another.

Unity in Aurality

The auditory quality of *Mason & Dixon*'s style is a deliberate reaching-back to an era of widespread oral storytelling that was ended by the onset of modernity when the new era brought the printing press and its products into broad circulation. Prior to this time, storytelling was primarily an aural form, as is reflected in the novel's frame tale; the Reverend Cherrycoke narrates the majority of the novel to his extended family in a room in Ives LeSpark's house at Christmastide. By choosing to implement not only a frame device, but the particular frame device of an orally delivered series of stories, Pynchon draws postmodern narration into close proximity to premodern modes of storytelling. *Mason & Dixon*'s narration achieves this effect by imitating aural storytelling practices in the written form. The novel brings the frame tale's storyteller into focus from time to time and describes actions at the level of the frame tale, both by typographically signifying auditory effects, like changes in pitch and pauses, and through structural similarities to orally delivered narratives like the *Arabian Nights*.

In recording oral storytelling on the printed page, a variety of methods of communication are lost; but *Mason & Dixon* recovers territory lost in the absence of those techniques. The novel mimics "paralinguistic and kinesthetic resources, including vocal features such as loudness, pitch, and intonation and visual features such as gestures and facial expressions to enhance

meaning making" (Lwin and Teo 212). It does so by moving fluidly between the nested levels of narrative, as when Chapter 10 follows Chapter 9's Mason-and-Dixon-level storytelling with an excerpted text from Cherrycoke's *Unpublished Sermons* and then transitions into narration on the level of the frame tale (94) or from Mason-and-Dixon-level narration to a different excerpt followed by the *Ghastly Fop* sequence. These transitions between narrative levels also take the form of shorter interludes, as when an unnamed relative briefly chides a racier description of the Reverend's—

> …a licentious night-world of Rakes and Whores… yet its infected, fragrant, soiled encounters 'neath the Moon were as worthy as any,— an evil-in-innocence…
>
> ("Uncle, Uncle!"
>
> "Hum, hum, howbeit,—"
>
> "Another Cup, Sir?") (110)

Unlike longer frame-tale passages, moments like the above, through their brevity and their parentheses, simply add narratorial tone and context to the story without focusing on extended frame-tale goings-on. Thus, such passages fill part of the role of oral storytelling gestures. Descriptions of the physical actions of frame tale inhabitants also recreate the atmosphere of traditional storytelling: "'What about Indians?' asks Pitt, adhering to the Door-Jamb. 'You *did* mention Indians,' mutters Pliny, around his Brother's Shoulder" (316). This episode displays physical and verbal comedy, while also simply communicating the atmosphere of a late-night family gathering at which the little ones are sent to bed. In this manner, the novel's frame story recreates premodern kinesthetic and tonal storytelling techniques.

Another means by which *Mason & Dixon* recovers the performative aspects of aurally transmitted text is through the use of the punctuation sequence "…?", which indicates a rising

pitch. Dixon pontificates, "Nothing like it again, that I've noahtic'd…? Until this Transit of Venus…this turning of Soul, have tha felt it,— they're beginning to talk to their Slaves?" (100). Such moments indicate that the punctuation sequence is not used precisely as interrogative, but reads *orally* as a combination of suggestively toned ellipsis and inquisitive question mark, the latter of which is indicated in spoken English through rising pitch. Finally, ellipsis serve the role of verbal pauses in an orally delivered tale; they heighten tension or provide a space to ponder implications to what has been said—or, on some occasions, lend a pomposity to the text that is then subverted: Mason feels "a peculiar Horror at being singl'd out for Misadventure…*The Victim of a Cheese malevolent*, being his last thought before abrupt Rescue" (170). The mock-dramatic tone of that sentence is elevated through its ellipsis-induced pause. These punctuation usages emphasize the novel's quality of oral performance.

Mason & Dixon's overt self-alignment with the *Arabian Nights* draws its premodern aspiration through aurality into explicit clarity. Besides the *Nights*' status as a story collection whose frame is a series of orally delivered tales, its heritage lies in the folk storytelling techniques of the Middle East—extempore narration and elaboration surrounding memorized chunks of verse and plot points. In Husain Haddawy's preface to the *Nights*, he writes that its tales "were… modified, as in [his] own experience, to suit the role of the storyteller or the demand of the occasion" (xi)—and that "[t]he stories of the *Nights* circulated in different manuscript copies until they were finally written down in a definite form" (xii), not even solidified permanently after their initial commitment to paper. The folktales of the collection, often delivered, like the bulk of much oral storytelling, to audiences of rapt children, bear recognizable structural resemblances to Reverend Cherrycoke's storytelling. Outbursts of song and fragments of or full documents (letters; passages from field-books and the Reverend's own

writings; quoted poetry) dot the text, like the songs and poetry embedded in the *Nights*. The *Nights* also, like *Mason & Dixon*, prominently possess a number of nested narratives: within Haddawy's attempt to restore a quasi-original version of the collection, the deepest-nested sections are six tales three layers of abstraction beneath Scheherazade's "Story of the Hunchback" (268-294). Scheherazade's need to entertain the Shah to keep her head, and thus her determination to vary the tales' tone through nested stories, mirrors *Mason & Dixon*'s restless genre-traipsing, as narratives like Dixon's bizarre, haunting fable of the Worm of Lambton Castle (587-594) contrast with, for example, the erotic tone of the *Ghastly Fop* excerpts (511-526; precise ending indeterminate). These formal elements—embedded texts of fixed verbiage; nested narratives of different tones; and aural focus—affirm *Mason & Dixon*'s explicit level of conversation with and influence from the *Arabian Nights*. That conversation, in turn, implies the novel's interest in the forms of premodern literature.

Postmodern literature's forms, however, have been characterized by vast amounts of experimentation, often toying with the fundamental formal structures of written narrative itself. The movement's motions have restlessly grasped for "[w]ords… as Homer himself often characterizes them" at the beginning of Western literature—"'winged' rather than inscribed" (Foley 1). In that vein, the importance of spoken lyrics in *Mason & Dixon*, and its motifs of live performance in the forms of the opera and Punch-and-Judy shows, unite postmodern artistry with live performance, the native mode of storytelling for humanity prior to the dominance of the printing press. The postmodern preoccupation with metatextuality also forms an obvious intersection with the documentary incursions in Cherrycoke's tales. Modernity's framing devices were often pragmatically textual, in ways exemplified by epistolary novels like *Pamela*, *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein*. Such devices provided explanations for how the stories they form

came to be recorded. Postmodern novels like *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor*, by John Barth (which also toys with the Scheherazade frame), *Pale Fire*, by Vladimir Nabokov, and *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino frequently feature newly crafted forms. *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* is a nested and interwoven set of (mostly oral) narratives; *Pale Fire*, a poem, commentary, and index; *Invisible Cities*, a lengthy conversation whose initial framing features an ambiguous "we" that seems to imply that the speaker (who never again self-describes) is a conqueror. These new-minted postmodern forms of storytelling, like premodernity's solemn concern with recitation, reflect an interest in the text as a dynamic and living thing, whose structure is of great interest and of great value in imparting meaning. *Mason & Dixon* unites the concern with oral storytelling with the metatextuality common in postmodernism through its hybrid structure, knit out of narrated tales and documents, poetry and prose.

In literature prior to the emergence of the printing press, the performance and dynamism of storytelling were key companions of any tale, and they reappear in *Mason & Dixon*. At the dawn of English literature, for instance, the *Canterbury Tales*' "General Prologue" sets the scene at the Tabard Inn, introducing those narrators whose ideas and voices later manifest in the tales each tells, and the descriptions given of each narrator prepare the reader for the process of storytelling to be transmitted through him or her. When Chef Armand, Aunt Euphrenia, Captain Zhang, or Mr. LeSpark tells a tale in *Mason & Dixon*, the character has similarly already been sketched, as has the atmosphere of the location in which storytelling takes place, contextualizing each story. Before even Chaucer are the invocative conventions of early Greco-Roman epics, which call on the gods to enable the very process of storytelling. In Homer's immortal "Of wrath sing Goddess," the poet does not merely coyly assure his audience that the *Iliad* will be good and

correct, but sets the stage for the series of improvisatory flourishes, plot beats, and epithets that will comprise the song. When *Mason & Dixon* engages with storytelling through its frame stories and its textual incursions, it evokes the same past paradigm of tale performance. In premodern storytelling, particulars were improvised, key portions of the text like epithets or poetry were held constant, and narratology was of the utmost importance. From a formal perspective, then, the novel, within the postmodern paradigm, affects semblances of premodern performance and conceptions of story—a thing improvised, for the sake of the audience, and composed of a wide range of gestures and techniques, conscious that it is heard.

Unity in Linguistic Variability

Premodernity predated the standardization efforts in language that would result in the stringencies of contemporary grammatical and orthographic rules. Shakespeare famously wrote his own name with variant spellings and invented words at will, and Thomas Browne's treatises feature sentence fragments. When the ripples of the Renaissance's ideals of purity, rationality, and the univocality of truth attained hegemony in the ideological sphere, the standardization of language restricted the variable modes of expression into simple and fixed sets of grammatical and orthographic parameters. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* is significant for its status as one of the landmark attempts to "capture and record English as spoken" in 1755 (Hinds 188), just 6 years before *Mason & Dixon*'s Mason-and-Dixon-level narrative begins. Johnson is himself a character in the novel, as is Boswell, whom Pynchon portrays, ironically, as trying to capture and record Johnson himself as his words were spoken, "a-bustle to get it all scribbl'd down into his Quarto" (746). Modernity's motion toward absolute systems of control over language, expanding from the simpler dictionaries of "hard words" to more ambitious and totalizing efforts in the eighteenth century (Levinson 462), was critiqued by

postmodernism's insistence on multivocality and multi-perspectival narratology, which reestablished a sense of value in searching out modes of expression alternate to those already established and codified.

Mason & Dixon's postmodernity represents a paradigm freed from the causal determination institutional power enforces. This postmodernity's ideal state of being is a reacquisition of the aspect of placelessness that premodernity possessed in its ignorance, or disregard, of the complexities of causal dynamics. In *Mason & Dixon*, the phrase "reduc'd to Certainty" (636), describing the erasure of the past's potentiality, exemplifies Pynchon's attitude toward determinism. As Brian Edwards writes, "[t]he danger is not only that with knowledge comes control… but also that it involves a diminution of the possibilities of enchantment" (26). The diminution of possibilities for enchantment, the knowledge that produces control (or makes one aware of control), and the reduction of potentiality to certainty meet in a shape discussed at a pivotal symbolic moment in the novel. When Cousin DePugh and the rest of Cherrycoke's family discourse on the relation between heaven and hell, they discuss the idea that "Hell[is] beneath our feet, bounded,— Heaven, above our pates, unbounded" (482). In this cosmological model, the lines along which the geometric projection occurs are conical, converging on a set number of infinitesimals in hell or diverging to spread-out infinities in heaven. Applying the same relation, each point of totally determined present reality can be projected backward into an infinitely expanding cone of potentiality. The purpose of *Mason & Dixon* is an examination of the process of looking backward from the point of the moment into the infinite breadth of the mutable past. For the space of possibilities to expand into this conic form and escape the tyranny of the linear, the rules of the symmetrical relation between causally related facts must be transgressed—"whoever said anything had to be symmetrickal?", Tenebrae asks (483).

Variability of language introduces new elements, like freshly coined words, and new faces of extant elements, like antiquated versions of contemporary expressions; both these classes of additions do not necessarily have firm causal bases, and thus they broaden the cone of reality as "Alternatives [that] hang about… like Wraiths" (437).

Linguistic variance is thus an avenue by which Pynchon effects an escape from the determinism, and hence entropy, that rationalistic analysis of time yields. Just as the arbitrariness of puns undermines causality's rigid laws, so too does the unjustified continuation of variable spelling and grammar. Ghosts of pre-literate variance are evident in the repeated use of "Smoke" and "Smoak" in the novel. The words are phonetically interchangeable, while their orthographies are not; the variants demand their own space in language as subterranean emergences, the hidden essence of transcribed sound still living in a written age. By exhuming the buried, orally generated discrepancies in language, Pynchon emphasizes that what lies under our current awareness is interpretable. When Mason understands the vast power communicating through a place of worship located in a rough cavern, he observes that what he finds "is Text,— and we are its readers" (497). Under the piled centuries is a legible linguistic history, and by mining that history Pynchon reverses etymological entropy.

The tradition of folk etymology serves as a potent example of premodernity's attitude toward language. Folk etymology, rather than the standardized form the field began to assume a few centuries ago, focused on specific terms charged with special importance, attributing origins to key terms and anchoring discourse in the loci of specific, revered terms and "Names of Power" (Pynchon 323). Folk etymology appeared generally in texts whose purpose was not constrained to the field of etymological study, but served illustrative functions across various major premodern texts. Aristotle etymologizes in the *Poetics* (13; 15); the Pentateuch

etymologizes frequently: see Genesis 3:20, "And the human called his woman's name Eve, for she was the mother of all that lives," on which Robert Alter's commentary introduces the topic of folk etymology (18). Terminology, in folk etymology, searches out a flow or grain native to the substance of history or culture, like *Mason & Dixon*'s concept of the dragon, or the Tao, and aligns linguistic consciousness with that grain. But, as with history, "[a]s the object of consumption, time is consumed by groups of people who reflect on a common past, present, and potential future in order to form a collective idea of themselves as a community" (Schell 70), and so too with language—it has its purpose as a tool, and even its history can be changed. The loss of the linguistic past, the words of power and languages of their interpretation like gematria or kabbalah, both of which are mentioned in the novel, is a "Chronologick wound" (555), just like the closing-up of the hollow earth Dixon discovers, or the severance of Mason's eleven days, separating an old world from a new.

The postmodern solution for modernity which Pynchon advocates includes a return to a form of folk etymology. *Mason & Dixon* frequently coins new words, and in this crucible of terminology, mixing particulate language together from varying Greek or Latin roots or altered Anglo-Saxon from the murkiest reaches of English's past, Pynchon alloys a tongue that was never actually spoken. Invented words like "thatwhichever" (491) make visible the fact that the novel's pastiche is not only creative, but reconstructive of the past, in much the same way as the text's fictive nature, and its repeated claims about history: such a word is palpably archaic, but never really existed, and thus the flavor of the past that it produces is a contemporary construction. By enacting linguistic memory in this creative way, Pynchon brings a postmodern theory of language into contact with a resurrected form of folk etymology—language and its ghosts are no longer problems merely of fact (because facts, as he notes, are immaterial to

history [349]), but points like those in traditional Chinese medicine's system of acupressure: redirections in the flow of life. The revivification of a dialect which never quite existed, in *Mason & Dixon*'s pastiche, epitomizes the novel's constant task of rejuvenating and anchoring contemporary experience in properly channeled cultural memory, in an atmosphere very like the deepest past of premodernity. It also relocates power away from centers of sociolinguistic control, like the Royal Society whose vengeance at Mason & Dixon's written correspondence is a permanent blot on their careers, by making available "interpretive and linguistic codes" from which the reader, and the protagonists, are not "excluded" (Ní Éigeartaigh 61). The process of folk etymology democratizes interpretive codes, and thus makes it possible for a people to conceive of their shared history.

The imperative described above—to anchor the contemporary in the past—results in *Mason & Dixon* meeting the definition of postmodernism as "the recognition of the specifically *temporal* irony within narrative" (Elam qtd. in Richardson 24), by means of the same subjunctive ethos that governs the novel's refusal to limit its language within standardized bounds. That ethos produces the novel's multiple endings and its relentlessly bifurcating and backtracking plot. Each of those attributes fractures temporal narratology and manufactures accompanying irony, as plot occurrences are explicitly potential rather than actual, or take time to read though they do not *happen*, and thus take no time to occur. Many times, a character *would have* spoken or done something, or, *had they* spoken or done a certain thing, a next thing *would* or *may have* happened, and the progression of events, if any, dilutes into airy tendrils that, cut short, send the reader on into the next series of progressions or digressions. The novel seeks always to avoid "the cold consensus that ignores dream in its Reckonings" (539. Further, it would not be too much to hazard that, when the mystical Squire says "They are Lads… Having a dream together.

No harm" (435), he is referring not merely to the bantering and playful characters of the expedition on the Line, but to the totality of the novel as a subjunctive exercise. In this exercise, Mason or Dixon looks back and wonders what could have been, or Cherrycoke wonders for them: "All subjunctive, of course,— *had* young Mason gone to his father, this *might have been* the conversation likely to result" (208). Cherrycoke looks back with his family on Mason and Dixon, and speaks as if the tale of their travels might have had sufficient adventure to warrant comparison with "the Escape from Hottentot-Land, the Accursèd Ruby of Mogok, the Ship-wrecks in Indies East and West" (7), and Pynchon looks back again in wonder with readers, at America when its potential was still apparently limitless, such that "[s]ome mornings [Mason and Dixon's party] can believe that they traverse an Eden, unbearably fair in the Dawn" (476).

Unity Through Polysemy

Postmodernity aligns itself with the sociological idea that signs are themselves the product of perceptual breakdown, or differentiation, rather than primal experience. Immediate perceptions, prior to conscious analysis, are whole, seamless fields of meaning; as Owen Barfield writes, "[t]o make no class-distinction between the sun and a white cockatoo, but to feel instantly and sharply a world of difference between both of these natural phenomena and a black cockatoo is, it is felt, a state of mind at which it would be difficult to arrive by inference" (30). This is because such totemic, unified experience is not arrived at by inference but by perception, which through inference breaks down whole, totemic realities into quanta of information. While modernity seeks to analyze the underlying structures of language as articulated in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and codified in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, postmodernity seeks a reentry into primal modalities of perception, effected through efforts toward reunification.

Pynchon's overdeterminative technique, as discussed earlier, manifests itself throughout the novel. As overdetermination compresses diverse meanings into single symbols, so too does *Mason & Dixon* adopt a posture of compressed meaning, through which the resonances of its metaphors may reverberate across the text, even as the juxtapositions of those resonances bring new associations to light. In each instant of revelation, whether it be an event in the narration or an object described, the novel embodies a concept, and it is across the array of metaphorical signs that repetitions at the levels of both the signifier and signified bind those concepts together, gradually adding context and accumulating meaning around them. A panoply of crucial images, terms, and metaphors, like the Leyden jar, the wind, lycanthropy, Transubstantiation, and dragons each acquire new meanings and shades of meaning over the course of the narrative. The Leyden jar, for example, is in some sense also the mysterious pre-Native-American cone structure that Captain Shelby shows Mason and Dixon (598-599), and the stacked capacitors of the electric eel (600). Chains, "with centuries of that word's poetic Associations adding to its Weight" (471), encircle the novel, holding its themes together by accumulating complex dynamics between them—slavery; necessity; surveying; and the "Chain of Generations" (602). The interpenetration of the symbolic order results in connotations, each colored by every other, such that the Leyden jar's electrical meaning becomes associated with that of the eel, the eel's menace with the pre-Native-American magical machinery, the chains of generations with the causality through which history binds us, and so on.

On a more microscopic level than that of the novel's major symbols, polysemy manifests where specific terms and gestures become laden with meaning. In *The Ghastly Fop* sections of *Mason & Dixon*'s narration, there are periods of notable upticks in the usage of ellipsis to indicate pauses (526), even in third-person narration and before the text is read aloud (519-520).

The eroticism of the *Fop* becomes apparent through these pauses, which pick up during a risqué moment in a Jesuit fort and when Tenebrae discovers Ethelmer's unwholesome entertainments. The ellipses permit the pacing of narration to slow to breathy jolts, although implicitly raising the question (before the novel confirms the segment is the *Fop*) of whether the Reverend is indeed reading this aloud and pausing as he does. When the present and past, or fiction and nonfiction overlay one another, such events further charge the novel with meanings. When Mason and Dixon's field-book is excerpted or historical figures wander onto the page, the world of readers and the world within the novel are brought into clear contrast, heightening focus on their differences. Likewise, at moments in which familiar language undergoes alteration to become anachronistic, like the so-called "Delaware Triangle" (323) or a girl who uses "was, as," in the place of "was, like," to introduce reports of speech (400), or an altered version of Ronald Reagan's Eleventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican" (Williams), reading "I must not speak ill of another Clergyman" (730), phrase-level linguistic quirks juxtapose contemporary language with the eighteenth century to make the novel's archaic.

Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds contends that the punning in *Mason & Dixon*, besides its typical function of bonding two unrelated terms, constitutes a transgressive act, or an act soon to be transgressive in a world on the cusp of vast change. The novel is full of puns: two militant puns even take place on the same page (723), and help set their scene's jaunty yet desperate mood as Mason helps shore up an Irish town against a flood. But besides the contextual color they add, the polysemy of these puns defies the most important development in linguistic standardization contemporaneous with the novel—the publication of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*. "Johnson's *Dictionary*," Hinds writes, "signaled the end of the legitimate pun in English" (191); thus, since the *Dictionary* is complete, the very manner of

speech in which *Mason & Dixon* is told is already, officially at least, made obsolete by the very beginning of the story. It does not produce subsurface cognitive tension, in the way that other anachronisms do, that *Mason & Dixon*'s puns defy contemporaneous good taste, playing up such wordplay at the time of its falling "out of favor" (190), simply because the eighteenth-century attitude toward puns is so far out of the realm of common knowledge. That wordplay does, however, lend a spry lightness to meaning in the texture of the novel, against forces of rationalism like the Jesuits, the Freemasons, or the Royal Society, who would be interested in the processes of refinement and confinement involved in delineating all aspects of life institutionally—that much is attainable from the plot of the novel alone.

These techniques, including punning, retrofitted contemporary expressions, and iterative metaphors, serve the purposes of a unification of pre- and postmodernity by incorporating undifferentiated fields of meaning into the very fabric of the text. It is through implicitly consuming the pastiche that the possibility emerges for readers to understand the tone of the novel without analyzing it—just as in the novel the taste of trees, to the beavers of the New World, impacts their capacity for chewing them down, while the imposition of the rectilinear logger's axe transgresses nature (620). *Mason & Dixon* communicates its ideas through this crafted texture palpably prior to intentional, conscious readerly analysis, and thus permits a non-logocentric reading. Each particular event in the novel takes place in the context of a language densely charged by its balancing of two different eras, as well as its persistent, multiform critiques of modernity. Each thing has its place within "the simultaneity of the text's perpetual and not-at-all homologous motions" (Huehls 32)—the novel's division along different eras, which, as Huehls explains, is its governing principle; diachrony "creates the effect of a singularized perpetuity" (ibid.), phenomenologically felt without requiring total understanding.

Mason & Dixon quite clearly opposes univocality, on each level of form and content. Structurally, its narratology, as discussed more thoroughly in earlier chapters, consists of nested, intersecting, and unstable sections which cannot be neatly categorized. These sections vary by genre, by narrator, by setting in time and location, and by apparent trustworthiness or obvious fiction. Portions of the text are even documents, fragments of documents, poetry, or song. Within the novel, too, there are no extraneous plot beats; each incident or event presents an essential portion of an idea, seen from a new angle. Themes explored through the novel appear in innumerable guises, hundreds of times. Chattel slavery, for instance, bleeds into commerce, as does all action in a flawed economic system of sufficient complexity: “all are in the Market,— however regrettably” (696-697), a slavedriver tells Dixon; further, God is compared with “Business” with a capital B (411), and it is an act of no small import to “draw… a Line between… Slave-Keepers, and… Wage-Payers” (692). Any incident that is not itself illustrative can safely be classified as setting up or tying off a metaphorical moment. Indeed, that is not only the case with incidents in the novel, but also with descriptions: the Torpedo, or electric eel, shares a structural affinity with the Leyden jar, and with the strange pre-Native-American structures the text records, for instance. Each fact possessed of significant elaboration becomes a new avenue of topical exploration, and all these meanings accrue, a harmony of voices dense and inseparable, each providing the others context.

One of the central concerns Pynchon expresses in *Mason & Dixon* is the loss of polyphony, particularly the “phantom polyphony” (53) of the past, or the dead, or ghosts. Intermixing, iterated, and compressed metaphors often take the forms of liminal or supernatural beings, native to the outskirts or thrust outside the bounds of human experience, like the dead or the mad. In many cases, disenfranchised voices will not accept being muted: “Dragons concealed

in Native American mounds, gigantic serpentine worms, and ghost fish… prove insubordinate to expansionist rhetoric that will lead to large-scale ecological depletion, and the bioregion surrounding each creature is transformed into a liminal space" (Rozelle 159). These beings are obscure and inconvenient participants in America, and are thus controlled or destroyed through the violence of a dominant univocal discourse, just as their ecological analogs are harvested or polluted by hyper-efficient machinery. In a blackly comic (and soon merely bleak) moment, the novel describes the slow loss, item by item, of a ship's band, concluding: "The *Seahorse* found herself down to a single Fifer… its Performance [during an attack by the *L'Grand*] recall'd as 'virtually Orchestral.' Amid the Blasts… could the Instrument ever be heard… aching for the phantom polyphony no longer on board, trying to make up for the other Voices" (53). Like the fifer of the *Seahorse*, *Mason & Dixon* is a vocal effort, attempting to call up the ghosts of history so that their harmony can be completed, that those in the present may "act for all of us who have so fail'd" (698) in the past. Though their ghosts are "beyond recompense" (Punday 255), the damage the dead have done is not beyond atonement. Further, Pynchon seeks to invoke not merely those who have failed to act but those who have been unable to take part in the expression of history: as Adam Lifshey observes, "[t]he imposition of 'progress' and 'order' in *Mason & Dixon* is relatively monolithic compared to the multiplicity of aboriginal societies and landscapes whose erasure it portends" (131-132); their ghosts will remain, unheard if no one speaks for them. Thus, the novel employs its style and structure in order to give voice to prior ages—in large part, it comprises the aching lament of modernity for the world it destroyed.

All of these aspects of textual polysemy, arising from the peculiarities of *Mason & Dixon*'s style, contribute to an effect of powerfully intersecting meaning. In this, the novel works to create an effect much like the premodern views of the Taoists, who believed that every thing

partook of the substance of the supreme Being, or the medieval Christians, whose Great Chain of Being assigned each creation a place in the universe according to a set ontology, which permanently distributed niches to each created thing. By producing an effect of undifferentiated experience, or newly wedded symbols in an overdetermined flux, *Mason & Dixon*'s pastiche prevents modernity's grip on the setting of the novel from penetrating into its voice, and brings postmodernity into line with premodern modes of expression and consumption.

Conclusion

Mason & Dixon's pastiche, through its auditory components, its linguistic variability, and its polysemy, produces a philosophical identification between premodernity and postmodernity. The novel's auditory form, on large and small scales, bespeaks a concern with ancient structures and styles of storytelling, and an interest in the pre-literate world. *Mason & Dixon*'s variability of language functions, on a metaphysical level, as a counter-charm against the stringent restrictiveness of determinism, which is undone by false hypotheticals—what if, for example, these spellings were both acceptable—working against the settled power structures that operate to constrict the plenitude of language. The pastiche's polysemy accomplishes a similar goal, but instead of working as subjunctively as its variability, the polysemic element in *Mason & Dixon*'s language attacks demarcating principles, mixing meaning together into a whole experience, although, like the variance of language, the text's polyphony constitutes a refusal to relinquish the past's potentiality. Taken together, these aspects of the pastiche illuminate significant motions that not only attack the modern paradigm, but advocate clearly for a unity between those worldviews which preceded and succeeded modernism.

Conclusion

"Our Afflictions are many, proceeding from an unilluminated Region deep and distant, which we are us'd to call by Names more reverent."

—Mason

This study has demonstrated the manner in which *Mason & Dixon*'s affected language interacts with and expresses the novel's ideas, arguing that the text's style subverts the modernist context of its era, and advocates, through variability and polysemy, a unity of premodernity and postmodernity. In so doing, the thesis has touched on a range of the material in *Mason & Dixon*, particularly those portions of the text concerned more directly with the fatal passage through modernity, and from potentiality to actuality, that America, for Pynchon, emblematizes. The novel's fragmentation and decentering of rationalism form a common ground between the "Age of Faith, in which Miracles literally happen'd" (726), and our own world, deserted not only by allegiance to the divine but, further, by the ambition of modernist projects of meaning-making.

The radical vision of postmodernity that Pynchon presents straddles a new and bizarre space. *Mason & Dixon* seems to adhere to a sort of atheistic Calvinism in its deterministic, pessimistic model of the universe as a vast entropic funnel disallowing perfection. But Pynchon advocates for inhabiting an untrue ideal of freedom rather than what he sees as the reality of Christless fate. The novel supports the idea of dwelling in a "chronologick Wound" (555), the element of liberty excluded by the Enlightenment's systems of causality. That one might know determinism, but live freedom, is the central mystery of *Mason & Dixon*. It constitutes the only way now possible to follow "the way journeymen became masters, and the ingenuous wise,— it is a musickal piece returning to its Tonick Home" (762). This recapitulation of premodernity's freedom enables an escape from entropy. The novel is inextricably reactionary, rather than

anything merely conservative; it reacts against the massed weight of a millennium or more of culture, in favor of a journey home to mankind's innocence, "an Eden, unbearably fair in the Dawn, squandering all its Beauty" (476). Reading *Mason & Dixon* means taking part in the dream of America in its infinite potential and majesty. However, for the reader, as for Mason, "[a]n accident of the late Light has fill'd [his or her] Orbits with color'd shadows" (478). An era no longer innocent, lit with modernity's "late Light," casts "color'd shadows" before him or her in the beautiful and insubstantial hopes that populate *Mason & Dixon*.

Future scholarship might well pursue avenues exploring the ways in which Pynchon's model of intellectual history and its relation to archaic language appears in his other works. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tyrone Slothrop descends from Constant and Variable Slothrop, a pair of Puritans whose names poke fun at the eternal calculus of Calvinism, the idea that God predestines the fate of each person with a view toward the highest goodness of the universe. The novel states that "[t]he illusion of control. That A could do B… that was false… No one can *do*. Things only happen, A and B unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable" (30). *Gravity's Rainbow* thus rebuts the idea of an absolute causal network in the Enlightenment mode. *Against the Day*, like *Mason & Dixon*, delves into pastiche, aping a few trends in the history of literature and hence evoking particular moments of intellectual history. *The Crying of Lot 49*, likewise, prominently includes a lengthy parody of Jacobean drama in *The Courier's Tragedy*. Conceptual threads connect affected language and probing analysis of history and causality throughout Pynchon's work. The archaic language of his fictions mirrors their historical and metaphysical implications, engaging with intellectual history in a consistent critique of rationalism.

Like Pynchon's historical and linguistic practice, the fundamental theory of fiction touched on in this thesis begs critical examination. Fiction as a subjunctive act, as something whose fabricatedness is intrinsic and good, possesses immense importance in reading Pynchon. The idea of the Reverend Cherrycoke as Scheherazade, who by his stories staves off loneliness and "the Winter's Block and Blade" (7), and Cherrycoke's idea of the Learned English Dog as a Scheherazade, whose ancestors' discourse has historically been a method of "nightly delaying the Blades of [his] Masters by telling back to them tales of their humanity" (22), display the same concept of the storyteller as overcomer of death. This model of storytelling raises the question of fiction itself, "[i]s this, like the Bread and Wine, a kindness of the Almighty, sparing… a sight [one] could not [abide]" (171), and the question of what other ways Pynchon expresses this idea. Such inquiry into Pynchon's exploration of religion and fiction, "kindness[es] of the Almighty," must examine his work's relation to premodern religious literature.

The premodern orientation of *Mason & Dixon*, and its intent search for Eden or the earthly paradise, evoke more than any other major work of literature the shadow of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The earthly paradise is depicted, in that medieval allegory, on the summit of the mount of Purgatory, just as St. Helena, an island mountain (like Purgatory's location in the *Comedy*), is explicitly purgatorial (161). Countless strands of *Mason & Dixon* gesture toward premodernity and the age of faith, prior to and greater than the age of reason; but in the *Comedy*, Dante leaves behind Virgil, an image of guiding reason, to be lead onward and then upward by Beatrice, symbol of faith, into the celestial realms. That Dante sees Beatrice in visions after her death, just as Mason looks for Rebecca in the heavens after hers, is likewise confirmed in the *Purgatorio*; and thus among a variety of other odd parallels and commonalities, it appears that

Mason & Dixon would benefit greatly from deliberate comparison with and dissection by means of the *Comedy* and other literature of premodern theology, and their points of intersection. Since "Pynchon's message is a survey of history itself, and in particular our ability to survey time and space with the instrument of Christ's resurrection" (Coe 150), it is only natural that more intimate appraisals of the age of faith's Christological consciousness should be brought to bear on the novel.

Mason & Dixon is a story about growing up (as a man, as a nation, as a civilization) and learning that childhood's dreams were best in the end, that the great mystery of life "turn'd out to be simple after all" (772). The "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11.1), faith is possible to maintain only if one rejects the empirical blows of "Death's thousand Metaphors in the World" (172). "Perhaps when Night has fallen," Pynchon speculates, Mason "will be able to look up, to question the Sky" (771). Until that final point of convergence on the Black Hole or the Bodily Resurrection—and *Mason & Dixon* ends, though Mason has died in the frame tale, before his death in the section being narrated—the novel rests in limitless potential, as William and Doctor Isaac hope for heavens in which "[t]he Stars are so close you won't need a Telescope" (773). The novel ends almost as it begins: stars; night massed outside the family circle; America in its youth. A flood-tide of hope burgeons to bear Mason out among the constellations, where "the great Loom of God works in darkness above" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 27), to innocence regained.

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