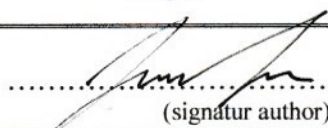




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**“All is Failure:” The Legacy of the Enlightenment and
Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon***

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Abstract

Since its publication in 1997, Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* has become a literary cornerstone within a continuing discussion about the 18th-Century and its influence on contemporary culture. Initially, this thesis will establish this critical discussion by engaging with the cultural work of Steven Pinker, Homi Bhabha, and Neil Postman, in hopes of developing a spectrum of criticism about the Enlightenment era. Further, it will determine how the Enlightenment movement and its attention to the ideals of liberty, progress, and history are presented in *Mason & Dixon* and how they engage with the growing concern about the era's legacy. Slavery, the Royal Society, the Watch, the Mechanickal Duck, and the world-system within the novel will be discussed in order to demonstrate how the novel subverts predispositions about the Enlightenment era. Ultimately, it will be suggested that *Mason & Dixon* works as an exemplary literary artifact contributing to the interdisciplinary anxiety over the Enlightenment by demonstrating that the contradictory conceptualizations of liberty, progress, and history developed in the novel present the possibility of a neutral narrative, the multiplicity of metahistory, and the complexity of cultural reality.

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Chapter 1: Representing the 18th-Century and the Enlightenment

1.1 Introduction to Research

“Charles and James... and their tangle of geometrick hopes,- that somehow the Arc, the Tangent, the Meridian, and the West Line should come together at the same perfect Point,- where, in fact, all is Failure” (Rev. Cherrycoke, *Mason & Dixon*, 337).

Despite the reverend’s skeptical attitude toward the Mason-Dixon venture, the surveyors’ commission to determine the rightful borders between Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware could be considered a practical success. The Mason-Dixon commission, both in the novel and in reality, was to consider the three grants given by King Charles II to each colony, and to determine their rightful borders using the extent of astronomical technology of the 18th-Century. These charters were initially miscalculated, causing the border dispute, and in need of ratification. In order to correct this, the surveyors created a complex web of geometric shapes and vectors: a true north line and a tangent line running north-south from the Twelve-Mile Circle in Delaware’s charter, and an East-West set of vectors which act as a single line to form the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland. The hope of King Charles was to calculate a set of vectors which would meet perfectly between the three colonies and, although Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon were able to ratify the border dispute, the reverend’s pessimism is justified. The closest set of vectors is what remains the ‘Mason-Dixon Line’ today, leaving a small, 1,068 square-mile “wedge” between the colonies. This was considered a ‘No Man’s Land’ until 1921 when this land was granted to the state of Delaware. The Wedge in *Mason & Dixon* is represented as “an Unseen World, beyond Resolution, of transactions never recorded... A small geographick Anomaly, a-bustle with Appetites high and low, their offerings and acceptances” (470). More directly, the Wedge is an anarchical place, comparable to “The Zone” in Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, where thieves go to escape the laws of the colonies and mystical elves burrow beneath the hills. What is relevant to the current thesis, however, is the formation of this lawless, undetermined area, this attempt to precisely define territory presents the failure of the reason-driven Enlightenment

ideology to reduce and divide all things, creating a concentrated area of near anarchy and contention. The failure to create a perfect set of vectors and the formation of the wedge brings into question the success of the Mason-Dixon commission and the ideologies surrounding it. To a similar extent as the reverend, this thesis attempts to ratify contradictions that are founded in the Enlightenment sentiment through the primary text and join the interdisciplinary discussion concerned with determining the era's place in the modern world.

Mason & Dixon specifically highlights the contradictions of 18th-Century ideologies, specifically contradictions in the conceptualization and manifestation of liberty and progress in social and political life of that time. The text confronts readers with a multitude of perspectives and settings ranging from the travels of the title characters through the African colonies of the Cape and St. Helena's, to their commissioned journey to the British-American colonies prior to the revolution, where the two surveyors are tasked with determining the long-disputed border. This primary narrative is framed by the Rev. Cherrycoke's storytime-telling of their adventures in postwar 1786 and jumps into a near, indiscernible, potential future as the surveyors continue their journey west and back again to the European continent, continuing their "conduit for evil" across the sea (*M&D* 701). Most prominently, the novel revolves around the development and impact of this conduit, 'the Line,' in the pseudo-historical, Enlightenment-driven American colonies. What is known in reality as the Mason-Dixon Line, is utilized as an image of division and determinacy which brings forth commentary on independence, slavery, globalization, and technology, all coated with a near-humorous helping of debauchery, paranoia, and the fantastic.

This project primarily investigates the ways in which the Enlightenment and its relevant ideals are presented in Thomas Pynchon's historical novel, *Mason & Dixon*. More specifically, having observed an intense desire within the cultural studies environment to either justify or belittle the legacy of the Enlightenment, a binary conflict which will be explained in further detail, the intention of this project is to accurately identify how Pynchon's subversive narrative engages with the contemporary and critical concern about the era. Ultimately, this project is intended to suggest that the novel could be seen as a cultural and historical lens of multiplicity into the Enlightenment, rather than a definitive statement on the era's successes or failures. In order to do so, this thesis will first take into consideration what the Enlightenment era entails,

politically, socially, and historically. This will also be intertwined with a few statements concerning the Enlightenment and its relationship to the novel, *Mason & Dixon*, establishing how the era and its ideals are integral to understanding Pynchon's narrative. Furthermore, this initial consideration will also establish and address the Enlightenment's legacy and its controversial status in the interdisciplinary academic environment. Proceeding this foundational discussion, detailed explications concerning *liberty* and *progress* within the novel will help illuminate the multiplicity of cultural history presented in the novel.¹ That is to say, *Mason & Dixon* presents a redefinition of cultural historiography and cognitive world mapping, one without a determined trajectory, one with an openness to the fluidity and ambiguity of historical variables.

The Enlightenment ideals that have been briefly mentioned will act as the subsections of the current discussion, specifically a consideration of the Enlightenment period in relationship to liberty and progress. By focusing the attention of this project to these subsections, the consideration of the primary text will be streamlined, negating the expansive quality of the narrative and allowing for a deeper analysis of key concepts. A discussion about how liberty and progress within the novel subvert predispositions about the Enlightenment movement will show how Pynchon's narrative particularly reveals the darker aspects of the era's history. The astronomical practices within the novel, particularly pertaining to the occupational activities of the title characters, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, provide a focal instance and apparent crux for the ideals often associated with the 'Age of Reason,' most prominently connected to an intense adherence to rationality in the novel. As a response to an instance of Mason's superstition, a consideration of the possibility of "some other Day," Dixon continues, "we're Men of Science. To huz must all days run alike, the same number of identical Seconds, each proceeding in but one Direction, irreclaimable" (27). In reality, this anti-superstitious attitude led to specific interdisciplinary movements during the 18th-Century: the further development of the scientific revolution and attention to technology, a pursuit of liberty and equality in both the political and social realms of life, as well as an adherence to reductionism and an inclination toward utilitarianism. Most generally, these ideals are rooted in a general attempt to advance the conditions of liberty and law determined by rationality in the newly global world of that time and

¹ 'Multiplicity,' here and furthermore, is comparable to Edmund Husserl's definition in his work, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, in which multiplicity is related to an idea being undetermined and in contrast to 'unity' (15).

is seen as ‘progressive’ movement. However, Pynchon challenges their success and idealism by framing the practices of the surveyors, Mason and Dixon, around the fiscal and political motives of the global imperium as well as highlighting some of the horrid realities of the 18th-Century. Pynchon’s narrative seems to suggest that although the Enlightenment movement and its conception of a global democracy were realized through the denouncement and eventual removal of absolute political and dogmatic power, the inevitable void of that power would be filled with a new global dominance, one with more implicit control and less concentrated enactors. The foundation of the modern world, birthed from the interests of the global powers in the novel, acts as a recorded heritage of culture, most prominently seen as a negative commentary on both the cultural reality of the contemporary world and the Enlightenment era. The connection between the modern world and the historical quality of Pynchon’s narrative has maintained the foremost position in the critical studies of the novel and will be shown in the form of critics who see the novel as a subversion of Enlightenment ideology.² Imperial interests dilute the intentions of the Enlightenment movement within the novel, which proposes a binary conflict, pitting idealism and reason against greed and power. However, Pynchon’s style and previous practice would suggest against such a definitive resolution. Additionally, a deeper look into the nature of history within the novel will shed light on how the narrative presents this type of delineation or the way in which it makes determined statements about the past. Ultimately, this thesis attempts to piece together many different facets of the historical narrative in Pynchon’s novel by challenging any determinative interpretation of the Enlightenment and its ideals, and it is important to note that a deeper analysis of the author’s subversion has potential to shed light on the nature of modernity, one’s understanding of history, as well as the practices of the literary arts. Rather than seeing the novel as a denouncement or praise of any specific ideal, this project will attempt to suggest that *Mason & Dixon* works as an exemplary literary artifact presenting the tensions developed from the Enlightenment, demonstrating the neutrality of the narrative, the multiplicity of metahistory, and the complexity of cultural reality.

1.2 A Preliminary Review of *Mason & Dixon*

² Throughout the thesis the term “modern” will be maintained as a reference to the historical period following the Enlightenment up until the early 20th-Century.

In an interview with Leonard Price in 2009, Harold Bloom, literary critic, Yale University professor, and contemporary advocate for the maintenance of a formal literary canon, has gone on record suggesting that *Mason & Dixon* should be held amongst the very best of not only postmodern literature, but of all fiction:

I don't know what I would choose if I had to select a single work of sublime fiction from the last century, it probably would not be something by Roth or McCarthy; it would probably be *Mason & Dixon*... Pynchon has the same relation to fiction, I think, that my friend John Ashbery has to poetry: he is beyond compare. (Bloom)

The interview, primarily focused on Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* as a prime candidate of contemporary canon, is an example of how *Mason & Dixon* is utilized as a standard to which other postmodern, contemporary literature is set against. Originally published in 1997, *Mason & Dixon* is generally thought to be the culmination of Pynchon's earlier work, signaling the transition into an equally impressive late career; in 1975, Pynchon had already begun work on the novel, having mentioned the surveyors, Mason and Dixon, twenty-two years before the novel would be published, showing the story's prevalence in the author's previous sentiments (Gussow). Taking on the same narrative model as Pynchon's previous works like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Mason & Dixon* utilizes historical accounts of a given period in order to disassemble, recreate, and redefine systems. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon dissects the paranoia of 1960's California, in *Gravity's Rainbow* he invites the reader to reconsider the world-system following the Second World War, and in *Mason & Dixon* the reader must attend to the contradictions of the Enlightenment sentiment in 18th-Century America. In this way, *Mason & Dixon*, as well as a majority of Pynchon's literary catalogue, can be considered historical fiction, a categorization that naturally sets fact against fiction as the novel takes into consideration the primary narrative of the Mason-Dixon venture and the reverend's frame narrative. In terms of the primary narrative, the characters of Mason and Dixon are the focalization of the conflict that Pynchon enters. Both characters represent an aspect of the binary conflict of Enlightenment sentiments; Mason is shown as a man of astrology, emotion, and the sublime, while Dixon is shown as a man of astronomy, rationality, and practicality. As for the frame narrative, Rev.

Cherrycoke represents the focalization of Pynchon's 'solution.' As a pseudo-teacher, a figure who is presenting a commentary on 18th-Century culture as a bedtime story, the reverend represents a figure that escapes the conflict set up by Pynchon, someone that represents the lucid quality of historiography, the blending of fact and fiction. These two narratives together, both the journey of the title characters and the reverend's frame narrative will be the textual focus of this project.

Although this thesis must necessarily be involved in the interdisciplinary discussion concerning the legacy of the Enlightenment, and therefore must initially deviate from a pure literary analysis of *Mason & Dixon* in order to establish the controversy of the Enlightenment, it is also important to establish a strong connection to the primary text of which this investigation will be focused. A brief synopsis of the primary text may shed light on the various conflicts, intricacies, and images that are relevant to the current and coming discussion. "Book One: Latitudes and Departures" begins with Rev. Cherrycoke's frame narrative, in which the reverend's nieces and nephews gather for a late night storytelling of their uncle's first encounter with Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, a point at which the reader is positioned to reflect on the novel's narrative backbone, both as a *story* and as a *history*. Book One continues with the initial encounters between Mason and Dixon themselves, both in comfort of 18th-Century urban life in Britain and as they navigate the dangers of international voyaging aboard the *Seahorse* as it journeys to Cape Colony. Once there, the surveyors, commissioned to trace the Transit of Venus, are brought under the Vroom household, a prominent Dutch family with particularly concupiscent daughters. Additionally, the two witness the intricate horrors of Dutch rule over the native populations, presented by the Vrooms as a sensical development in the modern world. Soon after, work takes Mason and Dixon out to a desolate island far out into the Atlantic, St. Helena's, where the two meet the astronomer, Maskelyne, who is cursed with faulty equipment and an obsession with the Moon. The two title characters are separated briefly, once Dixon is requested back at Cape Colony, but are reunited in London when both are considering a commission in America. It is important to note that Book One has an apparent 'global' quality to its subject matter and allusions, not only reflected in the travels of the surveyors as their innocence is slowly chipped away, but also reflected in scenes which meld separate cultures in single moments. A prime

example from Episode 23 is the first English ‘pizza’ of punched dough, Asian “ketjap,” pickled anchovies, and blue cheese being made in a pub. Moments like this, among others to be mentioned, highlight a particular cultural tension that develops from globalization in the novel, whether it is seen as a positive melding which brings together differences or as a negative stress from which violence erupts.

“Book Two: America” makes up the bulk of Pynchon’s novel, both in its length and its substance. The first episodes involve the surveyors getting introduced to the American lifestyle, this includes a visit to the coffeeshop with Dr. Benjamin Franklin and smoking marijuana with George Washington at Mt. Vernon, all while discovering an apparent paranoia surrounding the Jesuits and their global network. Over a period of time Mason and Dixon are able to set the starting point for their Tangent Line, not before dealing with spurts of violence from the colonists towards different groups, reminiscent of their time at the Cape. Mason and Dixon split up, Dixon visits Thomas Jefferson in the South and Mason travels North, where in New York, he learns of the plight of the labor-worker under British rule and the lack of colonial representation. The two surveyors meet again and join a crew of men to travel West as they divide North and South along their Line, this includes Swedish Ax-men, the Frenchman Allegre followed by a Mechanical Duck seeking either love or revenge for all of her duck brethren, and an unassociated group of extorting prostitutes. The surveying crew continues their journey into the untouched nature of North America, paranoid of Indian attacks and fantastical creatures. There are a few continuous episodes dealing with the Jesuit paranoia, particularly concerning an escapee joining the surveying party and conspiracies dealing with the Line, bringing up the complex purpose and motivations of their commission. The surveying crew finishes the Tangent, the Mechanical Duck becomes powered by the energy of the Line and remains along it, and the two surveyors dream of expanding the Line infinitely Westward. Before leaving Mason and Dixon stay for a period of time, handling the logistics of latitude and a Meridian Line. Additionally, Dixon, enraged with the presence of slavery in all of the locations they have visited, beats a slave-driver, and frees his slaves, before escaping with Mason. Book 2 ends with an opera, expressing what would have happened if the two surveyors continued traveling West, past the Mississippi, meeting fantastic beasts and other worlds, all before traveling East again, continuing their Line across the Atlantic.

Like the previous section, Book Two also delves into the global intricacies of the 18th Century, but does so by converging these details into a truly developing ‘American’ ideology.

“Book Three: Last Transit” sees the title characters back to the European continent after their journey west across the Atlantic. The two opt to work separately, Dixon in Norway and Mason in Ireland, both observing the return of the Transit of Venus. Mason is able to visit Dixon in England to talk of their new assignments, Dixon’s being an entire adventure into the center of the Earth. Then, on his way to Scotland for yet another assignment, Mason meets the English writer, Samuel Johnson, and the two discuss America, Scotland, and a few other men like Rev. Cherrycoke. Mason and Dixon, who have both remarried by this point, meet once more, and the reader learns that Dixon will not return to America due to his own health and the political situation in the British colonies. The novel ends with the death of the surveyor, Mason. Having been able to relocate to America, the surveyor is visited by Maskelyne and Benjamin Franklin before he dies with his two eldest sons, who reminisce of a time when they were boys and wanted to travel to America.

1.3 Critical Reception

It is fitting, yet somewhat unfortunate that the initial response to Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* in 1997 was almost exclusively in comparison to one of his previous works, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which since has still been generally accepted as his *magnum opus*. The two novels, although separated by nearly two decades, are undoubtedly similar in style and structure. In each of their respective ‘97 reviews of *Mason & Dixon*, Mar-Jones of *The Guardian* and Kakutani of the *New York Times* describe Pynchon’s style as picturesque, encyclopedic, and pseudo-historic. Further, T. Coraghessan Boyle of *Times Book Review* calls the novel “encyclopedic, witty, and surreal... playful, a pastiche redolent of the musty journal and the capitalomania of the day,” Ted Mooney reiterates that *Mason & Dixon* is “dizzying and encyclopedic... picturesque... remarkable,” and finally, Paul Gray from *Time* asks if readers are “willing to do the hard, head-scratching work that Pynchon’s uncompromising prose demands?” He predicts that “those who beg off the long journey through *Mason & Dixon* will deprive themselves of a unique and miraculous experience”

(qtd. in Clerc, 9-16). These descriptions, along with deep, narrative confusion, paranoia, and a surrealistic use of pastiche, were founded and mastered by the time the author finished *Gravity's Rainbow*. Early on in Pynchon studies, critics consolidated these descriptions into the term 'Pynchonesque,' a fitting word to describe the author's style.

Furthermore, the critical reception of the novel ranges from unabashed praise to deep disdain. In his book *Mason & Dixon & Pynchon*, Charles Clerc meticulously summarizes nearly every single nationally popularized review of the novel from its release in 1997 to the time of his own book's publication in 2000. Some of the most important and relevant reviews will be quoted here in hopes of creating not only a healthy understanding of the novel and its reception, but also a wholesome connection to the concerns and questions of this specific project. These reviews, summarized by Clerc, act as critical buffers to the discussion about the Enlightenment and its legacy today. Analyzing the Newsweek article "The Master Surveyor," from the initial release of the novel in 1997, Clerc and Jones Jr. highlight the duality of history:

Malcolm Jones Jr. cannot quite bring himself to call *Mason & Dixon* "the Great American Novel," yet he approaches within an inch: "but, hey, it walks like a great novel, it talks like a great novel, so..." The novel possesses a "tragic heart." According to Jones, "Pynchon's genius is to use [the Mason-Dixon] line as a starting point, the place where America's deepest characteristics -violence, restlessness -and contradiction- slaveholding vs. freedom loving- came into sharp focus." He concludes that this novel "will make you want to curse American history, then turn around and bless it, because nowhere else but America could you find a zany literary genius like Thomas Pynchon. (Clerc 13).

Continuing, Clerc highlights what makes *Mason & Dixon* stand out from Pynchon's other works by summarizing Mark Siegel's review from the *Journal of Popular Culture*:

Mark Siegel observes that "this latest novel is a prism refracting an accepted line of history into a harlequin spectrum of pop cultural events... The Line, or the Visto... foreshadows much of the conflict in American culture, but it's making also provides a panoramic view of the dreams and nightmares of those who made it." Siegel summarizes treatment of popular culture, Pynchon's optimistic pessimism, "wonders and mysteries," and "expected Pynchonesque conspiracies." He concludes, "This novel is not just about

our world, our history, our culture. It is about us, the ways we live and think and probably always will. The greatest evil is not cosmic entropy; it is personal slavery... But what makes this the greatest of Pynchon's works is its overwhelming humanity, its compassion for the good and foolish and weak -and occasionally- valiant human race." (Clerc 25)

Perhaps the most powerfully relevant of Clerc's summaries is of Louis Menand's insight into the entropic quality of the novel:

Louis Menand in a lengthy review entitled "Entropology," concludes that Pynchon "has produced a work of cultural anthropology, *A Tristes Tropiques* of North American civilization, and an astonishing and wonderful book." Menand explores the concept of entropy, that is, "the tendency of all systems -and ultimately the universe- to run down." He extends his idea through the vision of Claude Levi-Strauss to 'entropology' -cultural anthropology as "study of the highest manifestations of this process of disintegration." Modernity, a constant in Pynchonian concern, compels "cultures to come into contact with one another." whether it be "political, economic, cultural, or sexual." The concern of science, the "standardization and universalization of time and space" are achieved "at the expense of variety and possibility." Dreams, paranoia, phantasmagoria are all ways to resist "modernization and rationalization," but nevertheless "the disenchantment of the world" seems to be inevitable. (Clerc 20)

The initial reviews of *Mason & Dixon*, both positive and negative, are important to analyze in order to develop a deeper understanding of the cultural context of the novel's publication. Even Clerc, in the justification for his book, writes of the novel's complex resonance in cultural and literary history. He purposes, "What I promote is eclectic possibility: countless, rewarding ways of approaching a great work of fiction. Even including nay-sayers, *Mason & Dixon* deserves every bit of attention it gets" (38). Reviewing the initial critical reception of the novel brings out a few important notes to keep in mind, namely, that key ideas like *history*, *entropy*, *lines*, and *possibility* are all integral in the analysis of *Mason & Dixon*. History, more specifically historiography or the way in which history is determined, will be considered in connection to the metahistorical aspects of the reverend's frame narrative, highlighting the quality of multiplicity. Additionally, a deeper look into entropy will emphasize the impossibility of determinative claims

based on information. Delineation and possibility will also be considered as opposite forces in the novel, displaying a balancing act between chaos and order. These ideas will be investigated in order to show how meaning is underdetermined in the primary text and how that works against making a determinative claim about the Enlightenment and its legacy.

1.4 The Enlightenment

Pynchon rarely hesitates to remind those reading *Mason & Dixon* of the historical context that is focalized in the novel; early on Dixon reprimands Mason for his superstitious sentiment and paranoia about bad omens saying, “pray, You,- tis’ the Age of Reason” (27). Not only does Pynchon quickly set up a dichotomy between the two character's attitudes, but the author also establishes the setting and scope of the novel by highlighting the contradiction in sentiments within the given time period. The Age of Reason, or the Age of Enlightenment is a philosophical and ideological movement primarily recognized during the 18th-Century and prominently associated with the European continent and other extensions of Western civilization. Generally, the Enlightenment was an era that “prized rational inquiry, scientific discoveries, and individual freedoms,” but, unlike the Renaissance in early centuries, “enlightened thinkers were willing to discard the orthodox religious beliefs in favor of more ‘rational’ ideas and ideals” (Tindall and Shi 82). The fact that this period concept is explicitly mentioned in the novel may seem anachronistic, yet this is contextually warranted; similar terms and self-reflexive ideas about the era were established in the 18th-Century itself, most notably conceptualized in Immanuel Kant’s 1784 essay, “Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” And, in order to establish a general understanding of the era, this subsection of the thesis will attempt to answer the same question. Consequently, this discussion must first take into consideration the era’s ideals and motivations, the first being a strict adherence to reason and rationality as a means of finding truth. This is a metanarrative tension, one in which Pynchon pits the enlightened means of finding truth against his own, postmodern means. While Enlightenment thinkers saw truth as a possible outcome, writers like Pynchon see truth as an underdetermined, unattainable principle. Additionally, ideas concerning *liberty* and *progress* become increasingly important topics for

Enlightenment ideology, and, particularly within the primary text, *Mason & Dixon*, these ideals put into question one's understanding of the era's history.

If liberty and progress are two of the most notable ideals of the Enlightenment, it would be remorseful to exclude a consideration of their motivation, reason. In his most recent account of the Enlightenment and its impact on contemporary progress, Harvard psychologist and cultural theorist, Steven Pinker cites 'reason' as the foremost ideal of 18th-Century thinkers. He asserts, "If there's anything the Enlightenment thinkers had in common, it was an insistence that we energetically apply the standard of reason to understanding our world, and not fall back on generators of delusions like faith, dogma, revelation, authority, charisma, mysticism, divination, visions, gut feelings, or the hermeneutic parsing of sacred texts" (*Enlightenment Now* 8). 'Reason' is difficult to define, yet in a general way, it could be described as justification within a statically maintained standard, or as Pinker eloquently puts it, that something be "accountable to objective standards" (*EN* 8). One could consider reason to be the foremost ideal of the Enlightenment, primarily due to its capacity as a catalyst for the various other ideals established and championed by Enlightenment thinkers. If religious dogma no longer stands as an 'objective standard' in understanding the world dynamic, liberty from the restraints of oppressive systems is required, as is defined by Kant. Additionally, the new modes of intellect established by this reason-driven mentality developed the secondary ideals that Pinker highlights: the scientific method which strictly adheres to the validation of empirical evidence, the development of humanism and the education of the public, and most prominently the idealization of progress and a belief that the human condition can be improved. All of these new modes of intellect ultimately led to the development of new practical systems. The Enlightenment brought the rise of democratic governments, closely tended school systems, the advancement of healthcare systems, and the birth of the international free market, all of which, at their foundation, hold 'reason' as their primary catalyst. This has ultimately led to a general understanding of the Enlightenment era as one solely founded on the mentioned ideals, a history that has persisted, relatively unchallenged until the second half of the 20th-Century.

1.4.1 The Controversy of the Enlightenment Era and its Legacy

The following passage from *Mason & Dixon* proves essential to the current project, encapsulating the true tone of the entire novel and its connection to the greater interdisciplinary concern over the Enlightenment. In between quoting Frau Redzinger's story on the way to Philadelphia, the novel's narrator, assumingly Rev. Cherrycoke, asserts:

These times are unfriendly toward Worlds alternative to this one. Royal Society members and French [Encyclopedists] are in the Chariot, availing themselves whilst they may of any occasion to preach the Gospels of Reason, denouncing all that once was Magic, though too often in smirking tropes upon the Church of Rome,- visitations, bleeding statues, medical impossibilities,- no, no, far too foreign. One may be allowed an occasional Cock Lane Ghost,- otherwise, for any more in that Article, one must turn to Gothick Fictions, folded acceptably between the cover of Books. (359)

There are many contentions packed into this passage: the comparison of science to a new religion, the aggressive eradication of miracles, a human tendency toward superstition, and a meta-connection to the distrust of modern literature. These all prove to be immensely fruitful instances to investigate further, however, the more relevant textual evidence is the passage's general sentiment. In essence, the coming of the Age of Reason, represented as Royal Society scientists and encyclopedists, not only toppled the previous world concept, one driven by religious oppression, but also shunned anything that may remind one of the past or halter the 'progress' of reason-driven practices. Albeit informal, the idiom, "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater" successfully reiterates the reverend's contempt with the Enlightenment era and re-emphasizes the overzealousness of the reason-driven sentiment.

Similarly, thinkers are doing the same sort of questioning of the Enlightenment in contemporary disciplines. Has the world concept that influenced so many aspects of society been a positive or negative way of proceeding with the human project? Thinkers questioned the religious structure in the 18th-Century, and new thinkers have been questioning the Enlightenment structure that followed since the late 20th-Century. Without a doubt, even the things stated here, broad sweeping generalizations about a period concept, could be considered controversial among historians and theorists. A more relevant conflict lies in the success of the

ideals presented; did the populous and the culture of the Western world truly manifest reason, liberty, and progress during the 18th-Century, or were these ideals misguided and overshadowed by the atrocities of racism, nationalism, and violence which have been historically neglected until recent review?

In many ways it is rightful to consider this Enlightenment project to have been a success, most prominently as the precursor to the advanced, ‘modern’ world that humanity has enjoyed all the way through contemporary eras. As will be further explicated, Pinker is an ardent advocate for the statistical successes of the Enlightenment and its legacy. In his newest work, *Enlightenment Now*, Pinker asserts that the world has witnessed a drastic increase in life expectancy and wealth, a sharp drop in global inequality and safety issues, and has maintained relative peace for many years, all produced by the abolishment of religious doctrines and the promotion of the scientific method.³ However, contrary to the romanticizing of the Enlightenment depicted by many of the 18th-Century artists who saw the period as a radical success, the ‘modern’ world now feels the prolonged backlash and implications of the reason-driven ideals, many that have been clouded and covered for the centuries preceding. On the opposing end of the ‘Enlightenment legacy spectrum’ is the conjecture that the “successes” of the reason-driven ideals of the 18th-Century have also paved the way to contemporary ignorance and failure. The free market conceptually founded by Smith could be seen as the catalyst to the capitalistic corruption of Western democracies, identities, and cultures. Additionally, the industrial progress which stemmed from machinery like the cotton gin only prolonged racial injustices in the New World, of which implications still reverberate well into the 21st-Century. And finally, the astronomical progress that was founded in the Age of Reason could be seen as a prerequisite to the weaponization of satellites, rockets, and other nuclear outlets, a familiar topic to a reader of Pynchon’s 1973 novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and a concern which beckons humanity to consider questions of technological morality. The ultimate evidence for Enlightenment naysayers came with the atrocities of the two World Wars in the first half of the 20th-Century. More than one hundred years of relative global peace and reason-driven success, was trampled by some of the worst human rights violations and moral degradation ever recorded. Consequently, these

³ See the chapters, “Health,” “Inequality,” “Peace,” and “Safety,” in Pinker’s *Enlightenment Now*.

tragedies birthed a strong resistance to the Enlightenment project in the 1960's. How could reason and progress dominate the world concept if they allowed such raw brutality to surface?

This is essentially a problem of historiography. The controversy of the Enlightenment era, or any era for that matter, comes down to the malleable quality of history. Just how this new conception of historiography has created a problem for interdisciplinary critics today will be considered in context with explications from Cohen, Clerc, and Elias, with a particular attention to the concept of history in the novel. The reader is continually asked to consider Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* in a historical way, most prominently and explicitly discussed through the narrator, Rev. Cherrycoke. As Aarhus University's media culturalist, T. R. Andersen, points out, the novel can be read as "a veritable catalogue of the multiplicity of the 18th century." Ultimately, Andersen suggests that "Pynchon's three novels *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day* can profitably be read together as an ambitiously conceived world-historical trilogy which tells the story of the gestation and emergence of our contemporary global reality," and that, although "The relentless reduction of [many] possibilities, the narrowing of a historical field of many possibilities into a single beaten track, is at the absolute center of *Mason & Dixon*," the novel "deviates from traditional perspectives on linear history to emphasize that the individual human being actually has a significant degree of freedom in each historical moment. (Andersen). Consequently, *Mason & Dixon* sets up the same questions being considered now. This is manifested as the reimagining of prominent figures or historical events, the continual reminder from the protagonists that they are amidst the Age of Reason, or the explicit questions brought up by the reverend's young audience. It is the intention of this project to join this larger conversation concerned with the 'Legacy of the Enlightenment,' by utilizing an analysis of *Mason & Dixon* and its relevant critiques as a literary, historical, and cultural medium. A further analysis of the critical responses to the legacy of the Enlightenment will be discussed in the following sections. Furthermore, a new critical response to and analysis of the novel will be developed in the later chapters of this project with the intent of joining the dialogue surrounding the Enlightenment's legacy. By joining this greater conversation, it may be possible to identify the points in which the novel presents both the era's successes and failures from a literary perspective.

1.4.2 Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now* and Homi Bhabha's Response

At the end of 2018, Steven Pinker was invited by *IAI News* to defend his latest work, *Enlightenment Now*, against another Harvard-based cultural theorist, Homi Bhabha. The summary of this text-based debate stands as proof of the Enlightenment's relevance in contemporary cultural studies: "While Pinker focuses on the merits of the Enlightenment, Bhabha outlines its complicated and dual reverberations. We asked the two luminaries to engage in a written dialogue about the good, the bad and the ugly of the Enlightenment in the twenty-first century" (Pinker and Bhabha).⁴ For all intents and purposes, Pinker represents one end of the contemporary Enlightenment legacy spectrum, a view that the era has brought success and affluence to the modern world. His most recent opponent, Bhabha, on the other hand, represents a view that the Enlightenment has created a contradictory or even hypocritical world concept.

In order to summarize Pinker's work, Bhabha utilizes the book's title, 'Enlightenment Now,' seeing it as an act of urgency, stating "'Now' is more than a time signature that gives Steven's title a sense of urgency; it is an important measure of our progress" (Pinker and Bhabha). Although Bhabha considers the title of Pinker's work to be the relevancy of the Enlightenment in contemporary studies, an observation that the Enlightenment era is still working within contemporary culture and ignoring the tragedies of the *longue durée*, the title, 'Enlightenment Now,' could also be seen as a cultural allusion to the film *Apocalypse Now*. As both Pinker and Bhabha point out, the central claim of the book is to promote a consideration of the successes brought about because of the Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress, ultimately defeating the 'doomsayers' that have taken over global sentiment in the later half of the 20th-Century. In reference to the 1979 film, the book positions itself to overshadow the negativity of human suffering by illuminating it with the positive statistics of the past few hundred years, ultimately replacing the end of the world, with the humanistic belief of creating a new and better one. Continuing, Bhabha comes out with an initial rebuttal to Pinker's work, first

⁴ Similar features have been surfacing continually over the last decade; "Enlightenment Today," "Why the Enlightenment Still Matters Today," "The Enlightenment Project," are all headlines from news outlets, universities, and academics (Rajchman, Champion, Brooks). Steven Pinker has even participated in more discussions about the era, notably sharing the stage with public figure, Stephen Fry, in which the two "discuss the challenges we face in the 21st century and what we need to do to defend the values and ideas of the Enlightenment" (*How to: Academy*).

summarizing his colleague saying, “Steven believes that we take the enlightenment’s gifts for granted” (Pinker and Bhabha). More elaborately, Pinker summarizes his own sentiment later on by stating, “The natural state of humanity, at least since the dawn of civilisation, is poverty, disease, ignorance, exploitation, and violence (including slavery and imperial conquest). It is knowledge, mobilised to improve human welfare, that allows anyone to rise above this state... And identifying the forces that raised human welfare in the past shows us the ways in which we can reduce suffering and danger in the present” (Pinker and Bhabha). It is as if Pinker has reaffirmed, verbatim, the rationalistic sentiment of the 18th-Century, one recalls the value Descartes puts on the ability to know or Kant’s inclination toward understanding—the first chapter of *Enlightenment Now* is even titled “Dare to Understand!” Pinker responds by summarizing his stance saying, “The natural state of humanity, at least since the dawn of civilisation, is poverty, disease, ignorance, exploitation, and violence (including slavery and imperial conquest). It is knowledge, mobilised to improve human welfare, that allows anyone to rise above this state” (Pinker and Bhabha). Pinker is truly embracing the heart of the humanism that developed in the Enlightenment, concluding that morality is contingent on knowing how to improve welfare and instilling progression toward that welfare.

Moving to the book itself, the majority of Pinker’s nearly 500 page defense of the Enlightenment involves a heavy list of statistical evidence of the growth of the world’s success since the 18th-Century and connecting threads which suggest the positive influence of the specific ideals of reason and progress. This includes the increase in lives and life expectancy throughout the world, global wealth, and relative peace compared to other eras. To this he states, “the Enlightenment brought denunciations of war from Pascal, Swift, Voltaire, Samuel Johnson, and the Quakers... It also saw practical suggestions for how to reduce or even eliminate war... The spread of these ideas has been credited with the decline in great power wars.” Pinker continues, “Another brainchild of the Enlightenment is the theory that democratic government serves as a brake on glory-drunk leaders who would drag their countries into pointless wars” (*EN* 162-163). Beyond this, Pinker’s argument stretches to human rights, anti-terrorism, and happiness, always claiming that which ever increase or decrease is directly influenced by the

Enlightenment and an attention to knowledge. This, to him, proves that “we are now living in the safest time in history” (*EN* 168).

The statistics are promising and, quite frankly, give a truly optimistic view on the history of humanity. Yet, the reader must also recognize the contingent aspects of Pinker’s work. Later in the book, Pinker states, “*Homo Sapiens*, ‘knowing man,’ is the species that uses information to resist the rot of entropy.” To him, humanity defeats the ‘rot of entropy’ with “technologies that multiple, indeed, exponentiate, the growth of knowledge, such as writing, printing, and electronic media.” Pinker continues, “The supernova of knowledge continuously redefines what it means to be human, our understanding of who we are, where we came from, how the world works, and what matters in life depends on partaking of the vast and ever-expanding store of knowledge” (*EN* 233). In an optimistic way, Pinker is right. Humans have questions about themselves, about the world, about mind, about morality, and the only way to answer these questions is to gain as much knowledge about existence as possible. The more knowledge humanity has the better. However, this assertion relies on the fact that *knowledge trumps entropy* and Pinker’s use of the latter term should raise an eyebrow.

Originally a thermodynamic principle, the term has become an interpretive and literary principle as well, often referring to the underdetermined quality of language and literature. Entropy is a familiar idea to anyone who reads Pynchon’s novels, an idea that represents a quality of randomness or unpredictability in a system and most prominently utilized in all of the novels that will be discussed, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and *Mason & Dixon*. Within these texts, the entropy of technology and information is never ‘solved,’ the more input into a given system, the more unpredictability is output. For Oedipa in *Lot 49*, the more she attempts to solve the postal mystery, the more paranoid and lost she becomes. For Slothrop in *GR*, the more experiences away from London he has, the more he loses his identity. Finally, in *Mason & Dixon*, the more lines and divisions the surveyors create, the more ambiguity, suffering, and confusion manifests. In contrast to Pinker, who sees entropy as a ‘solvable’ problem, Pynchon’s novels suggest that *entropy trumps knowledge*.

Although Pinker’s *Enlightenment Now* sheds light on the positive influence the era had on human welfare, Bhabha’s hesitation toward humanism holds deeper connections to Pynchon’s

Mason & Dixon. Back to the *IAI News* article, Bhabha's statements about the Enlightenment can stand as reiterations of the current thesis: "I believe that in embracing [the gifts of the Enlightenment], we must look the gift-horse in the mouth. We must calculate the cost at which they come—a price paid largely by those who do not belong to 'our crowd.'" He continues, "I believe that any mature argument has to deal with praise *and* blame. As I said, I take my stand with Kant's view in *What is Enlightenment* that any purposeful exploration of progress must import paradoxes and contradiction into the act of judgment and self-reflection. Otherwise all you do is to take potshots at straw men and women. . . Enlightenment thinking is, quite properly, a work in progress. The best way to defend the Enlightenment is to stop being reductionist about it" (Pinker and Bhabha). Similarly, as will be explicated in the following chapters, *Mason & Dixon* works as an exemplary literary artifact contributing to the interdisciplinary anxiety over the Enlightenment's legacy, ultimately demonstrating that the tensions developed in the novel present the possibility of a neutral narrative, the multiplicity of metahistory, and the complexity of cultural reality rather than reducing the novel to an opinion piece. Pinker attacks this sentiment, however, concluding that "the epithet *reductionist* [can be] used to dismiss any attempt to bring clarity and evidence to bear on 'paradoxes', 'ironies', and 'contradictions'" (Pinker and Bhabha). But, as it has been suggested, Pynchon's aptitude for and use of paradox, irony, and contradiction, imply the novel's indifference for 'clarity' and 'evidence.'

1.4.3 Neil Postman's *Building a Bridge to the 18th-Century*

Perhaps fundamental to this contemporary concern of the Enlightenment's legacy are the assertions in Neil Postman's book, *Building a Bridge to the 18th-Century*. The title of Postman's book refers to the possibility of a connection between 18th-Century ideology and the contemporary cultural environment; published in 1999, *Building a Bridge* is a critical review of the Enlightenment's positive influence on the modern world, much like Pinker's more recent *Enlightenment Now*. However, unlike Pinker, Postman's assertions are based on cultural sentiment, rather than statistics, which proves to work in his favor. Postman understands the tensions that were created by the ideals of reason, progress, and liberty, but strives to emphasize,

that at their roots, the sentiment behind such ideals can lend themselves to promoting the proper kind of progress in contemporary times. Coming from a truly classical and liberal background (in the sense of education), Postman puts an emphasis on the value of truth, rather than advancement. The prelude to his book includes a passage from Andrew Hamilton's defense for John Peter Zenger in 1735, in which he simply appeals to what is "notoriously known to be true," a prelude to Postman's assertions in the purest way (4).

At the heart of Postman's book lies a definition of the Enlightenment, "A philosophical movement of the eighteenth century focusing on the criticism of previously accepted doctrines and institutions from the point of view of rationalism" (3). It may seem rather universal, thinkers from both ends of the critical Enlightenment legacy spectrum might find this definition acceptable, yet there is a precise choice of words that differentiates Postman's meticulous introduction to the era. Similar to Bhabha, Postman emphasizes the idea of 'criticism' over the actual elimination of doctrine and institution. He never once considers rationality to be an answer to mysteries and never jumps to the assertion that rationalists are superior to romantics. In fact, he considers opposition important, stating, "When we speak of 'Romanticism,' we speak of a rejection of the presumptions of rationalism, an important idea for people like ourselves to consider -but only after we are clear about what rationalism is" (21). Postman has other motivations than to promote any specific ideal, motivations that are made explicit early on:

There is even one group who seeks meaning in the ingenuity of technological innovation... They are information junkies, have no interest in narratives of the past, give little thought to the question of purpose... Such people have no hesitation in speaking of building a bridge to the new century. But to the question 'What will we carry across the bridge?' they answer, 'What else but high-definition TV, virtual reality, email, the Internet, cellular phones, and all the rest that digital technology has produced?' These, then, are the hollow men Eliot spoke of. They are, in a sense, no different from the alien- and devil-believers... I am not writing my book for these people. I write for those who are still searching for a way to confront the future, a way that faces reality as it is, that is connected to a human tradition, that provides sane authority and meaningful purpose.

(10-11)

This is where someone like Pinker and someone like Postman divert. While Pinker desires to highlight the successes of the Enlightenment because he believes they possess a morally-driven, progressive power, Postman sets out to uncover the sentiments of the Enlightenment, hoping to discover truth about humanity's cultural history and future. The former is assertive, the latter is explorative.

Similar to Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, *Building a Bridge* categorizes the various effects the Enlightenment has had on contemporary culture and the world dynamic. Postman's concerns about progress have already been briefly touched on, but it can be summarized in one of his last statements in the chapter: "Reason, when unaided and untempered by poetic insight and human feeling, turns ugly and dangerous. Blake, Carlyle, Ruskin, and William Morris agreed. And their saying so is part of the gift of the Enlightenment" (35). However, Postman has a solution to 'reason untempered;' only through the process of becoming "enlightened," just as Kant originally suggested, will one overcome the dangers of 'reason unaided.' On technology, Postman asks the reader to consider a series of questions: "What is the problem to which this technology is the solution?" "Whose problem is it?" "Which people and what institution might be most seriously harmed by a technological solution?" and "What new problems might be created because we have solved this problem?" In one way, Postman is implicitly recognizing the entropic nature of humanity, that the more problems we 'solve' the more problems appear. Ultimately, Postman proposes his own personal way of dealing with these ideas. He states, "I will use technology when I judge it to be in my favor to do so. I resist being used by it" (55). Finally, on democracy, Postman attempts to suggest that the Enlightenment's renewal of the ancient Greek government system was made possible by the advancement of communication technology, most notably the accessibility of printed word. Postman asserts, "We now know of the role played by the printing press with movable type in promoting individualism. It greatly amplified, for example, the quest for fame and individual achievement... Like the mechanical clock, which was also a great time-machine, the printing press captures, domestications, and transforms time, and in the process alters humanity's consciousness of itself" (151-152). In another way, the ability to produce public media that affects mass perception, ideas about individualism, liberties, and change travel faster, farther, and deeper. This not only results in stronger ideas, but also, as Postman suggests, a

stronger sense of self, which defines the drive for democratic governments in the 18th-Century. The exact same concern is found in *Mason & Dixon* as well. While traveling on the *Seahorse*, the surveyors learn that the Holy Bible has been banned on the sea; Lieutenant Unchleigh explains, “‘tis Print, -Print causes Civil Unrest,- Civil Unrest in any Ship at Sea is intolerable. Coffee as well. Where are newspapers found? In those damnable Whig Coffee-houses. Eh? A potion stimulating rebellion and immoderate desires” (48). Here, Pynchon is pointing to the same concern in the relationship between media and democratic identity and it is important to denote the tone. Similar to how Postman concludes his chapter by saying, “Here I raise the point that the fantasies and dreams of what we have come to call ‘democracy’ were created by the masters of the printed word... What I am asking for is a serious conversation about the relationship between our new media and our old democracy,” Pynchon, too, is asking for a conversation rather than stating an opinion (153-154). If the technologies of the 18th-Century redefined the governmental systems of that time, one must then consider the technologies of the contemporary world and how they, too affect our consciousness and our relationship to our environments.

Building a Bridge contains a good amount of details and concerns about Enlightenment sentiment and how it relates to contemporary culture, yet it is the process that Postman uses in order to explicate the Enlightenment that relates more to the current discussion. He concludes his book with a few parting ideas, stating, “I regard history as the single most important idea for our youth to take with them into the future... History, we might say, is a meta-subject. No one can claim adequate knowledge of a subject unless one knows how such knowledge came to be” (173). This exemplifies Postman’s process, to see history as a means of discovery, a tool of exploration in the hopes of finding some sort of take away, a truth perhaps. “And it has seemed to me that if we try to remember how others before us tried to get it right, our own chances are improved. As you may know by now, I think those eighteenth-century fellows made a damn good try” (174). If Postman were to be put on the Enlightenment legacy spectrum that has been created for the purposes of this discussion, his final statements might suggest a small plot for him in the middle along with Pynchon. Both understand the complexity of cultural history and the fluidity of the human condition. Although this subsection is suggesting that the sentiment toward the Enlightenment and its legacy found in *Building a Bridge to the 18th-Century* stands as an

exemplary connection to *Mason & Dixon*, it is difficult to suggest that the two writers would agree with each other on anything at all. In fact, Postman has explicit disdain for the postmodern movement and its underdetermined qualities. He relates deconstructionism and postmodernism to ‘devil-worshipping’ and ‘mental illness,’ ultimately showing his amusement at the fact that “You can actually get a Phd in this sort of thing” (8). However, both Postman and Pynchon demonstrate that history is a tool of underdetermined power, possessing the ability to alter the future.

Chapter 2: Subversion of the Enlightenment in *Mason & Dixon*

2.1 Liberty: Slavery and Dogmatic Science

As a pseudo-moral lesson for his nieces and nephews, Rev. Cherrycoke clarifies the ideological implications of the American Revolution, stating, “Unfortunately, young people... the word *Liberty*, so unreflectively sacred to us today, was taken in those Times to encompass even the darkest of Men’s rights,- to injure whomever we might wish,- unto extermination,- Free of Royal advice or Proclamation Lines and such. This being, indeed and alas, one of the Liberties our late War was fought to secure” (*M&D* 307). Pynchon takes great care to decenter the reader’s dispositions about liberty in *Mason & Dixon*; whether it's the horrific dehumanization of races or the reformation of dogmatic structure, the novel puts into question the liberties that were, and are still so ardently fought for and protected. The presence of slavery in the American colonies, the unjust violation of Native Americans, the motivations of the scientific community, the power dynamic of democracy in connection to the free market are textual cases of this decentering narrative. Yet, although the concept is subverted, Cherrycoke gives the reader a shed of ambiguity. The reverend simply denotes that ‘in those times’ liberty maintained sacredness without reflection, not necessarily denouncing its sacredness completely. This section of the thesis will investigate the ways in which *Mason & Dixon* does in fact subvert and denounce the Enlightenment movement by displaying the contradictions inherent in 18th-Century ideology. However, by accomplishing this, the field will be set in order to suggest that Pynchon’s narrative in fact works against such determinative claims through a redefinition of historiography.

It is apparent that the concept of liberty plays a major role in defining and understanding the mentality of the Enlightenment movement due to its prevalence in much of the era’s discourse. One can look to Kant who champions liberty of the intellect or one might also recall the famous imperative, “Give me liberty, or give me death!” which spurred the Virginians into revolutionary action, the ‘self evident’ truths of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” which govern the western conception of humanity and dignity, or Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People*, which glorifies and personifies ‘Lady Liberty’ leading the revolutionary charge. The idea of liberty has been intrinsically tied to the primary revolutionary movements of the 18th and 19th

centuries and represents the foundation of the constitutional democracies that followed thereof. Yet, being so prevalent and so saturated within the discourse of then and now, it can be difficult to use such an underdetermined word for literary explication. Therefore, for the purposes of a discussion of the Enlightenment and *Mason & Dixon*, the right questions must be asked and properly addressed. What is liberty? Where does it come from? Who has decided such things? These questions will hopefully lead to a deeper consideration of liberty in connection to *Mason & Dixon*. So that the discussion does not stray away from the primary text, it is important to consider how the specific ideal of liberty, in connection to equality as a practical mode of governing, manifests in *Mason & Dixon*.

The concept of liberty is an ancient concern. The Greeks, Persians, Romans, and Egyptians all contemplated and struggled with the idea of freedom, particularly differentiated as an opposition to physical slavery. This is at the foundation of what defines liberty, the antithesis of slavery, a struggle that persisted within the Enlightenment period and well beyond it. Perhaps here, the most apparent connection is the troubling presence of slavery throughout the journey of the title characters of *Mason & Dixon*. The particular textual cases of slavery within the novel, the surveyors' encounter with the Vrooms in Cape Colony in the early pages, and Dixon's eventual lashing out against a slave driver in a later episode are prominently explicit about the tension of slavery in the American colonies. Additionally, the mistreatment of Native tribes will be considered in the same light, being associated as physical injustices against one's liberty. Ultimately, this denial of liberties is presented in *Mason & Dixon* as troublingly sensical.

Early on in the novel, the surveyors witness the intricate horrors of Dutch rule over the native populations, particularly the prospect of 'breeding' slaves, which is presented by the Vrooms as a logical development in the modern world. Mason, being approached by one of the Vroom's servants, is caught by surprise in the secret of night. Austra, an African slave desensitized to the entire situation explains, "their Wish is that I become impregnated... All that the Mistress prizes of you is your Whiteness, understand? Don't feel disparag'd, -ev'ry white male who comes to this town is approach'd by ev'ry Dutch Wife, upon the same Topick. The baby, being fairer than its mother, will fetch more upon the Market, - there it begins, there it ends" (65). For the Dutch at Cape Town, the world has changed, "the field having shifted from

Motives of Pleasure to Motives of Reproduction and Commerce,” even to the point of productionizing what could be considered the most intimate type of relations, something Mason laments, for it possesses “no Sentiment, no Love” (65-66). It is meant for these injustices to be connected to the Enlightenment, not solely based on their existence in the novel, but also their connection to 18th-Century Dutch ventures. In particular, the famous Dutch East India Company is intrinsically tied to the development and history of the capitalistic mentality during the Age of Enlightenment. Being the first public company, and a successful one at that, drove the global markets to embrace free market strategies and encouraged development of modern capitalism. Secondary markets also began to emerge, acting as precursors to the contemporary stock exchange that embodies the modern global market. This capitalistic development and power struggle is further emphasized by Col. Washington in the American colonies when he points out that the East India Company possesses its own navy just as companies in the colonies have private armies (281). Further, beyond the stale vision of production that is driven by Enlightenment values and the enslavement of Africans that resulted, privileged, western liberty is put into question as well. Mason protests the approach of Austra claiming, “Why, in England, no one has the right to bid another to bear a *child*?... Our Women are free.” In a way, Mason acts as a contemporary reader, here, attempting to justify the liberties that were produced by the Enlightenment movement. To this, Austra replies, “Poh. White Wives are much alike, and all their Secrets are common knowledge at the Market. Many have there been. Oblig’d to go on bearing children, -for no reason but the man’s pride... how is the English Marriage any different from the Service I’m already in?” (65). There is no escape from the consequences of the Enlightenment mentality. Because of the commercial drive of the free market, even the most intimate and natural relationship humans can participate in becomes a means of production and profit, what Mason, the reverend, Pynchon, and perhaps the reader are missing is explicitly revealed: sentiment, love, pleasure. What is left, however, is the “daily efforts to secure Shelter against Demonic Infestation,” and what Mason and Dixon end up looking to aid them is rather tragic: not a “Love-Potion,” or a “Hate potion,” but an “Indifference-Draught” (67).

Before beginning their journey across the Line, Mason and Dixon witness more troubling events in the American colonies. Waking up to the city of Philadelphia in disarray, the two hear

of the Paxton Boys' massacre; "At Lancaster, -day before yesterday, - the Indians that were taking refuge in the Gaol there, were massacr'd ev'ry one, by local Irregulars, -the same Band that slew other Indians at Conestoga, but week before last" (304). This is an actual historical event, and it would even go further. More tribes would become victims and the Paxton Boys become a sort of rolling death, a force of destruction across the colonies, something that Mason and Dixon fear as they move West across their line. To them it is nothing new, however: "They saw white Brutality enough, at the Cape of Good Hope. They can no better understand it now, than then" (306). The concept of liberty is connected through the next line, implying the intent of the concept and its failure. "Whites in both places are become the very Savages of their own worst Dreams, far out of Measure to any Provocation" (307). Although the Enlightenment movement sought to employ liberty as a means of progression, the novel points to instances of misinformed morality. Benjamin Franklin blames the atrocities at the Dutch colonies on Cape Town's drastic weather fluctuation, "that vertiginous re-polarizing of the Air, and perhaps the [Aether] too, which may be affecting the very Mentality of the People there." But, Dixon, and perhaps the reader, rightfully responds, "Then what's America's excuse?" (307).

It is fitting that Pynchon pulls the reader back to the frame narrative at this moment, using the reverend as a pseudo-teacher. Here, Cherrycoke solemnly defines the American understanding of liberty, as the right "to injure whomever we might wish, unto extermination, were it possible" (307). This is immediately reinforced by Ives LeSpark, who asserts that colonial military leaders utilized the Smallpox virus to eliminate populations of Natives in earlier times. However, what initially seems to be presented as a colonial problem —something that a postcolonial reader would immediately grasp, suggesting that the novel should be read as an anti-white narrative, or a reader with a feminist lens might suggest should be read as an anti-male narrative— can be read differently when considering Cherrycoke's response. He states, "Unlike our more Virtuous Day, no one back then, was free from Sin. Quakers... profited from the sale of Weapons to the Indians... Ye can't go looking for Sinners, not in an Occupied City, -for ev'ryone at one time or another here was some kind of Rogue" (308). Instead of seeing the fallacy of liberty in the American colonies as a singularly sourced problem, Cherrycoke sees the tension as a structural, cultural, social problem that is rooted deeper than any one group. It is a failure to

successfully and consciously determine what liberty actually is, perhaps the reason why the reverend chose to interrupt the story to discuss its definition at the time of the commission and its definition at the time of the story, ultimately having the reader reflect on the definition of liberty, now.

A year later, Mason, in response to the neglect of justice after the Paxton Boys' massacre at Lancaster, asserts, "In America, as I apprehend, Time is a true River that runs 'round Hell'" (346). Responding to the same scene, Charles Clerc asserts, "any act of horrid criminality—massacre, extermination, genocide, holocaust— can tend to be lessened in impact if time is allowed to elapse without action" (132). One could see the novel itself as a time machine, attempting to eliminate the time between the events of the 18th-Century and the reader. In this way, Pynchon brings back the impact of the injustices presented, not as a denouncement or a reminder of atrocities in order to sway an opinion, but rather as an elaborate display. Perhaps a time capsule is the proper image; one can only see what was placed inside, ultimately left to make a conclusion on their own. This will be discussed further when considering the nature of history in the novel. For now, it will suffice to consider that the primarily positive or indifferent attitude toward slavery and denial of liberty by many of the characters in the narrative conflicts with the Enlightenment movement and a consideration of physical freedom as an intrinsic right. And, for the title characters as well as the reader, this becomes a troubling theme, putting into question the progress of the era and decentering one's disposition toward the social and cultural structures that allow such injustices.

Yet, the concept of liberty, both for Enlightenment thinkers and for Pynchon, goes beyond the physical freedom from shackles, a deeper idea that is sourced from early ideologies and deserving of a contextual pedigree. Once the 'history of liberty' is presented, the ambiguities and tensions within the primary text will become clearer. It is right to begin with Aristotle's consideration of democracy and its close relationship to *liberty* and *equality*. Many of the ideas about liberty expressed by Enlightenment thinkers in the 18th-Century and concepts that will be discussed in relationship to *Mason & Dixon* are founded by similar expressions in *Politics*. On democracy, Aristotle states, "Another [note of liberty which all democrats affirm to be the principle of their state] is that a man should live as he likes... whence has arisen the claim of men

to be ruled by none, if possible” (6.2). This is an adequate understanding of the word, but also establishes the concept as an ideal state, rather than an obtainable reality. Additionally, the modern concept of democracy developed from similar principles, most importantly seeing liberty as obtainable and practical. It is most certainly taken to this extent by Enlightenment thinkers and for them, liberty as a political concept becomes not only something obtainable, but something intrinsically inheritable by all people. Aristotle continues his consideration of democracy by establishing liberty and equality as the primary ends of the state. Furthermore, if being unruled is an impossibility, then “to rule and be ruled in turns... contributes to the freedom based upon equality” (6.2). In another way, while the goal of democracy is to maintain liberty for all, the most effective way of maintaining such a state is the consideration and adherence to equality. The Greek continues by characterizing the ideal democracy, describing many regulations that might seem familiar to the modern, western reader:

the characteristics of democracy are as follows... that all should rule over each, and each in his turn over all... that no property qualification should be required for offices, or only a very low one; that a man should not hold the same office twice, or not often, or in the case of few except military offices: that the tenure of all offices, or of as many as possible, should be brief, that all men should sit in judgment, or that judges selected out of all should judge... in most and in the greatest and most important—such as the scrutiny of accounts, the constitution, and private contracts; that the assembly should be supreme over all causes, or at any rate over the most important, and the magistrates over none or only over a very few. (6.2)

It is not a stretch to compare these characteristics of democracy to that of the modern, western constitutional governments. The U.S.A., for example, maintains low constitutional restrictions on who can or cannot be elected as president (age of 35, “natural-born citizen,” and 14 years of residency), particularly excluding any mention of class, race, or economic position. Although it was not added to the constitution until 1951, perhaps recognizing, as Aristotle did, the influential power of a ruler, the U.S. maintains that “No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice...” (US Const. amend. XXII, sec. 1). Additionally, one could compare Aristotle’s supposition, that judges ‘selected out of all’ should scrutinize the constitution, to the

interpretive power of the supreme court of the U.S. judicial branch. The point here is primarily the connection between liberty and equality, as well as this relationship connection to 18th-Century ideas. And as far as Aristotle defines liberty, to do as one wills, the practical way of maintaining it is to center the governmental system on equality, an ideal that is translated into modern democracy 2000 years later in the western world. Yet, even this simple constitutional detail is put into question in *Mason & Dixon*. Soon after the death of Mason's mentor, James Bradley, the two surveyors receive a message that their peer Maskelyne would be replacing Bradley as Astronomer Royal, one of the highest positions in the Royal Society. Mason, having thought the position would be passed on to himself, retaliates toward Dixon exclaiming, "Haven't I any standing in this? Is that what this fucking exile in America's about then, Morton and his fucking Royal Society, -to get me out of the way so that Maskelyne can go prancing up to Greenwich freed of opposition" (438). Dixon, having already received confirmation that "The last three A.R.'s were all Oxford men," tries to explain to his fellow surveyor, "Mason, you are a Miller's Son. That can never satisfy them." Assuming the narration, the reverend agrees, commenting, "Either Mason cannot admit there's a Class problem here, or, even this deeply compromised, he may somehow keep Faith that in the Service of Heavens, dramatic Elevations of Earthly Position are to be expected of these Times, this Reign of Reason, by any reasonable man" (438). The antiqually established concept of liberty, taken seriously by many of the founders of Enlightenment political structures, seems to collapse in *Mason & Dixon*, alluding to the corrupted roots that have paved the path to modern democracy.

The defining principles of liberty have now been considered in their ancient conception and the logical next step is to consider what explicitly connects this to the 18th-Century. One might consider the question: what caused the renewal of 'liberty' in the mindset of Enlightenment thinkers? The concern of liberty can be connected to the development of natural right theory. The ideas of natural rights, individual liberties, and a justified state of governing were formed from various philosophical minds of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, most prominently Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Without belaboring the point, a brief summation of some of their classic works might shed adequate light on the philosophical trends and motivations which would eventually influence and develop into the Enlightenment concern for

liberty. And, as Pynchon has done within *Mason & Dixon*, this may establish a sort of historical framework in which one can make educated assumptions about the time period in connection with the novel itself. Proper critical connections will also be made; some critics see these works as fundamental to understanding Pynchon's sentiment and intentions for the novel, if one is privileged to suggest such a thing.

In his controversial work, *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes and characterizes the various different forms of 'princedom,' ranging from the traditional monarchy, to the idea of a republic, to the authoritative rule of the Church.⁵ This takes on a similar form to that of Aristotle's already mentioned *Politics*, in which the Italian discusses the virtues and failures of each governing system except by utilizing the narrative as a pseudo-textbook for 'princes.' The treatise's controversy lies in its encouragement of immoral political action in order to maintain power, yet its influence lies in the same vein. Machiavelli's inclusion of the Church as a political body struggling to maintain power in the 16th-Century, put the 'infallible' nature of religious authority into question. Over the next centuries, this would develop into an understanding of religion as a system of authority and restriction, rather than one of morals and faith. However, Machiavelli's influence is shown in a negative light in *Mason & Dixon*. Mason, chatting with an old acquaintance, Lady Florinda, sets up a moment of irony for the reader early in the novel. Surprised to hear that Florinda knows British aristocrat, Bubb Dodington, Mason scuffs, "Excuse me, did I hear you, I'm sure inadvertently, mention that you receive... Assessments of Character, from Bubb Dodington? The ancient Fitch of legend? That relick from a signally squalid Era in our Nation's Politickal History, -that Bubb Dodington?" (114). Dodington, a Whig representative in the House of Commons in the 18th-Century and also known as Baron Melcombe, is infamously described as a quintessentially Machiavellian politician, having keep a diary of his questionably immoral political attitude. Such a reference in the novel, alludes to the narrative attitude toward Enlightenment developments and the consequences that followed.

In the 17th-Century, Hobbes published his famous work, *Leviathan*. Having witnessed the horrid realities of the English Civil War come to an end in 1651, Hobbes maintained that the 'nature state' of human existence to be violent stating:

⁵ Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. 2nd ed. Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield. The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, [continual fear,] and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. (179)

Although he explicitly denounces the philosophy of any Greek, Hobbes' assertions are similar to that of Aristotle's; it is rightful to avoid the 'state of nature,' that all of humanity cannot be truly liberated from all rule. However, his conclusions are actually antithetical to the Greek and the Enlightenment mentality; if true liberty is unattainable, absolute sovereign power must be maintained. Although not wholly transcribable into the Enlightenment mentality, *Leviathan* still holds some of the foundational ideas and questions that concern many thinkers of the 18th-Century and further. The 'state of nature' theory brought new ideas about the natural laws of humanity and the 'social contract' between individuals and a system of authority. Additionally, Hobbes vocally downplayed the authority of the Church and other religious systems, seeing them as an opposition to the absolute rule that was needed to maintain order. Finally, although the Enlightenment saw to the fall of absolute monarchies in the western world, *Leviathan* further developed and asserted the tension between individuals and authority. Similarly, *Mason & Dixon* presents that tension in the form of a new system of oppression in the money-driven scientific societies. Additionally, the social contract theory developed by Hobbes is reflected in the general atmosphere of the American colonies in *Mason & Dixon*. Early on, the reverend recalling the two surveyors meeting, Mason and Dixon complain about the "pushing folk" of the city, lamenting it as "insolent Stares," "mortal Assaults," and "an Orgy of Insult uninterrupted." Having become desensitized to the entire population and their habits, Mason concludes that "one soon understands it, as yet another Term in the contract between City and oneself, -a function of Simple Density" (14). The social contract that is established by thinkers like Hobbes ultimately becomes a spiritual counterforce, crushing human interaction, liveliness, and charisma, replacing them with efficiency, grayness, and rationalism.

More closely related to the Enlightenment and the 18th-Century understanding of liberty, John Locke, ‘The Father of Liberalism,’ continued to consider natural law, the social contract, and the intrinsic rights of humanity. Unlike Hobbes, Locke considered the state of nature to be based on reason not violence. However, he would agree with Hobbes in that the natural state of humanity allowed for one to become self-centered, thereby requiring the authority of civil society to control the consequences of a selfish population. Yet he also suggests that “The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule” (Locke 755). Additionally, Locke asserts that it is just to not relinquish the natural right to defend one’s “life, health, liberty, or possessions” to a social contract (754). This tension, between needing an artificial governing body to control the state of nature, but also being aware of the intrinsic social and civil rights of humanity, would come to be an exemplary concern for Enlightenment thinkers. Most, famously, Thomas Jefferson would eventually paraphrase Locke in *The Declaration of Independence*, maintaining the right of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” for all men. Additionally, Locke’s advocating for the dispersion of government power and his consideration for revolutionary obligation would become the cornerstone to the American Revolution and the U.S. Constitution. But, where is this in the novel? This Lockean attitude plays a major role in the characterization of the developing American identity in the colonies, but also the rights of those affected by the Line. The Mason-Dixon commission itself could be seen as a power move by the English monarchy to intrude on natural law. However, as Karl-Erik F. W. Olausen states in his work for UiO, “The Line of No Return: a Study of Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*,” “There is a relativism in Locke which is strongly present also in *Mason & Dixon*” (95). He asserts that although the Lockean mentality permeates the American identity in the novel, there is an attention to positive power systems as well. Of the novel, Olausen states, “local communities and local customs are revered with respect... World-construction is an activity that renders readable man’s environment, makes the world intelligible and therefore a home. Thus, the histories, the powers of the imagination makes and sets the ground for a common set of rules of conduct which is a prerequisite for any extended order of co-operation” (95). In this way, centralized power

systems are not completely eradicated, but shrunken to a local, positive scale. Olausen sees the problem as an abuse of rationality, stating:

Reason, blind to itself, scars the nature and the order of the Indians in shape of the Mason-Dixon line. The natives at the Cape are shamelessly intruded by European colonialism, the Americans infect the Indians with diseases, and the Jesuits are everywhere to try and convert people into the “right” faith. The entropic connotations are set up to defeat this hierarchical frame of mind... The lack of dialogue this represents and the danger of by means of power to get rid of elements, or force compliance from elements which does not fit into one’s own thinking, might be possible because of inventions which are the fruits of a sophisticated mind at work. However, acting on this possibility is nevertheless a result of the lack of prudence in applying this reason, often acting from very basic motives, to the paradoxical effect that it reduces possibilities to certainties and thus moves in a direction of less complexity. The single dimensioned cause-effect thinking is a desire for control, and is treated with severe scepticism in the novel. (95-96)

Olausen desires to suggest that the novel is ultimately a “meditation on complexity,” that the failure of the rationalism promoted in the Enlightenment is its ironic desire to explain complex systems which results in a less complex system. Lockean thought is used as a vehicle to do just that, to suggest the ambiguous power struggle in *Mason & Dixon*.

Continuing into the 18th-Century, the question, “What is Liberty?” brings the discussion back to Kant, who steps away from the tradition understanding of liberty, ultimately extending its potential into the intellectual realm. His understanding of the Enlightenment has already been discussed briefly, and it continues to play a role here. What also defines liberty during the Enlightenment period, besides its connection with equality and physical freedom, is one’s ability to readily escape from and/or work against the social, political, and economic restraints and motivations of various systems which oppress equality. Kant’s essay begins with a definition of the era’s namesake: “Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and

courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding!” (Kant). Kant’s manifesto centers the movement’s intent on intellectual courage, the courage to think independently, in opposition to the established order, and most important, to think freely. The Enlightenment movement is therefore counter-cultural, denying the ‘passive’ role of the public and asking the common person to question the restrictive nature of the power systems which dictate one’s civil life. He expresses the nature of these systems in a single, oppressive statement, “Don’t Argue!” and continues, “The officer says: Don't argue, get on parade! The tax-official: Don't argue, pay! The clergyman: Don't argue, believe!” (Kant). In this way, the Enlightenment is particularly set against the systems of justice, the economy, and the system of religion. Further, Kant concludes that the 18th-Century may be the ideal period of germination for a new reason-driven movement; he explains:

A high degree of civil freedom seems advantageous to a people's intellectual freedom, yet it also sets up insuperable barriers to it. Conversely, a lesser degree of civil freedom gives intellectual freedom enough room to expand to its fullest extent. Thus once the germ on which nature has lavished most care--man's inclination and vocation to think freely--has developed within this hard shell, it gradually reacts upon the mentality of the people, who thus gradually become increasingly able to act freely. Eventually, it even influences the principles of governments, which find that they can themselves profit by treating man, who is more than a machine, in a manner appropriate to his dignity. (Kant)

It is the particularly ‘hard shell’ of the 18th-Century power systems (monarchy, global wars, and an oppressive church structure) that allows the Enlightenment to flourish then and there. In the most direct way, Kant’s arguments hinge on a desire for civil and intellectual liberty, freedom from the systems which restrict the public’s ability to reason independently. Kant condenses this ideal when he states, “The public use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men” (Kant). This idea of intellectual freedom is put into question in *Mason & Dixon*, however.

It is necessary to consider how this new idea of liberty established by thinkers like Kant, as an escape from metaphysical and intellectual oppression, is manifested in *Mason & Dixon*. Most explicitly, the primary narrative setting, the American colonies prior to the revolution, sets

up various contextual tensions for the reader. The development of a unique American identity, their discontent with the various oppressive systems enacted against them, violent tensions between various groups of peoples and cultures, and the prominence of caffeine-hyped revolutionary thought in coffeehouses all play into a sort of need for escape, which, as only the reader and the storyteller reverend know, will eventually culminate in the American Revolution in 1776. Additionally, it is apparent that the global scientific community plays a major role in how the world within the text functions. Although the scientific mentality, to think rationally, is set in opposition to the systems which oppress intellect, namely monarchy and religion, the novel presents the development of a new global system which maintains oppression in a different way. Although Mason and Dixon study astronomy and the cartographic sciences with the motivation of curiosity and the pursuit of truth, they are often stifled by the scientific and global system they are working within, whether they be restricted by the funding of the Royal Society, or questioning the political motivation of their commissions. One of the first characterizations of the Royal Society is a letter sent to Mason and Dixon concerning their safety aboard the Seahorse. The two, having voiced their paranoia about being international targets of violence, receive a “swift reply... a Letter of Reproach and Threat from the Royal Society” (*M&D* 45). Although the content of the reply is unknown to the reader, Mason expresses anger in his response, “Not even the courtesy, -Damme! Of a personal Reply,- ‘tis rather the final draft of some faceless committee... [Bradley] betrays my Confession to some Gang of intial’s Scoundrels, leaving them the task of bringing us to the level of Fear needed to get us back aboard that dreadful Ship” (45). For the Royal Society, science and practice is above all else, even at the risk of someone else’s life.

Additionally oppressive, the scientific practices of the novel are completely dependent on funding and financial support of organizations. Mason, not having seen his two sons in years, has to make the difficult decision to leave for the American commission, stating, “The real Fees nowadays... are to be earn’d abroad. For the first time real money is finding its way even into Astronomy” (201). Science, because of the political power struggle and capitalistic pressure, has developed into a business of sorts, contradicting the some of the primary motivations of study. Later at Col. Washington’s estate, Mason “[embarks] upon an Apologia for Astronomy,” in

which, “like Glaucon... nervously listing for Socrates all the practical reasons he can think of for teaching Astronomy in schools,” the surveyor claims that “All Lens-fellows... recognize that our first Duty is to be of publick Use” (282-283). That is to say that the surveyor himself believes that at the root of scientific study is a noble pursuit of the common good, yet his description cannot escape the Royal Society’s presence. Mason cannot help but recognize that “ev’ry farthing we spend [is] charg’d finickingly against the Royal Purse,” and that “the ev’ryday work of the Observatories goes on as always, for the task at Greenwich” (283). This is further reverberated just before the two leave for America. Dixon, commenting on their new commission states, “Charter’d Companies may indeed be the form the World has now increasingly begun to take” (252). Similarly, Dixon is amazed that Emerson, who is building a watch to be used at sea, could have the liberty to study and the means, questioning, “Who in the World possesses the advanc’d Arts, and enjoys the liberal Funding requir’d for the building of such an Instrument?” (318). Because scientific study is funded by organizations like the Royal Society, science becomes what the given systems needs. It becomes dogmatic and oppressive, and scientists like Mason and Dixon become servants of the system that originated as a means of surpassing the similarly oppressive structures of religious doctrine. Postman has already been quoted as recognizing this transition in the 18th-Century, from studies motivated by the pursuit of truth to studies motivated by wealth, power, and production. In *Mason & Dixon*, this new oppression is put into question, though. Dixon, being self reflexive, states, “We are Fools... We shouldn’t be runnin’ this Line... there’s something [invisible] going on, tha must feel it, smell it” (478). To Mason, in his “darker Sentiments,” it is possible that the data from their commission will be used to reveal a secret message to the Jesuits, and in Dixon’s mind, the Line could be used for trade advantages by the East India Company (479). The two surveyors find themselves caught within a complex web of motivations, between money and principle, between morality and politics. They are simple tools in a bigger scheme, but do not have the ability to unravel it, instead Mason blames it on the Jesuits, and Dixon, on the East India Company. Although the novel suggests that the structures formed from the Enlightenment movement, namely organizations like the Royal Society which prove to be equally as oppressive as the structures before, *Mason & Dixon* does not propose a reinstatement of a time prior to the Enlightenment. Rather, it proposes a deeper look into the

structures that have dictated and will dictate the world-system, and perhaps to refuse taking any stance without doing just that. This is similar to the advice Washington gives the surveyors: “ye may speak your Minds upon any Topick Politickal. But on no account, ever discuss Religion. If any insist, represent yourselves as Deists” (278).

This topic has moved from liberty in its ancient conception all the way through its revival in the 18th-Century and a consideration of its manifestation in the primary text. Yet, how does one situate this into the greater discussion? Although the desire for intellectual liberty saw the downfall of tyrannical systems, the narrative subtleties presented suggest that new, more implicit systems of oppression developed in their place. Although liberty as an Enlightenment concept and ideal is put into question, decentered by the atrocities and power struggle within the novel, it is never truly denounced. Rather, “*Liberty*, so unreflectively sacred to us today, was taken in those Times to encompass even the darkest of Men’s rights,” must be reflected upon, considered, dissected. As Postman, Bhabha, and Kant suggest, ignorance to the cultural, social, and dogmatic structures of one’s existence will inevitably lead to miseducation, inequality, and oppression. For Pynchon, a lack of reflection almost always leads to death. The current discussion has been primarily focused on the concept of liberty and how it was developed into the *American-Enlightenment* ideal of the 18th-Century, both for ease of comparison, but also due to the setting of the primary text. However, the influence of these ideas stretch well beyond the New World. Various influences, both philosophical and artistic, spurred revolutionary thought into much of the western world. The American Revolution has been used here as a prime example of the Enlightenment desire for liberty; however, this movement would be followed by a multitude of similar rebellions and upheavals based on the same principles over the next century. The French Revolution would follow in 1789, and would see the elimination of the French monarchy and the development of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, which Thomas Jefferson had consulted over. The Haitian Revolution, the Irish Rebellion, the Portuguese Revolution, and further political unrest in Central Europe would be the theme of the following years. Additionally, many of the documents produced as a result of defining liberties, the *Declaration of Independence*, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, both the English and American *Bill of*

Rights, would act as the basis for our modern, legal definitions of liberty and intrinsic rights, represented in the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

2.2 Progress: The Watch, the Mechanical Duck, and a Cyclical World

Unlike liberty and, the soon to be discussed, history, Pynchon does not specifically define or state anything explicitly about progress in *Mason & Dixon*. Rather, the ideal permeates much of the implications displayed in the narrative and is reflected in the physical progression of the Mason-Dixon venture. Recognizing a cultural transition through their journey, Mason relays anxiety over their travels to Dixon; he states, "With London but the first Station. Then came the Cape. Then St. Helena. Now, -these Provinces. You were there, and are here. You must have seen it, -each time, another step further..." Dixon replies, "Away...? Away from...?" Nearly the midpoint of the entire novel neither surveyor is able to pinpoint how exactly the world has been progressing. Mason continues, "Perhaps not away, Dixon. No. Perhaps toward. Hum. Hadn't considered that, hey, Optimism? Exercise yer boobyish Casuistry 'pon that, why don't ye? Toward what?" (314). Mason and Dixon find themselves within a cultural transition, one of confusion, one of moral turpitude, where "Wonders [have] been cruelly poison'd with the coming of hydralick Looms and the appearance of a new sorts of wealthy individual, the late-come rulers." Ultimately, the surveyors are questioning what and where the end of progress is and how it can be justified with the "savage feelings within" (313).

As a result of the liberation of the intellect, the Era of the Enlightenment was one of development, of change, of 'progress.' As it has been suggested, the Enlightenment movement valued the public's education in all disciplines and social levels in order to be freed from the captive nature of ignorance, ranging from the religious and political realms to the economic and scientific principles which govern the globe. This desire for education was manifested in various ways, but always provoked an unattributed attitude that "If there is something you know, communicate it. If there is something you don't know, search for it." And its ideological effects can be summarized in terms of progressive optimism in the successes of the scientific revolution of the previous century:

The dramatic success of the new science in explaining the natural world promotes philosophy from a handmaiden of theology, constrained by its purposes and methods, to an independent force with the power and authority to challenge the old and construct the new, in the realms both of theory and practice, on the basis of its own principles... The faith of the Enlightenment – if one may call it that – is that the process of enlightenment, of becoming progressively self-directed in thought and action through the awakening of one’s intellectual powers, leads ultimately to a better, more fulfilled human existence.

(Bristow)

This section of the discussion concerned with the Enlightenment’s ideals will focus on answering a few questions. What is progress? Where does this ideal come from? What is progress leading to? All of these questions are important in order to define the Enlightenment, but are also intrinsic to understanding how the primary text comments on and works within the era’s intricacies.

One might begin by simply defining the term ‘progress;’ perhaps it could be suggested that “This idea means that civilisation has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction” (Bury). As J.B. Bury points out in his work, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth*, ‘progress’ as a concept has become an illusion to modernity, all the more reason to define it for the purposes of the thesis. Continuing, Bury states, “We now take [progress] so much for granted, we are so conscious of constantly progressing in knowledge, arts, organising capacities, utilities of all sorts, that it is easy to look upon Progress as an aim” (Bury). It would seem futile to consider progress as an outcome, if the goal of progression is to ‘move’ toward ‘something,’ it cannot be maintained as that ‘something’ in itself. Bury repositions the reader to consider progress as the means to an end, rather than the end itself; an end he defines as “the desirable outcome” of humanity, that “all inhabitants of the world would enjoy a perfectly happy existence” (Bury). If the end is to reach ‘the desirable outcome,’ it is apparent that progress represents ‘the desirable direction.’ Bury continues by suggesting the progressivism, in the sense that one might adhere their worldview to the assumption that humanity is going in ‘the desirable direction,’ is yet another worldview gamble. He explains, “This assumption is made on strictly limited experience. Science has been advancing without interruption during the last three or four hundred years... But what assurance have we that [men of science] will not come against

impassable barriers?” (Bury). Bury continues by concluding, “Thus continuous progress in man’s knowledge of his environment, which is one of the chief condition of general Progress, is a hypothesis which may or may not be true... Belief in it is an act of faith” (Bury). This is the theoretical basis for the Mason’s disdain for ‘Mechanickal Ingenuity’ in *Mason & Dixon*, represented by the overzealousness of scientific faith and the failures that stem from the ‘rational progressivism’ that is promoted by the scientific method. In essence, the novel is asking its readers to reconsider what ‘progress’ is and how it affects the world-system. Pynchon accomplishes this by highlighting some of the minutiae of 18th-Century technologies, particularly an anxiety over Vaucanson’s Duck and the development of an automatic watch. The technologies of the Enlightenment embody the mentality and spirit of the era, and are often seen as symbols of its success, yet, as the reader comes to find out, these technologies create tension and dilemmas concerning the nature of humanity.

This ‘Mechanickal Duck,’ a reference to the French inventor, Jacques de Vaucanson’s automata experiment, “Digesting Duck,” can be seen as the literary embodiment of the tensions presented by Enlightenment ideals in the novel and the era’s greater legacy. Vaucanson’s automatronic experiment, unveiled in 1739, was an attempt to create a machine capable of digesting food, its ‘functionality’ was noted as an artificial ploy to obtain patronage. However, the motivation behind Vaucanson’s experiments, to be able to build a *whole* from its *parts* and inversely reduce a *whole* into its *parts*, remains infamous as an exemplification of Enlightenment reductionism. As an early 17th-Century work of theory, René Descartes’s seminal piece in 1662, *The World*, discusses a wide range of physical and metaphysical topics, but, most relevantly, founded the intellectual tools for the reason-driven ideals of the Enlightenment.⁶ One of these tools being ‘Reductionism,’ the idea that something that is considered to be whole can be compartmentalized, explained, and consequently, reproduced by its smaller parts. More pertinently coined ‘methodological reductionism’ in contemporary theory, reductive thought became an extremely dominant and influential mindset in the Age of Reason, driving the desire to explain any and everything by digging deeper and defining ever-delineating parts. In *The World*, this reductionistic mentality ultimately leads to an early rendition of atomism, or

⁶ Descartes, René. *The World or Treatise on Light*. Translated by Michael S. Mahoney. Princeton University.

corpuscularianism. In *Mason & Dixon*, this reductionism is manifested in the Mechanickal Duck. Initially vengeful against, but eventually in love with the Parisian chef, Allegre, for cooking his duck brethren, this automaton tracks the surveying company as they move West, disappearing and playing illusionary tricks on anyone who interacts with her partner. As Vaucanson's Duck follows the surveyors down the Line, Mason, who attempt to ignore its presence, speaks up against the duck's existence and the nature of the surveying group's anxiety. He begins, "They'll believe what they like... in this Age, with its Faith in Mechanickal Ingenuity, whose ways will be forever dark to them. God help this Mobility." There is a pertinent reversal of roles here; to speak against the 'superstitions' of science seems backwards to the Enlightenment movement, a movement which sought to de-popularize the superstitions of religion. Mason continues:

They have to take all Projectors upon Trust, -half of whom have nothing to sell, who know nonetheless of this irrational need to believe in automatons, believe that they can sing and dance and play Chess, -even at the end of the Turn, when the latch is press'd and the Midget reveal'd, and the indomitable Hands fall still. Even as Monsieur Vaucanson furls back the last Silk Vestment, -no matter. (449)

As Allegre tells of his exodus to the New World, he suggests that it is failure of reason-driven ideals that caused the Duck to become more than a machine; he states, "Some, might point rather to the Commitment of Ingenuity unprecedented, toward making All things Authentic, -perhaps, it could be argued by minds more scientifick, 'twas this very Attention to Detail, whose Fineness, passing some Critickal Value, enabl'd in the Duck that Strange Metamorphosis, which has sent it out the Gate of the Inanimate" (372). In the attempt to create 'life,' the question, "What makes life?," having never been considered in the first place, now haunts one of the characters. Here the novel presents more tension fueled by the Enlightenment. First, are things no more than the parts of which is is made or, in a holistic and Aristotelian manner, is the *whole* greater than its *parts*? Second, what is life and what is human life? Third, what is representation and what is reality? And ultimately, who is responsible for answering these questions? It would seem that progress, or a 'Commitment of Ingenuity,' for its own sake is equally unhealthy in comparison to ignorance. By over exaggerating the personification of Vaucanson's Duck, *Mason & Dixon* does not claim to have the answer, but simply suggests that these concerns were inadequately considered.

The Watch brings up similar concerns. In the novel, Emerson, mentor and friend of Dixon, successfully creates a watch that can keep time without being wound, “whose ‘ten thousand irregular motions’ would defeat the regularity of any Time-Piece” (318). Its irregularity is suspicious, even to Mason who suggests that Dixon might be winding the watch when he is not looking. The fact that the Watch breaks “a Law of the Universe,” denying perpetual motion, adds to the mystification of technology in the novel; the Watch, ‘borrows’ power, “against repayment dates deferrable indefinitely” (317). Pynchon takes this one step further. Dixon begins to find the Watch evolving, personified and made almost human, described as a “higher form of life, -a Vegetable with a Pulse-beat!” (321). It even speaks, ominously saying, “When you accept me into your life... you will accept me... into your stomach” (321). In ways, the Watch comes to life just as Vaucanson’s Duck, beyond explanation and begging similar questions. When fellow surveyor, R.C., first sees the Watch, he becomes enthralled with it, sneaks into Dixon’s tent and swallows it whole. The reader learns that “a small volume within him is, and shall be immortal,” and that the surveyor’s life would be continually interrupted by the Watch within. As R.C. attempts to force the Watch up, his finger is bitten. When Dixon relays this to Emerson, expecting to be relieved of the task to protect the Watch, the scientist rejoices and exclaims, “Felicitations, Fool, for it hath work’d to Perfection,” perhaps suggesting that Emerson never wanted the Watch to actually surface significantly (326).

The Watch and the Mechnickal Duck step away from science and into a field of mysticism. In this way, the novel suggests that it is beyond scientific capability to solve all of the problems of reality. Emerson’s postscript in the letter to Dixon reads, “Time is the Space that may not be seen,” denoting a sensorial impossibility to clearly define the concept of time, or in another way, the Watch itself. Similarly, the Duck is never fully explained, its life simply caused by “Faith in Mechanikcal Ingenuity,” leading the reader to believe that the scientific method has its limits in explaining reality (449). What the novel is then doing, is to illuminate these limits through exaggeration. The narrator, reflecting on R.C.’s desire to swallow the Watch, explains:

The thing was either bewitch’d, by Country Women in the middle of the night, -Fire, monthly Blood, Names of Power,- or perfected, as might any Watch be, over years, small bit by bit, to its present mechanickal State, by Men, in work-Shops, and in the Daytime.

That was the sexual Choice that Moment presented, -between those two sorts of Magic.

(323)

The reverend, too, has no means of explaining the Watch, it is caught between reality and mysticism, something unexplainable. R.C. himself attempts to explain his actions as well, saying, “What were my Choices?... I had less than one of the Creature’s Ticks to decide. So I took it, and I gobbl’d it right down” (323). Perhaps Pynchon is setting up a notable dynamic here, between R.C. and the contemporary reader who is brought into the conversation concerning the legacy of the Enlightenment. One is caught between two ‘Magics,’ or ways of viewing history, caught between seeing the 18th-Century as Pinker does, a period of technological and moral growth, and seeing it as a period which brought about atrocities and the preservation of immorality as Bhabha. The reader is invited to choose which view to hold, but the novel makes it difficult.

Additionally, and more fitting for a discussion on *Mason & Dixon*, the postmodern movement of the late 1980’s began to question the validity and reality of progress through historical and cultural studies, what would be coined the ‘Progress Trap.’ In essence, this theory revolves around the idea of a never ending cycle of problems to solve or questions to answer. The more questions one answers, the more questions arise. This is intrinsically attached to the entropic quality of Pynchon’s narratives, as well. As Joseph Tabbi’s summarizes in his work, “World Systems Colliding: Thomas pynchon and Niklas Luhmann,” the closer ‘dt’ gets to zero, the closer it gets to infinity. Postman also touches this topic in *Building a Bridge*; technologies bring new concerns and new questions to the table, just as the printed word brought in the 18th-Century. The concept of entropy and its connection to the primary text and Pynchon’s other works will be considered further on, both through the lens of Tabbi and Postman. The presence of the postmodern ‘Progress Trap’ is not to suggest that one should maintain an ‘anti-progress’ stance, yet it emphasizes that one should be willing to understand the challenges that progress brings and be willing to ask the right questions at the right time.

It is fitting that Bury addresses the end goal of progress and science, as it is an important factor in identifying the transition from a cyclical to a progressive worldview and its role in the primary text. What Bury deemed the ‘desirable outcome’ can be seen as the motivation of any study and for those in early eras, the motivation was the pursuit of truth. As Postman points out,

prior to Francis Bacon in the 17th-Century, scientists like Galileo and Newton did not see the goal of their work as progress of the quality of human life or that it could contribute to its prosperity, rather “The science they created was almost wholly concerned with questions of truth... These men were not concerned with the idea of progress.” Postman continues, “It is Bacon who brought science down from the heavens,” also, “Although [he] had no coherent theory concerning the movement of civilization, he is the first to claim that the principal end of scientific work was to advance the ‘happiness of mankind’” (27).

How did the worldview shift to this ‘rationally-progressive dogma’ in the first place? Unlike the concept of liberty and much of the Enlightenment movement, which are rooted in antiquital thought, the concept of progress opposes, or in the least reworks, the cyclical worldview of early cultures. ‘Cyclical’ refers to the worldview that human prosperity moves in fluctuation, reminiscent of Shakespeare’s ‘wheel of fortune’ in which one’s own prosperity may be up one day and down the next. This understanding of the world is commonly associated with religiously oriented cultures, which might deem the fluctuations as divine intervention or predestination in some fashion, an observation that is especially pertinent when considering the organized opposition to orthodoxy in the Enlightenment. Postman makes it a point to address the succession of worldviews which eventually led to the ‘theory of progress’ developed in the Enlightenment Era. On the presence of the cyclical worldview he states that “in the classical periods of Greece and Rome there did not exist a clear idea of progress as an inevitable and immutable movement of history,” and he finishes, “The idea of decadence,” referring to the possibility of the ‘decline’ of human prosperity, “is as strong and ever-present as the idea of progress” (26). This is a difficult claim to stand behind, however. One simply has to present another with the ability to photograph the cosmo, the capability to produce skyscrapers that breach higher stratospheres, or the statistical analysis of human life expectancy in order to convince him or her of ‘progress.’ As a result, and perhaps more relevantly, one might similarly be convinced that the Enlightenment, having championed this idea of progress, to be the source of a healthy, ‘true’ worldview. Likewise, this conflict between worldviews manifests in the primary text as a tension between energies; Late in the surveying journey across the American colonies, an accompanying Chinese man, Cpt. Zhang, sees the commission’s fate in terms of a cyclical

worldview, describing the Line as a “Bad Energy,” which is like “a Wind, a truly ill wind, bringing failure, poverty, disgrace, betrayal... with many times the force of the worst storm you were ever in” (542). For Zhang, “the currents of the Earth,” act in a sort of ebb and flow that is influenced by Feng-Shui, rotating between good and bad energies.

Eventually, Darwin’s evolutionary theory, formally published in his work, *On the Origin of Species*, would push Enlightenment ideals into the 20th-century. His work suggests that species, including humans, have risen to their current state via biological evolution, essentially dethroning the religious belief of creation, and providing ‘proof’ for progressivists to permeate and solidify rational progressivism as a truthful worldview. To this day the progressive world theory dominates, and its cyclical counterpart is seen as an antiquital afterthought, a way that past and inferior world-systems used to maintain oppression and make sense of the immorality of the world. Consequently, most would agree and consider the Enlightenment movement to be of the desirable sort. Along with this renewal of liberal thinking, progressive concepts appeared in all disciplines in and around the 18th-Century and provided frameworks for the following centuries to build up affluence, political justice, and safety. The economic principles of the ‘free market’ founded by Adam Smith in his work, *The Wealth of Nations*, resulted in a dramatic increase in the standard of living for most populations over the last centuries. Similarly, the physical sciences flourished, producing higher quality medical treatments, such as advanced surgery and vaccinations. Machinery like Whitney’s cotton gin and Franklin’s bifocals would improve the quality of life and increase the quantity of production in a majority of the western world. And, finally, astronomical progress from surveyors like Maskelyne and Horrocks contributed by paving the way to the future successes in mathematics, astrophysics, and even indirectly influencing the U.S. Moon landing in ‘69. This sentiment could be placed in the same spot as Pinker’s on the Enlightenment Legacy spectrum. Yet, this ideal is put into question in *Mason & Dixon*, and one sees this same struggle of transition from a cyclical worldview to a progressive one. The reader is reminded of this conflict between world views early in the novel; the British conversion into the Gregorian calendar in the 18th-Century put the country eleven days ahead of their previous records, causing irritation. The population, thinking they might have lost eleven days of their lives became outraged, and Mason finds ‘The George,’ a local pub to be particularly

saturated with conspiracy theories concerning the matter. Macclesfield, the man being blamed, asks, although in a far more aggressive way, a similar question as Bury: “who in G-d’s Name among them could want eleven more Days? Of what? The further chance that something else dreadful will happen, in a Life of already unbearable misfortune?” In response, Bradley, Mason’s mentor, asserts the opposing view, “Yet we are mortal... Would you spit, my Lord, truly, upon eleven more Days?” (193).

Regardless of whether the ‘cyclical theory’ or the ‘progressive theory’ is more accurate, this subsection is more relevantly concerned with the pedigree of progress, as Bury has put it, “...*Its Origin and Growth*.” In fact, this also seems to be Pynchon’s motivation. *Mason & Dixon* stands as a narrative of the Enlightenment’s pedigree, displaying where ideals such as liberty and progress have been founded, promoted, and grown. This ultimately leads to a consideration of rational progressivism and its impact on the contemporary world system, a part of the Enlightenment’s legacy. Whether or not rational progressivism, both in the novel and in reality, has made a more positive or negative impact is still up for debate, but Bury’s introduction to the history of progress still denotes the devolution of the concept. While progress was originally seen as ‘the desirable direction’ by which ‘the desirable outcome’ is achieved, the concept has developed into the outcome itself, achieved by way of a strict adherence to science and technology. Bury’s comparison of progressivism to faith seemingly addresses the ironic nature of this movement and plays into the idea that the greater Enlightenment movement eliminated one oppressive system by creating a new one. Generally, 18th-Century thinkers attempted to escape the assumptions and restrictions of religious doctrine by promoting liberal intellect and the power of truth in the scientific method. In a way, shifting ‘the desirable direction’ from a life of religious practice to a life of technical study. However, these ideals eventually formed a new assumption and faith in progressivism, or more specifically scientism, which, over hundreds of years, has morphed into an delusional ‘end.’ Despite the meaning of the novel being ambiguous like Pynchon’s previous novels, *Mason & Dixon* does, in fact, have a relatively satisfying and conclusive last few pages, which, in a way, speaks against delusional endings. On Mason’s deathbed, his two sons take over the scene, revealing their desire to stay in America where there father was, a place where “The Stars are so close you won’t need a Telescope” and “The Fish

jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick” (773). The absence of technology, a telescope or a fishing rod, denotes a non-need for the progressive rationality which particularly frames the activity of astronomy. Rather, this pastime, along with fishing, is rightfully considered in a more ‘human’ manner, something akin to star-gazing.

The purpose of this investigation into both liberty and progress in the primary text, *Mason & Dixon*, was to establish how Pynchon’s narrative both subverts predispositions about the Enlightenment and how this subversion sets up difficult paradoxes and double-coding for the reader. Although thinkers and leaders of the 18th-Century championed liberty as an intrinsic right amongst all of humanity, the presence of slavery and other physical injustices throughout the Mason-Dixon commission suggest this ideal never truly came to fruition. Similarly, the liberation of intellect, summarized in Kant’s exclamatory essay and put into practice by characters in the novel like Mason and Dixon, who put blind faith into systems like the Royal Society, ultimately leads to an equally oppressive governing system, one influenced by monetary gain, in which the enactors of oppression were less known and highly dissipated. As for the ideal of progress, it has been suggested that an ignorance to the moral dilemmas that develop from the technological advances and progress of humanity leads to a religious-like relationship with science, technology, and progress itself. Ultimately, the novel beckons the reader to consider concerns and questions about these conflicts and tensions, just as Kant and many others questioned the systems which governed their cultural reality.

Chapter 3: Historiography in *Mason & Dixon*

3.1 Pynchon's Previous Practice with History

Pynchon's attitude toward history can be summarized in a single line from *Gravity's Rainbow*: "All talk of cause and effect is secular history, and secular history is a diversionary tactic" (170). For Pynchon, to reduce history to a linear set of points, often referenced as an affinity to the cause-and-effect relationship, is a way in which humanity justifies the complexity of cultural reality. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon sees any means in which this is proliferated as "structures favoring death. Death converted into more death" (169). Before discussing a new analysis of the primary text, a look at how Pynchon's previous work is interpreted will shed light on how one should go about interpreting *Mason & Dixon*. Joseph Tabbi, professor of literature and media ecology at the University of Illinois at Chicago and editor of the *Electronic Book Review*, taps into Pynchon's practices when he describes paranoia in the author's novels in his work "World-Systems Colliding: Thomas Pynchon and Niklas Luhmann." Tabbi states, "The trope of paranoia, the 'leading edge' of the insight, in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, that 'everything is connected,' can also just as well be understood as a condition in which 'nothing connects to anything.' The two possibilities are held together in Pynchon" (315). Similarly, there are two interpretive paths to take when considering the narrative practice of *Mason & Dixon*. This is not to suggest that the novel must be taken in one of these two ways, as it is completely understandable, if not essential to view *Mason & Dixon* through a deconstructive, psychoanalytical, postcolonial, feminist, or new historicism lens (Clerc 135). However, these two differing interpretations, separate or holistic, are more concerned with the possibility of interpretation rather than what that interpretation is. On one hand, one can take the more holistic approach, suggesting that the particulars, or the various moments of significance in the novel, revolve around a central interpretation. This could lead to a discuss on the subversion of liberty in light of racial injustice or how progressivism has led to new dogma. These approaches to the novel have be considered, yet the idea that a work possesses a central determinative meaning is iconically modern, something that is ardently fought against in the postmodern era. On the other hand, like the ambiguities within the content of the novel, one cannot ignore the discontinuity of

Pynchon's prose. This suggests that the complexity of the narrative in *Mason & Dixon* ends with any given particular. Consequently, the movement of these particulars is counterproductive way, never converging together in a meaningful way. That is to say that Pynchon's style is purposefully indiscernible as a whole and suggests that any attempt to build a totality upon it to be reductionist and futile. *The Crying of Lot 49* stands as an essential comparison in this capacity and *Gravity's Rainbow*, although working with a distinct narrative movement, can be seen as an equally comparative work. Although it could be argued that his narrative practices have a central interpretation, a deeper look into Pynchon's more popular novels suggests that there is little to gain from a neatly bound book or a satisfying conclusion, but all to gain by recognizing the frailty of interpretation.

It is important to read Pynchon's early novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, with a recognition that the frail nature of interpretation resonates throughout its narrative. Because of close attention to Oedipa's perspective, one which confuses puns and metaphors with meaningful language, the reader is not expected to solve the mystery of an age-old postal conspiracy that the protagonist struggles to unravel. Consequently, any attempt to reduce a story to a discernible interpretation ends up being destructive. Driblette, the director of "The Courier's Tragedy," a play within *The Crying of Lot 49*, reminds Oedipa of the futile nature of interpretation when he states, "You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why the characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did.... You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth" (60-63). Although, as a reader, one desires to find some sort of resolution in Oedipa's experiences, and thereby find meaning in the novel itself, the various particulars the reader is given—the W.A.S.T.E. acronym, the muted horn symbol, words from delusional scientists—never lead to anything conclusive about the postal mystery. This movement of meaning, the movement of particulars within *The Crying of Lot 49*, could be described as centrifugal, moving outward from the central idea of the narrative, dissipating and never forming a collective resolution (Tom). By moving the particular instances of meaning in the novel outward, not presenting a formal resolution to Oedipa's struggle with isolation, Pynchon turns the focus of the reader toward the interpretive process, rather than outcomes and resolution. This is further emphasized by a particular attention to the entropic quality of meaning. Oedipa, as well as the

reader, see the world in terms of cause and effect, wanting to connect an effect to a cause in order to make sense of the world. Yet, the world in the novel is not presented in such a straightforward way; the more Oedipa uncovers about the Tystero mystery, the more she becomes confused, loses her identity, and becomes increasingly invested in resolution. This entropic quality in the novel is even explicitly referenced; Oedipa ends up meeting a Berkeley scientist, John Nefastis, who is attempting to create a working 'Maxwell's Demon,' a theoretical contraption which "defeats" the second law of thermodynamics, the scientific representation of entropy. Further, all of the various particulars of the novel lead to the auction of rare postage stamps, Lot 49, in which, Oedipa and the reader are convinced, lies the answers to the postal conspiracy of Tystero. However, the book ends before the bidding begins, reemphasizing the undervaluedness of resolution. It could then be suggested that this fundamental resistance to resolution and the inability to obtain discernible meaning from the particulars of Oedipa's encounters is the tragedy of Pynchon's novel.

It could be suggested that the movement of particulars in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in contrast to *The Crying of Lot 49*, can be described as centripetal, or that the particulars of the narrative always move inward, toward the novel's center. Like *Lot 49*, the narrative emphasizes entropic interpretation. That is to say, characterizations seem to dissipate, multiple plots are left without resolution, and the narrations sometimes end mid-sentence. However, these unresolved particulars never fully dissipate, an accurate comparison to the narrative style of *Mason & Dixon*. Even in the first words of *Gravity's Rainbow*, an epigraph quoting the rocket scientist Von Braun, speak about a lack of resolution in life: "Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death" (1). Further, in terms of character resolution, it is never fully determined how or why Slothrop, a US Army Lieutenant and the novel's 'protagonist,' is able to predict or control the trajectory of the German V-2 rockets based on his sexual experiences throughout London. It is ultimately up to the reader's judgment to determine whether his ability is simply a statistical coincidence or a direct consequence of his Pavlovian conditioning. It is this interpretative power, given to the reader, that emphasizes the entropic quality of the narrative (Tom).

At the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* the reader is reminded of Pynchon's definitive flight from resolution; as Weissman launches a rocket housing his boy-pet Gottfried in the novel's last scene, Pynchon confirms that "The exact moment of his death will never be known" (766). Unlike stories bound to a traditional sense of progression and conclusion, Pynchon emphasizes that resolution, the exact moment of Gottfried's death, is unnecessary to the story. What makes this narrative evasion of resolution worth discussing in connection to the author's other works is Pynchon's distinct treatment of meaning in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The reader may not be given the exact moment of Gottfried's death, but Pynchon does reveal the particulars leading to and surrounding the launch of the rocket. Weissman is able to create a rocket encasing Gottfried in the benzene-based polymer Imipolex by manipulating the German power structure, abusing scientists such as Pökler, and the utilization of the labor force from concentration camps. Not only is the moment of launching Gottfried's rocket bring together these aspects of Pynchon's novel, but it is more significantly the last moment of the story. The importance of resolution is overshadowed by the particulars leading to it (Tom).

John Muste discusses a similar narrative interplay in his essay "The Mandala in *Gravity's Rainbow*," in which he describes meaning and interpretation as "kinds of forces Pynchon has placed in contention with one another" (163). About the particular images in the novel, Muste concludes that "It would be foolhardy to suggest that any one of [these symbols could be] the key to the novel," but finds that the mandala symbol naturally draws in the particulars of the novel and speaks to the movement of the narrative (163). The mandala shape, commonly associated with graphs, diagrams, and charts which depict the cosmos or the universe, is connected to the *Schwarzkommando* in the novel, the displaced African tribe known as the Hereros. Muste suggests that the mandala represents "four contending forces... which can be used to understand better the world view projected by *Gravity's Rainbow*" (164). These mandala forces are reflected in the shape of the Herero village and are described in the novel as four quadrants divided into male and female sections. Andreas, a Herero in the novel, describes the center of the mandala as "the pen where we kept the sacred cattle. The souls of our ancestors" (572). Additionally, connecting the mandala to the other images in *Gravity's Rainbow*, these quadrants are comparative to the centering effect of a rocket's fins, always working opposite of each other to

create balance as a centripetal force. In this way, the rocket can be seen as an equivalent image of balance. The opposing forces, the given particulars of the novel which attempt to create meaning, are constantly pulling into the center of the rocket or the mandala just as the reader is asked to consider how the seemingly insignificant particulars of the novel converge on one another (Tom).

Muste's conclusion about the mandala is necessarily applicable to this project's concern. He states: "At the center of the mandala rests that infuriating empty circle, that refusal to impose meaning or to confirm either our fondest wishes or our direst fears. We are left with the silence, the void, the sterile nothingness; we are left also with unlimited possibility" (178). The same can be said for all of the various moments of meaning throughout Pynchon's novels. As a reader, one is naturally inclined to search for resolution, meaning, purpose and Pynchon invites the reader to do just that. However, one's effort to do so is met with resistance. It has been suggested that the attention to entropy in Pynchon's narratives results in meaning being pushed outward, like the movement one finds in *The Crying of Lot 49*, or meaning being drawn inward, like the centripetal structures of the mandala and the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Both narrative strategies seem to have a comparably indeterminate result. Moving forward, one must consider how Pynchon creates a narrative which confuses the agency of meaning in order to define the distinction between the meaningful, but illusive interplay and evasion of meaning one finds in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* (Tom).

The conflict of agency, or the power struggle by which meaning is determined from a text, has a major effect on the way postmodern works are written, read, and interpreted. It is nothing new to suggest that Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" sheds light on Pynchon's interwoven style and the way in which agency is applied to his novels. In opposition to the historical criticism which dominated the literary world at the time, Barthes suggests that the imposition of an author limits the interpretation of a text. In another way, the biographical, historical, or influential context of the author does not give meaning to a text, rather meaning is created by the language itself and the reader's societal impression of that language. This understanding of the dynamic between author, reader, and text defines a dramatic shift in 20th-Century criticism and has become a major conversation point for critics and writers, most prominently in concern with the implications of interpreted meaning in texts. In connection to the

primary author, Tony Tanner, in his work “Thomas Pynchon and the Death of the Author,” begins with the claim that Pynchon’s active evasion of publicity has affected the author’s works (12). Further, Tanner takes the limited amount of biographical information about Pynchon and suggests that the author’s family, dating back to colonial times, has always ended up siding with the losers of history. Tanner continues by suggesting Pynchon’s recognition of and response to his family’s misfortunes directly plays out in his care of the marginalized characters of his works (14-16). Tanner ultimately implies that because the public cannot attach biographical, motivational, or even visual facts of an author to his works, directly embracing the ‘death’ of the author, the process of interpretation is ultimately in the hands of the reader. It is precisely the disconnection of the author and text that allows Pynchon’s narratives to move the reader into paranoia, indeterminate meanings, circular symbolism. It is the responsibility of the reader, rather than the author, to write the novel, create narrative, make meaning. And for one who reads any of Pynchon’s three novels being considered *Mason & Dixon*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, or *Gravity’s Rainbow*, this becomes a rather significant and substantial burden (Tom).

This burden is fueled by narratives that embrace the concept of ‘entropy’— a term commonly used to describe the dissipation of meaning within Pynchon’s works. Entropy is taken quite seriously in Pynchon studies and its implications redefine the way one reads a novel beyond the late 20th-Century. As was mentioned, Tabbi briefly mentions Pynchon’s undergraduate short-story, “Entropy,” and describes the concept mathematically as “a condition that Pynchon (again characteristically) conflated with the ‘dt’ or delta-t, a unit of change in calculus that indicates neither a quantity nor an operation but an approach to zero in the space between known quantities.” Similarly, Pynchon utilizes the minutia of history, ‘between’ any significant event, to display the ‘approach to zero,’ often represented as death. Tabbi continues, “The dimensions of this unit are, literally, imaginary - it is not a countable number, not reducible to ones or zero, not a dimension at all, but instead the disappearance of dimension which can only be imagined as a process, a convergence of parallel lines at infinity” (337). The concept of ‘infinity’ and the removal of ‘dimension’ is important here. In this way, Pynchon’s novels are exceptionally *meta*; history and story are blended, characterization is never resolved, and there are no lessons to be learned. What is left is words and connections, ‘parallel lines at infinity.’

Tabbi's claims do not end there. In connection with the consideration of entropy, Tabbi suggests that Pynchon's novels can be seen "as a kind of material counterforce to the headlong 'movement in straight lines and at right angles,'... 'a progressive reduction of choices, until the final turn through the final gate that led to the killing-floor.' For Pynchon, death or global breakdown is the only imaginable end to a system built along straight lines and an ideology of progressive rationalism" (335). In his work, "'When You Come to a Fork in the Road'—Marcuse, Intellectual Subversion and Negative Thought in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Against the Day*," Toon Staes from the University of Antwerp sees a similar contention with the technological-sentiment in Pynchon's other novels. Of these previous works, Staes writes:

Pynchon goes beyond official, teleological history in an attempt to restore the flattened one-dimensional man to his full multidimensional autonomy... The mediated truth that is imposed in the public domain through discourse closes all meaning down to the presupposed meaning. Since the corporate structures appear to be insurmountable, effective dissent is neutralized, and there seems to be no other option than to join the one-dimensional synthesis of opinions. Dissent is co-opted, repressive tolerance bars any real change. The result is an impression of technological determinism: the system's configuration is exactly how it is meant to be. (97)

Both Tabbi and Staes understand Pynchon's novels in terms of delineation and determinism, a contention they see as a focal point in his works. The reader can also apply this to *Mason & Dixon*; the novel presents similar contentions about the delineation of the Line and the oppressive, restrictive nature of the progressive rationalist mindset. This progressive rationalism extends to all of Pynchon's work, but is undoubtedly explicit in *Mason & Dixon*. The belief that global progress depends on political change by way of reason is the theoretical and ideological background of 18th-Century America, an ideology that is put into question in the novel. This disdain for 'lines,' 'angles,' and 'progressive reduction of choices' is maintained as a narrative practice for Pynchon, one that has developed into an actual manifestation of lines and boundaries in *Mason & Dixon*. But, if making distinct claims, taking a definitive position, or proposing a political coup, are not in Pynchon's intentions, what is the intent of his subversive narratives?

One can only make a claim with a true consideration of these novels as indeterminable; that the answer is the notoriously deceiving ‘none of the above.’

3.2 Historiography as a Mode of Delineation in *Mason & Dixon*

Periodically throughout *Mason & Dixon*, the nieces and nephews of Rev. Cherrycoke remind their uncle that his accounts of the historical surveyors are inaccurate, to which the reverend responds, “Facts are but the Play-things of lawyers... History is not Chronology, for that is left to the lawyers, nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People... It may be the Historian’s duty to seek the Truth, yet must he do everything he can, not to tell it” (349). The reverend's perspective stands as an exemplary summation of the novel’s relationship with and consideration of history, as one of purposeful subjectivity. Since the conception of language and the dawn of the western literary tradition, the ideas of ‘history’ and ‘story’ have been interwoven. Originally a part of the Greek oral tradition, Homer’s *The Iliad* stands as a prime example of this relationship. The epic is an attempt to maintain the history of the Greek conflict with the Trojans through narrative and verse, blending fact with fiction, history and story. Contrary to the etymological roots of the two concepts, histories and stories eventually divided under the guises of science and art, ‘Chronology’ and ‘Remembrance.’ This antiquital relationship and its further division during the Enlightenment's attempt to delineate practices is brought into question in the primary text, something that Pynchon tries to reconcile through the reverend’s frame narrative.

Now there is an opportunity to satisfy what has been suggested, that the primary text embraces a tone of disillusionment, employs the power of entropy, and rejects objectivity through a redefinition of historiography. However, before delving into historiography within *Mason & Dixon* and how it prevents the reduction of the narrative, a thorough look into what history in literature is, might shed light on its relationship to meaning in the novel. Bennett and Royle, in their *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, categorize the literary-historical relationship in four ways. First, “Literary texts belong to no particular time, they are universal and transcend history;” this strategy is commonly associated with new criticism, or formalism, a strategy which focuses on the text as an isolated artifact (138). Second, Bennett and Royle claim

that ‘background’ critics have an understanding that “the historical context of a literary work - the circumstances surrounding its production - can and should guide us in reading it” (138). They continue, “The third model tends to be associated more with traditional historical scholarship than with literary criticism, as it assumes that literary texts are in some respect subordinate to their historical context” (139). The last, and the most relevant in Pynchon studies, is the new historicist model. Bennett and Royle summarize that new historicists understand that “Literary texts are bound up with other discourses and rhetorical structures: such as, they are part of a history that is still in the process of being written” (138). When considering history, literature beckons us to answer a question, “How should one apply history to a text?” Although “The form of the question presupposes that there is literature on the one side and history on the other...” and that “‘new critics,’ ‘background critics’ and ‘reflectionists’ tend to rely on precisely such polarity,” New historicism “may be understood as a reaction against such presuppositions” (139-140). Bennett and Royle continue, “it may be defined as a recognition of the extent to which history is textual, as a rejection of the autonomy of the literary text and as an attempted displacement of the objectivity of interpretation in general” (140). Using Bennett and Royle’s summarization of the new historical perspective, it could be suggested that there is space between the binary opposition initially laid out on the Enlightenment legacy spectrum. *Mason & Dixon* could be read under the assumption that objectivity is ‘displaced.’

This is where this project’s argument takes form; the relationship between history and text is one of purposeful subjectivity or ambiguity in *Mason & Dixon*. The history of surveyors is forever in flux due to “Time unredeemable,” and the power of interpretation (*M&D* 45). The novel itself contributes to this fluctuation; the reader is asked to step into the 18th-Century and attempt to reconsider the Enlightenment with a new, literary perspective. This is most prominently manifested in the frame narrative, as Rev. Cherrycoke expresses the journey of Mason and Dixon as a bedtime story. And similarly, the reader is reminded, just as a painting of a rifle is confused with an actual weapon in the novel, the ambiguity of history is seen as a “failing to mark the Boundaries between Reality and Representation” (429). Pynchon’s work is stylized as the encyclopedic multiplicity of a given era and this multiplicity reflects the underdetermined nature of history within that given period. This multiplicity is loosely represented in philosophy

as ‘Différance,’ a deconstructive idea presented by Jacques Derrida. As Derrida famously states, “There is no outside-text,” one must consider language and writing in light of unavoidable context. Yet, this context, namely history, authorial intention, language, and words in themselves, are infinite, unstable and undefinable. In this way, the meaning of a novel cannot stand as being determinable. As this project shifts its focus to a consideration of how history is treated in the novel, it is important to keep *Mason & Dixon*’s critical environment in mind, as a postmodern, deconstructive, and new historical novel.

Mr. Edgewise, a drinking, happenstance traveler the reverend meets on his way to Philadelphia, a “Purveyor of Delusion,” finishes “a lengthy range of Sentiment” by comparing historiography to the delineative quality of the Christian creation story: “‘It goes back,’ he might have begun, ‘to the second Day of Creation, when ‘[God] made the Firmament, and divided the Waters which were under the Firmament,’ -thus the first Boundary Line. All else after that, in all History, is but Sub-Division.’” (360-361) Historiography is delineative, reductive, it draws lines and boundaries around interpretation and meaning just as the Mason-Dixon line across America reduces identity and destroys innocence. In this way, history within the novel is tied up in a complex interplay between fact and fiction, displayed through the various fantastic and exaggerated events in the narrative, but also emphasized by the reverend’s frame narrative, situating a person of factual authority—the reverend being an actual participant in the formation of the Line—with a fictitious, story-time telling of the events. And this is the point, the blend of fact and fiction reflects the literary practice itself. It is apparent that Pynchon conflates the historian and the writer, seeing their roles as equal, “to seek the Truth” of the past and bring it to the present, or even the future, “and not tell it” (349). The same could be said of scientific study as well, yet, as one sees in the primary text, historiography and story-telling more artfully expresses truths about reality, without compromising an attention to humanity. This is the novel’s lesson; history is not fact and it is not fiction, it is not simply a story or a science, it is something in-between. In a way, Olausen was correct in describing the novel as a “meditation on complexity,” fact and fiction are intertwined, liberty is muddled by injustice, and progress has become an illusion, but this may not stretch far enough (110). Perhaps it is safe to claim that *Mason & Dixon* is a meditation on interplay, an apology for the in-between, a consideration for

the unseen. One is reminded of the following passage from Cherrycoke's consideration of history. Shocked to hear the reverend's definition of history, Uncle Ives asserts, "What, -seek the Truth and not tell it! Shameful." To which Cherrycoke responds:

Who claims Truth, Truth abandons... but touch her, and all her Credit is in the instant vanish'd as if it had never been. She needs rather to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiters, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev'ry Radius, Masters of Disguise to provide her the Costume, Toilette, and Bearing, and Speech nimble enough to keep her beyond Desires, or even the Curiosity, of Government. (350)

The reverend and the narrative present history as a sort of paradox; one must seek truth in the past, yet to claim that something is true leads to atrocities. In a way, historiography itself becomes a mode of delineation and destruction, ultimately manifested in the Line.

An adherence to fact must be taken in relationship to the fictive aspects of the novel due to the novel's redefinition of 'historical' facts, as Rev. Cherrycoke puts it, "the play-things of lawyers" (349). Although Pynchon's attention to historical evidence, particular the novel's connection to the actual journal entries of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, gives the writer and the work convincing authority over the *history* of the surveyors, the *story* being told is one of emotion, contemplation, and discernment over the nature of the lines being drawn in the colonies. These aspects, mainly the attitudes of Mason and Dixon while plotting out their line, are not written in any journal or history book, yet Pynchon takes great care into developing such concerns throughout the narrative. In this way, Clerc states, "[Pynchon] has taken the necessary steps of extrapolation to which the historical novelist is entitled... [he] fills in the details to give [the reader] the full experience" (40). It is this interplay of history and story which defines and gives power to Pynchon's narrative and the 'historical novel' as a genre, power that is founded on the idea of a malleable history and possesses the ability to decenter and subvert predispositions. In dramatic opposition to the factual backbone of the narrative, there is the reverend's story-time telling of these events and Pynchon's near obscene use of the fantastic and exaggeration to take into consideration. The Mason-Dixon line, as an image and a force of destruction in the novel, plays a key role in this literary stance.

The Line itself is perhaps the most pronounced of the Enlightenment-influenced tensions within the novel and it is fruitful to consider it further. It is not only a manifestation of the desire to delineate and divide through the physical sciences of astronomy and cartography, but also a tool used to control identity and ideology. Before considering the text, it is important to discuss the nature of maps and lines as a general concept. Although his primary concern envelopes the cartography practiced hundreds of years prior to the events of Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, Helgerson's "The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England" provides a source of theoretical terms and thoughts on the nature of cartography in historical and political contexts. Helgerson makes the claim that cartographic representations, although often motivated, funded, or encouraged by external forces, remains "ideologically neutral" in themselves, but ultimately have an "ideological effect," in many cases an effect on national identity in opposition to a dynastic identity (56). That is to say, that maps hold power over identity and ideology. Consequently, the Mason-Dixon line represents a sort of powerplay from British authority in order to limit and control the developing American identity. This could be added to the suspicions the surveyors begin to play with as they travel along their Line. However, as will be discussed shortly, this desire by the British to delineate any and everything, ultimately fails in the novel.

In his near textbook work, *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch touches a similar topic as he introduces the topic of city-planning and the fundamental motivations of mapmaking. Speaking to the 'legibility' of an environment, he states, "Structuring and identifying the environment is a vital ability among all mobile animals... This organization is fundamental to the efficiency and to the very survival of free-moving life" (3). Lynch also makes the claim that "Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable," a statement that is founded in the Enlightenment's own aesthetic sensibility (6). This aesthetic desire to domesticate the chaos of the world is displayed and challenged by the novel and the Mason-Dixon commission represents that. As the surveying company moves across the wilderness they witness the effects of delineation first hand. The 'annoyances' of the Mechanickal Duck are one, but further, the destruction brought from the Line crosses into a more real situation. Soon the Mason-Dixon line runs straight through the lone house of Mr. and Mrs. Price, dividing their homestead between

Pennsylvania and Maryland. With the prospect of “paying double taxes,” and “visits from the Sheriffs of both Provinces,” the family decide to roll their house down the hill to Maryland, to which Mrs. Price responds somewhat eager, pointing out that the two are legally married in Pennsylvania and not Maryland. Rhys Price attempts to burst out at the surveyors, saying, “Separating neighbors is one thing... but separating Husband and Wife, -no wonder you people get shot at all the time. No wonder those Chains are call’d the [Devil’s] Guts” (447). The novel adds to this sentiment by continuing, “[Mr. Price] must struggle to work himself into Rage, -owing to an insufficient exposure, so far, to Evil and Sorrow, remaining a Youth who trusts all he may meet, to be as kindly dispos’d as he” (447). It seems as though the Line not only interrupts the life and peace of a family, but also destroys Mr. Price’s innocence. The Price family is seen as an embodiment of natural existence, untouched by the ‘Evil and Sorrow’ that is brought by the Line, an embodiment of delineation and a “conduit of evil” (701). Sascha Pöhlman’s discussion in his work, “Imagining 18th-Century Globalization: Transatlantic and Transnational Phenomena in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*,” is particularly telling of the consequences of the commission and its motives. He sees the Line as a “human desire towards repressive order,” alluding to the destructive nature of delineation. However, Pöhlman also sees the Line as “the exemplary instance of heterotopia,” or, “one of ‘Pynchon’s symbolic areas of anarchy,” which straddles and connects America to its mother-continent, which alludes to a different aspect of Pynchon’s image, one of ambiguity that will be considered further (30, 32).

Beyond the particulars of the Mason-Dixon line, the conceptual and historical framing of the commission also lends itself to downplay delineation and division. The fact that the surveying company, both in the narrative and in reality, moved from East to West, creating a line along the Earth’s latitude and dividing America between North and South, plays a role in Pynchon’s subversion. In one way, the West represents eternal possibility, much like it has been suggested about history or language, they are open fields of meaning and discovery. As the surveyor, Shelby puts it, all of America, including the West represents “pure Space,” a place with “no previous Lines, no fences, no streets to constrain polygony however extravagant” (*M&D* 586). As the surveying company continues, Mason and Dixon find themselves dealing with a professor and some sort of electric eel (called a Torpedo) associated with the immoral gambler, Lord Lepton.

Mason explains the limitless possibilities out West for the professor, stating, “Yet, supposing Progress Westward were a Journey, returning unto Innocence, -approaching, as a Limit, the innocence of the Animals with whom the Folk must inter-act upon a daily basis,- why, Sir, your Torpedo may hold for them greater appeal than you may guess” (427). This idea even develops into a full utopic state later on in the novel:

...who might not come to believe in an Eternal West? In a Momentum that bears all way? ‘Men are remov’d by it, and women, from where they were, -as if surrender’d to a great current of Westering. You will hear of gold cities, marble cities, men that fly, women that fight, fantastickal creatures never dream’d in Europe,- something always to take and draw you that way.’ (671)

The West is seen as true, innocent potential, a chance for humanity to restart. Yet, the Line destroys this idea, brings death to the natural utopia that the West represents.

Additionally, the sunset as a symbol of the West and often the time when Mason and Dixon begin their work tracing lines by the stars, represents a passing over into death, day to night with “trans-Terminal America passing by” (*M&D* 680). This is a common American trope, both in cultural and literary history. Just as in Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, more specifically, in the memorial poem to Abraham Lincoln, “When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom’d,” or the reflection on death in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” day and night are conflated with life and death and the westward direction is associated with a passing over. Cultural history paints a similar picture; the old American West was seen as a “colorful drama of determined pioneers and cowboys overcoming obstacles,” and also maintained “short sighted greed... irresponsible behavior... reckless exploitation,” and extermination (Tindall and Shi 572). In *Mason & Dixon*, not only is the West metaphorically connected to death through the trope of a setting sun, but the Line itself, a mode of delineation, brings destruction to the innocence and utopic possibility of the West. The case of Mr. Price’s lost innocence has been mentioned and relevantly applies here, the westward moving Line destroys the Price family’s natural homestead, a place of purity. But further, the Line is seen as “Terrible *Feng-Shui*” to a following Chinaman, “a Wind, a truly ill wind, bringing failure, poverty, disgrace, betrayal, -every kind of bad luck” (542). He continues, “Ev’rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature, -coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks,- so

honoring the Dragon or *Shan* within, from which Landscape ever takes its form. To mark a right line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-slash, a long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year 'round to see as other than hateful Assault. How can it pass unanswer'd?" (542). This imbalance in Feng-Shui is represented in the zany, ridiculous, and dangerous happenings which plague the surveying company as they create the Line. The fear of The Black Dog and native assaults, the malfunctioning of compasses near mystical sites, and powering up of Vaucanson's Mechanickal Duck, —a scene which connects the technological ingenuity of the 18th-Century with the destruction of nature— all play into the the Line's image as a mode of destruction. Beyond the narrative, the reader can also reflect on the future implications of the Mason-Dixon Line, most prominently, that the Line would become both a physical and ideological dividing line between the North and the South in the United States, eventually culminating in one of the bloodiest American conflicts one hundred years later, the American Civil War. However, the West is used as a multi-faceted image in a fair portion of Western culture, although Whitman mourned the loss of Lincoln, he mourned with "ever-returning spring" (459). Similarly, the West was also seen as an opportunity for personal freedom and economy potential in American cultural history (Tindall and Shi 573). In *Mason & Dixon*, the West is equally dualistic, an image of discovery, of freedom, and of death, and the movement of the Line westward represents a movement toward and a desire for these aspects of the developing American identity, but also toward annihilation.

One could realign this idea of the Line as a double-coded image with another of Clerc's explications, perhaps condensing it in a concise, critically-influenced manner. He states:

In subject matter, a simple view of the Mason-Dixon Line, from Zheng's perspective, would make it evil. It goes against and spoils nature; it's artificially imposed, it creates divisioning which, after all, answers its original intent)... But, deconstructed, the line collapses these notions. A measured divisioning between Pennsylvania and Maryland met a legal requirement. The imposition of accurate science and technology settled differences between opposing sides. Progress cannot be forestalled; wherever the line went, local economy improved. The line contributed to territorial expansion westward. In short, the

line can be interpreted in different ways. By no means must we necessarily assume that the line is *only* a negative force. (138).

Ultimately, the reader is left to make their own conclusions about the Line; it can be seen as a means of destruction or as a symbol of possibility. In the American colonies, Col. Washington addresses the same ‘double-coded’ nature of lines, as both the catalyst to both order and chaos. He states, “—a piece of tricky weaving, order, I mean to say, in Chaos. Markets appearing, with their unwritten Laws, upon ev’ry patch of open ground, power beginning to sort itself out, Line and Staff” (281). Clerc continues his explication by quoting the novel and states that Mason and Dixon are not presented as naive to the ambiguity of their line (138). Mason questions, “Shall wise Doctors one day write History’s assessment of the Good resulting from this Line, vis-a-vis the not-so-good? I wonder which List will be longer” (666). Clerc finishes his deconstructive take on the novel with the possibility of a neutral interpretation, stating, “Binary opposites like present and past, reason and emotion, innocence and corruption, science and art may collapse as their meanings move in flux” (138). This is telling of the Line, the novel, and the greater Enlightenment controversy; there is an opportunity to interpret things neutrally. The Line, representing determinacy and division, can then be seen as image of duality: a symbol and manifestation of destruction as the surveyors move West toward liberation and possibility and death. The novel, often displaying the contradictions of the 18th-Century movement toward rational progressivism, could be seen as a narrative of multiplicity and ambiguity. The Enlightenment, recently under attack by many who see it as a period of injustice and the foundation of contemporary moral depravity, can be justified and defended as a period of equal successes and failures.

Moving back to the initial understanding of the novel as a representation that alludes binary oppositions, it could be suggested that Pynchon, through *Mason & Dixon*, is attempting to present definitive histories as a destructive force, the same way that the Line divides, destories, and delineates the pre-war American colonies. Yet, claiming this is an uphill battle, and Pynchon recognizes this; literature faces a contemporary assault of rationalism, as LeSpark suggests, “all History unsupported by contemporary Evidence is Romance” (351). However, Pynchon fights this battle by being a thorough researcher. Speaking to the author’s ability to portray an accurate

history, the factual aspects of the narrative, Charles Clerc mentions that “Pynchon is a world-class researcher... [He] happens to be one of those rare birds as comfortable in the hard sciences as he is in literature and the arts” (39-40). As a part of his work, Clerc painstakingly assesses the factual components of Pynchon’s narrative, an aspect of research that is undoubtedly time-consuming for anyone analyzing the novel today. Most prominently, Clerc compares the account of Rev. Cherrycoke and Pynchon to that of the journeys of Mason and Dixon in reality, noticing that the novel “is shaped in large measure by the course of actual historical events” (53). Clerc also notes that the entire structure of *Mason & Dixon* is founded and framed on two mathematically certain events, the Transit of Venus in 1761 and eight years later in 1769, which, along with the surveyors’ journey to America, create, as Clerc states, an “ABA” structure similar to other journey stories like *Madame Bovary*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *An American Tragedy*. This also is reflected in the novel’s three titled parts: “Latitudes and Departures,” as a determined beginning of a journey, “America,” as a body representing discovery and liberty, and “Last Transit,” as a bookend and return to normality. (55). Furthermore, Pynchon’s attention to the details of the surveyors’ journey within the novel adheres closely to their journeys in reality; the dates and locations are accurate, the major characters involved are named, and the surveying complications and mathematics are representative of the historical accounts. Because Pynchon’s research and knowledge brings credibility to the text as historically accurate, it is reasonable to consider the narrative as a direct reflection on the 18th-Century, yet this attitude toward the text, one of historical determinacy, can be troublesome. All of these ‘factual’ aspects of the narrative add to the novel’s credibility and authority as a historical account of the development of the Mason-Dixon Line, yet, the narrative adamantly suggests a redefinition of what history encapsulates; equally important as fact is to the an account of history, ‘fiction’ must also be considered. Pynchon utilizes a blend of fact and fiction to a great and nearly exaggerated effect by highlighting the encyclopedic minutia of the 18th-Century (even to the point of writing in the appropriate vernacular complemented by archaic typography), with fantastic moments of talking dogs, oversized cheese wheels, and conspiring Jesuits, decentering one’s predispositions toward history as factual recounting. By doing so, the novel continually asks the reader to question what

is significant and what holds meaning, for the reverend, for the title characters, for Pynchon, and for oneself.

3.3 Reviewing Critical Strategies

It has become apparent that there is a general attempt among Postmodern critics to justify the limbo-like state in which a given narrative, style, or motivation lies. Just as Elias states, “that what is left to postmodernists in this between-state of belief is only ‘metahistory,’” Staes, too, attempts to justify this postmodern paradox by claiming, “it is exactly the insight into this necessary incompleteness that still allows for certain possibilities” (xvii, 97). In her review of Susan Rubin Suleiman, Christy Burns establishes the critical environment of postmodern literature, stating that there are “three general clusters among intellectuals and writers.” First, there are “those who pursue a ‘postmodernism of resistance’ through experimental work that allows previously silenced groups to speak in contra-normative modes of representation.” Then, “those who argue that postmodernism lacks a firmness of values and principles and so fails to have any political effect (that is, it disavows universals).” And finally, “those whom [identify] as ‘cultural pessimists,’ who believe neither in the efficacy of decentered experimentation nor in the claims of universals (the project of modernity, and so on), leaving to the postmodernist only the role of critic and never that of future visionary” (2). Burns sees Pynchon’s works caught between the first and last groups; while his novels often “implicitly [support] a politics of resistance and [employ] experimental and decentering forms of representation,” Burns sees *Mason & Dixon* in a neutral manner. She ends this thought by stating, “in *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon creates a parallactic intersection of perspectives and time frames, which allows him to engage in critique while also pointing toward a different possible future in which imperialist elements of American history are not comfortably edited out but are critically worked back into national awareness” (2). In this way, the novel straddles the binary of opposition, never fully denouncing the imperialistic notions which are presented as negative forces, but allowing them to be ‘worked back’ into the American identity. This is what will be shown when considering critical interpretations of *Mason & Dixon*.

First, as an opposition to the idea that the novel is non-binary, Victor Strandberg's article, "Dimming the Enlightenment: Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," adheres to a more traditional historical and 'background' oriented strategy, a strategy that takes the historical implications of the novel as the narrative's main function. When applied to the Burns/Suleiman groupings, Strandberg could be placed in the first, seeing the novel as a representation of counterculture and resistance. Strandberg's essential argument can be summarized in a single line; he asserts that "*Mason & Dixon* is calculated to display the underside of the Enlightenment" (103). In order to form his assertion, Strandberg begins by suggesting that, "Most significantly for his work, Pynchon's discontent with his times shaped his aesthetic sensibility... his favor falls exclusively on contemporary voices of social protest and emotional liberation" (102). Further, Strandberg backs his claim by suggesting that "[rebellion] against tradition, convention, and all forms of social hierarchy" is common practice for Pynchon, referencing *Gravity's Rainbow* and the introduction to *Slow Learner*, which, in Strandberg's view, declare the author's aesthetic intentions, intentions that would not "find much resonance with the aristocratic elegance of the Age of Reason" (103, 102). Strandberg concludes his analysis by suggesting that the reversal of roles in *Mason & Dixon*, particularly roles that have been deemed rationalist, show that "the purported triumphs of the Age of Reason actually reflect moral turpitude," and that the central image in the novel, the Line, "represents a misbegotten rationalist undertaking that affords [Pynchon's] book length opportunity to expound his anti-rationalist theme" (105, 107).

It is not the intention of this project to discredit Strandberg's interpretation, but rather to assess the absence of certain critical acknowledgments in his theory and to set up a comparative opposition. It is apparent that Strandberg's assertions are founded in traditional historicism, for his claims hinge on the previous practices of Pynchon, not solely as an author but more prominently as a person, a person with the "temperment of a hippie rebel" (103). Additionally, Strandberg fails to acknowledge the deconstructive aspect of postmodern literature and more specifically *Mason & Dixon*, stating that Pynchon "achieves a victory of sorts over the true essence of chaos" (110). However, Strandberg steps over the close relationship between postmodern literature and the ideas founded by deconstruction, post-structural, and new historical thinkers. Reiterating, it is known that Pynchon's reclusive lifestyle, as a person, beckons for a

serious consideration of Barthes's "The Death of the Author." Barthes suggests a movement away from the modern sense of authorship, one that sees the historical, social, and psychological status of the author as influential, or even dominant in the interpretation of a novel. Rather, he suggests a movement to a new, postmodern sensibility, one in which the reader, "without history, biography, psychology," creates the meaning, previously injected by the author, through the act of reading itself and interpretation (148). When considering this, it is rightful, as both Strandberg and others might do, to consider the narrative in *Mason & Dixon* as a subversion or undermining of specific Enlightenment ideals and the era's hypocritical shortcomings, yet it is unwarranted to consider the novel as a mere, singularly-minded denouncement. As Strandberg points out himself, "when we speak of 'seriousness' in fiction ultimately we are talking about an attitude toward death" (Pynchon qtd by Strandberg 102).

Taking a look at one of Strandberg's own close readings of the novel, one finds the traditional historical strategy to be troublesome. Strandberg begins by stating, "In the closing pages of the *Mason & Dixon*, Mason comes to realize two fallacies in his Age of Reason philosophy. One is that the struggle for order, lucidity, and progress epitomized in the Line is nullified by the possibility of radical human evil" (108). He continues by quoting one of Mason's revelatory moments, which ends, "There may be found... a conscious Denial of all that Reason holds true... that there are Beings who are not wise, or spiritually advanced, or indeed capable of Human kindness, but ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting..." (769). Strandberg utilizes this passage as the moment in which Mason, implying Pynchon and the reader as well, wholly denounces the Enlightenment, continuing that "[Mason] abandons astronomy in favor of astrology when he casts Dixon's horoscope" (108). Yet, when considering indeterminacy as a staple in Pynchon's work, one could read the passage as a neutral conflict in which Mason is caught. For him, "it was Purgatory," a place of uncertainty, of conflict, a place of neutrality and a place in which faults are acknowledged, yet forgiven in time. Mason's reflection additionally ends in a state of uncertainty and the 'in between:' "Plexities of Honor and Sin we may never clearly sight... between the number'd and the unimagin'd, -between common safety and Ruin solitary" (769).

Moving to other critical interpretations of the novel, there is a sense that the neutrality of the narrative in *Mason & Dixon* is imperative to consider. In “‘Mason & Dixon’ & the Ampersand,” Samuel Cohen emphasizes that *Mason & Dixon* is “a novel about lines” (265). In opposition to some, Cohen sees the novel as a positive representation of America, “a new, more hopeful story... emphasizing relation, connection, and possibility” (265). In terms of the Line, Cohen recognizes that its image as a metaphor dominates the critical reception of the novel, yet builds off of these earlier claims by suggesting the novel, and many of Pynchon’s others, to be works of geometry. Speaking specifically of the title characters, Cohen asserts:

Their ability, therefore, provides an apt metaphor for their times. In a nascent America, a creation of the Enlightenment, their applications of science to government, of rationality to the wilderness, embody the claims of the Age of Reason. While the drawing of the line is on a (literally) mundane level, mere surveying and cutting (as the unhappy, stargazing-astronomer Mason sometimes sees it), it depends on a belief in the human ability to domesticate the natural. (267)

This description of the surveyors’ practices is not only telling of the Enlightenment era, but also the novel’s relationship with it. As Cohen states, “By drawing lines across experience... the Enlightenment project of understanding and domesticating the world had the unfortunate effect of robbing it of its magic” (268). This plays into the metaphor of the Line and, in turn, all of the modes of delineation within the novel as destructive forces. Cohen continues by quoting an important question in the novel, “Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?” The critic asserts that America stands between a place of reality and possibility, slowing being destroyed by delineation. He states, “The visto Mason and Dixon draw, as it cuts through America, is the vehicle through which the novel encounters the ways America is built on lines... It was one place we should not have found them. The disenchantment of America, the turning of the New World into just another part of the Old, is the turning of subjunctive into indicative.” (274-275). But, Cohen diverts his attention. He sees his own discussion about lines to be conflated with other critical analysis, and ultimately claims:

A focus on the line as the dominant figure in the novel can lead to a reading of Pynchon as squarely on the side of Adorno, Horkheimer, and others in condemning the Enlightenment

as the cause of many modern ills. This condemnation would square with the readings many have made of *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow* as depicting worlds disfigured by science and modernity. Reading *Mason & Dixon* only through the figure of the line yields this same reading. (268-269).

Further, Cohen turns his attention to the ampersand in the title of the novel. While some might see it as a historically accurate text symbol or a fissure between the title characters, “the distinction between the characters,” Cohen sees the ampersand as a connective symbol, bridging two widely distinct sentiments and ideologies, “the connection between these two distinct characters, just like that between the e and t from which the ampersand derives” (278). In this way, the differences between Mason and Dixon -the former being a deist astronomer and the latter, a Quaker surveyor- become representative of the American aesthetic and the Enlightenment conflict as a whole. On one side, there is the Old World, idealism, astronomy and the heaven, and the Romantic sensibility. On the other side stands the New World, realism, surveying the earth, and the Enlightenment’s scientific sensibility. Cohen is suggesting that the ampersand, and therefore the novel, does not represent the division between these two sensibilities, but the connection and transition through them. The ampersand represents the “openness not just to difference -to recognizing both the existence of difference and also the possibility of connecting across it- but also to a history that could have turned out differently and can still. Seeing this kind of history in *Mason & Dixon* requires seeing not just the line but what the line makes possible, seeing not just an anatomy of loss but also a celebration of continued possibility” (282). Cohen embraces the new historical aspects of the novel, emphasizing the ability to interpret the novel beyond a denouncement of the Enlightenment, as a narrative that redefines history and participates in the era’s legacy by highlighting its subjectivity.

Clerc has a similar view of the novel in *Mason & Dixon & Pynchon*. Initially, like others, Clerc sees the novel as a denouncement of Enlightenment ideals, he states:

“Possibilities,” which may suggest development, expansiveness, potential successes, often result in diminishment, bareness, reductive foolishness... Human capacity is thus not emboldened toward achievement; it cowers, withdraws, retreats. Repressiveness, bureaucratization, enclaspment -in belief, control sought by government is assured. When

mystery and spirituality are vitiated, when fires in the blood of the individual aspirations are extinguished, when the mire of human complexity shrivels into impoverished despondency, we have little left to fight with. (130-131)

Yet, Clerc is hesitant to make this the definitive interpretation of the novel; he continues, “This anti-establishment stance taken by Pynchon can hardly be seen as new, particularly his thematic belief that the countervailing prompted by ‘the ends of Governments’ leaves us short of dreams, hopes, yearnings, Goal-less and barren” (131). Consequently, the critic digs deeper when considering critical perspectives. Because of the novel’s “multiple meanings, instability of language, internal contradictions, and anachronisms,” Clerc sees the novel as a “paradise for deconstructive criticism” (137, 139). He explains, “the multiple approaches that can be taken toward the novel support deconstructionist theorizing; it can be read as allegory, as epic, as on-the-road adventure, as exercise in ‘entropology,’ as history, as myth, and more” (139). Clerc, like Cohen, understands that the novel is working with the ‘in-between,’ something Clerc classifies as “disorder, fragmentation, disunity, contradiction, instability” (139). This idea is manifested in the novel as “conflicting characterizations of Mason or Dixon or Maskelyne; the support of conformity while seeming to promote nonconformity, or an exact reversal of the two; opposing views of nature; differing attitudes toward the results of power, authority, the establishment, national rule, down to precise sources, such as the Royal Society, the East India Company, George III” (139). Again, to interpret the novel in one way seems to work against the narrative’s integrity. Clerc finishes this topic with a quick assessment of the “forces of laying” in *Mason & Dixon*, concluding that this ‘lamination’ “leads to greater metaphors for multiplicity of interpretation,” suggesting that reducing the novel to a single motive or purpose to be futile.

Continuing this trend of interpreting *Mason & Dixon* beyond its subversion of Enlightenment predispositions, Amy Elias, In her 2001 book, *Sublime Desire*, gathers insight into the complex relationship between postmodernism and history. Elias asserts that “the postmodern attitude toward history is paradoxical, an attitude of supplication and desire as well as an attitude of skepticism.” Reiterating, she also suggests that “what is left to postmodernists in this between-state of belief is only ‘metahistory,’ the ability to theorize and ironically desire history rather than access it through discovery and reconstruction” (xvii). These assertions stem from a

nihilistic understanding of the postmodern conception, particularly that postmodern writers are “hyperconsciously aware that the drive to write and know history may be a futile endeavor” (xvii). This ‘futile endeavor’ is a familiar concept in postmodern criticism, one generally accepted as a hallmark of postmodern literature. Brian McHale, in his chapter entitled “Pynchon’s Postmodernism” from *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, also recognizes the futility and frailty of not only period concepts in general, but especially the “unresolved” nature of the postmodern conception. McHale defines postmodernism in terms of incredulity toward tradition, simulation, and a subjective decentering. Additionally, McHale refines ‘postmodernity,’ particularly the period’s “historical and cultural conditions,” in terms of double-coding, irony, and pastiche (97). It is the unresolved nature of the genre, the subjective decentering of meaning, and the use of literary techniques such as double-coding and pastiche that reflects the genre’s emphasis on futility and underdetermined thematic substance. Elias’ *Sublime Desire* continues with assertions concerning “the interrelationship between post-1960s historical fiction and the anti-foundationalist historiography of its own time,” as well as the “shared characteristics between the conventional historical romance and certain kinds of post-1960s ‘First World’ fiction” (xvii).

Beyond these claims, Elias ends her book-length investigation with her treatment of John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*. Elias’ goals are to show that these ‘metahistorical romances’ are “defined by [their] internal conflicts, conflicts inherent in Enlightenment-birthing progressivism.” These conflicts include “anxiety about the racialized colonial Other, the security of privilege, capitalism and accumulation, global economies, nationhood and indigenous cultures, and exocentric nature versus the progressive urban center” (221-222). One can take away a understanding of the paradoxical and underdetermined nature of postmodern literature, particularly that “Postmodernism becomes that which scientism ignores; that which reason represses; that which cannot be thought or spoken given the terms available to and the politics of representation governing Western discourse” (xxi-xxii). Particularly concerning *Mason & Dixon*, Elias continues by stating:

Terribly important to the novel’s thematics is the fact that [Mason and Dixon] are to observe the Transit of Venus at the Cape of Good Hope, in a colonial province whose

economy depends upon slavery. Funded by the Royal Society, the two men start their journeys by looking at the heavens, literally and figuratively, through the lens provided by colonial power; as the novel progresses, however, they begin to suspect that more is going on than a simple astronomical observation, and that they are somehow pawns in a political power play of a global scale. (233)

Her observation is completely valid, in fact, exemplary, the novel can and should be seen as a commentary on the imperialistic nature of this historical situation. She continues by condensing *Mason & Dixon* into a few words, saying the novel “is a historical consolidation of the multinational military-industrial complex and European imperialism and colonialism. The origin is the late eighteenth century, and the catalyst is the political need to map colonial territory” (242). Yet, Elias astutely recognizes the frailty of this interpretation, for, as she quotes *The Sot-Weed Factor*, “One must *assert, assert, assert*, or go screaming mad” (Barth qtd by Elias 232).

Elias’ explication goes further, justifying the nature of postmodern literature as underdetermined. Elias continues with a discussion of a passage late in the novel. Mason, seen as a reborn figure at this point in the narrative, views the night sky as he proclaims a sort of revelation, stating, “The place where [the comet] pointed was the place I knew I must journey to, for beneath the Sky-born Index lay, as once beneath a Star, an Infant that must, again, re-make the World” (726). Elias claims that the power of *Mason & Dixon* lies in its resistance to lines and that “The vision of the infinitude that Mason sees in the night sky -free of tangent lines and boundaries- leads him to a vision of the sacred, to the possibility of redemption through the remaking of the world.” She continues by asserting that these sublime moments hold “the power of space and time manifesting secular-sacred meaningfulness that spurs the mortal onto ethical action” (234). One could add to Elias’ explication; the active phrases she uses, ‘remaking the world’ and ‘spurs ethical action,’ denote a required change, a remaking which will inevitably contain new lines and new boundaries just as before. Yet, as Elias points out, beyond seeing this passage as a call for revolutionary change, it could be suggested that Mason’s desire to “re-make the World” must be taken in relationship to the new infinitude of the night sky, the human desire to delineate in flux with undeterminable limitlessness. These aspects of reality can coexist in their

given context, not requiring a denouncement of one or the other. Redemption is not in creating new lines to replace the old ones, but in the expression of sublime, unlimited moments. While it is beneficial and expected to read revolutionary implications into the novel, as Elias puts it, that there is a “modernization,” there must also be an attention to “the curbing of desire for the infinite and the promotion of desire for power and control... the death drive,” it would be misguided to embrace a perspective which ignores major aspects of Pynchon’s practice and the Postmodern project, most generally, an attention to underdetermined meanings.

Although it has been suggested that Elias’ explication emphasizes the subversive nature of the novel, her discussion on how *Mason & Dixon* moves beyond denouncement is exemplary. She expressly denotes and accurately elaborates on the multifaceted aspects of Pynchon’s Enlightenment and its display of modernity, and, additionally, Elias recognizes the tension between and coexistence of a desire to limit and limitlessness. She claims that resistance in the novel “lies not in ‘drawing lines;’ rather salvation lies in refusing to draw lines or in complicating the lines one has already drawn, keeping oneself open to the flux and infinite freedom of possibilities” (234). The last part of this quote speaks to how the novel proposes such a tension, an openness to limitlessness. Elias continues, “The Sacred is infinite possibility; while terrifying, it is also liberating. It is defiled by boundaries, chained by empiricism and for Pynchon, the loss of sacred potential leads to ‘our Despair’” (237). There is particular importance in emphasizing the ‘potential’ and ‘possibility’ in contrast to determinative explications.

Cowart, in his work, *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History*, sees the novel in a similar way, reaffirming the destructive power of delineation and implicitly proposing a productive interpretation of the novel as ‘in-between.’ Like the others mentioned, Cowart concludes that the novel can be viewed as a denouncement of the technological advancements of the Enlightenment period, a contemporary ‘Luddite Vision’ fueled by the redefinition of 18th-Century history. He states, “Pynchon scrutinizes the age in which technology began to come into its own — and with it the modern world’s spiritual desperation. He exposes the fallacy of scientific rationalism at the moment of its great effloration in the eighteenth century” (137). This is the same interpretation that was presented in the earlier chapters on liberty and progress, and the same as the other critics mentioned, from Strandberg to Elias. It is important to understand

Mason & Dixon as a subversive narrative, one that displays the the contradictions of the Enlightenment sentiment. However, Cowart also understands the novel in terms of ambiguity and the tensions brought from delineation when he states, “Pynchon expresses an interest in the struggle between scientific rationalism and the perennial yearning for mystical possibility. In the novel, similarly, the author characterizes America as a crossroads for the energies of the eighteenth century, and here the Mason-Dixon Line becomes a powerful symbol of rationalism’s putting its mark on a land once consecrated to multiple perspectives” (139). In this way, the Line, a theoretical product of Enlightenment ideals, destroys the ‘consecrated lands’ of the American identity as a place of multiplicity and possibility. It could then be suggested that the ambiguity of the American Identity as a sort of crossroads of ‘energies,’ one driven by technological advancement and the other founded in spiritual tradition, seems to be a positive. The ideal would, therefore, represent a middle ground, a collapse of the ‘pre-Enlightenment’ and ‘post-Enlightenment’ binary, a consideration of an ‘in-between.’

3.3.1 Defining a New Critical Strategy

Applying this new perspective of history to the novel, one finds a prime, textual example of the novel’s redefinition of history in Mason and Dixon’s encounters with Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, prominently displaying the interrelationship of fact and fiction. Although these figures have established ‘histories’ to which one makes judgements about their character, beliefs, and role in various events, Pynchon mixes the facts of their history with the fictive aspects of narrative. Soon after arriving to the new British colonies, the surveyors, visiting an apothecary to obtain any “For-mulation” or elixir with “Ooapium” and “Al-cohol,” meet the iconic American founding father, Benjamin Franklin, who, as he is commonly known for, discusses the various projects and inventions he has developed; bifocals, the glass armonica, and an electrostatic machine are among the most notable. Franklin is introduced to the reader as the iconic Enlightenment American, as he is presented in traditional historical texts, even to the point of recognizing his lively sexual life and womanizing by introducing the pair, Molly and Dolly. Additionally, there is a case to be made that Franklin had significant contact with the two

surveyors in reality. As Clerc points out, Thomas D. Cope made note of the various contacts between Mason, Dixon, and Franklin throughout the late 18th-Century, yet it is still questionable whether or not the three would have ever met in person, a gray area which Pynchon as an author takes further (47). As the chapter and the novel develop, one recognizes additional exaggerated qualities of Franklin's characterization and his connection to the surveyors in the novel. Firstly, Franklin immediately describes Molly and Dolly as "Students of the Elektrikal Arts, whom I am pleas'd to examine from time to time, in the Sub-ject," a description which denotes some sort of misaligned perception of humanity within the character. Additionally, soon after the surveyors visit Col. Washington in Virginia, Franklin introduces the reader to a general suspicion of a Jesuit conspiracy against Christendom; as Postmaster General of the New World, Franklin fears the implications of the Jesuit telegraph and their ability to subvert the delay of messages across great distances. This suspicion, which extends beyond Benjamin Franklin in the novel, is uncharacteristic of the historical figure and breathes a Pynchonesque quality, stretching fiction from fact, into the novelized character. But what does this blend of fact and fiction say about the novel's attention to the Enlightenment? Most relevantly, the 'anti' characterization of Franklin seems to illuminate the unstable nature of history and Pynchon desires to show the reader that the past cannot be divided into the facts of history and the art of story, but rather, through the subjective and entropic quality of time and human experience, the two aspects of the past are an interwoven system.

One could also draw similar conclusions concerning the surveyors' visit with George Washington and the attention to Enlightenment ideals is further explicated through the famous colonel. While the novel takes care to establish the factual Col. Washington of the late 18th-Century, describing his height and dialectic in comparison to others, there is also care taken to fictionalize the soon-to-be 1st President of the United States, playing into the greater concern of the Enlightenment's legacy. It is apparent that the reader is presented with a conflicting characterization of the iconized American leader who, like Benjamin Franklin, could be described as a representative Enlightenment figure. In order to determine this claim, one could focus on a single statement from Episode 28, arguably representing both sides of the legacy discussion. In response to Dixon's concern of extending their meridian line further West and 'destroying' the

homes of the natives and previous settlers, Washington states, “Americans will fight Indians whenever they please, which is whenever they can,- and Brits wherever they must, for we will be no more contain’d, than tax’d” (277). This presents conflicting generalization about the Enlightenment; in one way, the reader is presented with a ‘traditional’ understanding of reason-driven ideals in Washington’s disdain for the British taxes on the colonies, a denouncement of the tyrannical and unrepresentative governments of 18th-Century. Yet, the reader also gets a glimpse of a destructive manifestation of the same ideal of liberty, a particularly unjust disdain for natives and anyone else who may ‘contain’ or limit the progress or expansion of the new American culture. Additionally, within the same episode, Pynchon utilizes an intertextual allusion to Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in order to establish a similar tension concerning the Enlightenment and its ideals. It is no coincidence the Washington’s disdain for monarchical rule- a disdain embodied by most American, Enlightenment era leaders- is contradicted by his own patriarchal rule over Mt. Vernon. This is presented through the two supporting characters of the episode: his wife, Martha Washington -convinced that she alone, the “Agent of Domesticity unrelenting,” must run the household- and his servant, Gershom. While both characters still garner respect and authority in conversation with their guests, there is still an underlying subservience to the master of the house, Col. Washington. More pertinent to the Enlightenment, Gershom, in a peculiarly cutting section of the episode, begins to entertain the other characters with “King-Joaks,” what he describes as “Slave-and-Master Joaks, re-tailor’d for these audiences” (284). The comparison to his own situation continues as the Fool in this story refers to the King as “George.” Gershom, ostensibly the Fool in his own story, takes the role of Shakespeare’s Fool in *King Lear*, subservient in title, yet equal in stature to his King. For Gershom this is represented in the final quip of his story; when told by a farmer that the King and his Fool must walk ten miles more to the palace, the Fool replies, “Come on, George -we can do it easily,- ‘tis but five miles apiece” (285). How does this allusion relate to the Enlightenment and its legacy? The reader is presented with a contradictory characterization of Washington, an Enlightenment icon who maintains disdain for tyrannical rule, yet maintains a similar patriarchal and unjust rule over his own household and even connected to the title of ‘King’ in Gershom’s story. This is particularly telling of the interdisciplinary tension when discussing the legacy of the

Enlightenment, is George Washington deserving of enlightened praise, or does his ironic lifestyle and misaligned ideals, presented through a literary balance of fact and fiction in the novel, destroy the reputation of the reason-driven ideals of the Enlightenment? The question is prominently exposed in the novel, but it would be foolhardy to suggest that Pynchon gives an answer. Once again, the reader is asked to consider the paradox and tension of the Enlightenment movement, but left to his or her own devices to make a conclusion. This is the difficulty of the novel, but at the same time, it is the mystery and joy of Pynchon's expansive narrative as well.

There is an undeniable anxiety one gets while reading *Mason & Dixon*. Perhaps this is due to the novel's daunting, encyclopedic prose, or maybe it is how Pynchon manipulates characters and emotion in a particularly unsettling way; the sly, prophetic remarks of a talking dog, the near-horrific cheers of children enjoying violence, and the constant paranoia of a Jesuit global conspiracy all slowly build up the reader's anxiety and hope for resolution. Yet, the reader is only given closure on the life Mason, one of the title protagonists, but also a man that is caught between the dichotomy that has been established, between reason and emotion, science and spiritualism, a man who was "convinc'd that he [had] been set upon a Pilgrimage by Forces beyond his ability at present to reach, -a Station of the Cross being his preferr'd Trope" (158). In the end, Mason comes to realize the frailty of life, interpretation, and history. In a passage already quoted the reader finds that Mason's realizations toward the end of his life is one of pessimism, death, and darkness, but also caught, caught between a world of delineation and lines and one of silence, spirituality, and things unimagined:

Mason has seen in the Glass, unexpectedly, something beyond simple reflection, -outside of the world,- a procession of luminous Phantoms... There may be found, within the malodorous Grotto of the Selves, a conscious Denial of all that Reason holds true. Something that knows unarguably as it knows Flesh is sooner or later Meat, that there are Beings who are not wise, or spiritually advanced, or indeed capable of Human kindness, but ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting, -known only to the blood-scented deserts of the Night, - and any who see them out of Disguise are instantly pursued,- and none escape, however long and fruitful be the years till the Shadow creeps 'cross the Sill-plate, its Advent how mute. Spheres of Darkness, Darkness impure,-

Plexities of Honor and Sin we may never clearly sight, for when we venture near they fall silent, Murdering must be silent, by Potions and Spells, by summonings from beyond the Horizons, of Spirits who dwell a little over the Line between Day and its annihilation, between the number'd and the unimagin'd,- between common safety and Ruin ever Solitary.... (769)

This is a place of natural humanity, a naturalness that is dark and gritty, but also true for Mason. He is struggling between a world ruled by rationality and a world ruled by spirituality. This is reflected in the next lines in which the Royal Society is divided into 'Men of Science' and 'Macaronis.' But, where is Mason placed in this dichotomy? The surveyor dies safely in the presence of his family, his story brought to resolution, quite uncharacteristically of Pynchon narratives. The novel does not end by resolving the implicit dispute over the Enlightenment's legacy; it does not conclude that the faults of the 18th-Century Enlightenment sentiment was wholeheartedly flawed and that the contemporary world system should scrap any semblance of the era, and it certainly does not suggest that the 18th-Century was an era of progressivist success as Pinker would. Instead, *Mason & Dixon* resolves with the death of the character who struggled with the inconsistencies and contradictions of the period, who began to recognize how the world develops around ideals like liberty, progress, technology, who ultimately is found in the space in between, undetermined, unresolved.

If there is anything to take away from this project, it is the consideration of delineation and reductionism as negative forces in and around *Mason & Dixon*. Delineation is the destruction of the 'in-between,' an ignorance to multiplicity and a complacency in the ease of taking a side. If Pynchon shows the reader anything, it is that ease of reductionism cannot be maintained. A reductive understanding of history is another form of this destructive delineation. The reduction of past to events, patterns, and analytics, in the same way that other scientific studies utilize a scientific method, is downplayed in Pynchon's work. And finally, the novel, as a literary counterpart to history, reduces the possibility of meaning through a selection of language. Perhaps Mason summarizes the delineation best when he states, "As if... there were no single Destiny... but rather a choice among a great many possible ones, their number steadily diminishing each time a Choice be made, till at last 'reduc'd,' to the vents that do happen to us, as

we pass among 'em, thro' Time unredeemable, -much as a Lens, indeed, may receive all the Light from some vast celestial Field of View, and reduce it to a single Point." (45). Delineation works as a lens -perhaps an allusion to Franklin's bifocals,- which focuses and reduces possibility. The novel, too, reduces the history of the Mason-Dixon line, but also emphasizes the choices one has as a reader of history, not only by the novel's narrative complexity and lengthy discourse, but also through its treatment of the 18th-Century. It acts as a lens looking onto the Enlightenment, but one of multiplicity, like Franklin's bifocals.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

4.1 “All is Failure”

Beyond the serious discussion about the Enlightenment movement and its legacy today from scholars like Pinker, Bhabha, Fry, and others, there are also cultural movements that continually bring up concerns about progressive rationalism, scientific paranoia, and delineation. Most prominently, in response to the authoritative power of the scientific community, small groups have begun to surface, questioning generally-accepted aspects of the physical world. Dating back to the early 20th-Century, “flat-earth societies’ have once again gained popularity in the internet era in an effort to both infuriate social media participants and to deny a reality they see as unprovable.⁷ Similarly, in response to the growing concern about the global environment and committees like the UN Climate Change Summit, many have begun to question the authority of the scientific communities responsible for such movements and deny the existence of climate change in the face of overwhelming evidence.⁸ Further, there is a general spread of ‘anti-scientific’ sentiment in popular culture, which has culminated in specific movements like ‘paleo diets’ and ‘anti-vaxxers.’^{9 10} All of these movements represent an extreme end of the Enlightenment legacy spectrum, an ardent denial of the world-system and power structure that formed during the Enlightenment era and that has persisted into the 21st-Century, a structure that holds reason, rationality, and progress above all else. The contemporary cultural, social, political, and ecological systems of the world are connected to and working through the ideologies developed in the 18th-Century and the mere presence of these ‘anti-scientific’ movements stands as a testament to relevance of the Enlightenment controversy, that the era’s validity and effectiveness is still very much up for discussion. Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* adds to this, not as a solution, but as a literary means to which one can develop a better understanding of the

⁷ There is even a well-developed and up-to-date organization aimed at mediating the “Flat-Earth Theory” and the discussion around it at www.tfes.org.

⁸ The Union of Concerned Scientists cites ten different, well-established organizations that actively speak against climate change and/or global warming that is caused by human activity (Global Warming Skeptic Organizations).

⁹ ‘Paleo diets’ refers to the contemporary trend to limit oneself to primitive food sources, specifically to anything humans would have been able to forage during the paleolithic period, in order to promote more natural digestive activity.

¹⁰ ‘Anti-Vaxxers’ refers to those who hold an deny vaccinations.

complex, elusive, and fluid qualities of culture. This thesis aimed to highlight this aspect of the novel and to shed light on the importance of the contemporary discussion about the Enlightenment, seeing the era not as a time gone by, but as a precursor to the world-system that is maintained in the 21st-Century. That is what is at stake; to be ignorant to the past is to be ignorant to the present, and Pynchon grants the reader access into the multiplicity of history, allowing one to witness cultural complexity.

Simply working through a concise reiteration of the entire thesis might bring this idea to a satisfying conclusion. First, the 18th-Century, more specifically the Enlightenment era, was defined as a movement which denounced the oppressive structure of religion and championed the ideals of reason, liberty, and progress. Further, as part of the motivation for the project, the Enlightenment's legacy in terms of its connection to the modern world has become controversial. Today, there seems to be a spectrum of thought, in which one can either believe that Enlightenment ideology is a positive force which brought about affluence, safety, and justice to the modern world, or one can join the relatively new stance that the Age of Reason prolonged injustices which have begun to resurface generations later. As has been discussed, thinkers like Pinker and progressive rationalists have been caught in this binary opposition with others like Bhabha and progress sceptics. Technological advances and statistical analysis have been set against redefined history and the plight of those not included in the modern world's successes. This preliminary work was described in order to establish *Mason & Dixon* in the contemporary anxiety over the 18th-Century. Further, the specific Enlightenment ideals of liberty and progress were considered in connection with the novel. From this, it is undoubtable that the intention of Pynchon's book-length investigation into the characters of Mason and Dixon was to subvert predispositions about the Enlightenment; as Dixon states, to put "our very Faith, as modern Men, suddenly in question" (319). Although an attention to liberty in the 18th-Century led to the downfall of tyrannical rule in the western world, the subtleties of *Mason & Dixon* suggest that the concept of liberty was never fully considered or defined. Racial injustices and the oppressive nature of both the scientific and capitalistic structures in the novel present the rise of equally tyrannical systems. Just as the reverend reminds his young audience, "*Liberty*, so unreflectively sacred to us today, was taken in those Times to encompass even the darkest of Men's rights,"

Pynchon also reminds the reader that ignorance to concepts that dictate a power structure can be the death of culture, killing it from its roots. Similarly, when considering the concept of progress, Pynchon's narrative suggests a redefinition of the world system that was founded in progressive rationalism. The Enlightenment brought about a new worldview, that humanity has been gradually progressing and advancing in a positively linear fashion. However, as J.B. Bury suggests, this progressive worldview has developed an illusionary end, that progress and advancement have become the end rather than the means to an end. In this way, progress has become a never-ending flight into entropy. This manifests in *Mason & Dixon* as an ignorance toward technologies like the Mechanickal Duck and the Watch, which represent humanity's failure to ask the right questions about morality, life, and purpose.

Considering the novel's subversion of Enlightenment ideals might place *Mason & Dixon* on one side of the Enlightenment legacy spectrum, the side which sees the 18th-Century in a negative light. Yet, the explications from various literary critics suggests that the novel can be taken in a neutral way as well. Concerning the author's previous practices, Tabbi shows that Pynchon's narratives are often dancing in between connectedness and displacement, that novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* must be taken in consideration of paranoia and a lack of resolution. Although it could be argued that *Mason & Dixon* has a satisfying conclusion in the death of Mason, the reader is continually reminded that the story of the title characters is merely one 'history' told by the reverend. The redefinition of history in the novel displaces all meaning from the primary narrative; any conclusions made by the reader must be taken with hesitation as the children remind the reverend of 'factual' history. Yet, for the reverend, this is the point, for "Who claims Truth, Truth abandons" (350). In this way, the novel never really "ends." There is a sense that the history of Mason and Dixon is forever in flux, that no one can ever really claim to have figured them out, or resolved the conflicts of the Mason-Dixon Line. Pynchon desires to show that history is less about what happened and more about how and why something happened, it is more about historiography. In this way, the novel defeats the binary of 'true or untrue,' and creates a third option, an 'in-between.'

Furthermore, *Mason & Dixon* displays the destructive power of delineation, particularly with reference to the Line and its uncanny ability to destroy innocence and carve up the newly

forming American identity. In addition, reducing the novel to any single motive can be seen as equally as destructive. To suggest that the novel stands on one side of the Enlightenment legacy spectrum or the other would be to suggest the finality of history, reducing *Mason & Dixon* to an opinion piece, either denouncing or uplifting the 18th-Century. The stance that the novel rests between the binary opposition set up by the Enlightenment legacy is further reinforced by the critics considered earlier. Through Clerc's deconstructive perspective, the novel can be read as a lens of multiplicity, seeing imagery like the Line as both a positive and negative force, one of destruction, but also one of order. Similarly, Cohen suggests that the prominence of the ampersand in the novel's title denotes a sense of connection rather than division, that the narrative of delineation is also one of discovery and development. Elias thinks the same when she suggests that Mason resists the inclination to delineate and finds the sublime in the borderless sky, an image of possibility. Finally, Cowart asserts that *Mason & Dixon* displays the tension and struggle between rationalism and spiritualism, never truly defining a place for itself on either side. So where does the novel end up on the Enlightenment legacy spectrum? It was the intention of this project to suggest that there is the possibility of reading the novel as a 'historical looking-glass,' recognizing the value of an incomplete or underdetermined narrative, one of multiplicity and ambiguity just as history is left for the reader to interpret. As Olausen puts it, "The moral emphasis in the novel lies, then, in this respect, not so much in intentions versus the consequences of acts, but more in the duty to discover what is actually willed" (98). In another way, the summarization by *The A.V. Club's* John Krewson fits well: "Whatever meanings and complex messages may lie hidden in Pynchon's text can, for now, be left to develop subconsciously as the reader enjoys the more immediate rewards of the work of a consummate storyteller. Pynchon is one, and he never quite lets you forget that while this might be an epic story, it's an epic story told to wide-eyed children who are up past their bedtime" (Krewson). *Mason & Dixon* is a story of complexity, a history of turpitude, a novel of possibility and discovery, rather than one of denouncement and finality.

Taking another look at Rev. Cherrycoke's conclusion that 'All is Failure' with a developed understanding of the novel's treatment of the 18th-Century may be a fitting conclusion to the thesis. In a way, the reverend's simple phrase summarizes the concerns that present

themselves in the novel and the greater Enlightenment controversy: was the Enlightenment a success, or was it all failure? Perhaps it could be suggested that Cherrycoke sees the Line as a negative force, a project which “[refused] to admit that America, in any way, may be serious,” reflecting Mason’s pessimistic sentiment early in the novel, that “All is struggle,” hoping that “somewhere in the World, Innocence may yet abide” (337, 67). However, the reverend is contemplative of this stance; his sermons, quoted as introductions to some of the novel’s episodes, hold a more optimistic sentiment. The reverend proclaims, “God is as sensible to us, as a Sun to a Planet. Tho’ we do not see Him, yet we know where in our Orbits we run... Surely if a Planet be a living Creature, then it knows, but something even more wondrous than Human Sight, where its Sun shines, however far it lie” (94). Cherrycoke is attempting to justify the newly forming worldview of enlightened thinking in that time with his inherent spiritualism as a man of faith, using astronomical terms in comparison to God. In a way, he is straddling the Enlightenment legacy spectrum just as the novel does, not giving in to the traps that may be held by the progressive rational movement, but also recognizing that his own traditional worldview may need re-evaluation in light of new discoveries about existence. Because Pynchon continually asks the reader to reconsider and redefine history, the tale of the Mason-Dixon commission seems to be in a similar position as the reverend, remaining in flux and contemplating the various intricacies of historiography. Yet, there is the creation of the anarchical Wedge that pushes against this, which seemingly highlights the creation of chaos and disorder. However, it could be suggested that it is the Wedge, an area of anarchy, paranoia, and the unknown that Pynchon wants the reader to remain in. It is safe there, a place that excludes binaries, oppositions, and resolutions, a timeless void where meaning has no foothold. Just as in Pynchon’s other narratives of double-coding, contradictions, and pastiche, the reader is once again asked to consider seriously the complexity and subjective quality of the Mason and Dixon story. It is important to remember that the novel “‘Twas but a Representation,” something Pynchon explains “repeatedly, till [we] quite lost count, having also ceas’d to know what the word meant anyway” (*M&D* 186).

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