Wesleyan University The Honors College

Art/Official Insemination:
Social Reproduction in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon

by

Edward Morgan Day Frank
Class of 2008

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in English

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2008

Contents

	Acknowledgments	iii
	Introduction	1
1	*Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)	6
2	*Vineland* (1990)	29
3	*Mason & Dixon* (1997)	50
	Conclusion	73
	Works Cited	75

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of my family and friends. It would also not have been possible without the Olin Fellowship, which gave me the opportunity this summer to tackle a very difficult writer.

In particular, I would like to thank Sean McCann, without whose dedication, instruction, and perceptive comments, my thesis would have been much worse off. Over the last two years he has pushed me and transformed my writing. His Faulkner seminar alone made my college education much more enjoyable.

I would also like to thank Khachig Tölölyan, who first sparked my interest in Pynchon when he let me into his *Gravity's Rainbow* class sophomore year (even though in hind sight my application was fairly incoherent), and who has continued to foster my appreciation of Pynchon through energetic office hour conversations and lengthy email back-and-forths.

I also want to thank Bill Kennedy, my first English teacher, who introduced me to J.G. Ballard's "Enormous Space" and who in doing so taught me the pleasures of reading.

My big brother Willie also deserves special thanks, because he was willing to read over my thesis when few else would.

And last but certainly not least, I want to thank Molly, who suffers me on a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute basis. She came up with the title of my thesis, and for this, and so much more, I am grateful.

Introduction:

"The America which should have been is not the America we ourselves live in": Social Reproduction in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon

Thomas Pynchon, one of the greatest writers in twentieth century American literature, completed three novels between 1963 and 1973 upon which his reputation largely rests: *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). "It was as though, in some odd quantum stroke, Hemingway died one day and Pynchon was born the next," another major post-World War II American writer, Don DeLillo, declared in a recent interview. "I was writing ads for Sears truck tires when a friend gave me a copy of *V.* in paperback. I read it and thought, Where did this come from?" (Howard). After ten years of fierce creative productivity, though, Pynchon fell virtually silent, contributing only a few articles to the *New York Times* and writing an introduction to his collection of previously published short stories. Eventually, seventeen years following *GR*, Pynchon broke his silence and, over the next two decades, wrote three more works: *Vineland* (1990), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), and *Against the Day* (2006).

A striking feature of Pynchon's oeuvre that critics have widely and inexplicably overlooked is how in the seventeen years between *GR* and *Vineland* Pynchon's writing underwent a profound transformation, a transformation that separates his work, it seems, into two distinct phases, one running from 1963 to 1973 and the other from 1990 to 2006. Not only do the later novels depart from the thematic and stylistic makeup of the early ones, but – more significantly – the later novels reveal Pynchon's severe rejection of the artistic philosophy behind his early

fiction. That is, in *Vineland* and *M&D*, specifically, Pynchon admits that his previous novels were misguided and sets out, in effect, to rewrite them.

A hint of Pynchon's dissatisfaction with his younger work comes across, explicitly, in *Slow Learner*, the collection of stories published in 1984, during the seventeen year silence that defines the two phases of his career. Most noticeably, the title of the book – *Slow Learner* – suggests Pynchon's critical attitude towards his earlier fiction. Yet the truly distinctive feature of the collection appears in its introduction, where the reclusive Pynchon, who has never done an interview and who refuses to have his picture made available to the public, gives an unexpectedly vivid glimpse of his personal experiences growing up in the fifties and sixties. The "new," more mature Pynchon that emerges in this introduction expresses regret and embarrassment about his early work. "You may already know what a blow to the ego it can be to have to read over anything you wrote 20 years ago, even cancelled checks," he jokes. "My first reaction, rereading these stories, was *oh my God*, accompanied by physical symptoms we shouldn't dwell upon" (3). But though the essay conveys Pynchon's harsh assessment of a few particular short stories, describing their author at an analytical distance, as if discussing an entirely different person,[1] in fact the retrospective seems to cover a large portion of his early work. The story "Under the Rose" in the book is reproduced for the most part in *V.*, and he practically calls *The Crying of Lot 49* a failure: "The next story I wrote was 'The

[1] He writes in the introduction to *Slow Learner*: "[My first reactions] have given way to one of those episodes of middle-aged tranquility, in which now I pretend to have reached a level of clarity about the young writer I was back then. I mean I can't just 86 this guy from my life. On the other hand, if through some as yet undeveloped technology I were to run into him today, how comfortable would I feel about lending him money, or for that matter even stepping down the street to have a beer and talk over old times?" (3).

Crying of Lot 49,' which was marketed as a 'novel,' and in which I seem to have forgotten most of what I thought I'd learned up till then" (22).

However, Pynchon's transformation becomes most apparent in the works themselves. The central preoccupation that each novel in the oeuvre addresses – and that best reflects Pynchon's shifting attitude during these two phases of his career – is social reproduction. Like many left-leaning thinkers in the decades after World War II, such as C. Wright Mills, Pynchon looked for the causes of social injustice at levels deeper than manifest coercion and exploitation. His fiction, in consequence, remains profoundly interested in discovering the obscured cultural forces that maintain an unjust social order and in figuring out why, as he puts it, "the America which should have been is not the America we ourselves live in" (Blurb). How societies pass on structures and values, and how societies mold people to fill the roles they are expected or needed to play, thus becomes one of Pynchon's main concerns throughout his fiction.[2]

By examining social reproduction, Pynchon places himself in a long line of major figures in European intellectual history, from Marx to Gramsci to Althusser, each of whom explored in certain ways "*the reproduction of the conditions of production*" (Althusser 127). Yet perhaps a more revealing predecessor to Pynchon's work is another artist who lived during a crisis in American democracy: Walt Whitman. Writing shortly after the Civil War, in 1871, Whitman noticed that America, instead of becoming a thriving democratic society made up of free

[2] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron first introduced the term "social reproduction" in the 1970s, defining it as "the reproduction of the structure of the relations of force between the classes" (11). However, social reproduction has been a key issue in intellectual history long before Bourdieu and Passeron defined it.

individuals, was growing increasingly corrupted and heading towards disaster. In response, he published "Democratic Vistas," a jeremiad in which he argued that the problems with American life could be found and corrected – though he did not use the terminology – through an attention to social reproduction. For Whitman, the institutions intended to educate American citizens were under traditional, undemocratic influences and failed to produce liberated and functioning individuals. "[T]he ecclesiastic traditions," he contended, "still hold essentially, by their spirit, even in this country, entire possession of the more important fields, indeed the very subsoil, of education, and of social standards and literature" (398). The alternative to these traditional institutions of social reproduction, Whitman concluded, was a new kind of art, a subversive form of social reproduction: "Our fundamental want to-day in the United States […] is of a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatuses, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life, giving it decision" (398).

Writing a century later, Pynchon begins where Whitman left off. Throughout his novels, Pynchon looks to uncover the nefarious state forces and institutions that recreate social hegemony, while also frantically searching for the best means of teaching people to become free, autonomous individuals who will be able to create an egalitarian society. Social reproduction, in a sense, functions as the engine of history in Pynchon's literary vision. It is both the general explanation for the disastrous condition of the world, and a force of power that, if harnessed for the good, would have the capacity to remake society.

But the alternatives Pynchon conceives to state power change dramatically in the two phases of his career; and the way he reenvisions subversive agencies of social reproduction from *GR* to *Vineland*, in turn, mirrors the way he reevaluates, in his later work, the most basic assumptions of the narrative and storytelling principles behind his early fiction. During the sixties, Pynchon's view of the evils and the potential of social reproduction hinges on his preoccupation with the terrible powers of the state, which he thinks are malevolent and oppressive and – at the same time, but less evidently – somehow capable of pushing humanity to overcome its traditional limitations. In the second major phase of his career, though, Pynchon's fiction reconsiders this preoccupation and arrives at different alternatives. Both in the stories he tells and in his narrative methods, Pynchon finds redemption in a less radical appreciation of the values of family, community, and tradition. That little noted shift in Pynchon's attitude is the subject of this thesis.

Chapter 1

Fucking, Done on Paper:
Family, School and the Text in *Gravity's Rainbow*

In February 1973, Thomas Pynchon completed *Gravity's Rainbow*, an unwieldy novel that in terms of ambition, complexity, and scope represents the zenith of his early work. Upon its publication, critics and readers alike went into a literary frenzy. For such a dense, uninviting book, *GR* was a success; it sold some 4,500 copies in paper and cloth combined, and its Bantam mass market-edition, published one year later, sold about 250,000 copies over the subsequent ten years (Howard). It received the National Book Award and the William Dean Howells Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters for the best novel of the decade, and it caused a stir in the Pulitzer Prize selection committee when the three-member fiction jury unanimously selected it for the award but were overruled by the board, who called the novel "turgid," "unreadable," "overwritten," and in parts "obscene" (Kihss).

On the whole, *GR* is a novel that defies description. It consists of more than 400 characters, it has a cosmographic span and contains a myriad of references ranging from military science to comic strips to literature, it employs and undermines countless storytelling conventions, and if it can be said to have a plot at all the book follows the misadventures of the hapless and cunning, the oblivious and ingenious Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop, an American whose erections coincide with the impact points of the V-2 rocket in World War II London, a mysterious connection that eventually sends him traveling across continental Europe in the months proceeding V-E in search of answers. But though Slothrop's trials appear on the surface to be the

key narrative thread running through *GR*, in fact the plot's main focus remains the Rocket, the technological idol around which all characters and subplots feverishly orbit.

For Pynchon, the Rocket represents philosophically the culmination of both humanity's desire and inability to transcend the entropic movements of the natural world, movements that inevitably lead to death, disorder, and a lukewarm universe. Less abstractly, though, Pynchon also depicts the Rocket as a symbol of how the military industrial state exercises an apparently inescapable control over individuals living in society, how "They" – pervasive and sinister military economic forces – exert power over the most fundamental aspects of daily life, from early childhood dictating the ways people mature and think.

And so reading *GR* it becomes increasingly clear that one of Pynchon's central concerns is the problem of social reproduction – or in other words, the making of individuals in modes that ensure the continuance of their society. Indeed, despite the vast canvas he paints and the nuanced depiction of power abuse he provides, the political troubles in the novel all tend to be secondary effects of the military industrial state's capacity to manufacture docile individuals. *GR*, it seems, proceeds from the realization that the traditional methods and institutions society uses to create free and functioning individuals go hand in hand with the state and are effective only for malevolent purposes: they are coercive rather than emancipatory, they are oppressive, not liberating.

However, *GR* does not simply expose the forces that control the manufacturing of individuals and submit to their limitless power. Rather, beneath the

otherwise hopeless surface of the novel a profound ambivalence exists, an ambivalence that suggests Pynchon has not totally abandoned the notion that certain existing social structures can help create self-realizing individuals capable of forming a more just and harmonious society. These conflicting, perhaps contradictory sensibilities appear, more specifically, in Pynchon's portraits of the family, the school, and the text – the three major agencies of social reproduction in *GR*. Though each comes to be associated with coercion and the state, in several resonant places they also present appealing alternatives to the nightmarish landscape of post WWII life.[3] Yet in the end Pynchon ultimately fails to rescue family life and the school system from the control of the military industrial state. Instead, he advocates a radical vision of freedom and decides to embrace the coercive and redeeming possibilities of the text, hoping *through* his novel to free individuals from local institutions and allow them to join the human race.

---

[3] Interestingly, the critical response to Pynchon's masterpiece in a way mimics the author's own ambivalence. Bernard Duyfhuizen's "Taking Stock: 26 Years since 'V.'" describes three phases of Pynchon criticism that had taken place up to 1989. The first occurred in the 1979 when Khachig Tölölyan published an essay encouraging scholars to move away from narrow readings of "entropy" and "paranoia" in Pynchon's work and to recognize how "hope" and "possibility" operate (Tölölyan 231). The second wave, according to Duyfhuizen, took place in 1981 when Thomas Schaub's *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity* urged critics move beyond overstatement and told them to study "the issues of stylistic instability, genre, literary mode, and characterization" in the novels as well as Pynchon's literary environment (Duyfhuizen, "26 Years" 76). The third phase, then, is defined by critics like Kathryn Hume, Thomas Moore, and Steven Weisenburger, each of whom explores how *GR* finds redemption through its use of mythological and religious references and structuring devices. Throughout this first sixteen years of academic response, and continuing into the new millennium, scholars have struggled to comprehend a fundamental aspect of Pynchon's writing: whether he is an optimist or a pessimist, a believer or a nihilist. This critical ambivalence mirrors the conflicting sensibilities depicted in *GR*, a world where humanity teeters on the cusp of the apocalypse, balancing between salvation and damnation.

I.

At the center of his complex, ambivalent portrait of social reproduction Pynchon places the family unit. For the most part, in *GR* family life seems deeply abhorrent. In earlier strains of literature and political thought, the family has tended to appear either as an appealing alternative to state repression or as a parochial institution one might escape to become a citizen of a thriving democratic state. What seems exceptionally striking about Pynchon's depiction of family life is the way he manages to show how the family and the military state are entangled and present no alternative to each other. But despite the inescapable conjunction of family and state interests, Pynchon also suggests in a few select passages that the "good" family may also exist, a family that offers his characters a chance for growth and civilization a chance for salvation. However, for Pynchon these alternative families cannot be sustained: they necessarily bring about hegemony, or they can only form just before the apocalypse, when the distinctions between chosen and unchosen, between elect and preterite vanish, and all of humanity stands together, as one, before God's judgment.[4]

Though *GR* presents a wide and extensive catalogue of failed marriages, abusive parents, and fragmented families, the most salient example Pynchon crafts to expose the problems of the family as an institution of social reproduction involves the

[4] Preterition is a theological concept central to *GR*. The term, which Pynchon adopts from the Calvinist doctrine, refers to those who are not among the elect, who in some way are excluded from the chosen people. In *GR* preterition is generally emblematic of all the intellectual and social divisions that organize modern life. Wherever he looks, Pynchon sees structures and social arrangements that, as in Calvinist theology, illegitimately seek to exclude and repress. However, tracing Tyrone Slothrop's roots back to Puritan New England, Pynchon also discovers preterition at the origin of the history of American corruption. Indeed, the Calvinist need to imagine a divine role for the elect by casting out sinful humanity is where Pynchon suggests the promise of America was sacrificed and the seeds of hierarchy were planted.

novel's "protagonist," Tyrone Slothrop. The central mystery of the text is Slothrop's relationship with the V-2. Although he never gleans the complete truth behind this enigma, Slothrop does discover that when he was a child, his family gave him to behavioral psychologist Laszlo Jamf in exchange for a Harvard education. After performing experiments on Slothrop's penis, Jamf went on to work for IG Farben where he designed Imipolex G, an erotic plastic used in the creation of the V-2. Thus Pynchon reveals how the ordinary, democratic ambitions of the Slothrop family lead to the creation of an impotent and powerless individual who is under the control of the state – his identity, his intellect, his desires all dictated by higher, unknowable business and governmental operations. "They were not aristocrats," Pynchon writes, "no Slothrop ever made it into the Social Register […] they carried on their enterprise in silence, assimilated in life to the dynamic that surrounded them thoroughly as in death they would be to churchyard earth […] the three American truths, powering American mobility, claimed the Slothrops, clasped them for good to the country's fate" (28).

At the end of *GR* Pynchon more openly expresses his resentment towards Tyrone's parents, transforming Broderick and Nalline Slothrop from ambitious citizens to super villains actively seeking their son's death. In the final pages, as Tyrone begins to dissipate physically and psychologically across the German landscape, he starts to hallucinate, in one fantasy becoming a cartoon hero whose missions are often foiled by a character named Poppa Pernicious, a transparent embodiment of his father Broderick's murderous desires: "[T]here is a villain here, serious as death. It is this typical American teenager's own *Father*, trying episode

after episode to kill his son. And the kid knows it" (687). Soon in Tyrone's mind Broderick and Poppa Pernicious grow more and more indistinguishable, and Nalline takes on a new role entirely: the narrator reveals that for Tyrone "[i]t's getting harder to remember either of them, as Broderick progresses into Pernicious Pop and Nalline into ssshhhghhh…(into what? *What* was that word? Whatever it is, the harder he chases, the faster it goes away)" (695). The word Tyrone grasps for, according to critic Steven Weisenburger, is "doubtless[ly] *Shekhinah*, the black symbol of maternal punishment and death in Hebrew and Kabbalistic mythology" (286). Earlier an actress named Greta Erdmann assumes the Shekhinah archetype and kills her daughter Bianca, and now Nalline Slothrop does so as well, seeking to destroy Tyrone, her son. As with the Slothrops, most familial relationships throughout *GR* appear murderous and to varying degrees dictated by the state – whether Greta and Bianca, Tchitcherine and Enzian, two half brothers, one of whom wants desperately to find and kill the other, or Jessica Swanlake, who ends her intense and passionate wartime love affair with statistician Roger Mexico to have kids with her husband, a government official named Jeremy, "The Old Beaver."

A more nuanced, developed expression of Pynchon's attitude toward family life, though, comes to the fore in his portrait of Franz Pökler, the German engineer whose family the Reich manipulates to facilitate construction of the V-2.[5] Before working on the rocket, Pökler is a devoted family man and uxorious husband – two qualities his wife Leni finds deeply annoying. Years later, after their marriage falls

[5] In his depiction of Pökler, Pynchon draws a very rough allusion to Werner von Braun. More significantly, *GR* makes the Slothrop and Pökler families analogous in order to downplay the political differences between the Allied powers and Nazi Germany, exposing how the military industrial state transcends national borders and how both nations employ the same methods of making and controlling people.

apart, Pökler assists in the creation of the V-2, and in exchange for his tireless efforts he receives permission from his commander, SS Captain Weissmann, to see his daughter Ilse once every year for two weeks.[6] Unlike his wife Leni, whose radical belief system allows her to move beyond familial bonds and see people as individuals – "'How can I be *human* for [Ilse]?'" she asks a friend. "'Not her *mother*'" (222) – Pökler's love for his daughter makes him a subject of the Nazi regime. Upon meeting Ilse for the first time in years Pökler falls into a reverie, imagining her as a "ward of the Reich" in an almost utopian world without war, where he, his daughter, and the Rocket could all coexist peacefully: "[S]ometimes Ilse whispered to him bedtime stories about the moon she would live on, till he had transferred silently to a world that wasn't this one after all: a map without any national borders, insecure and exhilarating, in which flight was as natural as breathing" (417).

Weissmann then harnesses Pökler's dreams and affection for his daughter to bring about the construction of the V-2, and in these episodes Pynchon further solidifies the intractable relationship between family and the state by associating Ilse with the Rocket. Commenting on his relationship with Ilse – or the girl who may or may not be his daughter – Pökler thinks: "A daughter a year, each one about a year older, each time taking up nearly from scratch. The only continuity has been her name […] They have used it to create for him the moving image of a daughter,

[6] Captain Weissmann, also known as Blicero, "one of the many Germanic nicknames for death" (Weisenburger 31), is as close as Pynchon gets to the representative face of the obsessive, deadly force of the military industrial state. In the final scene of *GR*, Weissmann/Blicero places his lover Gottfried in the "Schwartzgerät" rocket, firing it due north, into the mythical land of the dead. Virtually every character in the text searches for the Schwartgerät (number 00000), which contains Imipolex G and which may hold the secret to Tyrone's past. Furthermore, in the final section of the novel, Pynchon suggests that after the firing of the Schwartgerät Weissmann/Blicero's legacy lives on through the fascist political powers at work in late twentieth century American life.

flashing him only these summertime frames of her, leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child…what would the time scale matter, a 24th of a second or a year[?]" (429). The formulation of Ilse as a film child – she was even conceived after Pökler watched Greta Erdmann's movie – appears strikingly similar to Pökler's description of his work on the rocket only pages beforehand. Implicit in this association is Pynchon's belief that the family does not function as a natural set of relationships but rather as an artificial construction of the state: "Heinkels were also dropping iron models of the Rocket from 20,000 feet. The fall was photographed by Askania cinetheodolite rigs on the ground. […] There has been this strange connection between the German mind and the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement" (413). Both the Rocket and Ilse, Pynchon suggests, share a cinematic illusion of motion, both through Pökler's obsessive consciousness become associated with the calculus of Leibniz, and both under the watch of Captain Weissman function as unnatural agents for state control.

Eventually, Pynchon's suspicion of the family and the state becomes transformed into profound wariness, repulsion, even disgust. While on vacation with a girl who is apparently Ilse, Pökler and his daughter share an incestuous glance that reflects a more disturbing picture of family and state relations: "'Papi,' gravely unlacing, 'may I sleep next to you tonight?' One of her hands had come lightly to rest on the beginning of his bare calf" (427). Pökler responds to this offer, at first, by imagining a violent sexual encounter with his daughter – "He hit her upside the head with his open hand," and "he had dragged her up on the bed next to him, her dazed little hands already at the buttons of his trousers" (427) – an encounter that, strangely,

leads to his own liberation and a new, ideal family life in Denmark: "'Come on up, and take a look at your home! […] Yes, they're free people here. Good luck to both of you!'" (430). But rather than carrying out this plan of incest, escape, and personal independence, Pökler instead chooses to play "Their game" (430) and submit to state control, a choice that leads him to conclude: "It was the real moment of conception, in which, years too late, he became her father" (428).

The fatherhood Pökler assumes in this scenario is not natural, Pynchon implies; it is a product of political authority and therefore inevitably involves submission to control. That is, the official image of the family as peaceful and consensual, for Pynchon, bears little resemblance to actual family life, which is not peaceful or consensual at all, but covertly coercive and tied up with state interests. Moreover, the only way Pökler can free himself from the state's power is to engage in a brutal, incestuous relationship with his daughter. Pynchon, it seems, provides two choices for Pökler: either he takes on the role of father and remains in the power of the military industrial state or he lashes out, commits incest, and escapes. The preferable path to travel, Pynchon thereby suggests, is towards incest, towards coercion, towards beastly physical and sexual violence – not towards the shackles of the state. Paradoxically, then, the seemingly violent and coercive alternative to the family – rape and incest – in a strange way becomes consensual and a route to a new peaceful and free society.

Later, though, an alternative, universal vision of the family begins to surface, when Pökler has a transcendent experience and moves beyond his local, narrow familial affection to join a greater community, one where he becomes a human being

capable of acknowledging suffering and pain. In the final stages of the war, he leaves the rocket facility and goes to the concentration camp at Dora looking for Ilse, but what he finds instead is "[t]he odors of shit, death, sweat, sickness, mildew, piss," the violent side of the war he never saw, too busy thinking about the Rocket and his family: "All his vacuums, his labyrinths, had been the other side of this […] Pökler vomited. He cried some" (440). This instant of intense inner growth culminates when Pökler sees a woman still living in the wreckage of the camp. "Where it was darkest and smelled the worst," Pynchon writes, "Pökler found a woman lying, a random woman. He sat for half an hour holding her bone hand. She was breathing. Before he left, he took off his gold wedding ring and put it on the woman's thin finger, curling her hand to keep it from sliding off" (440).

Pökler's experience at Dora represents Pynchon at perhaps his most sympathetic, almost optimistic – the German engineer sees injustice and human suffering and responds with a profound act of charity. In order for Pökler to help this "random woman" he offers his wedding ring, symbolically ending his relationship with Leni and marrying the random woman, an act which weds him to all humanity. This dying woman becomes Pynchon's embodiment of a universal vision of humanity not simply because she is "random," but also because she represents the preterite and is found among the rejected and passed over – among shit, death, and darkness. In a sense, then, after Dora Pökler "rejoins" his wife Leni and becomes capable of recognizing and valuing human – not familial – bonds. Significantly, Pökler can only have this experience at Dora, after understanding his role in the military industrial state's abuse of power, surrounded by the charred remains of the dead. Pynchon thus

sees the family as a profoundly abhorrent foundation of communal order; however, by dissolving familial bonds he also senses the possibility of a larger, harmonious community, a community where distinctions between rich and poor, chosen and unchosen disappear, leaving everyone in humanity together, before judgment.

Pynchon offers similar striking moments throughout the novel in which an ideal, utopian community appears – but in each case he always presents an equivocation, a hesitation. The banana breakfast at Pirate Prentice's maisonette in the opening pages of *GR* – perhaps the most appealing scene in Pynchon's entire oeuvre – provides this picture of a "good" family. A group of military men congregate around the breakfast table: "Elsewhere in the maisonette, other drinking companions disentangle from blankets," Pynchon describes Pirate Prentice's friends coming to the banana breakfast, "piss into bathroom sinks, look at themselves with dismay in concave shaving mirrors, slap water with no clear plan in mind onto heads of thinning hair […] Now there grows among all the room, replacing the night's old smoke, alcohol and sweat, the fragile, musaceous odor of Breakfast: flowery, permeating, surprising, more than the color of winter sunlight" (10).

War and the presence of death are absent in these first pages: the men gather around the table, eat a meal together, and in doing so they form an ideal, but disheveled, democratic community in stark opposition to the nefarious and pervasive "Them." But inherently, then, this idealized collective contains the seeds of hegemony, because in order for it to exist there remains the need to distinguish between preterite and elect, between "we" and "They." In short, the banana breakfast is a family that cannot be sustained: only moments later Pirate learns of a rocket crash

and afterwards feels removed from his friends and returns yet again to the realities of life and the war: “A hundred miles of it, so suddenly. Solitude, even among the meshes of this war, can when it wishes so take him by the blind gut and touch, as now, possessively. Pirate’s again some other side of a window, watching strangers eat breakfast” (11).

In *GR*, the possibility of a functioning family, or community, cannot exist in modern life: a social collective either creates an “us” and “Them,” or it is universal and can form only right before the apocalypse. The Rocket, in other words, must always remind Pirate of his solitude, the counterforce must always be bumbling, ineffective, part of the larger system, and Franz Pökler can only feel at one with humanity among the dead at Dora. This is expressed most forcefully in the last pages of *GR*, when Pynchon reveals that the whole preceding narrative has been a film and that the reader is in fact sitting among an audience at a movie theater in 1973. Then, as the crowd sings a song and watches the bouncing ball the screen, a rocket crashes killing everyone. The final line of the novel asks all humanity to join together and participate in the movie theater audience’s apocalyptic song: “Now everybody –” (776). *GR* therefore appears profoundly ambivalent about the possibilities of communal family life, both exposing it as a malevolent agency of social reproduction, entwined with state interests, and expressing a lingering hope, a belief that an ideal, utopian family may exist which would be able to bring about self-realizing individuals. In the end, though, the alternative community cannot sustain itself, and Pynchon remains unable to save the family from the power of the military industrial state.

II.

Pynchon further explores social reproduction in his account of the American university system. Schools in *GR*, on the whole, fail to provide characters with a proper education. Rather than molding Americans into autonomous citizens and freeing them from the oppressive military industrial state, colleges and universities actively participate in the subjugation of the individual will. Yet at the same time, in the aesthetic style and content of *GR*, Pynchon also acknowledges the possible redeeming qualities of the school system, suggesting that an individual with a college education may be able to navigate the complex and tyrannical structures established by the military industrial state. Inevitably, however, as with his depiction of the family, Pynchon's ambivalence prevents him from endorsing schools as a liberating mechanism for social reproduction.

Pynchon's conflicting attitudes towards the school system emerge again and again throughout the narrative *GR*. Although the novel is often celebrated for its broad encyclopedic canvas, and although it contains some four hundred characters, Pynchon chooses to center his story primarily around young male college educated technical workers like Tyrone Slothrop, the German engineer Pökler, the British statistician Roger Mexico, and the Soviet technical intelligence officer Tchitcherine. Dramatizing the Second World War, Pynchon downplays the presence of soldiers and battles, instead choosing to focus on this kind of young educated man; each of the

text's central characters, it seems, has technical training provided by the state, and each in turn participates in – and sometimes fights against, though not effectively – wartime state bureaucracies. And so, despite the innumerable plots and subplots presented in *GR*, a consistent thread that runs through much of the novel appears to be the struggle that arises between the trained male technical worker and the bureaucratic apparatus he attempts to navigate.

Pynchon gives the most vivid and rich portrait of this conflict between technician and bureaucracy through Tyrone Slothrop. When Broderick and Nalline exchange Tyrone's penis for a Harvard education, their deal does more than place his sexual desires under Their control; it also means that his intellect and identity are cultivated by the larger, institutionalized, business and military driven academic world. Yet although the Slothrops' transaction appears to leave Tyrone helpless, at Their mercy, in fact his Harvard education gives him the faculties needed to research documents and follow the paper trail that leads to the secrets of his past. Tyrone's education thus both makes him a prisoner of the military industrial state and gives him the tools that can help move him towards self-discovery and evade Their oppression.

The overarching aesthetic construction of *GR* also echoes Pynchon's concern with the American universities system. Stylistically, the text's refusal to provide narrative resolution and its complex plots where *"everything is connected"* (*GR* 717) resist interpretation in a manner that, if not openly sadistic, then at least shows a certain hostility towards academia. Scholar Michael Bérubé points out the contradiction between Pynchon's work and its critical response: "Pynchon has also

been celebrated by academic critics because his work resists academic study, because *Gravity's Rainbow*, especially, parodies and indicts the institutional transmission of cultural products" (268). *GR*, however, also possesses a profound awareness of its own place relative to the scholastic world it critiques. By writing a book filled with a dense and extensive collection of historical, literary, and scientific references, Pynchon registers a tension in his own writing, showing an understanding of both his reliance on the school system and his dazzling ability to manipulate and achieve mastery over the information taught in universities. Pynchon's ambivalence manifests itself almost paradoxically: he aims to expose the military industrial state's control over colleges, but at the same time he writes a novel that can be understood almost only by readers with a college education.

Pynchon's own background further underscores this ambivalence and reveals his implication in the network of forces *GR* critiques. In 1953, during the Cold War, Pynchon started attending Cornell University, a time when government interests informed and affected the organization of the American school system. In fact, while on scholarship, before switching to the English major, he first studied engineering in a program created with national resources intended to help develop technology and defense needs.[7] Moreover, after his sophomore year at Cornell, Pynchon served a two year stint in the U.S. Navy then returned to school. Upon graduating, he proceeded to work as a technical writer for Boeing, an aerospace and defense corporation. He even composed the first draft of *GR* "in neat, tiny script on

[7] Lance Schachterle writes: "By supporting these technologies on an unprecedented scale, especially in America, the war effort supplied national resources for scientific and technological development. Fighting the war nurtured the development, not only of these new technologies, but of new relations among universities, industry, and the military to coordinate research programs. […] One of these linkages was Engineering Physics at Cornell" (131-132).

engineers' quadrille paper" (Weisenburger 1). To a certain extent, then, Pynchon's training as a writer and thinker came about as a result of the nation's defense needs during the Cold War, and this educational history, like the narrative content and aesthetic style of *GR*, reflects Pynchon's deep understanding of his own entanglement in the systems of power and control he himself condemns.

Ultimately, Pynchon does not fully *reject* the American university system. Rather, more accurately, it seems that he *fails to embrace it* as an agency of social reproduction. A college education, that is, may teach Tyrone Slothrop and Roger Mexico to elude and navigate the structures of the military industrial complex better, yet by the end of *GR* these technical skills do not save Roger from his helpless and trampled existence without Jessica, and they do not stop Tyrone from being scattered across the German landscape. With this understanding, Pynchon turns to a less formal and less institutionalized form of training: the written word, a medium through which he believes he can push individuals towards a vision of a more harmonious society.

III.

Paper, text, and the written word occupy a significant place in the construction and narrative of *GR*. Upon first examination, Pynchon appears profoundly wary of the forces governing the publication of print. Like family life and the school system,

paper in the novel remains closely linked to the military industrial state's attempts to control and oppress individuals. Under closer scrutiny, though, Pynchon's depiction of paper becomes increasingly complex and ambivalent. Though at certain times Pynchon emphasizes how paper exists as a coercive tool for the military industrial state, at other times he also hints at the redeeming qualities of storytelling, suggesting that its capacity to challenge and confront readers may in fact produce more "human" individuals and function as a benevolent tool for social reproduction.

Pynchon first introduces the coercive interests surrounding the creation of the printed word in his description of the Slothrop family. For generations, he explains, Slothrop merchants have been in the paper business: "[W]hat stayed at home in Berkshire went into timberland whose diminishing green reaches were converted acres at a clip into paper – toilet paper, banknote stock, newsprint – a medium or ground for shit, money, and the Word" (28). To Pynchon, the Slothrops represent a deeply unappealing quality of American life: they are parasitical merchants concerned with ambition, social mobility, and money, merchants who use up the land and move on, who exchange their son's life – his childhood, his identity – for a Harvard education. They are a family, in short, complicit with the military industrial state. And by highlighting the state's influence over the Slothrops, Pynchon in turn implies that the state dictates and controls the Slothrops' business dealings: the publication of print.

The Slothrop family, however, is just one example of how Pynchon connects paper with higher political and business interests. Enzian, a Herero in Germany working on the V-2, believes his people's destiny after the war is "to be the scholar-

magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it's all squeezed limp of its last drop […] this holy Text had to be the Rocket" (529). Also, Ned Pointsman, a behavioral psychologist trying desperately to understand and control Tyrone Slothrop, worships "The Book" – not of Holy Scripture but of Pavlov's writings (89). Furthermore, in the final sentences of "In the Zone," *GR*'s penultimate section, the narrator criticizes the Second World War for the way it destroys any feelings of camaraderie or male love: "But the life-cry of that love has long since hissed away into no more than this idle and bitchy faggotry. In this latest War, death was no enemy, but a collaborator. Homosexuality in high places is just a carnal afterthought now, and the real and only fucking is done on paper…" (627). For Pynchon, the ideal democratic communal relations between men established during combat in older wars disappears in the bureaucratic apparatuses of World War II. Instead, what emerges is a perverted form of love "done on paper," a medium Pynchon implies They use to exert control over the ways individuals form bonds and community, over the ways individuals reproduce, over the ways they fuck.

The military industrial state's capacity to influence the interests surrounding paper is also confirmed in Pynchon's own family history. When his Puritan ancestor William Pynchon published an anti-Calvinist tract, "The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption," it was banned in Boston for being too controversial (Howard). Similarly, Tyrone Slothrop's Puritan relative, William Slothrop, publishes a rebellious pamphlet that is burned: "He wrote a long tract about it presently, called *On Preterition*. It had to be published in England, and is among the first books to've

been not only banned but also ceremonially burned in Boston" (565). William Slothrop's book, which celebrates the unchosen and the ones passed over, is more than a veiled reference to Pynchon's own forbearer. It also shows how higher powers enforce and dictate the publication of the written word, preserving whatever material They find useful and burning whatever material They find subversive.

Yet a different element is also at work in *GR*, one that suggests the emancipatory and redeeming qualities of the written word. The novel's ambivalence concerning the creation of paper comes to fore during the Kirghiz Light episode, when Tchitcherine – an official in the Soviet government – travels at the behest of higher ups to the province of Kirghizistan, where he will transcribe oral traditions into written words. Tchitcherine reaches the village, and after listening to a singing duel, he laments the loss of the people's oral traditions: "Tchitcherine understands, abruptly, that soon someone will come out and begin to write some of these down in the New Turkic Alphabet he helped frame…and this is how they will be lost" (362). More significantly, Tchitcherine later hears "The Aqyn's Song," a song that represents *GR*'s central preoccupations concerning the printed word and explains the fictitious Kirghiz Light as a condition in which language is unnecessary, in which communication takes place without mediation: "It is told that a land far distant/ Is the place of the Kirghiz Light./ In a place where words are unknown,/ And eyes shine like candles at night,/ And the face of God is a presence/ Behind the mask of the sky (363). On the one hand, Pynchon conveys the beauty and tragedy of this scene by suggesting that through Tchitcherine's bureaucratic position, the Kirghiz Light and these oral traditions will be transcribed onto paper, a place both where their essence

will be lost and where, more generally, they will be subjected to state control. But on the other hand, Pynchon himself renders this poignant, moving scene through the printed word – through a medium he at the same time consistently reminds the reader is governed by darker interests.

Critics Brian McHale and Gabriele Schwab pose the most compelling account of the redeeming aspects of Pynchon's masterpiece, emphasizing how the text operates almost as a training manual. For these two scholars, the book represents a force of good in the world, giving readers an exercise in mental activity and making them, consequently, more able to participate in society. "In *Gravity's Rainbow*," Schwab writes, "the fictionalization of fact is shown to be as much a reality as is the actualization of fictions." Interpreting the novel, she goes on to argue, becomes a useful exercise for readers, allowing them to step outside of the "habitualized" ways of perceiving history and thus providing a creative, therapeutic exercise: "The deliberately induced loss of orientation, and the strategies that help the reader to overcome it constructively, have a utopian dimension" (109). McHale presents a similar formulation of the pragmatic qualities of *GR*: "For the effect of this troublesome novel is, finally, the salutary one of disrupting the conditioned responses of the modernist reader […] The readerly equivalent of this de-conditioning 'beyond the zero' is that state in which 'nothing is connected to anything' which Pynchon calls anti paranoia. It is an instructive, perhaps even hygienic, state" (*Postmodernism* 81).[8]

[8] McHale describes *GR*'s power to "de-condition" the reader through an examination of the opening pages of the novel, when Pynchon offers a vivid description of the evacuation of London during a bomb raid. During this scene, McHale explains, the reader is first urged to construct a fictional world, answering questions such as, "who is this 'he' whom the narrative does not find it necessary to identify? where and when is this Evacuation taking place? what screams across the sky?" However, Pynchon transforms this world pages later, revealing that it is all part of Pirate Prentice's dream. "With

According to McHale *GR* serves as a training manual in the way it constantly forces readers to reevaluate and correct their previous interpretations of the text, and according to Schwab *GR* enacts a kind of mental work out in the way its plot leaps abruptly through space and time. Yet more so than McHale and Schwab argue, the novel seems most therapeutic in its capacity to bring readers face to face with an apocalyptic and nightmarish world that promises to collapse on itself at any moment. This harsh and confrontational reading experience then pushes individuals to become part of the human race and to move away from simple familial affection. That is, like Franz Pökler's walk among the dead at Dora, when readers sit down with *GR* they come face to face with the deadly apparatuses of the military industrial state and understand what it means to be human. Though certain critics in the past have denounced Pynchon's writing for what they perceive as his out-right hostility towards readers, in fact as Schwab and McHale contend *GR*'s complex narrative style helps expand and confront – not mock – readers' ability to think and function in a society run by the military industrial state, proving that the novel does indeed possess a "utopian dimension," a vision of and a means to produce a better world, free of injustice and preterition.

Thus Pynchon explores paper as a means both to impose and escape social control. The written word in *GR* is at times a vehicle of corruption, capable of coercing readers and controlled by the same menacing economic and governmental agencies that exert influence over the Slothrops. *GR*, though, in the end harnesses the

---

this reversal begins the reader's reeducation," McHale explains. "[T]he reader, invited to reconstruct a 'real' scene or action in the novel's fictive world, is forced in retrospect – sometimes in long retrospect – to 'cancel' the reconstruction he or she has made, and to relocate it within a character's dream, hallucination, or fantasy" (*Postmodernism* 61-62).

coercive qualities of the text, intending to manipulate and confront readers in a manner that forces them to grow out of their narrow familial bonds and join a larger community free of chosen and unchosen, free of "we" and "Them."[9]

IV.

From its inception as a form in the late eighteenth century, to its full realization in the nineteenth century, the novel has been concerned not only with rendering a world of individuals, but also with teaching its readers *how to be* fully functioning individuals in a more just world. *GR*, it seems, takes the tradition of the didactic novel to the limits of complexity and intensity, expressing a profound wariness of community, family, the text, and the traditional forms of social reproduction while at the same time presenting itself to readers as a liberating medium. Significantly, the solution Pynchon arrives at – the text – looks on the surface more coercive than the alternatives it replaces. The novel, unlike the family or the school, has always been criticized by some for its power to manipulate and control the emotions of readers.[10] Pynchon, perhaps, allows himself to coerce readers

[9] Along these lines, it may be more accurate to say that in the final scene of *GR*, when the rocket crashes into the movie theater and in doing so offers the theater goers an "unmediated" glimpse of the military industrial state's power, the novel in fact *re*conditions – rather than de-conditions – the reader.
[10] Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, for instance, argues that the novel as a form coerced readers in the eighteenth century and led to the redefinition of social relationships and social hierarchy: "It is my contention that narratives which seemed to be concerned solely with matters of courtship and marriage in fact seized the authority to say what was female, and that they did so in order to contest the reigning notion of kinship relations that attached most power and privilege to certain family lines" (5). Conversely, Ian Watt describes the rise of the novel as the emergence of a medium for social good: "If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would only be an inverted romance; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it" (11).

because he feels justified by the prospect of a greater liberty that this coercion will produce. To use an earlier example, it is acceptable for Franz Pökler to hit Ilse because they will both escape to a better life in Denmark, free of Captain Weissmann and the Reich. Similarly, too, Pynchon's novel can be more coercive because he believes his storytelling will emancipate readers and lead to greater freedom, to a more just and harmonious society. However, while writing *Vineland* seventeen years later, Pynchon will inevitably look back at *GR* and its underlying philosophical principles and conclude that this understanding of social reform had unforeseen consequences.

Chapter 2

"All on their own": Discovering Family in *Vineland*

The prevailing critical view of *Vineland* that has emerged since the novel's publication in 1990 emphasizes two major assumptions. First, most readers consider the book a disappointment, claiming that *Vineland* lacks the complexity and artistic merits of Pynchon's previous work. One early reviewer complained that it "can be annoyingly simplistic" (Lehmann-Haupt), and others expressed similar frustration: "[O]ne must note that in view of our expectations the book is a disappointment" (Leithauser 7). Of course, this response contains a certain amount of truth. Coming out seventeen years after the behemoth *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland* weighs in modestly at just under 400 pages. Furthermore, instead of crafting an encyclopedic narrative filled with a wide range of historical, literary, and scientific allusions, Pynchon's fourth novel offers a more accessible reading experience, one which includes extensive references to popular culture and television.

The second assumption the critical view of *Vineland* highlights is more substantive, arguing that the book conveys Pynchon's nostalgia for the sixties, a time when he was at the height of his powers and when the counterculture had an opportunity to bring about change in American life. "With its laid-back style, American matter, and deliberately conventional sixties nostalgia," scholar Joseph Tabbi grumbles, "the novel is all too easily *placeable* in the field of current writing" (90). David Porush also calls attention to the book's nostalgic tone; for him, Pynchon "romanticize[s] the sixties, a period we can take to mean roughly the years 1962 to

1972, which neatly defines the period when Pynchon was most fertile" (23). Critic David Cowart further confirms this general consensus, writing that *Vineland* "looks backward to that summer [of love] – and forward to some Republican version of the thousand-year Reich. It reveals how the nation has allowed an earlier passion for justice to go dead, to be co-opted by a conservative backlash" (12).

Ultimately, however, both of these assumptions – and the prevailing critical view as a whole – miss the point of Pynchon's novel.

Vineland alternates between two principle time periods: the sixties, when the counterculture emerged, and 1984, the year Reagan ran for reelection. The book follows, primarily, the lives of aging hippie Zoyd Wheeler, his ex-wife, radical filmmaker turned underground government informant Frenesi Gates, their daughter Prairie, and their antagonist, Brock Vond, a malevolent federal official who seduces Frenesi in the sixties, turning her against her friends during a campus revolution, and who uses all of his power in the eighties to hunt down members of the Wheeler/Gates family. In typical Pynchon fashion, *Vineland* examines the lost promise of American life and contains a vast and disparate group of characters, all with cartoonish names. But what truly distinguishes the book from its predecessors is the story of Frenesi's reunion with her estranged daughter Prairie. Through this intergenerational relationship, Pynchon gives the novel a narrative coherence and poignancy that his earlier fiction resists, and brings the problem of social reproduction to the fore. Whether Prairie living in the conservative eighties can learn from the mistakes her mother made – and whether she can move on from the failed revolution of the sixties – remains Pynchon's central preoccupation throughout the novel.

In the end, *Vineland* does not present a simplistic and nostalgic account of American life. Rather, the novel shows Pynchon thinking through his earlier work and arriving at a diagnosis of where it went wrong. In doing so, Pynchon does not necessarily produce a lesser book, but a different kind of book altogether, based on different premises and with different aims. Nearing the millennium, it seems, Pynchon comes to the awful realization that higher political and economic forces no longer need manipulative agencies of social reproduction to create docile individuals; instead, individuals now readily follow and accept the government's authority, without conditioning. In *Vineland*, Pynchon thus rejects the philosophical and aesthetic motivations underpinning *GR*, in a sense admitting that he was wrong. More specifically, Pynchon understands that by confronting readers in 1973 with a narrative that brought them face to face with the deadly and nightmarish machinery of the state, his writing did not help stop the rise of Reagan and the right. So rather than envisioning an apocalyptic union of all humanity, Pynchon discovers in *Vineland* a less grand alternative to the evils of a corrupt society and reorients his storytelling methods to celebrate an exiled remnant, a subversive institution of social reproduction: the extended family.

I.

Pynchon most forcefully provides a critical evaluation of his earlier fiction in *Vineland* through the character Frenesi Gates. A radical artist in the sixties, Frenesi

works in a filmmaking collective called 24 frames per second (24fps), a group that aspires to improve society by aggressively pointing their cameras at political corruption and revealing to viewers its destructive and deadly power. In a sense, then, Frenesi's artistic ambitions appear consistent with the aesthetic construction of *GR*, and by depicting her downfall in the sixties – and her role in the disastrous revolution at the College of the Surf – Pynchon presents an extended meditation on his earlier work, retrospectively concluding that its vision of the text as a means to confront and train individuals was wrongheaded and, on the whole, unsuccessful.

Frenesi and the members of 24fps view documentary filmmaking as a practical tool, capable of exposing the government's abuse of power to American citizens. "They went looking for trouble, they found it, they filmed it, and then quickly got the record of their witness someplace safe," Pynchon writes. "When power corrupts, it keeps a log of its progress, written into that most sensitive memory devise, the human face. Who could withstand the light? What viewer could believe in the war, the system, the countless lies about American freedom, looking into these mug shots of the bought and sold?" (195). Like *GR*, which intends to train readers by bringing them up close to the devastating force of the military industrial state, Frenesi and 24fps believe that film can confront the evils of government head on, giving viewers a glimpse of power abuse and corruption. With this challenging and stimulating approach to art, both *GR* and 24fps feel they can enlighten individuals, improve society, and end the fascist and tyrannical interests operating in American life.

Through the film collective's manifesto, then, Pynchon first introduces his critique of *GR*'s approach to social reform. 24fps, he reveals, forms out of an even more radical film group, one that associates the subversive powers of the camera with violent resistance: "Frenesi and the Pisks had taken over what was left of the Death to the Pig Nihilist Film Kollective, based in Berkeley, a doomed attempt to live out the metaphor of movie camera as weapon […] [They] had put some of the language of their old manifesto into 24fps's new one – 'A camera is a gun. An image taken is a death performed'" (197). For Pynchon in the nineties, the radical members of 24fps in the sixties unwittingly embrace the violence they believe they are resisting; they wish to seize and assert power over the government but fail to understand how wielding this power eventually leads to their own corruption and their own demise.

In fact, the central event of the narrative, the event that affects the lives of every character described in *Vineland*, occurs when 24fps records the revolution at the College of the Surf and in doing so undermines it and becomes a tool manipulated by the government.[11] The revolution initially arises after a large body of students, led by a math professor named Weed Atman, decides to secede from the United States and start a new country, the People's Republic of Rock and Roll. Upon her arrival at the college, Frenesi meets Brock Vond, who soon turns her against the collective and

[11] Through the revolution – and through Zoyd and Frenesi's relationship – Pynchon seems to allegorize the brief union of the New Left and the counterculture, which eventually splintered in the mid-to-late sixties as militant radicals took over the movement and countercultural types drifted away. Pynchon's critical attitude towards the radical elements in the New Left – which, if *GR* is any indication, he himself was part of – seems consistent with the views of historians like James Miller, who writes: "The New Left was obviously in some respects a dead end – indeed, for many years I did not want to think about the Sixties at all, since I had grown ashamed of my youthful naiveté. At the same time, as a mood of smug tranquility began to settle over the political culture of the United States in the early Eighties, I found myself increasingly uncomfortable with both the neoconservative scorn and the facile nostalgia that have typified popular attitudes about the sixties" (17). Pynchon's allegory mirrors Miller's sentiments and seems particularly significant because it reflects how in reevaluating his political views in the nineties, Pynchon in turn reevaluates his literary practices.

convinces her to spread rumors about Weed Atman and put him on camera. "'We're going to be filming it,'" Frenesi tells Brock, "'Once we have him on film, whether he lies or whether he confesses, he's done for, it doesn't matter'" (240). Frenesi puts Weed in front of the camera, and Brock's plan works: after a moment of intense confusion the leader of the revolution is shot by one of his former friends, Rex. The town then erupts into violence and the People's Republic of Rock and Roll self-destructs: "Weed was on his face with his blood all on the cement, the shirt cloth still burning around the blackly erupted exit, pale flames guttering out, and Rex was staring into the camera, posing, pretending to blow smoke away from the muzzle of the .38" (246).

The glimpse 24fps provides of the state's deadly machinery does not train viewers to recognize and avoid injustice. It does not, in other words, bring about a kind of therapeutic exercise, like *GR* attempts to do. Instead, the glimpse *attracts* people like Frenesi to violence and injustice, drawing them into the state's power, not away from it. For Pynchon, therefore, Frenesi represents the dangers of radicalism and the mistakes of his past storytelling convictions: at the beginning of the novel she is in love with the possibilities of revolutionary imagery and violence, but in the end she is seduced by the evil power she wants to defeat.

II.

Pynchon further reflects on the consequences of his earlier work in the text's depiction of Brock Vond, a character whose federal job consists of conceiving, building, and filling re-education camps. Through Vond's program, which aims to turn radicals into conservatives, dissidents into informants, Pynchon once again explores how the government produces docile individuals by attempting to control the family and the school in American life. Yet the camps also reflect a profound shift in Pynchon's approach to social reproduction, a shift that reveals, once again, how *Vineland* reconsiders and reimagines the key issues presented in *GR*.

The concentration camp has been a long-running preoccupation for Pynchon. Horrible versions of it show up in his earlier fiction, during Franz Pökler's walk among the dead at Dora in *GR* and during Kurt Mondaugen's story of the German extermination of the Herero in *V.*. In both cases, Pynchon implies that the concentration camp is an emblematic face of the twentieth century, symbolizing the death drive of modern state power.[12] Camps, these novels suggests, do more than manufacture a mass numbers of dead bodies; they also represent the place where the energies of industrial production and bureaucratic government are heading. In *Vineland*, though, Pynchon offers a different picture of the concentration camp, bringing social reproduction to the fore and emphasizing how the nightmare of state power is *not* a movement towards death and destruction, but rather a softer, more insidious coercion: that is, the concentration camp now reveals the state's awful power to educate and – more importantly – *mis*educate citizens.

[12] In this way Pynchon seems in line with other late twentieth century thinkers like Hannah Arendt (6) and Zygmunt Bauman (18), both of whom view the concentration camp as a key representation of twentieth century state power.

Brock Vond centers his re-education program around the belief that deep underneath the revolutionary tendencies displayed by the youth in sixties America, there lingers a desire for order and for a larger family. "While the Tube was proclaiming youth revolution against parents of all kinds and most viewers were accepting this story," Pynchon's narrator explains, "Brock saw the deep – if he'd allowed himself to feel it, the sometimes touching – need only to stay children forever, safe inside some extended national Family. The hunch he was betting on was that these kid rebels, being halfway there already, would be easy to turn and cheap to develop. […] They needed some reconditioning" (269). The embodiment of federal interests in the novel, Brock recognizes the real and "touching" connections that can be established through family life. But rather than embracing its redeeming qualities, Brock manipulates familial structures, hoping by integrating the rebellious youth into a larger "national Family," the government can recondition individuals to act more submissively and follow prevailing notions of acceptable behavior. Thus like *GR*, *Vineland* continues to emphasize how higher forces attempt to use family life as a means to subjugate and control citizens.

The re-education camps also reaffirm *GR*'s suspicion of the national interests infiltrating the school system. Indeed, the name of the program highlights its status as a type of school: "[Brock] was up to have a look at the physical plant and inspect the population of his Political Re-Education Program, or PREP" (268). The naming of Brock's fascist re-education camps "PREP" appears to suggest, on a certain level, Pynchon's belief that all preparatory schools re-educate individuals to behave more in-line with government interests. Brock's description of the camps also continues to

develop the connection between PREP and regular schools. "'How do you like our campus?'" Brock jokes savagely with Frenesi, his prisoner. "'Full athletic program, chaplain's office with a minister, a priest, *and* a rabbi, maybe even a few rock concerts'" (273). Despite his malice and sarcasm, Brock's willingness to describe the program as a kind of college campus remains significant, linking PREP with the entire school system in America. In fact, once reconditioned, the prisoners are often integrated into universities, further allowing the government to control and undermine revolutionary activities: "[I]n addition to immunity from the law, another selling point for hiring on would turn out to be this casual granting of the wish implied in the classical postcollegiate Dream of Autumn Return, to one more semester, one more course credit required, another chance to be back in school again" (269).

But though in his depiction of Brock's re-education program Pynchon expresses, as in *GR*, a deep suspicion of the interests governing family life and schools, at the end of *Vineland* Reagan cuts funding from the PREP program, an act which signals a transformation in Pynchon's writing. One of Zoyd's rivals, a DEA agent named Hector, delivers Frenesi the news about Brock's camps: "'[D]id you know he took it away from Brock too? Imagine how pissed off he must feel! Yeah, PREP, the camp, everythín, they did a study, found out since '81 kids were comín in all on their own askín about careers, no need for no separate facility anymore'" (347). In 1973, the government's ability to reproduce docile individuals, for Pynchon, could be overcome through art which challenged and confronted the reader. By 1990, though, the government no longer needs to manipulate the agencies of social reproduction to cultivate submissive citizens – citizens follow predominant rules and

orders “all on their own.” Pynchon therefore further concedes that *GR* did not help prevent the rise of fascism and Reagan in America, and thus suggests that the aesthetic and philosophical factors driving his early fiction throughout the sixties and seventies were mistaken.

The prevailing critical consensus of *Vineland*, which sees the novel as a nostalgic longing for the lost hope and possibilities of the sixties, thereby fails to understand Pynchon’s harsh critique of both his earlier work and the counterculture that emerged during the time period. Critic Edward Mendelson gives an insightful and compelling rebuttal to the critical consensus: “The contrast between the achingly nostalgic tone of the story and the harsh judgment of its content is *Vineland*’s most calculatedly unsettling quality. The effect is designed to educate the reader away from the nostalgia that the book itself evokes. *Vineland* adopts the nostalgic wish of its early chapters precisely in order to expose the delusion and fantasy of those wishes later” (44). As Mendelson argues perceptively, Pynchon refuses to celebrate the sixties blindly, instead warning readers against easy nostalgia and teaching them to understand where he went wrong. *Vineland* almost explicitly condemns sixties nostalgia when Hector tries to sell Frenesi’s life story to the film industry. Hector and a producer named Ernie, it turns out, want to make a movie about her because both have “‘been waitín years for the big Nostalgia Wave to move along to the sixties […] Our dream, Ernie’s and mine, is […] to make a Film about all those long-ago political wars, the drugs, the sex, the rock an’ roll’” (51). Hector’s movie pitch forcefully conveys Pynchon’s suspicion of sixties nostalgia, connecting it with commercial interests, not with a longing sense of what could have been.

In *Vineland*, Pynchon thus rejects the beliefs that led to the creation of *GR*, admitting that his conception of social reform in 1973 was misguided and, in the end, ineffective. Almost every character in the novel walks around Northern California with wounds from the sixties, whether Zoyd, Frenesi, or the Thanatoids, a community of people who occupy an uncertain space between life and death, comprised mostly of Vietnam veterans and victims of the failed revolution at the College at the Surf, like Weed Atman. However, with his realization that the counterculture of the sixties failed and that the American government no longer needs to manipulate agencies of social reproduction to produce submissive citizens, Pynchon also rediscovers, in Frenesi's family, an alternative to state oppression.

III.

Even though by the end of *Vineland* family life appears positive and contrasts starkly with the Slothrops and Pöklers of *GR*, Pynchon still refuses to hold it up as an incorruptible alternative to state oppression. Instead, for Pynchon, the family remains at a moment of crisis in contemporary American society: it is fragile, oftentimes fragmented, and constantly in danger. However, in the most poignant and compelling example of familial relations in *Vineland* – Frenesi and Prairie's reunion – Pynchon suggests that a particular kind of family can produce self-realizing individuals and can salvage a sense of hope in a world overrun by fascist political and economic forces. In other words, Pynchon no longer seeks to create free individuals or

complete humanity; rather, he values small, genealogical communities, and the climactic moments of the novel involve rediscovering family and the value of parents and genealogy.

Somewhat ironically, Pynchon bases his alternative vision of American life on some of the qualities that the Reagan revolution had urged on the public as an alternative to the state – family, tradition, and child rearing. On a certain level, in fact, Pynchon even appears to accept a conservative critique of liberal parenting, suggesting that it fosters selfishness, social decay, and the breakdown of the familial order. For instance, most of the adult characters in *Vineland* are divorced, including Zoyd and Frenesi, Frenesi's radical parents Sasha and Hub Gates, Hector, Weed Atman, and Takeshi, a major character who works as a karmic insurance adjustor. Furthermore, familial abuse occupies a prominent place in the text. Frenesi's best friend from 24fps, the ninjette DL Chastain, has a violent father named Moody, a veteran too scared to hit DL but more than willing to beat her mother, Norleen. Prairie's best friend, Ché, whose grandparents worked in Hollywood with Sasha and Hub Gates, also comes from an abusive family: Ché has sex with her mother's lecherous and belligerent boyfriend, Lucky – and yet "when her mom found out about it she never brought [it] up to Lucky's face, turning on Ché instead" (329). Perhaps what is more surprising than Pynchon's right-leaning critique of family life, though, is how at this stage in his career child abuse, family violence, divorce, and neglect are all meaningful subjects. Earlier, in *GR*, they were not: when Leni Pökler leaves her daughter Ilse, Pynchon celebrates her freedom and her independence from narrow

social constraints. When Frenesi first walks out on Prairie, however, Pynchon emphasizes how damaging and emotionally disturbing this abandonment is.

Indeed, through the ups and downs of Frenesi and Prairie's relationship, Pynchon offers a rich exploration of the problematic and redeeming qualities of family life; and in their eventual reunion, he discovers the family as an appealing communal structure, capable of opposing state power. After Prairie's birth, Zoyd experiences a new sense of purpose: "[T]he baby with both eyes open now looking right at him with a vast, an unmistakable recognition […] This look from brand new Prairie – oh, you, huh? – would be there for Zoyd more than once in years to come" (285). For Frenesi, however, motherhood seems like an awful way to live, allowing the baby Prairie to suck away her life, independence, and her value to society. Upon giving birth, she suffers terrible postpartum depression: "No amnesia, no kind leaching bath of time would ever take from her memories of descent to cold regions of hatred for the tiny life, raw, parasitic using her body through wearying months and now still looking to control her" (286). During this period of despair, after betraying 24fps and hiding from Brock, Frenesi believes that Prairie condemns her to a bland, bourgeois suburban life: "The baby was perfect cover, it made her something else, a mom, that was all, just another mom in the nation of moms, and all she'd ever have to do to be safe was stay inside that particular fate […] Prairie could be her salvation, pretending to be Prairie's mom the worst lie, the basest betrayal" (292).

Throughout her postpartum depression, Frenesi also envisions Brock coming to her house, giving her a way out of motherhood and an opportunity to regain her independence. "'This is just how they want you,'" she imagines Brock telling her,

"'an animal, a bitch with swollen udders lying in the dirt, blank-faced, surrendered, reduced to this meat, these smells…'" (287). Rather than performing the basic duties of a mother, Frenesi wants to join Brock Vond and become a self-sufficient member of the national family. In fact, she eventually cheats on Zoyd with Brock and returns to the underground as an informant. And though later she leaves Brock, marries another informant and has a son, since she remains under the protection of the government and refuses to surrender her freedom and autonomy to her new family, during this time she never fully succeeds in breaking free of the national family. Where in *GR* the way to escape the state's oppression is to become a radically independent, self-realizing human being, in *Vineland* there is a price to pay for such freedom by mothers *and* daughters. Along similar lines, Pynchon suggests that Frenesi's personal independence is no longer a viable alternative to the traditional bourgeois family that turns women solely into mothers. Instead, Pynchon embraces an older alternative social structure: the extended family.

Only at the end of the novel, in fact, when Frenesi returns to her position among her mother's family, the Traverse-Beckers, does she effectively escape Brock and the state's control. The Traverse-Becker family represents a long genealogy of hostility towards the American government, starting with the marriage of two fiercely pro-union Wobblies in the early twentieth century, Eula Becker and Jess Traverse. When Eula and Jess lived in Northern California in the thirties, a member of the Employers Association cut down an old redwood tree that just happened to fall on Jess, crippling him for life. Every year the Traverse-Beckers hold a reunion in Vineland, and in 1984 Frenesi attends it with her husband Flash and her son Justin,

seeing her mother Sasha for the first time in years. The two women share a warm, meaningful silence: "Sasha looked younger than either could remember, and Frenesi glowed like a cheap woodstove. They sat […] so unwilling to break eye contact, as if one of them might disappear" (362). This strong non-verbal connection persists, and both refrain from talking, deciding instead to dance the jitterbug.

By rejoining the Traverse-Beckers, Frenesi breaks free of the national family and finds another community, one with an alternative history and one that will never fail to remind people of the government's injustices and its abuse of power. As Eula tells Sasha in her childhood: "'[A]ny time they see a Traverse, or a Becker for that matter, they'll remember that one tree, and who did it, and why'" (76). Finally, Frenesi meets her own daughter as well, and after sharing a profound, albeit awkward silence with Prairie, the three generations of women find a quiet place to talk and reestablish their connection as members within a unified family: "The girl followed them to a beer and a soda cooler beneath an oak tree, where they would sit and hang out for hours, spinning and catching strands of memory, perilously reconnecting" (368).

Having reaffirmed the matrilineal descent of the Traverse-Becker genealogy, the key question that Pynchon raises – and answers – in the final pages of *Vineland* is whether or not Prairie's new family life will help her move on from the mistakes her mother made during the sixties revolution. Leaving the Traverse-Becker reunion, Prairie tells her father that she feels "'totally familied out'" (374) and heads into the forests of Vineland with a sleeping bag for the night in the same way that Frenesi did during her childhood (305). Alone, in isolation, Brock Vond comes to abduct Prairie

by telling her that he is her real father; and though she initially rejects his advances and Brock leaves, later that night she invites him to return, pleading to the empty forest: "'You can come back […] It's OK, rilly. Come on, come in. I don't care. Take me anyplace you want'" (384).

Prairie's ambivalence seems to suggest that even the ideal family cannot totally protect its members from the power of government, that Prairie is doomed to repeat her mother's mistakes. Yet the next morning, still alone in the woods, she wakes up to her dog Desmond licking her face, the family pet that has been absent from the majority of the novel, run off from the house earlier by Brock's henchman. "Prairie woke to a warm and persistent tongue all over her face," Pynchon concludes his fourth novel. "It was Desmond, none other, the spit image of his grandmother Chloe, roughened by the miles, face fully of blue-jay feathers, smiling out of his eyes, wagging his tail, thinking he must be home" (385). With Desmond's homecoming, Pynchon signals the final reunification of the Wheeler/Gates family and suggests, more optimistically, that Prairie will be all right and that Frenesi's sins can be redeemed through the life of her daughter: in fact, pages earlier he explicitly describes how Prairie, in the future, will spend time with Weed Atman, making up for her mother's mistakes: "[T]hey were soon to become an item around Shade Creek, out to all hours among the milling sleepless of the town" (366). And so although *Vineland* begins with Zoyd rising later than usual one summer morning alone in a society run by fascists, his daughter already at work, the novel ends with Prairie waking up to a new world, one where a strong family – not Brock Vond – supports her.

In a novel dedicated to his mother and father, Pynchon therefore rediscovers the family as a subversive form of social reproduction in a country otherwise under the power of rightwing forces. "[T]his time entropy is not the only counterweight to power; community, it is suggested, might be another, and individuality, and family," proclaims Salmon Rushdie, insightfully. "These are the values the Nixon-Reagan era stole from the 60's and warped, aiming them back at America as weapons of control. They are values that 'Vineland' seeks to recapture, by remembering what they meant before the dirt got thrown all over them." Thus despite what Pynchon perceives as a crisis in American family life, there does exist in *Vineland* a sense that a specific kind of community, tied together by loose biological relationships and filled with interesting and disparate individuals, can sustain itself indefinitely, almost like a sitcom family. Through these persisting familial bonds, he believes that values will be transmitted and relearned while a karmic rebalancing act takes place over time, the kind Jess Traverse describes when he quotes Emerson at the family reunion: "'Secret retributions are always restoring the level, when disturbed, of the divine justice. It is impossible to tilt the beam. All the tyrants and proprietors and monopolists of the world in vain set their shoulders to heave the bar. Settles forever more the ponderous equator to its line, and man and mote, and star and sun, must range to it, or be pulverized by the recoil'" (369).

IV.

In keeping with his discovery of the family as a viable form of social reproduction, in *Vineland* Pynchon reorients his storytelling methods in a fairly dramatic way. Overall, the novel's comic tone deflates the more serious and lethal forces pervading the characters in *GR*. In other words, the power of the state, though still troubling, does not possess the same omnipotence that it does in *GR* – and more importantly, it appears less deadly than it did before. No longer embracing uncertainty or paranoia, no longer trying to bring readers face to face with the approaching apocalypse, Pynchon crafts a new kind of novel, one with poignant characters and story lines and one that contains a beginning, middle, and end. Fiction, in Pynchon's stylistic shift, still possesses subversive qualities, but its main purpose is to establish connections, to provide a history where one is lacking, and to remind readers of the significance of family life.

Pynchon articulates his newfound aesthetic methodology through his depiction of television. Despite the government's influence over the production and consumption of the Tube, television remains capable of educating and improving individuals *when it reinforces communal bonds*.[13] Frenesi, for instance, receives a political education by watching movies on television with her parents, two radicals abused in the Hollywood studio system in the fifties. "[S]eeing older movies on the

[13] Generally, television in *Vineland* is a medium used by the government to dictate and control citizens. Sasha and Hub Gates struggle to find work in the Hollywood studio system in the fifties, when Reagan and the unions "controlled anyone in the industry who'd ever taken a step leftward of registering to vote as a Democrat" (289-290). Later, during the revolution at the College of the Surf, Brock Vond turns 24fps' cameras on the revolution and, in doing so, ends it. Summed up by critic Joseph Slade in his essay on technology in *Vineland*: "What happened to the rocket happens to television; an instrument for change becomes an instrument of the status quo" (70). However, despite Slade's helpful comments, Pynchon does suggest in a few key examples that television still possesses the power to free and subvert.

Tube with her parents," Pynchon writes, "making for the first time a connection between the far-off images and her real life, it seemed she had misunderstood everything [as a child], paying too much attention to the raw emotions, the easy conflicts, when something else, some finer drama the Movies had never considered worth ennobling, had been unfolding all the time. It was a step in her political education (81-82).

Moreover, by watching the footage taken by 24fps over the course of the revolution at the College of the Surf, Prairie is able to connect with her mother, become more aware of the government's abuse of power, and acknowledge the failure of the sixties revolution: "With all the footage of Frenesi she'd seen, all the other shots that had come by way of her eye and body, this hard frightening light, this white outpouring, had shown the girl most accurately, least mercifully, her mother's real face" (262). After learning of her mother's past, Prairie becomes energized and has a new sense of vitality, feelings which fight against the entropic movements of the world: "[Prairie] felt like the basketball after a Lakers game – alive, resilient, still pressurized with spirit yet with a distinct memory of having been, for a few hours, expertly bounced" (261). Additionally, when Prairie finally does meet her mother, their awkward silence is overcome when Sasha, witnessing the reunion, breaks the ice by forcing Prairie to sing the "Gilligan's Island" theme song, a television show that connects them all: "'First time she ever noticed the Tube, remember, Frenesi? A tiny thing less than four months old – 'Gilligan's Island' was on'" (368).

Pynchon's attitude towards television, it seems, reflects the transformation in his storytelling style. Indeed, one of his central aims in publishing *Vineland* after

seventeen years of silence appears to be his desire to communicate to the next generation of Americans, who did not grow up during Vietnam and Watergate, the failure of the sixties counterculture and to suggest a return to the alternative genealogies of the extended family. As Prairie, whose name suggests the possibility of the open frontier America was settled on, learns about the disastrous revolution and the importance of family life, so too does the reader. Scholar N. Katherine Hayles describes how the familial relationship between mother and daughter in the novel acts as a metaphor that mimics Pynchon's relationship with the reader: "Running parallel to Prairie's quest is another search, that of the narrator, for his generation-gapped readers" (15). For Pynchon writing in the nineties, the purpose of art is to remind readers of his past mistakes and to reaffirm the value of familial bonds. He carries out this new storytelling style by embracing a different kind of poignancy than *GR*, presenting compelling characters, offering narrative resolution, and – on the whole – providing a more accessible reading experience.

V.

Ultimately, though, assessing the narrative merits of *Vineland* seems problematic. Detractors of the novel are quick to point out its disorganized and confusing plot structure: reviewer Carol Iannone writes that Pynchon's insights seem more "like the disembodied flashes of a drug trip or a psychiatric case history than the

insights that arise out of a coherent development of character" (59), and Brad Leithauser calls *Vineland* "a loosely packed grab bag of a book" (7). Certainly, the text's confusing narrative structure and its lengthy side story involving Takeshi the Japanese karmic insurance adjustor makes it difficult to disagree with critics like Iannone and Leithauser.[14] However, after stepping back and examining the entire Pynchon oeuvre, it becomes clear that *Vineland* acts as a transitional novel, a novel that repudiates the aesthetic and philosophical principles behind Pynchon's earlier work while paving the way for his most forceful and nuanced depiction of the importance of family life: *Mason & Dixon*.

[14] There are some reviewers who claim that *Vineland* is meticulously constructed despite its otherwise ramshackle appearance, like Susan Strehle's "Pynchon's Elaborate Game of Doubles in *Vineland*." These arguments, however, seem fairly unconvincing.

Chapter 3

"Snow-Balls have flown their Arcs"
(Re)Envisioning American Life in *Mason & Dixon*

Critics examining *Mason & Dixon* since its publication in 1997 have called it Pynchon's return to form, a novel that reestablishes him as a preeminent author in contemporary American fiction. "For those who were puzzled by 'Vineland,'" American writer T.C. Boyle proclaims, "[t]his is the old Pynchon, the true Pynchon, the best Pynchon of all. 'Mason & Dixon' is a groundbreaking book, a book of heart and fire and genius, and there is nothing quite like it in our literature, except maybe 'V.' and 'Gravity's Rainbow.'" However, according to certain reviewers, Pynchon's "return to form" is not just based on artistic merit, as Boyle suggests – it is a return to the ideas, themes, and complexities of the early novels. "The Great Big Question in Thomas Pynchon's novels," Michiko Kakutani writes, "has been: Is the world dominated by conspiracies or chaos? […] [In *Mason & Dixon*] Mr. Pynchon offers a variation on his favorite theme" ("Hits the Road").[15]

On some level, of course, the critics who see continuity are correct. Despite its arcane language and setting, *M&D* unmistakably bears the signature of Thomas Pynchon. Narrated from the LeSparks' home outside of Philadelphia in the late eighteenth century by Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, an unorthodox minister who is allowed to stay with his in-laws on the condition that he amuses their rambunctious children, the story follows from Britain to the Cape of Good Hope to America the

[15] See Donald J. Greiner's "Thomas Pynchon and the Fault Lines of America" (75), David Seed's "Mapping the Course of Empire in the New World" (93), Victor Strandberg's "Dimming the Enlightenment: Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*" (102), and Bernard Duyfhuizen's "Reading at the 'Crease of Credulity'" (133) for other scholars who see continuity, more or less, between Pynchon's earlier novels and *M&D*.

adventures of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two men – astronomer and surveyor, respectively – famed for their role in creating the Mason-Dixon line that cuts through the center of America. Symbolically, the line is familiar ground for Pynchon's fiction. Like the Zone in *GR*, pre-revolutionary America represents a chaotic landscape filled with danger and possibility, a landscape that greater, more sinister powers seek to impose order upon – in this case, the powers of reason and the Enlightenment. As Cherrycoke explains, "'[W]e were putting a line straight through the heart of the Wilderness'" (8). Throughout their trials, the partners also encounter quintessential Pynchonesque characters and fabrications, all of which are mixed with an obsessive attention to historical detail.

Something different is also operating in *M&D*, however, something quite unlike *GR* and the pre-1973 novels. "Snow-Balls have flown their Arcs," Pynchon begins his fifth novel, and with this line he invokes the parabola, a shape that occupies a significant position in *GR*, signaling the approaching apocalypse and the end of God's covenant with Noah. In *M&D*, though, the arc no longer carries this ominous prophecy of impending doom. Instead, it symbolizes the joy and playful exuberance of childhood – it represents nostalgia and the expectations that accompanied the founding of America. From his opening sentence, Pynchon thus explicitly sets out to transform, reimagine, and rewrite his earlier work.

And so, although the book contains talking clocks and famous historical personages, long meandering sentences and dark unknowable forces, sophomoric humor and outrageous puns, a robotic duck, visitors from the other side, order and disorder – in short, although it contains all the hallmarks of Pynchon's style, *M&D* in

a manner consistent with *Vineland* and inconsistent with *GR* is more than anything a story of homecoming, of family life as a benevolent agency of social reproduction. Dedicated to his wife and son, Pynchon's novel sets out as a rollicking historical adventure teeming with intrigue and conspiracy, but ends with two men returning to their families, where despite Mason and Dixon's joint disillusionment, through their children the expectation of what America *could be* is preserved and transmitted. As *Vineland* rejects the underpinnings of *GR* and gestures towards a different kind of storytelling aesthetic, in *M&D* Pynchon's newfound style achieves its full potential, discarding the apocalyptic outlook of his earlier fiction and instead adopting a more entertaining and comprehensible tone. In his fifth book, narrative reinforces and strengthens familial bonds, until the two – storytelling and family – merge together seamlessly to produce perhaps Pynchon's most moving and emotional reading experience yet. *M&D* in all of its subversive and benevolent splendor thereby rediscovers the capacity for possibility and hope in a modern world that is otherwise filled with impossibilities and hopelessness.

I.

At its most basic level, *M&D* is a variation on a classic story about overcoming grief and reestablishing personal connections. Over the course of the novel, Cherrycoke relates how Mason, depressed and in mourning after the death of his wife Rebecca, travels with his jovial and fun-loving counterpart Dixon across the

world unwittingly carrying out the underhanded and nefarious demands of the British Royal Society. Upon the completion of their job in America, Dixon returns to England, starts a family, and soon understands the evil forces that controlled his work and the creation of the line.[16] But for Mason, recognizing the injustice he was a part of takes more time; and significantly, it is *only after* Dixon's death teaches him the importance of friendship and community that Mason can reconcile with the family he left behind and see the evil in which he was complicit. Along the same lines as *Vineland*, then, to the more mature Pynchon family acts as a redeeming alternative to the oppressive powers that dominate society.

Throughout their journeys, Mason and Dixon encounter a wide variety of family life, ranging from the Vrooms in South Africa, to the ambitious British Maskelynes, to the Redzingers, Hynes, and Cresaps in America. Some families are eccentric, some have poignant stories, and some take part in the marriage of family and state interests that helps to define *GR*. In the end, however, Pynchon forms his most compelling portrait of family life in Mason's homecoming. From the outset of the novel Mason is in a state of grief, mourning the loss of his wife. At different moments working across the globe, though, he discovers that her ghost will visit him,[17] and these meetings reinforce his desire to leave England more often and abandon his two children, William and Dr. Isaac, with whom he has a terrible

---

[16] Dixon's intuitive awareness of social corruption and power abuse is explained, somewhat like the Traverse-Beckers, in his own personal background. Early in his life, Dixon witnessed the enclosure movement, and is much less trusting than Mason in consequence.

[17] Rebecca's ghost, like the Thanatoid community in *Vineland*, represents a fairly dramatic shift from Pynchon's *GR* sensibilities. In short, otherworldly visitors are not so *familial* or *personal* in Pynchon's early fiction. Interestingly, ghosts were a virtual hallmark of popular and literary culture in the last two decades of the twentieth century, from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to Tim Burton's *Beetle Juice* and countless others in between. *M&D*, it seems, is just one particularly sophisticated example of a wave of sentimental fiction in the late twentieth century that features stories of ghosts haunting friends and loved ones.

relationship. “His relations look on,” Pynchon describes Mason’s awkwardness around his sons, “variously grimacing, sneering, or pretending not to see, all recalling his difficulties, in particular with Dr. Isaac, in even touching his Sons. ‘I am ever afraid they’ll draw away,’ he confesses to his little sister Anne […] ‘Who would not be? Willy doesn’t remember me, Doc is too little’” (202). Mason’s reluctance to touch his children may not only come from their estrangement, his absence in their lives. It also appears to be a result of his wife’s death: Mason’s unwillingness to touch Dr. Isaac *in particular* is significant, since it was during his childbirth that Rebecca died. In fact, Pynchon later reveals that Mason may have named Dr. Isaac after the doctor who delivered him, the doctor who killed Rebecca (763).

But Mason’s journeys on the behalf of the Royal Society eventually end, and he is forced to move on from Rebecca, go home, and make amends with the boys he abandoned. What he eventually comes to understand after his return to England is that the camaraderie that sustains him abroad – his friendship with Dixon – becomes reconfigured and expressed through familial relationships: more specifically, Doctor Isaac, the son he blames for Rebecca’s death, replaces Dixon and provides Mason with a support system, a sustainable community. Doc accompanies his father on the way to Dixon’s funeral, and at one point they stop at a seedy bar that Mason immediately wants to leave. Dr. Isaac, though, displays the jovialness and good-humor that defined Dixon and wins over everyone at the bar. “‘Here then, Coves, ’tis Mason and Mason,’” he proclaims entering, “‘High Tobers of Greenwich, rambling Bearward, and Zoot Cheroot sez me early-and-late, or ’tis be-wary of the Frigidary, for the Gloak that quiddles. – Oh and Pints for all, that’s if we may’” (767). In one of

the most moving scenes in the novel, then, Mason and Doc attend Dixon's funeral. Neither blaming him for Rebecca's death nor refusing to touch him, Mason for the first time shares a profound moment with his son. Dixon's death thus serves to re-educate Mason and teach him the importance of family relationships. In other words, the friendship that nourishes Mason, that gives him support and care throughout his travels from Britain to the Cape of Good Hope to America, becomes transformed into a familial bond:

> The Boy he had gone to the other side of the Globe to avoid was looking at him now with nothing in his face but concern for his Father.
> "Oh, Son." He shook his Head. He didn't continue.
> "It's your Mate," Doctor Isaac assur'd him, "It's what happens when your Mate dies" (768).

In his account of Mason's visit to Dixon's grave, Pynchon therefore rewrites Franz Pökler's experience at Dora. Both characters are technical workers co-opted by evil institutions, and just as Pökler walks among the charred remains of the dead and finally understands his role in the destructive machinery of the state, so too does Mason attend Dixon's funeral and finally acknowledge the injustice he had been a part of while working for the Royal Society. "Mason has seen in the Glass, unexpectedly, something beyond simple reflection," Pynchon writes on the page following Dixon's funeral. Mason has seen "[s]pheres 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 the Day and its annihilation" (769). Only after traveling with Dr. Isaac to Dixon's funeral can Mason understand the dark and hidden powers that "summon[ed]" him to the "Line,"

the powers whose wishes he carried out while carving a line into the wilderness; after his revelation, he even confronts Maskelyne, his former colleague and the head of the Astronomer Royal (770-771). But where Pökler glimpses the apocalyptic results of state power and moves beyond his narrow familial affection, Mason stands in front of Dixon's grave and arrives at a different understanding of life altogether: with his son at his side, his best friend in the earth, Mason recognizes the importance of friendship and family life, finally returning to the son he had traveled to the other side of the globe to avoid.

The creation of a solid family structure does more than transform Mason's life, though; it also reproduces, in his children, the hope and possibility that accompanied the creation of America. Pynchon ends *M&D* with a conversation between Mason's two sons, William and Doc, both of whom stay in America after their father's death. In the discussion, they recall their shared childhood desire to follow their father to America:

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

Mason's life culminates when he returns home and recognizes the wicked Enlightenment agencies that transform the American wilderness into civilization. But for Pynchon, on the final page of his novel, Mason's understanding of America's corruption is secondary to the hope William and Doc experience. Though the

America the two sons expect to find will not, with its slavery and its excesses and its injustices, coincide with the idealized world they describe, in fact the promise in their youth of what America *could be* – a nostalgia that the opening sentences of the novel also evoke – is more important at this moment, to Pynchon, than the failure America has become. Significantly, *when* this conversation occurs remains confusing and somewhat ambiguous. William and Doc are talking to their father – after Cherrycoke has already narrated his death – about their *future* plans in the *past*, when they were ten. It is as if this conversation – this hope and expectation – takes place outside the realm of time, where it exists eternally, constantly recreating and returning to itself, forever at work in American life.

"Pynchon's closure," critic Victor Strandberg argues, "appears to grant greater weight to the ameliorative promise of America than to the tragic patrimony of the line" (109). Thomas Schaub provides a similar, but more developed, reading. William and Doc's conversation, he writes, "give[s] to the novel's close all the utopian expectancy of youth, a prospect already considerably compromised by their father's experience and the reader's ex post facto knowledge of what such dreams have become." The ending, for Schaub, then fixes *M&D* among other books in the genre of tragic nostalgia: "tragic because there is always some prior crime that makes our present moment 'too late,' and nostalgic because the novels end 'at home,' in moments of willed reconciliation with what has gone before" ("Plot" 200-201). Strandberg and Schaub then both articulate what Brian McHale calls Pynchon's rendering of the "subjunctive space" of America, "the space of wish and desire, of the

hypothetical and the counterfactual, of speculation and possibility" ("Mason & Dixon" 44).

But Strandberg, Schaub, and McHale – despite their compelling readings of the "utopian expectancy of youth" that emerges in the novel's concluding paragraphs – each fail to notice how the family unit is the primary mechanism that enables the reproduction of expectation and possibility, how – more than anything else – William and Doc's relationship with their father allows for hope to emerge. Thus in stark contrast to *GR*, but reminiscent of *Vineland*, family life in *M&D* provides a viable form of social reproduction, transmitting values from generation to generation that may help to improve society, values that can transform what America *is* into what America *could be*.

II.

Above all, then, *M&D* is about homecoming, about family life as a benevolent agency of social reproduction. But how Pynchon constructs his story – how he frames Mason and Dixon's lives within Reverend Cherrycoke's narration – reflects yet another transformation from his earlier work. For most critics, Cherrycoke acts as the key Pynchon-surrogate in the novel. He is the main storyteller and he is a character who was once arrested for "'the Crime they styl'd 'Anonymity.' That is, I left messages posted publicly, but did not sign them'" (9), a detail that seems

consistent with Pynchon's own hermitic tendencies.[18] However, throughout the critical history of *M&D*, scholars have ignored two other storytellers – *The Ghastly Fop* series and the poet Timothy Tox – that also inform how Cherrycoke, and by implication Pynchon, define the redeeming qualities of narrative and its effectiveness as a subversive form of social reproduction. More specifically, unlike *GR*, where the text remains difficult, labyrinthine, acting as a means to confront and educate *individuals*, in *M&D* storytelling becomes more entertaining and comprehensible, capable of creating a whole *community*, a social collective that is on some level separated from – and able to critique – the evils and corruption of the powers controlling the outside world.

i.

Through his depiction of *The Ghastly Fop* series, Pynchon articulates one aspect of his new literary style. For the most part, the series occupies a curious, enigmatic position in the text.[19] It is a fictional, low-brow publication, Pynchon emphasizes, detailing the exploits of the Ghastly Fop, a ghost from the country who comes to London in order to settle and avenge a number of debts incurred during his lifetime.[20] It is also mass produced and has inspired any number of forgeries: "The

---

[18] Critics of *M&D* all tend to agree that Pynchon endorses Cherrycoke's political, religious, and philosophical beliefs. For instance, Joseph Dewey, Victor Strandberg, Brian McHale, and Thomas Schaub each to varying degrees suggest that Cherrycoke acts as a Pynchon-surrogate.

[19] Scholars have struggled, unsuccessfully, to comprehend Pynchon's repeated references to *The Ghastly Fop* series. See Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds's "Introduction: The Times of *Mason & Dixon*," Mitchum Huehls' "The Form of Historicity in *Mason & Dixon*," Joseph Dewey's "The Sound of One Man Mapping," and Bernard Duyfhuizen's "Reading at the 'Crease of Credulity' for critics who have dealt with the enigmatic Fop.

[20] *The Ghastly Fop* is roughly analogous, it seems, to the role of Plasticman in *GR*, a popular entertainment comic book character that Pynchon, in 1973, adopts and parodies as part of his subversion of high modernist formalism. But with *The Ghastly Fop* Pynchon also invokes the origins

Series runs to at least a Dozen Volumes by now, tho' no one is sure exactly how many, – forgeries have also found their way into the Market" (527). Moreover, almost every character in the novel – both low *and* high brow – seems aware of its significance. Young Nathan McClean plans to masturbate to its "erotick Pictures and Text" (457), but falls asleep from exhaustion first. Robert Jenkin's Ear enjoys listening to it (178), Dr. Isaac learns about the inner workings of pubs from it (767), and Dixon defends it to Maskelyne, the pretentious academic: "'*The Ghastly Fop*? […] Come, come. Worth a dozen of any *Tom Jones*, Sir'" (117). Even Mason, the oftentimes insufferable high-brow, reads *The Ghastly Fop*: "Returning to their Rooms, [Dixon] finds Mason reclin'd and smoking, looking up guiltily from a ragged Installment of *The Ghastly Fop*" (347).

In addition, for almost twenty pages *The Ghastly Fop* seems to usurp the narration from Reverend Cherrycoke. From Chapter 53 of *M&D* to Chapter 54, Pynchon creates a series of nested narratives but subverts the logic organizing them, allowing one narrative – *The Ghastly Fop* – to be confused with its frame. More simply put, Chapter 52 ends fairly undramatically – Mason and Dixon part ways for the winter after working on the line for a year. Chapter 53, however, begins with an excerpt from Cherrycoke's sermons and continues with a captivity narrative about a group of Jesuits who kidnap an American woman named Eliza Fields and take her to Quebec, a series of events that is almost entirely incongruous with the rest of the novel. Chapter 54 then begins with a first person narrative from Eliza's perspective,

---

of mass popular culture in the 18th century. At that time, a more commercial and relatively open society was developing in Anglo-America, one aspect of which was the flourishing of cheap entertainment that contributed to the rise of the novel. In his later allusion to *Tom Jones*, Pynchon appears to say that the historical origins of *his* work are not in the now respectable sources of the novel (Fielding, DeFoe, Richardson), but in a more forgotten history of subversive sensationalism.

but this new format is broken only pages later when Pynchon reveals that Tenebrae, one of the LeSparks in the frame narrative, is reading the preceding episodes from *The Ghastly Fop* series with her cousin Ethelmer: "Brae has discover'd the sinister Volume in 'Thelmer's Room" (526). To make matters even more confusing, Tenebrae and Ethelmer do not simply finish reading *The Ghastly Fop* and return to Cherrycoke in the parlor, where the telling of Mason and Dixon's lives resumes. Instead, scholar Bernard Duyfhuizen explains, "[i]n a wonderful bit of narrative slippage, *The Ghastly Fop* episode dialogically merges with the story of Mason and Dixon, and before another page goes by Cherrycoke has regained full control of the narration" ("Reading" 139). That is, although Eliza Fields occupies a plane of narrative altogether different from Cherrycoke's story, she somehow finds herself among the surveyors on the line.

For Duyfhuizen, *The Ghastly Fop* chapters reflect Cherrycoke's authorial playfulness and Pynchon's virtuosity as a writer; but what seems particularly important about this inserted episode is that *The Ghastly Fop* and Cherrycoke's stories *can* merge, that there are certain elements shared between the two that allow them to fuse together almost seamlessly. Both Cherrycoke and *The Ghastly Fop*, it appears, seek to entertain readers and listeners, not to alienate and challenge them. Pynchon, of course, has always toyed with the formal logic of fictional narrative. In the opening scene of *GR*, for instance, Pirate Prentice's harsh and vivid dream world appears in many respects more "real" than the world he awakes to. But in Pynchon's earlier work, this narrative playfulness almost always serves to confront readers, confusing them about what is real, what has been invented, even about who is

speaking. In *M&D*, the playful and disruptive narrative slip between the main story and *The Ghastly Fop* seems to show how Cherrycoke's telling of Mason and Dixon's adventures charms and brings together large groups of people, thereby creating a community, an audience, a readership. So as Cherrycoke "has linger'd" (6 *and* 8) at the house of his sister, like a ghost "haunting Mason" (8) and regaling his family with pleasurable stories, so too does the Ghastly Fop haunt London's economic world and provide amusement for his interested fans.

The second prominent storytelling figure in *M&D* other than Cherrycoke is the resident poet of Pennsylvania, Timothy Tox. Everyone in America seems to read Timothy Tox's epic poems in the same way that they read *The Ghastly Fop* series. John Wade LeSpark cites Tox's *Pennsylvaniad* (217), Jonas Everybeet, a handyman working on the line refers to him (443), and so too does Captain Evan Shelby (600). Timothy Tox even joins Mason and Dixon for a short period of time, along with a golem he can summon at will (684-686). The key feature of Tox's poetry that Pynchon repeatedly emphasizes is its subversiveness. When Cherrycoke describes Megan Cresap, a relative of Thomas Cresap, the surveyor and notorious defender of Lord Baltimore's land claims, her decision to read Tox comes to the fore and reflects her rebellious character: "Hair all a-fire, spirited, no respect at all for Traditional Authority. She knows how to read, and she is reading him Tox's *Pennsylvaniad*" (641). Timothy Tox, himself, explains to Dixon the nature of his poetry. "'Not so loud,'" he warns Dixon, who is about to identify him, "'This is not my Home. I am upon the Scamper, I fear, tho' none will speak of it. Like Mr. Wilkes, I have

endanger'd my Freedom by Printing what displeaseth this King. Not 'the' King, you appreciate…'" (489).

Tox's style of writing also manifests itself in Cherrycoke, a character whose anonymous printing in his youth angered the authorities and led to his arrest. In fact, Timothy Tox visits Cherrycoke in final pages of the novel at the LeSpark household, and the two plan to leave together and visit Mason's remaining family (759-760). Cherrycoke thus reconciles the redeeming qualities of Timothy Tox and *The Ghastly Fop* series: he tells widely accessible and entertaining stories, but he remains subversive nonetheless. He brings people together, yet at the same time he shows contempt for traditional authority. Both of these framed narratives are imitations of prominent eighteenth century genres, one high brow and one low brow; and how Pynchon inhabits and parodies each – and how he subsumes high and low culture into a single narrative that undermines their ostensible differences – further reveals his powers and genius as a writer.

ii.

The content and aesthetic construction of *M&D*, along with Cherrycoke's presence at the center of the text, affirms Pynchon's newfound celebration of storytelling as means to form community and reinforce familial bonds – *The Ghastly Fop* qualities of the novel. Narrative and family go hand-in-hand throughout *M&D*. From the moment Cherrycoke sits down and reads from his book in the opening chapter to the final pages of the text, storytelling serves to bring people and family together. It enables the transmission of one generation's values and ideals to the next,

a process that in turn preserves the feelings of hope and possibility that accompanied the founding of America.

The LeSpark house presented in the introductory pages of *M&D* frames the entire narrative and contains, under its roof, a vast array of family members. The two youngest LeSparks are the twins Pitt and Pliny, who enjoy playing in the snow and listening to pirate stories. Another member of the younger LeSpark generation is Tenebrae, who spends most of the novel knitting a quilt of immense "size and difficulty" (7) to fend off the advances of Ethelmer, her cousin recently returned from college. The head of the house is John Wade LeSpark, a Philadelphia merchant who is joined by his two brothers, Ives and Lomax, one a gun-dealer willing to sell his goods to either side of a conflict, and the other a man who manufactures and sells low quality soap. Ives LeSpark has a son DePugh, who like Ethelmer is on break from school. And finally John Wade LeSpark's wife, Elizabeth, stays in the house, as well as her brother, the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, and her sister Euphrenia, who plays the oboe and at one point in her life was a member of a Turkish harem.

For Pynchon, the comically exaggerated extended family that the LeSparks – and the Traverse-Beckers of *Vineland* – represent seems like an appealing alternative to the bland, homogenized bourgeois families that usually conform to the interests of higher powers. And inevitably, the unifying device in *M&D* that brings together these disparate characters and that unites them as a family is Cherrycoke's account of Mason and Dixon's adventures in America.

In accordance with his celebration of storytelling and family life, Pynchon abandons the narrative techniques that define *GR* to emphasize the power of narrative

to bring people together, as in *Vineland*. Instead of crafting an elaborate mystery narrative that challenges and baffles readers, bringing them up close to the state's savage power, *M&D* adopts a more comprehensible attitude towards plot, one that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Thomas Schaub describes Pynchon's departure from his earlier storytelling conventions in *M&D*: "Pynchon has jettisoned his use of the detective genre…he has dispensed with the epistemological doubt that he used to bedevil and provoke his readers. More accurately, from a narrative point of view this doubt remains but is transformed (or solved) by an intermediary storyteller – Wicks Cherrycoke – a device that makes clear from the get-go the contingency of what follows" (190).

The frame-narrative of *M&D* also appears even more significant when compared to other examples of storytelling from Pynchon's earlier fiction. For instance, "Kurt Mondaugen's story" in *V.* recounts Von Trotha's extermination of the Hereros in South-West Africa, and "Ensign Morituri's Story" in *GR* describes Greta Erdmann's homicidal rage towards children. Both of these framed stories reveal the brutality of the twentieth century state power, and – more importantly – both are presented as confessions, one to Herbert Stencil and one to Tyrone Slothrop, intending to enlighten a *single person*, alone, outside the tyrannical dominant community. "Kurt Mondaugen's story" and "Ensign Morituri's Story" then seem strikingly different from the LeSparks, who congregate around Cherrycoke *together*, listening to stories as a family, sitting in "a comfortable Room at the rear of the House, years since given over to [the twin's] carefree Assaults" (5).

But though Pynchon most forcefully shows the power of storytelling to create and sustain family in the novel's frame-narrative, he also allows it to play a key role in Mason and Dixon's journeys. One of the more affecting scenes in the text takes place when Dixon stands up to a slave driver in Baltimore and strikes him with his own whip; and Cherrycoke legitimizes the retelling of this story – one which has no historical proof or documentation – by invoking the family. "'[T]hese Family stories have been perfected in the hellish Forge of Domestick Recension,'" the Reverend explains, "'generation 'pon generation, till what survives is the pure truth, anneal'd to Mercilessness, about each Figure, no matter how stretch'd, nor how influenced over the years by all Sentiments from unreflective love to inflexible Dislike" (695-696). Cherrycoke thereby presents family custom and family stories as the best ways to establish historical truth, a belief that runs counter to prevailing assumptions that lore preserves and exacerbates historical inaccuracies. What follows is a tale of Dixon's courage to take on – and perhaps his failure to overthrow – an unjust system of oppression. Not only does Cherrycoke's story, through its retelling, offer a lesson to members of the Dixon family, where Cherrycoke allegedly received it, but it also provides the assembled LeSparks, especially the younger generation, with a parable of morality.

More significantly, storytelling also helps to bring together Mason and Doc. On their way to Dixon's funeral, at a moment when Mason still feels somewhat uncomfortable with the child he had traveled across the world to avoid, stories bridge the gap between father and son: "As they lie side by side in bed, Mason finds he cannot refrain from telling his Son bedtime stories about Dixon" (763). Later on the

road Mason again reverts back to "bedtime stories" – this time about Rebecca, Doc's mother – to connect with his son: "The snow is falling now. Mason sits by the window waiting for traces of these outspoken Spirits to show up against the white Descent. At some point, invisible across the room, Doctor Isaac will ask, quietly, evenly, 'When did you and she meet? How young were you?'" (767). Through these stories Mason cements and strengthens his relationship with Doc in the same way that Cherrycoke's story establishes familial order in the LeSparks' home.

iii.

The other feature of Reverend Cherrycoke's storytelling that informs the aesthetic structures of *M&D* is its subversive, anti-authoritarian style – the Timothy Tox qualities of the text. Storytelling, to Pynchon, represents a benevolent form of social reproduction not simply because it brings together family, but also because once the community has been established, storytelling can undermine the repressive powers in society. That is, with its capacity to open up subjunctive space and undermine the accepted cause-and-effect linearity of history, fiction offers an alternative to the evil institutions that control the characters' lives. The power of narrative to subvert the hidden industrial and economic forces then seems consistent throughout Pynchon's oeuvre. However, *M&D*'s newfound emphasis on cultivating the community, rather than the individual, reveals a shift in what Gabriele Schwab calls, while talking about *GR*, the "utopian dimension" of Pynchon's storytelling. Pynchon no longer seeks the perfect society; instead, he aspires to express compassion for the flaws and injustices of the society he inhabits.

Cherrycoke's subversive storytelling style comes to the fore in Chapter 38, when Uncle Ives, the weapons-dealer, attacks him for narrating historical incidents without evidence, testimony, or truth. "'Who claims Truth, Truth abandons,'" Cherrycoke defends himself:

> "History is hir'd, or coerc'd, only in Interests that must ever prove base. She is too innocent, to be left within the reach of anyone in Power, – who need 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 the Desires, or even the Curiosity, of Government" (350).

Higher Enlightenment forces, for Cherrycoke and Pynchon, manipulate history to wield power and maintain control over the world. The alternative Cherrycoke then provides to the repressiveness of history is storytelling, which undermines historical truth in a manner that paradoxically also disguises and saves it.

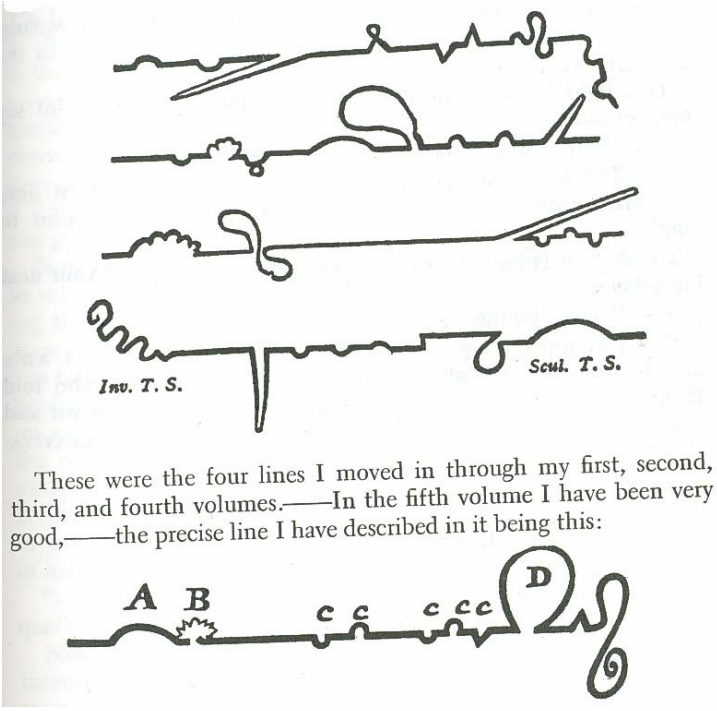
One way Pynchon supplies a "Costume" for Truth is by incorporating fantastic elements into Mason and Dixon's adventures, achieving a balance between, on the one hand, a strict attention to historical detail and, on the other hand, the presence of magical and unrealistic events. In a sense, then, Pynchon crafts – by theorist Tzvetan Todorov's definition – a fantastic narrative, obliging "the reader to consider the world of characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described" (33). In *M&D*, Pynchon invites the reader into an historical past that appears faithfully and historically reconstructed: he includes events and impressions recorded in *The Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, he employs archaic language, and he

alludes to historical incidents that did in fact surround the characters' lives, like Mason's experience growing up during the weavers strike of the mid-1700s.[21] Yet by also adding anachronisms and magical entities like talking clocks and robotic ducks, and by allowing Cherrycoke to narrate events he is not present for, Pynchon also forces the reader to "hesitate," to pause and ask whether these events have "real" or supernatural explanations. The fantastic elements of Pynchon's novel present an alternative to the authority of conventional history, which Pynchon remains deeply suspicious of, and further opens up what McHale calls the "subjunctive space" of the narrative.

Additionally, Cherrycoke's storytelling style saves Truth and subverts the authority of the Enlightenment forces with its non-linearity. The Visto Mason and Dixon carve through the wilderness of America symbolizes the imposition of order on disorder, of reason on chaos; it represents the nefarious plans of industrial, religious, and economic forces to spread their power over an uncorrupted land. The plot line of Cherrycoke's narrative, however, is not dictated by a strict attention to order. Instead, it contains sudden shifts between space and time, stories within stories, multiple narrators, rehashings, contradictions, and – more than anything – many, many digressions. For Bernard Duyfhuizen, "[a]lthough it is correct to say that *Mason & Dixon* traces a narrative line for its eponymous heroes, that line hardly resembles the 'Visto' the two surveyors' project carved into the landscape of America. Instead, it resembles the lines Laurence Sterne drew in volume 6, chapter 40 of *Tristram*

[21] See David Foreman's "Historical Documents Relating to *Mason & Dixon*" and Frank Palmeri's "General Wolfe and the Weavers: Re-envisioning History in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*" for explorations of Pynchon's historical sources.

Shandy" ("Reading" 139-140). Duyfhuizen then provides Tristram's various diagrams:



(Sterne 333).

According to Duyfuizen, despite its narrative complexity, *M&D* remains pleasurable: "readers may be better off getting lost in [*M&D's*] wilderness of narrators and voices than trying to carve a clear and straight Visto through its thickets of words" ("Reading" 140). Yet in comparing the plot-line to the Visto, Duyfuizen overlooks how Cherrycoke's non-linear, Shandy-esque narrative symbolizes a profound swipe at the forces of order and reason in society, the forces that control history but cannot control the wild and unpredictable structures of fiction. The subversiveness of Pynchon's new style becomes most apparent, then, in his ability to turn all of these disjointed asides into a traditional, conventionally plotted narrative with a coherent beginning, middle, and end. In other words, although Pynchon has always

incorporated a multiplicity of plots and subplots into his fiction, one of *M&D*'s greatest achievements appears to be how all of its digressions end up working to build a clear and strongly resolved story.

M&D and *Vineland* thus embrace storytelling as a means to bring together family and subvert higher forces of repression. Mason's experience at Dixon's grave seems particularly significant in this light, paralleling the reader's experience of *M&D*: where Mason remembers his relationship with Dixon, understands his role in the family, and better recognizes injustice, so too does *M&D* remind readers of the dangers of power and the significance of personal connections, genealogy, and tradition.

III.

Yet although Pynchon embraces family life and storytelling in *M&D* as benevolent institutions of social reproduction, he does not suggest that they will lead to a utopian world of complete freedom and equality. While Cherrycoke concludes the adventures of Mason and Dixon for his brother-in-law John Wade LeSpark, and while the other members of the LeSpark family lie asleep, the servants of the house enter: "[S]lowly into the Room begin to walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese Sailors, the overflow'd from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia" (759). Family may have the capacity to improve society, but as long as it exists, Pynchon warns, preterition will exist with it. Pynchon,

significantly, no longer foresees an impending apocalyptic doom coming from this inability to conceive a perfect society. Rather, in 1997, he shows compassion for the flawed and unjust world he inhabits. Pynchon's use of pathos and sympathy, to Thomas Schaub, allows *M&D* to present the "aesthetic strategies for getting over the hump of apocalypse" ("Plot" 201), to render the tragic nostalgia of life in a world that has already been corrupted. Critic Anthony Lane gives a more forceful explanation of Pynchon's compassion along similar lines: "Since the rocket-powered riffs of 'Gravity's Rainbow,' Pynchon has learned how to stop worrying about the Bomb. He has even started loving a little, extending an amused tenderness in all sorts of directions." Pynchon, however, refuses to remain complacent, as Lane and Schaub may suggest, to simply move "over the hump of apocalypse" and express love and compassion unequivocally. Rather, he still embraces rebelliousness and disobedience, he still seeks to change and improve society. Timothy Tox, Pynchon's key subversive storyteller, comes into the LeSpark parlor towards the end of the novel and proceeds to address the servants in the house; he begins "to recite the *Pennsylvaniad*, *sotto Voce* as he wanders the Room, among the others, the untold others…" (760).

Conclusion:

"Now Everybody –"
After *Mason & Dixon*

Pynchon's newfound celebration of family, tradition, and genealogy extends beyond *Mason & Dixon*, into the twentieth-first century. The main characters in his most recent work, *Against the Day*, which was published in 2006, are members of *Vineland*'s Traverse family, and the novel achieves a sense of narrative coherence and unity in its depiction of the struggle that emerges between family loyalty and the forces of capitalism, between the Traverses and the ruthless coal miner Scarsdale Vibe. Indeed, the villainous Vibe admits throughout *Against the Day* a yearning to absorb and destroy his adversaries' family: "'I coveted the bloodline of my enemy, which I fancied uncontaminated, I wanted that promise, promise unlimited'" (332). And the text ends with the remaining Traverses heading west in the early twentieth century, seeking "someplace, some deep penultimate town the capitalist/Christer gridwork hadn't got to quite yet" (1075).

And so although *Against the Day* for the most part resembles a rambling, swollen, 1,085 page disaster – what Michiko Kakutani calls "a humongous, bloated jigsaw puzzle of a story, pretentious without being provocative, elliptical without being illuminating, complicated without being rewardingly complex" ("Pynchonesque") – the novel continues to reveal how Pynchon embraces family life and adopts a storytelling style that sets out to *bring together* readers, not to confront and challenge them. In between 1973 and 1990 Pynchon therefore went through a profound transformation in which he reevaluated his understanding of social

reproduction, cast off the aesthetic sensibilities of his early work, and discovered hope and possibility in the family, a potentially subversive group that can exist outside of state power, a group that can preserve alternative values and histories and successfully counteract the destructive force of the system. It is through the family, the more mature Pynchon suggests, that the America we live in may become the America which should have been.

Works Cited:

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.* Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Meridian Books, 1958.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.

Bérubé, Michael. *Marginal Forces / Cultural Centers*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992.

Boyle, T.C. "The Great Divide." *New York Times* 18 May 1997: BR9.

Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. *Reproduction: In Education, Society, and Culture*. Trans. Richard Nice. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977.

Cowart, David. "Attenuated Postmodernism: Pynchon's *Vineland*." *The Vineland Papers*. Ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Dewey, Joseph. "The Sound of One Man Mapping." *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

Duyfhuizen, Bernard. "Reading at the 'Crease of Credulity.'" *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

------. "Taking Stock: 26 Years since "V." *Novel* 23.1 (1989): 75-88.

Foreman, David. "Historical Documents Relating to *Mason & Dixon*." *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

Greiner, Donald J. "Thomas Pynchon and the Fault Lines of America." *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *The Vineland Papers*. Ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Hinds, Elizabeth Jane Wall. "Introduction: The Times of *Mason & Dixon*." *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds. New York: Camden, 2005.

Howard, Gerald. “Pynchon from A to V.” *Bookforum* (Summer, 2005). <http://www.bookforum.com/archive/sum_05/pynchon.html>

Huehls, Mitchum. “The Form of Historicity in *Mason & Dixon*.” *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon’s* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds. New York: Camden, 2005.

Hume, Kathryn. *Pynchon’s Mythography*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.

Iannone, Carol. “Pynchon’s Progress.” *Commentary* 89 (April 1990): 58-59.

Kakutani, Michiko. “Pynchon Hits the Road with Mason and Dixon.” *New York Times* 29 Apr. 1997: C11+.

------. “A Pynchonesque Turn by Pynchon.” *New York Times* 20 Nov. 2006: E1+.

Kihss, Peter. “Pulitzer Jurors Dismayed on Pynchon.” *New York Times* 8 May 1974: L38+.

Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. “‘Vineland,’ Pynchon’s First Novel in 17 Years.” *New York Times* 26 Dec. 1989: C21.

Leithauser, Brad. “Any Place You Want.” *New York Review of Books* 15 March 1990: 7-10.

McHale, Brian. *Constructing Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

------. “Mason & Dixon in the Zone, or, A Brief Poetics of Pynchon-Space.” *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

Mendelson, Edward. “Levity’s Rainbow.” *New Republic* 9-16 July 1990: 40-46.

Miller, James. *“Democracy is in the Streets.”* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Moore, Thomas. *The Style of Connectedness*. Columbia, U of Missouri Press, 1987.

Palmeri, Frank. “General Wolfe and the Weavers: Re-envisioning History in Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*.” *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Against the Day*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

------. Blurb for David Shetzline, *DeFord* (New York: Random House, 1968), qtd. At Clifford Mead, *Thomas Pynchon: Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials* (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1989): 43.

------. *The Crying of Lot 49*. New York: Perennial Classics, 1999.

------. *Gravity's Rainbow*. New York: Penguin, 2000.

------. *Mason & Dixon*. New York: Picador, 1997.

------. *Slow Learner*. New York: Bay Back Books, 1984.

------. *V*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.

------. *Vineland*. New York: Penguin, 1990.

Rushdie, Salmon. "Still Crazy After All These Years." *New York Times Book Review* 14 Jan. 1990: BR1.

Schachterle, Lance. "Pynchon and Cornell Engineering Physics, 1953-54." *Pynchon Notes* 26-27 (Spring-Fall 1990), 129-137.

Schaub, Thomas H. "Plot, Ideology, and Compassion in *Mason & Dixon*." *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

------. *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity*. Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1981.

Schwab, Gabriele. "Creative Paranoia and Frost Patterns of White Words." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Gravity's Rainbow*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

Seed, David. "Mapping the Course of Empire in the New World." *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

Slade, Joseph. "Communication, Group Theory, and Perception in *Vineland*." *The Vineland Papers*. Ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Standberg, Victor. "Dimming the Enlightenment: Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*." *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon. Ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware Press, 2000.

Sterne, Laurence. *Tristram Shandy*. Ed. Howard Anderson. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980.

Strehle, Susan. “Pynchon’s Elaborate Game of Doubles in *Vineland*.” *The Vineland Papers*. Ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Tabbi, Joseph. “Pynchon’s Groundward Art.” *The Vineland Papers*. Ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975.

Tölölyan, Khachig. “Prodigious Pynchon and His Progeny.” *Novel* 11.2 (1979): 224-234.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. Los Angeles: U of California Press, 1957.

Weisenburger, Steven. *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion*. Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1988.

Whitman, Walt. “Democratic Vistas.” *The Portable Walt Whitman*. Ed. Michael Warner. New York: Penguin, 2004.