

**“The Ecocritical Carnivalesque of
Mason & Dixon: Thomas Pynchon’s
Environmental Vision”**

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Abstract:

Among American novelists since 1945, Thomas Pynchon ranks as one of the most accomplished, with arguably *the* most fully realized and profound visions of Postmodernity. Therefore, his absence from the field of Ecocriticism is alarming. The aim of my thesis is to demonstrate that Pynchon's 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon* ought to be considered as an essential text of American environmental writing. My thesis triangulates the environmental vision of *Mason & Dixon* by highlighting its affinity with environmental literature on three overlapping levels: the specter of the ancient, the spectacle of the new during the Enlightenment setting of the novel, and the novel's visions of futurity. These chapters demonstrate that Pynchon's novel proves to be harmonious with the aesthetic and thematic concerns of Ecocriticism. Of particular note is my attentiveness to the postsecular spirituality in the novel, which presents a framework for expanding the religious dimension of Ecocriticism. Finally, my thesis is synthesized in my concluding chapter on the novel's "ecological carnivalesque." Drawing upon the aesthetic of Francois Rabelais, and his most accomplished theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, I demonstrate that while *Mason & Dixon* proves harmonious with a majority of the core concerns of Ecocriticism, the canonical forms of environmental writing are insufficient for containing Pynchon's vast environmental vision. This section is the most substantial critical intervention into Pynchon and Ecocriticism thus far, and demonstrates the ability of Pynchon to emerge as a vital voice in the field.

Key Words:

Ecocriticism; Pynchon; Postmodernism; *Mason & Dixon*; postsecular; carnivalesque; pastoral; Rabelais; environmentalism; American literature.

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Introduction: Thomas Pynchon and the Silence of Ecocriticism

“ ‘The St. Helena of old had been as a Paradise,’ avers Euphrenia. ‘The Orange and Lemon-Groves, the Coffee-Fields,--’
‘Gone before your Time, Euphie.’
‘Does that mean I am forbidden to mourn them?’”¹

The falling of snowflakes in a Vermont forest, the rustling of the wind in an Iowa cornfield, the rattle of a snake in the arid Nevada desert, the echo of cicadas off of the mud of the Mississippi Delta, the pursuit of the grizzly in the Rocky Mountains: nature and the environment have been central thematic foundations for American literature for nearly as long as it has existed. From the most ancient of Native creation stories, through the Puritan Anne Bradstreet, to the early literary generation of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, and Henry David Thoreau, to the Modernist innovations of William Faulkner, to the Beat writer Jack Kerouac, to Toni Morrison, Rachel Carson, Jonathan Franzen, Cormac McCarthy and onwards into the new millennium, nature has bountifully supplied the American literary imaginary. The full litany of American environmental writers would include nearly all major American authors, and as the field of Ecocriticism expands, the legacy of some like Thoreau continues to be solidified, while authors across the spectrum of American literature are being reconsidered and rehabilitated by Ecocritical re-readings. One glaring absence² is the writer who, over the course of 4,600 collective pages of novels in a fifty-plus year career, has provided some of the most substantial contributions to Post-1945 American literature: Thomas Pynchon.

¹ *Mason & Dixon*, 105; hereafter, when quotes from the novel are clearly indicated by the analysis, page numbers

² The notable Ecocritic Ursula Heise proves to be a *minor* exception, as she briefly mentions Thomas Pynchon on five occasions (26, 75, 161, 176, 212) in her *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, 2008, Oxford University Press, NY NY, but only as an example of American countercultural writing alongside Allen Ginsberg and Williams S. Burroughs, which serves as her launching point for discussing Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*; Heise views Pynchon as typifying 1960's anti-establishment currents through his questioning of institutions and focus on paranoia, and notably *does not* consider Ecocritical themes in his writings, nor does she consider Pynchon an “environmental” writer in the least.

Ecocriticism, essentially the literary wing of environmentalism, which traditionally traces its birth to the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, must be broadly defined before moving forward. Evan Berry, in a recent study of the religious roots of environmentalism, defines the movement/theoretical field as the "unique historical fusion of romantic ideas about the soteriological potency of nature with newfound understandings about the human capacity for environmental destruction."³ This unprecedented "fusion" of environmentalism encompassed "agrarian sentimentalism, romantic naturalism, and Progressive conservationism."⁴ Louise Westling, defining Ecocriticism for *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (2013), uncannily mirrors Berry. Ecocriticism "[is] in some ways reviving pastoral and romantic attitudes about the natural world," thus continuing canonical literary approaches to the environmental while also being "informed by modern science and responding to alarm about the fragility of biological environments increasingly devastated by human technologies."⁵ Westling's *Companion* is indicative of the ease with which the field could accommodate an author like Thomas Pynchon, displaying broad-sweeping, truly Pynchonian areas of interest such as tackling new understandings of canonical genres like the pastoral, the influence of European Critical Theory, feminist and gender studies approaches, contemporary environmental policy-political issues, while also expanding the conversation to encompass non-Western influences such as Native American, East Asian and Subcontinental literary traditions and perspectives on the environmental crisis. A brief survey of other companions to Ecocriticism reveals a similarly encyclopedic attentiveness to a truly Pynchonian catalogue of special interests, discussions of Heideggerian eco-philosophy, the real and/or imagined "wilderness," the centrality of

³ Berry, 61

⁴ Berry, 76

⁵ Westling, 5

apocalypse, and the literature of animals;⁶ to the question of genre in regard to environmental (non)-fiction, post-humanist theory and the Anthropocene, and the role of anthropomorphism in Ecocriticism⁷. As is quite obvious by this point, Ecocriticism contains within itself a cornucopia of approaches, and for the purposes of this investigation, the Ecocritical emphasis upon the pastoral, Heideggerian eco-philosophy, non-Western influences, questions of wilderness, and the apocalypse will provide a number of the theoretical windows.

Determining the “canon” of Ecocriticism is problematic, given that it encompasses not simply “world literature,” but crisscrosses the disciplines of poetry, novels, philosophy, scientific writing, and environmental-activist non-fiction. For Ecocriticism and American literature, it is worthwhile to consult the contents of the Library of America’s 2008 reader, *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*. Edited by no less than Al Gore and Bill McKibben, two of the United States’ most visible environmental activists, the collection reveals an approximation of the American Ecocritical canon. Thomas Pynchon is absent from this tentative “canon” in *American Earth*, which is greatly frustrating, and discouraging, given the truly Pynchonian kaleidoscope of authors the volume encompasses. While no doubt incomplete or flawed to certain Ecocritics, *American Earth* presents the striking potential of Ecocriticism to forge new literary canons, wherein popular musicians like Marvin Gaye or Joni Mitchell can co-exist alongside presidential speeches by Theodore Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson, which in turn cohabit a sphere with the speculative science fictions of Philip K. Dick and the ancestrally-charged narratives of Silko or Momaday (older, in many ways, than “America” itself), where the sprawling poetics of “Song of Myself” can be called upon to compliment the strident activism of

⁶ A selection of chapter/section topics from *Ecocriticism (The New Critical Idiom)*, by Greg Garrard, Routledge, NY NY, 2012, print.

⁷ A selection of chapter/section topics from *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, by Timothy Clark, Cambridge University Press, NY NY, 2011, print.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Thus, it is imperative to note that the absence and/or exclusion of Thomas Pynchon from the Ecocritical conversation is among the greatest shortcomings of the field thus far.

When Hanjo Berressem claims, "if Henry James has written *The Portrait of a Lady*, Pynchon, I would argue, has always been, and still is, writing *A Portrait of America*,"⁸ his absence from the tentative American Ecocritical canon found in *American Earth* becomes all the more alarming. The eccentrically constellated field of Pynchon studies has excelled in highlighting the vitality of his corpus in areas like Postmodernism, post-Orwellian literature of paranoia, the literature of Late Capitalism, the intersections of literature and technology, Gnosticism and Kabbalah, ad infinitum. A single Pynchon novel contains Whitmanesque multitudes of thematic exploration, and the *Summa Pynchonica* has yet to be written (and likely eludes the desires of scholars *a la* Thomas Aquinas attempting to write *the* book on Pynchon). Fredric Jameson influentially included Pynchon in his opening litany of *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), placing him as an exemplary literary voice of Postmodernism alongside Ishmael Reed, William S. Burroughs, and the French *nouveau roman* movement.⁹ Heirs to Pynchon have been identified in Richard Powers, David Foster Wallace (now deceased), William T. Vollmann, Lydia Davis, Lorrie Moore, George Saunders, Zadie Smith, and Jeffrey Eugenides, among many others¹⁰. The purpose of Jameson's litany, and the latter group of successors identified in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* (2011) is to suggest that while Pynchon has been an exemplary voice for various aspects of literary history, and still exerts a healthy influence upon disparate writers of younger generations, the critical conversation has thus far *not* placed Pynchon within American environmental writing.

⁸ Berressem, 176

⁹ Jameson, 1

¹⁰ Cowart, 93-94

Perhaps only William T. Vollman approaches closest as an heir whose Ecocritical potential has similarly been ignored thus far: the possibilities of *You Bright and Risen Angels* (1987), for example, with its chronicle of a war between insects and human civilization, could be revelatory for the literature of animals field of studies within Ecocriticism.

There exists a significant amount of scholarship on *Mason & Dixon* (1997), though compared to *Gravity's Rainbow* (1974) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) it is a striking dearth. The critical conversation has primarily focused upon the thematic poles of race and slavery, and Postmodern complications of the Enlightenment's ideas of scientific and historical objectivity. In the age of Wikileaks and the revelations of Edward Snowden, when a major broadcast network like the History Channel thrives upon its conspiracy theory-laden series "Ancient Aliens," when the smartphones of a majority of Americans functions as their "phantom limb," the foundational concerns of Pynchon studies, notably paranoia, conspiracy theories, the detrimental impact of technology, etc., will only continue to be more essential for the critical discourse of the Obama era. Two recent publications of note for their expansion of the scope of Pynchon studies are Mark Greif's *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (2015), and John A. McClure's *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (2007). Greif devotes a valuable chapter to new critical frameworks for Pynchon scholarship. The timeframe of Greif's study significantly excludes *Gravity's Rainbow* (1974), for he outlines that while invaluable scholarship has broadened the critical understanding of the immensity of technologies like the Nazi's V2 ballistic missiles, there has been an absence of critical focus on "the technologies of mundane, ordinary life,"¹¹ in Pynchon's earlier work. His novels appear on the surface-level to be concerned with such high-level, specialized fields of knowledge, in particular knowledge of that which is occult, esoteric, and obscure, that Greif notes an absence of

¹¹ Greif, 228

critical attention to what is most *familiar*. Greif argues that “those new planned developments in Southern California”¹², the springboard of *The Crying of Lot 49*’s narrative, are as significant of technologies as the V2. The groundbreaking chapter devoted to Pynchon’s postsecular spirituality in McClure’s study will be drawn from extensively in the following section, but suffice to say that McClure’s work situates this particular strain of spirituality found in Pynchon within the broader literary context of Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko and Louis Erdrich. At the time of writing, there exists *no* Ecocritically-minded work on Pynchon.

While written in an 18th Century English vernacular akin to that of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), *Mason & Dixon* offers the Ecocritical scholar a uniquely Pynchonian brew of environmental collapse, apocalyptic theology, the Enlightenment, the emergence of global capitalism, and the consequences of a spectacle-obsessed society. To briefly summarize the narrative of *Mason & Dixon* is akin to stating that *Ulysses* is a novel by James Joyce about people walking around and thinking in Dublin on June 16, 1904. Yet, very loosely, the highly intricate narrative concerns the exiled Anglican Rev’d Wicks Cherrycoke as he narrates his memories of colonial America to his family at their New England residence in the Christmas season of 1786. Cherrycoke chronicles the lives of the astronomers and surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon as they travel to the Cape of Good Hope, to the island of St. Helena off the Brazilian coast, and back to their English homeland on various commissions from the Royal Society. The central narrative concerns Mason and Dixon’s commission to survey what would become their famous Line, settling a boundary dispute between Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware in colonial America. This section involves their interactions with Rev’d Cherrycoke, various luminaries of the American Revolution, a convoluted conspiracy theory involving Jesuit missionaries and their Chinese converts, encounters with Native Americans, and an overall

¹² Ibid

phantasmagoric approach to the inhabitants of the American wilderness. The brief conclusion of the novel finds Mason and Dixon returning to an England greatly changed from the time of their departure, and Cherrycoke relates the end of his rambling fireside tale.

The aim of this investigation is to persuade the reader that Thomas Pynchon is an essential addition to the Ecocritical canon, with *Mason & Dixon* being an exemplary text in the field. I will demonstrate that not merely does *Mason & Dixon* prove to be harmonious with a great majority of the aesthetic and thematic concerns of American environmental literature and Ecocriticism writ large, particularly the complex legacy of Christianity and the Enlightenment upon both environmental destruction and the environmental movement itself, but also through his postsecular spiritual vision, articulated most powerfully in the novel's ecological carnivalesque, Pynchon emerges as a vital voice for the emergent canon of Ecocriticism. Through my concluding chapter on what I dub Pynchon's "ecological carnivalesque", I offer a radically new reading of *Mason & Dixon* for the field of Ecocriticism. The ecological carnivalesque is the novel's formal embodiment of Pynchon's sprawling global narrative, one which traverses multiple geographies, temporalities, even the history of global thought itself. While the three central chapters dealing with the Old, the New, and the Future, function as sweeping investigations of *Mason & Dixon*'s harmonious relationship with the thematic and aesthetic hallmarks of the "symphony" of Ecocriticism, it is in the concluding chapter on the ecological carnivalesque where I demonstrate most powerfully the manner in which Pynchon contributes a new octave to the symphonic potential of Ecocriticism. The aim of this approach is twin-fold, firstly seeking to expand the scope of Pynchon criticism as a whole, while also framing Pynchon as a unique and formidable voice in the American environmental canon. The old, the new, and the future triangulate to form the structure of the body of my thesis, and the

conclusion functions as a synthesizing force of these triangulated investigations. An overview of the chapters of my thesis will clarify the overall scope and trajectory, for my thesis operates on a cumulative level: the trees eventually equal a forest, so to speak.

Chapter I concerns the past, most often the ancient, even ahistorical past, which is a phantasm throughout *Mason & Dixon*. The Enlightenment's tenuous relation to Europe's Christian past factors significantly in comprehending the environmental destruction begun in the era. Perception of America as deeply ancient, even Edenic, coincided with catastrophic culture clashes between Native American and European approaches to the natural world. Essential to the yearnings for the Christian past, even the Edenic past, is a complex cultural current of nostalgia, the environmental complications of which will be made very transparent. The postsecular spiritual vision of Thomas Pynchon, of central importance to his status as an Ecocritical writer, synthesizes a panoply of ancient religious-spiritual systems. The Orphism of Greek Antiquity, Zen Buddhism, the heretical Gnostic vision of Christianity's first centuries, the countercultural Franciscan strain of Medieval Catholicism, and the mystical Kabbalistic strain of Judaism, among others, informs the postsecular spiritual vision of Pynchon, absolutely vital for comprehending his Ecocritical contributions in *Mason & Dixon*. The novel also triangulates three literary modes of an equal antiquity, from the epic quest narratives of Homer and Virgil, to the pastoral genre begun in Antiquity and which navigates throughout English literary history, so foundational for environmental writing, to the jeremiad of the Biblical prophets. Pynchon's novel occurs as the future United States of America is burgeoning and coagulating into the eventual Revolution of 1776, and the presence of the novel's engagement with literary modes from Greco-Roman Antiquity mirrors the inspiration that ancient Greece and Rome exerted upon the young republic. The environmental legacy of Greco-Roman Antiquity will briefly be examined

to illustrate the truly ancient beginnings of the current environmental crisis. Arguably the most significant ancient literary mode of *Mason & Dixon* is the jeremiad of the Biblical prophets. The prophetic jeremiad has become the favored literary mode of Ecocritical writers who have secularized the genre away from apocalyptic warnings of sin-inspired conflagrations to “sermons of the earth,” spurring human communities to “conversion” where environmental destruction is concerned. *Mason & Dixon*’s significant engagement with the prophetic jeremiad will illustrate Pynchon’s abundantly clear continuance of this ancient strain informing Ecocritical writing, proving why the novel (and indeed Pynchon in general) ought to be placed at the forefront of the American Ecocritical canon, alongside texts such as *Walden*, *Silent Spring* and *Desert Solitaire*.

Chapter II concerns the “Spectacle of the New,” the historical moment of Mason and Dixon’s lifetimes wherein nearly all aspects of life changed with a rapidity more akin to the whirling kaleidoscopes of the carnivalesque than the “Age of Reason” which the Enlightenment declared it to be. Juxtaposed to the complexities of the previous discussion of nostalgia, the newness of the novel’s setting is of utmost significance. The Enlightenment thrived upon the new sciences such as astronomy, the new global reach of European civilization (especially to the New World), the new economic mode of global capitalism, the new radicalism of thought fostered by the Reformation and its attendant questioning of authority and traditional institutions, and most crucially, the new dream of a utopian future realized by materialism, technology, and rationalism. For an Ecocritical illumination of the Enlightenment’s legacy of environmental destruction, as evidenced throughout *Mason & Dixon*, several exemplary Enlightenment personalities will be examined. Francis Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and the historical figures of Mason and Dixon will be surveyed to provide insight into the radical newness of the age, as well as their exemplifications of various aspects of environmental

destruction during the Enlightenment. The novel's absolutely vital contribution to Ecocriticism, namely that the contemporary environmental crisis began *en masse* during the Enlightenment, will be treated in two parts. Firstly, Pynchon's triangulation of the new mode of global capitalism, including the new consumer society it birthed, with the global slave trade, and its attendant environmental destruction, will situate *Mason & Dixon* as a core Ecocritical text. Secondly, the new, unprecedented scale of environmental destruction during the Enlightenment will be surveyed to provide a mosaic of Pynchon's engagement with key Ecocritical issues, for the novel is a unique contribution to the field with its location of the environmental crisis' birth as occurring *before* the Industrial Revolution, so commonly cited as the birth of the crisis by environmental writers.

Chapter III, "Visions of Futurity," is concerned with both the aftermath of the Enlightenment as it concerns the contemporary environmental movement, and its attendant apocalyptic representations in American environmental writing. The influence of Christianity upon the contemporary environmental movement will be examined in light of its simultaneity with the environmental destruction of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, the influence of the Enlightenment's conception of its objective status regarding scientific inquiry will be interrogated regarding its problematic relationship to Ecocriticism's central concerns. The globalized character of the climate crisis has become a central concern for the field, and *Mason & Dixon*'s traversing of marginalized sites across the globe, and its incorporation of non-Western philosophies and influences, reflects a broader trend in Ecocriticism towards visions of nature separate from the Enlightenment and Christian sources whose legacies are so troubling for environmentalists. The focus then turns to situating Pynchon and *Mason & Dixon* within the

broader tradition of apocalyptic writing in American literature, paying specific attention to the environmental variations on apocalyptic themes and images within the novel.

The concluding chapter, “The Ecological Carnavalesque” presents my central critical intervention, the “ecological carnivalesque” aesthetic of the novel. As Pynchon’s continuity and symmetry with broader thematic and aesthetic interests of Ecocritical writing have been clearly defined in the previous chapters, this conclusion seeks to argue for Pynchon’s elevation to the forefront of the Ecocritical canon via his unique and vital contribution to the field. Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* provides the theoretical framework for the argument, illustrating Pynchon’s continuance of the carnivalesque whilst also situating his ecological variation upon the genre as evidence for *Mason & Dixon* to be considered alongside exemplary texts like *Walden* or *Silent Spring* as fundamental to the Ecocritical canon. For indeed, it is *only* the carnivalesque aesthetics of *Mason & Dixon* which prove capable of synthesizing the truly Pynchonian array of historical, literary, geographical, environmental, philosophical, and spiritual concerns of the preceding triune overview of the Old, the New, and the Future.

I conclude with a brief coda situating Pynchon and the ecological carnivalesque of *Mason & Dixon* within the present moment of the worldwide climate crisis. The implications thus raised in my thesis constitute a large-scale reconsideration of the boundaries of Ecocriticism, and the centrality of Thomas Pynchon as one of the essential voices of environmental literature to address such a totalizing global crisis.

Chapter I: *The Specter of the Old*

Nostalgia for Eternity: Eden & Enlightenment

Europe's Christian past haunted the Enlightenment imaginary, largely in an adamant rejection, but also in a nostalgia instigated by secular disenchantment. For all that the Enlightenment *philosophes* sought to crumble the structural foundations of Christianity (particularly Voltaire¹³), there was a concurrent feeling of loss, uncertainty as to what would replace the Christian facets of Western culture. Dialectically opposed to the "Enlightenment's drive to inherit the future" is a nostalgia which Robert Pogue Harrison deems *the* "irrevocable emotion of the post-Christian era."¹⁴ The future which the Enlightenment desires to inherit, as Harrison stipulates, is defined in Pynchon's novel as "A Light in which all Pain and failure, all fear, are bleach'd away," (35) a "dream of Enlightenment" with subtle Ecocritical implications. The elimination of "Pain and failure", i.e. the "dark ages" of the Christian past, is rendered as being "bleach'd away," curiously aligning the faith which the Enlightenment placed in a technocratic utopian future with a manmade chemical such as bleach, an environmentally harmful agent which has raised activist alarms because of its ubiquity in millions of households. This alignment recalls the prior discussion of Mark Greif focus on "the technologies of mundane, ordinary life,"¹⁶ revealing the Ecocritical possibilities of his expansion of Pynchon studies. Returning to Harrison's "irrevocable emotion" of nostalgia is the exemplary cultural trajectory of the Hebrew Psalm 148, a symphonic praise to God, composed of a chorus of the entire natural world, from the sun and the moon to the mysterious aquatic creatures of the deep sea. Mark Stoll traces its cultural inspiration in the modern era from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to the American

¹³ His *Candide*, interestingly, resembles *Mason & Dixon* in its rambling traverse of the globe and emphasis upon parodying established philosophical discourses

¹⁴ Harrison, 155

¹⁶ Greif, 228

Enlightenment's representative secularist tinkerer Benjamin Franklin, and finally to the early advocate of conservationism in the American environmental movement, John Muir.¹⁷ Psalm 148 thus attests to the lingering presence of the Christian past during the Enlightenment, and continuing through to the roots of modern environmentalism, piquing the interest of very disparate figures where the relationship of nature and religion is concerned. The intensely pantheistic elements of Psalm 148 could very well have informed Pynchon's own heavily Orphic imaginary, soon to be addressed. The Scheherazade-esque narrator of *Mason & Dixon*, the exiled Anglican Rev'd Wicks Cherrycoke, becomes Pynchon's embodiment of the loss and nostalgia felt for the Christian past. He produces a nigh-identical statement to Robert Pogue Harrison's, concerning the return of the surveying party of the Mason-Dixon Line from just short of the eastern banks of the Ohio River. "Going west has been all Futurity. Now, moving against the Sun, they may take up again the past," (499) i.e. the Christian past which the Rev'd experiences as rapidly passing away in the hyper-active Westward Expansion of the Age of Reason. Yet Cherrycoke's statement also conflicts with the prevailing notions during the Enlightenment, where "going west" in the New World paradoxically entailed forays into the ancient past.

Inasmuch as the settlement of America appeared to validate the dreams of the Enlightenment, and inspire new visions of futurity such as Manifest Destiny, the landscape of the New World also offered Europeans a glimpse of something deeply ancient, even ahistorical. This was a landscape "untouched by history...the way the world might have been supposed to look before the beginning of civilization."¹⁹ Encountering Native Americans in the wilderness often confirmed such ahistorical, pre-civilized sentiments, as a line from the novel, "the Nakedness of the dark and wild men," (512) confirms in its conflation of Natives with the Edenic

¹⁷ Stoll (1997), 14

¹⁹ Marx, 36

nakedness of Adam and Eve. As Mason and Dixon venture Westward, there is an intimation that “something in this Wilderness, something ancient...waited for them...” (347) The surveying party eventually journeys from the Susquehanna River to the Alleghany Mountains of Appalachia, wherein certain mornings in the wilderness inspire the belief “that they traverse an Eden, unbearably fair in the Dawn.” (476) The worldview of Francis Bacon, typified by his unfinished novel *The New Atlantis* (1627), was founded upon the belief that Eden or other ahistorical utopias could be returned to not only by exploring new “virginal” lands, but also, through the strivings of science and technology, could be “re-created” by humanity. Conversely, a more “realistic” project was attempted, involving “reproducing the Old World mosaic in an American environment.”²³ Within this framework, an activity like deforestation was not viewed negatively but merely as a necessity for reproducing “an old and familiar way of life.”²⁴ The Edenic world could also be unusually conjured by the cultural memory of the firmly demarcated European continent left behind by early settlers. The novel’s Mr. Edgewise links Eden and the Europe of his recent memory, returning to “ ‘the Second Day of Creation, when G-d made the Firmament, and divided the Waters...thus the first Boundary Line. All else after that, in all History, is but Sub-Division.’ ” (360-61)²⁵ Nostalgia for the world left behind thus became a powerful engine of ultra-violent degradation of the supposedly Edenic New World. The paradoxical engines of futurity and nostalgia fueled Westward Expansion; every movement to the West signified both the realization of America’s immanent providential destiny, and also an entrance to the long-lost Garden of Eden. Indeed, Pynchon has Mason ponder whether “ ‘Progress Westward were a Journey, returning unto Innocence,--approaching, as a Limit, the

²³ Cronon, 126

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Recall that Mark Greif highlights the significance in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* where the rapidly appearing suburban housing of postwar California is concerned.

innocence of the Animals,” (427) a pantheistic Edenic vision highlighting the European attitude towards the American landscape during the Enlightenment. The nostalgia for Eden has existed for as long as the ancient Hebrew peoples forged the mythic story, as the theologian Theodore Hiebert has argued that *Genesis*’ prevalence of the concept of “before” indicates “the perspective of an audience outside the garden familiar with the post-Edenic landscape.”²⁷ This Edenic nostalgia outlasted the Enlightenment, proving to be a powerful wellspring of inspiration for the burgeoning environmental movement.

In January of 1855²⁸, Henry David Thoreau began his famous *Journal*, with the aim of chronicling the environmental effects upon his beloved Concord, Massachusetts after roughly two and a half centuries of European colonization and inhabitation of the land. The litany of environmental degradation recorded at this date, before the American Civil War, was “a romantic’s lament for the pristine world of an earlier and now-lost time.”²⁹ This Transcendentalist anticipation of the Proustian search for lost time highlights the pervasiveness of the image of a virginal, Edenic America. The environmental movement was largely founded upon translations of Edenic images away from their status as Biblical doctrine to being seen as fundamental to the American consciousness, absolutely vital for the culture and “soul” of the young nation. The primeval quality ascribed to the American wilderness was applied by America’s early literary generations, notably James Fennimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, as a “dramatic stage”³⁰ befitting the truly epic story of progress and Westward Expansion in America. Thus, one of the foundations of American environmental writing is a nostalgia connected with a longing for the primeval, framed in the

²⁷ Merchant (2004), 14

²⁸ Cronon, 3

²⁹ Cronon, 4

³⁰ Cronon, 54

then-contemporary trope of theatricality to represent American Exceptionalism. Roughly a century and a half later, Sigmund Freud linked *nostalgia* to the feelings “we often attach to the unspoiled landscape”, a reflection of the desire to be “[free] from the grip of the external world.”³¹ In the case of colonial settlers, the ravages of European history proved to be the only “external” reality they had known. Freud’s observation has repercussions for modern environmentalists who would fashion themselves disciples of Thoreau or Muir. The lure of “the unspoiled landscape” has remained a potent rousing point for the environmental movement, whether on the rhetorical or iconographical level.

The state of wilderness in Europe by the 18th century of the novel’s setting was dismal (to put it very kindly), and enthusiasm for the great mountain ranges such as the Alps would not surge until the mid-to-late 19th Century, thanks largely to the efforts of Romanticism and its offspring. Nearly a millennium elapsed while Europe’s “primeval” forests vanished, and by the time of European settlement in the New World, they were certainly gone. The Jesuit priest³² Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix, author of the first large-scale history of New France, articulated the European sentiment towards American forests when he declared them to be “as ancient as the world.”³³ Europeans had witnessed their landscape ravaged by the destructive forces of history from the Roman Empire through the multiple wars spawned by the Reformation. Beyond these historical ravages to the landscape, on a purely ecological level the “wide open spaces of Europe [were] things of the past.” The feudal legacy left “every scrap of land...meted, delimited, parceled out,”³⁴ as opposed to the “endless forest[s]”³⁵ of the New

³¹ Marx, 8

³² Recall that *Mason & Dixon* features an elaborate, fantastical sub-plot involving Jesuits and Chinese astronomers concocting a global conspiracy revolving around a pre-Internet form of global communication. Once again, the *global* scope of the novel situates Pynchon clearly in the broader trends of Ecocriticism.

³³ Whitney, 54

³⁴ Hazard, 437

³⁵ *Mason & Dixon*, 458

World which populated the imaginary of both the historical European settlers and Pynchon's fictional characters. From atop Laurel Hill, Pennsylvania, Mason is afforded " 'the most delightful pleasing View of the Western Plains the Eye can behold,'—the Paradise once denied him by the Mills," (679) an epiphanic, ecstatic moment of the partitioned European imaginary colliding with the nigh-infinite expansiveness of the American wilderness. *Mason & Dixon's* variation upon the Indian captivity narrative so ubiquitous in early American literature, which abruptly careens the narrative away from the long and dense central plot of the Line's surveying (and which is never explained or mentioned again by Cherrycoke), embodies the European imaginary's yearning for pre-civilized spaces of Edenic infinitude. The narrator of this tale relates "the billowing of the Forests, in short-Cycle Repetition overset upon the longer Swell of the Mountains,—a Population unnumber'd of Chestnuts, Maples, Locusts, Sweet Gums, Sycamores, Birches, in full green Abandon." (513) A sweeping vision of verdant, Edenic abundance residing deep in the American heartland, and *par excellence* of Pynchon's capacities of nature writing in the canonical Ecocritical vein of Thoreau or Robert Frost. The depiction of abundance can also take on carnivalesque elements, as the French chef exiled in the New World by Vaucanson's Mechanical Duck wonders in a frenzy if, "you ever wanted to cook *everything*,—the tomatoes, terrapins, peaches, rockfish, crabs, Indian Corn, Venison! Bear! Beaver!" (383) Rev'd Cherrycoke succinctly declares, "in America is Abundance, impossible to reach the end of in one lifetime," (754) a remark which rings darkly ironic given the current climate crisis, encompassing issues of dramatic scarcity like food deserts, the desertification of previously abundant soil, the drive for fossil fuel extraction in increasingly remote areas like the Arctic, the controversies surrounding water rights, and GMO copyrights from multinational firms like Monsanto.

More Ancient than Eden: Greco-Roman and Native American Antiquity

The pre-Christian past of the West has complicated the thesis, rose most controversially by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944),³⁹ namely that the Enlightenment's Baconian attitudes of dominance and mastery over nature are solely to blame for the present climate crisis. Inasmuch as historians from the grandiosely eccentric Oswald Spengler and the (in)famous medievalist Lynn White Jr.⁴⁰, for instance, differ in their respective projects, their nearly identical understanding that the "Western striving for domination over nature [has] been present from the beginnings of Western European civilization"⁴¹, highlights the ancient roots of the present crisis. A notable example from early Antiquity is the theory that one's immortal soul is trapped within the base matter of this world. Central to the philosophies of Pythagoras and Plato, it ushered in an "essentially foreign attitude to the hostile physical world."⁴² This "hostility" does not die with the fall of the Roman Empire but became engrained in the European consciousness from its popularization by Pauline Catholicism up through the dualism of Rene Descartes. Across the Atlantic, the revolutionary spirit of colonial America drew inspiration equally from the new radicalism of Enlightenment *philosophes*, as it did from the foundation stone of Western democracy, Greco-Roman Antiquity. The resonances inspired by the Roman Republic or Athenian democracy with America's Revolutionary generation has long been a staple of histories of the young nation. What concerns this

³⁹ The scholarly debates over this work are storied, and extensive. In the interest of searching for alternate critical interventions on the broader topics of Enlightenment, environmentalism and religious issues, I have chosen expressly not to engage with this work in great detail.

⁴⁰ White's 1967 essay "On the Historical Roots of Our Present Environmental Crisis", wherein he charged the Judeo-Christian worldview as being anthropocentric and unconcerned with the changes to this world in view of the Kingdom to Come, became the prevailing academic attitude on the subject for many decades. Only in recent years has the thesis been more fully scrutinized.

⁴¹ LaFreniere, 36

⁴² LaFrenier, 84

investigation is how previously overlooked environmental attitudes of the much-emulated Greco-Roman cultures of Antiquity furthers the history of American Ecocriticism.

During the historical moment of *Mason & Dixon* the English Royal Navy experienced a drastic shortage of timber, subsequently driving deforestation in the New England colonies. Robert Pogue Harrison outlines how this moment of scarcity was mirrored centuries before the appearance of Christianity: in the 4th century B.C.E., Plato recalled “with nostalgia a time when forests still covered much of Attica.”⁴³ Crucially, this was a nostalgia inspired by deforestation, which was the “result of the Athenian navy’s need for wood.”⁴⁴ Nostalgia, far from an emotion exclusively reserved for the Christian past, becomes *ecologically* expanded⁴⁵ to encompass natural places violently altered, often wholly destroyed, by human efforts spanning from the dawn of Western culture to the fictional pre-Industrial lifetime of the Rev’d Wicks Cherrycoke, to contemporary chroniclers of environmental collapse like Rachael Carson and Thomas Pynchon.

The global reach of America, whether militarily, culturally, and linguistically, solidified largely over the course of Thomas Pynchon’s lifetime thus far (1937-the present). Inevitably, comparisons with the Roman Empire, particularly of its decline and fall, are in no short supply. The Ecocritical significance of the Roman influence upon the American environment is glaringly obvious though perhaps unexpected in its magnitude: agriculture. The Roman legacies typically remembered by schoolchildren are its military might, its construction of massive monuments, its innovative aqueducts and road systems, its attempt to universalize imperial culture through Latin, or its gladiators and Christian-eating lions. All of which exemplify what Charles Mason’s

⁴³ Harrison, 55

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Further research would draw upon Marcel Proust’s notions of the effects of *place* upon the memory, particularly, the nostalgic effects of memory for places irreparably destroyed by climate change and similar natural disasters.

teacher in the novel, William Emerson, cites as the “‘Roman’s...preoccupation with conveying Force...along straight Lines.’” (219) Rome’s agricultural predisposition is of equal, if not more, consequence for its legacy regarding the current climate crisis. As the “insatiable mouth of empire devoured the land, clearing it for agriculture and leaving to irreversible erosion in regions that were once the most fertile in the world,”⁴⁶ Western culture’s dominant relation to the environment for domestic goods would become agricultural. The Roman agricultural legacy becomes abundantly clear in its tempestuous alteration of the American landscape by juxtaposing it against the Native American relations to the earth.

The environmental attitudes of the deeply ancient Natives peoples of the American continent must be illuminated in order to fully comprehend the destructive tendencies lingering in Western environmental thought from imperial Rome and the authors of the Bible to Francis Bacon and John Locke. Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon were land surveyors in addition to being astronomers, an occupation which collates them with the ancient past of America’s Native peoples and environment in a explicit and surprising manner. Rather than the travelogues or diaries of early colonists, the most valuable source for modern scholars attempting to recreate what the pre-settlement American landscape looked like are the records of the land surveyors of the pre-Revolutionary era⁴⁷. The scholarly consensus amazingly validates the case for Pynchon as a central Ecocritical writer, in that his Mason and Dixon are thus critically expanded into custodians of the American landscape, before the vicissitudes of history, such the Industrial Revolution and the completion of Westward Expansion, would erase that “Edenic” environment

⁴⁶ Harrison, 5

⁴⁷ Highlighted equally in *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain: A History of Environmental Change in Temperate North America 1500 to the Present* by Gordon G. Whitney, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, Print., 29, and *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, by William Cronon, Hill and Wing, NY, 1983, print., 7

forever. Yet, environmental historians like William Cronon caution⁴⁸ the persistence of Edenic imagery, even in its later secularized forms by the environmental movement. He soberly declaims that this mythologized European encounter with “Virgin Land, the Forest Primeval, a wilderness which had existed for eons uninfluenced by human hands” is simply untrue. Cronon prefers instead the sentiment of the historian Francis Jennings that “the land was less virgin that it was widowed.”⁴⁹ While environmental historians have largely concluded that Native peoples dramatically altered the American landscape⁵⁰, especially with their use of fire, their long-term effects would never resemble those of Europeans because of the issue of *mobility*. The Native peoples inhabiting the lands which eventually became the United States were a mobile society to such an extent that it was not just the hunter-gatherers who frequently moved about, but the entire tribe. The “village” was a dynamic, constantly moving entity, a concept utterly foreign to Western understandings of the term. The rationale for a transitory culture appeared rather simple and obvious to the Native peoples: “find maximum abundance through minimal work”.⁵¹ An approach which, while certainly not “neutral” in its impact, nonetheless reduced the overall environmental disruptions or damages caused by these temporary settlements. It was the Christian English, darkly ironically, with their belief in an ephemeral, transitory life on earth, who would dramatically alter the American landscape in a frighteningly short timeframe because of their insistence on *permanent* social settlements.

For the New England Puritan, “right to absolute possession of his private property was akin to the right to absolute possession of his own soul and conscience,”⁵² theologically

⁴⁸ See also Shephard Krech III’s *The Ecological Indian* (1999; W.W. Norton & Co.) for its interrogation of the commonly held cultural “myth” of Native Americans as possessing a completely pure and holistic relation to their natural surroundings.

⁴⁹ Cronon, 12

⁵⁰ See the aforementioned works of Cronon, Whitney, Krech, et al.

⁵¹ Cronon, 53

⁵² Slotkin, 43

justifying one of the central tenets of emergent capitalism, which was to have crucial environmental consequences. The paradox of the Puritan worldview thrived on the tension of feeling “caught between being centered and being scattered, placed and uprooted, frightened and enchanted by the same beauteous and rugged space in which they dwelt.”⁵³ The novel’s Mr. Everybeet⁵⁴ echoes the disenchantment of many Edenically eager Europeans with the harsh realities of the American climate when he regretfully acknowledges that it is “ ‘not at all the Paradise one has been led to expect.’ ” (548) In a subtle, yet Romantically elegiac passage, Pynchon writes, “In the strong twilight over the Mountains of Wales, draining of light League upon League of darkly forested Peaks...to the eye familiar, the occasional interruption of Cabin or Plantation...” (585) The twilit setting of lush wilderness juxtaposed with “interruptions” of frontier cabins and the South’s ubiquitous plantations hints at the permanent alterations to the American landscape via Westward Expansion and the Southern slavery-plantation system.

Thomas Pynchon’s Postsecular Spirituality: Ever Ancient, Ever New

John A. McClure’s groundbreaking work on postsecularism in contemporary literature defines the field as “a mode of being and seeing that is at once critical of secular constructions of reality and of dogmatic religiosity.”⁵⁷ Those postsecular writers McClure cites, such as Pynchon, Toni Morrison and Louis Erdrich, “tell stories about new forms of religiously inflected seeing and being,” and yet these tales “do not provide, or even aspire to provide, any full ‘mapping’ of the reenchanting cosmos. They do not promise anything like full redemption.”⁵⁸ A perfect distillation of this postsecular spirituality in Pynchon’s novels occurs when Rev’d Cherrycoke experiences anxiety when speaking of his “true ‘Church’, of the planet-wide Syncretism, among

⁵³ Lane, 152

⁵⁴ Perhaps an ecologically Pynchonian pun on James Joyce’s “Here Comes Everybody” from *Finnegan’s Wake*.

⁵⁷ McClure, ix

⁵⁸ Ibid

the Deistick, the Oriental, Kabbalist, and the Savage, that is to be,--the Promise of Man, the redemptive Point, ever at our God-horizon, toward which all Faiths, true and delusional, must alike converge!” (356) The global “Syncretism” for which he pines is in essence the spirituality of Thomas Pynchon, one which is “postsecular” in its striving for a religious experience beyond the confines of traditional institutional religions, capable of encompassing the spirituality of the Kabbalah equally as well as the Buddhist or the cosmic Christianity of Teilhard de Chardin⁶⁰, whose famous insistence that “everything that rises must converge”, is clearly echoed here. Just as Teilhard de Chardin was excommunicated by the Catholic Church for his attempts to juxtapose the findings of modern science with Christianity, Rev’d Cherrycoke attempts a similar high-wire act, embodied in an excerpt from his *Undeliver’d Sermons*, something of an apocryphal text in the novel. He declares, “The final pure Christ is pure uncertainty,” (511) a heavily Gnostic theological statement smacking of Werner Heisenberg⁶¹ far more than Matthew, Mark, Luke or John⁶². It is abundantly clear that for Pynchon, Cherrycoke functions as a vehicle for postsecular thought, as his conflation of Christ and modern physics demonstrates. At the novel’s outset Cherrycoke describes to his relatives “one of those moments Hindoos and Chinamen are ever said to be having, entire loss of Self, perfect union with All, sort of thing,” (10) a postsecular blurring of institutionalized religious boundaries (an Anglican priest having a Hindu and/or Buddhist experience) to communicate an Orphic relation to the living world.

The centrality of the mythological figure of Orpheus in *Gravity’s Rainbow* provides at least one of the cornerstones of Pynchon’s postsecular spiritual vision. Whether in direct

⁶⁰ A discussion of Teilhard de Chardin also occurs on *Gravity’s Rainbow*, 539, reflecting a long interest on Pynchon’s behalf

⁶¹ directly referenced earlier in Pynchon’s work, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, 348, illustrating a continuity of “the uncertainty principle” throughout his oeuvre

⁶² See *Gravity’s Rainbow* 747, where “a Gnostic or Cathar symbol for the Church of Rome” is employed in defiance of the institutional religion that Catholicism represents.

references to Orpheus, or in the novel's "canonization" of Rainer Maria Rilke (whose *Sonnets to Orpheus* inform Pynchon's imaginary), *Gravity's Rainbow*'s veritable patron saint⁶⁴ is surely this mythical poet devoted to the natural world in song and who descended to the Underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice. Orphic spirituality pervades Pynchon's entire oeuvre⁶⁵, for the nigh-pantheistic delight taken in the natural world in his novels, while hitherto overlooked in the critical discourse, is an essential counterpoint to the infernal devastations wrought upon humanity and the earth by scientific-technological advancements⁶⁶. The Orphism in Pynchon's narratives shows his clear "alignment...with those larger movements in secular and religious culture that are responding to environmental crisis."⁶⁷ Martin Heidegger, a philosopher whom Ecocriticism is notably rehabilitating⁶⁸, organized his essay "What are Poets for?" around the figure of Rainer Maria Rilke. Citing the root meaning of "abyss" as referring to "the soil and ground toward which, because it is undermost, a thing tends downward,"⁶⁹ Heidegger anticipates the Ecocritical potential of the Orphic spirituality espoused by Rilke and furthered by Thomas Pynchon, especially where the Underworld of Orphism and Pynchon's novels is concerned. The technocratic modern age is dubbed by Heidegger as "the world's night," an age in which "the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss."⁷⁰ The Orphic descent, whether in Rilke or Pynchon, is of profoundly spiritual consequence of Heidegger, as the task of the poet is "to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods. This is why the poet in the time of the world's night utters the

⁶⁴ McClure, 38

⁶⁵ A passing reference on *Mason & Dixon* 147 does not discount his thematic centrality to the novel.

⁶⁶ Arguably the central concern of Pynchon scholarship from its outset.

⁶⁷ McClure, 30

⁶⁸ "Of all twentieth-century philosophers, Martin Heidegger wrote persuasively of the rampant estrangement from place that is prevalent in contemporary culture," Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (7; 2002, Johns Hopkins University Press).

⁶⁹ Heidegger, 90

⁷⁰ Ibid

holy.”⁷¹ To comprehend Pynchon’s “poetics” in the Orphic sense of Heidegger, Peter Hanns Reill outlines a vision of literary creation in a deeply ecological manner. In a work highlighting the late Enlightenment figure Alexander von Humboldt⁷², Reill cites the “poetic act, which combines intuition and reason informed by precise empirical study and creative imagination” as a grand possibility for “at least point[ing] to nature’s underlying harmony.”⁷³ Reill concludes that this poetic act “constitutes the highest form of knowledge, joining the study of physical nature with the study of the moral, linking blind forces to life drives.”⁷⁴ Orpheus, then, certainly embodies this ecologically charged definition of poetic creation, and there are few novelists who so richly parallel this vision as Thomas Pynchon. *Mason & Dixon*, like *Gravity’s Rainbow*, illustrates how a novelist of Pynchon’s intellectual capacities is mesmerizingly able to weave in expert knowledge on pre-Revolutionary land surveyance or ballistic missile technology, while simultaneously gifting to American literature some of its most stunningly *human* moments of love, sex, humor, death, and much more. In this sense, Pynchon is most clearly the American heir to James Joyce, whose expertise across a spectrum of obtuse intellectual interests was always synthesized with a poetic, high-mystical rendering of the *human*.

The Orphic spirituality of Rilke, whose most influential heir in contemporary literature is Thomas Pynchon, is thus a postsecular spirituality in that it seeks to “utter the holy” of the “fugitive gods” without confining itself to the strictures of a single, totalizing institutional religion. The perversely omnipresent authoritarian forces of They/Them of Pynchon’s narratives preside over their respective “world’s night[s],” but it is the narrative voice of *Mason & Dixon*’s

⁷¹ Heidegger, 92

⁷² Further research would encompass the recent magisterial work by Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt’s New World*, Vintage, 2015, which cites the titular subject as one of the neglected founders of environmentalism; his *global* vision would prove particularly fruitful to parallel with the novels of Thomas Pynchon.

⁷³ Reill, 20

⁷⁴ Reill, 20

Rev'd Cherrycoke who most powerfully enacts the Orphic reach/descent into the abyss of the environmental destruction, global slavery, imperialism, etc., of the Enlightenment, emerging from this Underworld uttering the holiness of Pynchon's postsecular earth-spirituality. Indeed, alongside the Edenic vision of the American wilderness, the "West" carried equally ancient, Orphic connotations for early settlers. The mythology of the Old World had long associated the "West" and those who lived in this mysterious realm "with the kingdom of death and dreams, the underworld...In this dark, hidden realm abides the forces that silently and inscrutably shape the destiny of men, nations, and the physical universe."⁷⁵ *Mason & Dixon's* American West is a supernaturally exotic realm, and the ancient European mythology it revived in settlers is also distinctly Pynchonian in its concerns. The connection of the West and the underworld further illuminates the Orphic spirituality in Pynchon's novels, with its emphasis on journeying through the underworld. Secondly, that this Orphic-zone should also be the dwelling place of "the forces" which govern human and cosmic trajectories, instantly echoes the anonymous determining forces of They/Them in Pynchon's novels who are the masters of the underworld-like realms which his protagonists struggle to survive within. The concluding line of *Against the Day* (2006), "They fly toward grace" may be read as the dialectical resolution to *Gravity's Rainbow's* opening salvo of "A screaming comes across the sky", with that flight toward the postsecularly ambiguous "grace" as Pynchon's iteration of the Orphic emergence from Hades with Eurydice.⁷⁶ The ecological emphasis of Orphic spirituality combined with its insistence regarding a confrontation with, indeed a descent into, the "abyss" of the underworlds of the Enlightenment and Postmodernity, is a persuasive element for a large-scale Ecocritical canonization of Pynchon.

⁷⁵ Slotkin, 28

⁷⁶ The "Eurydice-obsession" of Orpheus and Tyrone Slothrop appears in *Gravity's Rainbow*, 472

Dwight Eddins' groundbreaking work on Gnosticism in Pynchon's work⁷⁷, particularly his "Orphic naturalism," contends that a novel like *Gravity's Rainbow* absolutely contains⁷⁸ "a holy center, the living and ultimately beneficent earth."⁷⁹ John A. McClure also cites the potent specter of St. Francis of Assisi in *Gravity's Rainbow*.⁸⁰ While a central figure of Roman Catholicism, Francis nonetheless verges on a similarly Orphic pantheism, and his devotion to the poor of rural Italy in defiance of the self-indulgent corruption of the institutional Church of his lifetime, makes him a powerful presence in Pynchon's work, where the commingling of Ecocriticism and postsecularism is concerned. Mikhail Bakhtin notes that St. Francis referred to himself and his followers as "God's jugglers," which, along with Francis' "blessing of the material bodily principle" leads Bakhtin to conclude, "with some exaggeration", that the Franciscan movement instigated a "carnivalized Catholicism."⁸¹ Dixon experiences a Franciscan moment when, "Returning north,---mud Tracks, black wet Branching of Trees overhead, as Revelations of Earth out thro' the Snow,--[he], inhabiting Silence, waits, Clop after Clop, Mile after Mile, for some kind of sense to be made of what has otherwise been a pointless Trip." (397) The "Trees overhead" of Dixon's Franciscan moment may be elucidated by Steven Weisenburger and Luc Herman's recent and significant addition to criticism on *Gravity's Rainbow*. Contending that the novel is "subtly preoccupied with what is materially *counter* to culture: the nature surround us all, especially trees,"⁸² the "counterculture" stance of Francis becomes wedded to the pantheistic Orphism of Pynchon's spirituality. When *Mason & Dixon's* Capt. Zhang triangulates the pivotal moments in the hagiographies of Adam and Eve, the

⁷⁷ Dwight Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon*, Indiana University Press, 1990.

⁷⁸ Eddins' contention runs contrary to that of noted Pynchon scholar Molly Hite, who views Pynchon as typifying Postmodernism with *Gravity's Rainbow* absence of a "center" of any kind.

⁷⁹ Eddins, 140.

⁸⁰ McClure, 23

⁸¹ Bakhtin, 57

⁸² Herman and Weisenburger, 67

Buddha, and Isaac Newton, he concludes , “Trees produce Enlightenment. Trees are not the problem. The Forest is not an Agent of Darkness.” (615) Zhang’s pantheistic claims that “ ‘Wood is as much an Element as Air or Water,--living Trees in particular,” and “ ‘Earth, withal, is a Body, like our own,”” (602) are highly Orphic-Franciscan evidence of Weisenburger and Herman’s claim about the centrality of trees in Pynchon’s oeuvre. Compounding the already unusual blend of Orphism and Franciscan spirituality, Pynchon’s postsecularism also brings the ancient strain of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah into the fold. The Rabbi of Prague in *Mason & Dixon* posits that “This ‘New World’ was ever a secret Body of Knowledge,--meant to be studied with the same dedication as the Hebrew Kabbala...Forms of the Land, the flow of water, the occurrence of what us’d to be call’d Miracles, all are Text.” (487) Pynchon’s Orphic-Franciscan pantheism merges with the Kabbalistic spirituality so pervasive in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, creating a powerful, yet eccentric, concoction of a postsecular vision firmly grounded in the earth.

If the natural world has functioned as the overlooked dialectical, indeed, *spiritual*, response to the devastations wrought by technology in Pynchon’s *oeuvre*, then surely it will be the Ecocritical approach which will be capable of rehabilitating Pynchon for the new millennium. *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s now-canonical dictum that “*Everything is connected*” solidified Pynchon’s status as modern literature’s grand poet of Paranoia. Perhaps this over-emphasis on themes of paranoia and conspiracy theories in the academy’s reading of Pynchon has resulted in his hitherto exclusion from Ecocriticism. Yet, one of the foundational thinkers of Ecocriticism, Arne Naess, provides a powerful example of Pynchon’s complementarity with the field at large, particularly his postsecular spiritual vision. Naess is credited with establishing the field of “deep ecology” in 1973, emphasizing a radical interconnectivity of all living things;

ecology had previously centered around the interconnectedness of plant and animal life, but Naess was the first to situate human beings *within* the planet's ecology, not objectively viewing it from a god-like height *a la* Enlightenment science. Naess' influences ranged from the "ecology of Rachel Carson, the nonviolence of Mahatma Gandhi, and the pantheist metaphysics...of Baruch Spinoza"⁹¹: a truly Pynchonian cavalcade of interdisciplinary inspiration on the global level. Deep ecology seeks to remedy the "cornucopian concept of nature as inexhaustible," for which the Romantic legacy certainly contributed, and to "reform environmentalism's belief that prudent management of resources can suffice to avoid environmental disaster and societal collapse,"⁹² indicating a clear desire to pivot environmentalism away from its Enlightenment heritage. Thomas Pynchon's work, similarly, proudly bears vestiges of Romanticism while also engaging in thorough socio-historical critiques *a la* Fredric Jameson, and his postsecular vision is similarly suspect of the ability of institutions to provide solutions to the truly pressing needs of humanity, whether on the level of religious dogma or the climate crisis. Finally, the insistence of Arne Naess that humans "see ourselves not as atomistic individuals, but as part of a greater living community,"⁹³ provides a fascinating, and radical, point of departure for Pynchon studies. While *Gravity's Rainbow* may be infamous to those critics hostile to Pynchon, for the dissolving of its protagonist Tyrone Slothrop has been indicative to many commentators of the supposedly pessimistic state of the human condition in Postmodernity, a deep ecological reading of Pynchon may reveal startling, and vital, ways his rehabilitation, and expansion, beyond the thematic confines of Postmodernism. The "greater living community" which is exemplified in the deep ecology of Arne Naess provides another bridge into the postsecular spirituality of Pynchon, namely, the globalized vision of the carnivalesque communities within *Mason & Dixon*.

⁹¹ Goodbody, 64

⁹² Goodbody, 64

⁹³ Ibid

Turning once more to John A. McClure's pioneering work on postsecular fiction, it is crucial to note that he grounds the various spiritual traditions of Pynchon's novels in a *global* character. In 1988, Pynchon reviewed *Love in the Time of Cholera* by the Colombian magical realist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, for the *New York Times Book Review*, entitled "The Heart's Eternal Vow." Commenting on themes within Marquez's novel, Pynchon interestingly declared that, "to assert the resurrection of the body [is] today as throughout history an unavoidably revolutionary idea."⁹⁴ Marquez is certainly not a catechist of orthodox, institutional Christianity (his is a more alchemical blend of Gnosticism and Latin American folkloric mythology), but Pynchon's consideration of the radical spiritual power of *Cholera* is significant for its alignment of himself with the broader aesthetic and thematic concerns of the Latin American Boom, in particular with a novel like *Cholera* which features environmental degradation as its elegiac coda. The postsecular spirituality of Gabriel Garcia Marquez is thus seen as another voice of thematic and aesthetic complementarity and influence upon Pynchon's global Ecocritical imaginary. *Gravity's Rainbow* calls attention to "see Gnostics so hunted,"⁹⁵ an alignment of one of the primary agents of Pynchon's postsecular vision with a marginalized group persecuted by institutionalized religion (in this case, the Catholic Church, for their "heretical" practice of the Eucharist). On the grounds that the postsecular visions within Pynchon's narratives "directly address recognizable social evils—militant nationalism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and the ongoing assault on the environment,"⁹⁶ Ecocriticism must seriously consider the thematic commitment, in narratives of a global scale, of Thomas Pynchon to these issues as a primary reason for his admittance as an absolutely vital and powerful literary voice in this emergent

⁹⁴ "The Heart's Eternal Vow," *The New York Times Book Review*, Thomas Pynchon, April 10, 1988

⁹⁵ *Gravity's Rainbow*, 739

⁹⁶ McClure, 20

canon. Lawrence Buell speculates, “If such as a thing as global culture ever comes into being,”⁹⁷ the environmental movement will be at the vanguard. Pynchon is indeed mentioned⁹⁸ by Buell in that landmark work on American environmental literature⁹⁹, but only as a representative of “paranoid literature” *a la* fellow 1960’s luminaries like Joseph Heller and John Barth, *not* as a writer to be considered alongside Thoreau or Wendell Berry or John Muir. Among American writers, Thomas Pynchon surely ranks as among the most *global* in scope, particularly in his postsecular ecological vision, encompassing spiritual influences from Zen Buddhism, the Kabbalah, Orphism, Gnosticism, Latin American magical realism, and so forth. The mirroring of these postsecular characteristics with the deep ecology of Arne Naess, and Pynchon’s commitment to highlighting marginalized peoples and locales on a global scale, rank as some of the most compelling reasons for his inclusion as one of the foremost Ecocritical voices in American literature.

The Heroic Quest & the Pastoral: Pynchon’s Ancient Literary Modes

Thomas Pynchon ranks as one of the most compelling modern American heirs to a panoply of ancient literary traditions, particularly the Homeric and Virgilian heroic quest narratives so foundational to Western culture. Richard Slotkin contends, “the myth of the heroic quest...is perhaps the most important archetype underlying American cultural mythology.”¹⁰⁴ From the epic quest for the elusive titular character of his debut novel *V.*, spanning the globe as well as multiple historical epochs, to the Odysseus-esque trajectory of Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, to *Mason & Dixon*’s explicit engagement with Homer and Virgil, Slotkin’s

⁹⁷ Buell, 3

⁹⁸ Buell, 300

⁹⁹ *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*, Daniel J. Philippon, The University of Georgia Press, Athens GA, 2005, print., is a work of slightly more specific intention than Buell’s, but focuses on largely the same figures as Buell’s work. The absence of Thomas Pynchon in this work is exemplary of his absence in hitherto critical forays into American Ecocriticism.

¹⁰⁴ Slotkin, 10

analysis thus places Pynchon firmly within the broader aesthetic interests of American literature. David Cowart confirms this when he notes that Pynchon's novelistic "catalogues—of disasters, of trash in a used car, of stamp anomalies, or pre-war British candies—link him to Homer, to Spenser, to his countryman Walt Whitman...In *Mason & Dixon*, like Virgil chronicling the mythic genesis of the fatherland, [he] imagines the moment at which the disparate ingredients of the American nation first came together."¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Pynchon's entire corpus including his most recent novels *Inherent Vice* (2009) and *Bleeding Edge* (2013) are structured as Homeric-Virgilian heroic quest narratives rendered in Postmodern tonalities, centering around their protagonists' odysseys through the chaotic labyrinthine underworlds of Postmodernity, always finding their primal motivating energies in the bizarre meanderings of Odysseus and Aeneas.

Mason & Dixon engages Homer in references to *The Iliad* (fitting for a novel posited on the eve of the Revolution), and especially in its Postmodern rendering of *The Odyssey*, with its global traverse of fantastical locales populated by the grotesque, whether werewolves or Dutch slaveholders, wherein the protagonists' final return to England is as insignificant as Odysseus' to Ithaca. In true Homeric fashion, it is the experience of the journey itself to which Pynchon assigns the greatest import. The circuitous and convoluted journey of Mason Dixon witnesses the pair routinely diverted, even unwillingly governed by the omnipresent They/Them who function as Pynchon's iteration of the Homeric Olympian pantheon who often arbitrarily and unpredictably delayed Odysseus' return to Penelope. The Homeric strain is also contextual, in that the Enlightenment produced a newfound craze for Homer¹⁰⁶, beginning with Alexander Pope's celebrated translation of *The Iliad* (1715-20). Recall the storied emulation of Greco-Roman Antiquity, which the American revolutionaries strove towards, and the presence of the

¹⁰⁵ Cowart, 83

¹⁰⁶ Hazart, 338

national epic poets Homer and Virgil becomes even more compelling in Pynchon's engagement with the heroic quest narrative. The Postmodern innovations to the genre have implications beyond the Enlightenment, too, as one of Pynchon's greatest Ecocritical assets is the aforementioned commitment to marginal places and peoples across the globe throughout his novels. Mason and Dixon are ejected from their comfortable pastoral life in England to the marginalized (both geographically and socio-economically) global sites of the Cape of Good Hope, St. Helena, and the American colonies. The quest still affords plenty of fantastically Homeric sequences, in locales that would have seemed as exotic and strange to Cherrycoke's familial audience as those of Odysseus' grueling journey would have been to the audiences of Antiquity, particularly in the novel's long middle section titled "America", where Mason and Dixon encounter the "mythical" creatures and/or beasts of the American wilderness, like werewolves and Jewish diaspora golems. Mason and Dixon are not rendered as abolitionist-esque activists, but nonetheless, the novel presents two Englishmen, who have come of age in the island culture of British cultural superiority and the wider world of Enlightenment thought, and are forced to see the world not as escapist tourists seeking exotic pleasures, but rather as witnesses to, and somewhat unwillingly participants in, the horrors of slavery, environmental destruction, the first phases of global capitalist alienation, the exploitation of the global south, and so forth. Thus, Pynchon's reworking of the ancient Homeric motif becomes an exemplary Ecocritical narrative of those in the passive and complacent West becoming exposed, often against their most strenuous efforts, to the *global* scale of the present environmental crisis, and its attendant human destruction.

Mason & Dixon also negotiates with the similarly ancient literary tradition of the pastoral, a mode with perhaps more complex Ecocritical implications. If the novel is to be read

literally, as a “novel” by the Rev’d Wicks Cherrycoke, the presence of pastoral elements is quite sensible for representing and/or parodying English literature of the era. The Romantic movement of the 19th century would revitalize the concerns of the pastoral, particularly its idealization of the spiritual nourishment afforded to those engaged in solitary tasks in the natural world, while providing far more rugged and sublime landscapes than the ancient tradition dwelt within (such as Horace’s *Odes* or Virgil’s *Georgics*). Pynchon’s inclusion of pastoral elements, which are firmly related to the picaresque of Henry Fielding and Cervantes, reveals more than Postmodernist playfulness with literary history. Lawrence Buell confines the “main canonical forms of environmental writing” in the American canon to “the wilderness romance, and the lyric meditation on the luminous natural image of scene.”¹⁰⁷ *Mason & Dixon* fulfills both of these “requirements,” for the “wilderness romance” is expressed in the large forays into the American wilderness during Mason and Dixon’s surveying of the Line, as well as the story-within-a-story-within-a-story where Pynchon engages the “Indian Captivity” narrative form. The novel also fulfills the luminous meditation requirement, in a scene devoted to the “ecological-sloth”, to be discussed in the final section of this investigation. Carolyn Merchant outlines a triadic heritage of the pastoral, with its “nostalgia for the Homeric Golden Age, for the uncorrupted Garden of Eden, and escape from the ills of the city.”¹⁰⁸ Nostalgia for a supposedly bucolic, pastoral Antiquity confirms a marked escapist predilection towards the ancient past, wherein human relations with nature are retrospectively constructed as idyllic, harmonious and unconcerned with the technology of Baconian mastery. Buell demonstrates how rampant this eternal nostalgia is for pastoral lifestyles, citing Raymond Williams’ argument that English

¹⁰⁷ Buell, 85

¹⁰⁸ Merchant (1980), 8

literature's "nostalgia for the vanishing 'country way of life'"¹⁰⁹ extends as far as the Anglo-Saxon era of *Beowulf*. The escapism of the pastoral, particularly its integration of fantastical elements in chivalric romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is infused with an Edenic yearning for the infinite by Rev'd Cherrycoke and other characters as previously discussed. His litany of "tales" of the American wilderness involving "fertile lands, Savage women, giant Vegetables, forests without end, Marshlands seething with shell-fish, Buffalo-Herds the size of Paris," (380) is a perfectly executed example of Pynchon's awareness of Ecocritical issues in colonial America while also remaining true to his carnivalization of canonical modes like the pastoral. This is identical to Merchant's second root of pastoral nostalgia, translated into the Judeo-Christian framework, revealing an original contribution to the pastoral of America as a virginal Edenic land. Escapism in the pastoral also encompasses the desire for wild places, typically resulting from perceptions associating the urban with corruption of various forms.

Mason & Dixon is exceptionally aware of this urban vs. rural tension, for the central narrative concerns the titular Line demarcating, in broad terms, the civilized (or urban) and the wild in the colonial America. The wilderness spaces of the novel are the zones most heavily populated with characters and/or occurrences of the fantastical, exotic, esoteric, and carnivalesque variety. This thread in *Mason & Dixon* encompasses the Shakespearean pastoral, in its engagement of the carnivalesque elements of the Bard's urban vs. rural dynamics, or in references to *The Tempest*, such as a frontier watchman likening himself to Prospero.¹¹¹ The setting of the latter play on a tropical island presumably in the New World, which involves natural disasters invoked by occult magic, is an explicit link to Pynchon's commingling of apocalyptic storms and the supernatural, whether in the presence of ghosts or the invocation of

¹⁰⁹ Buell, 161

¹¹¹ *Mason & Dixon*, 658

“black magic” such as Kabbalistic mysticism. The English landscape was altered dramatically in Shakespeare’s lifetime, and Robert Pogue Harrison notes that in his works, “the savagery that once traditionally belonged to the forests now lurks in the hearts of men—civic men.”¹¹² The Shakespearian inversion accounts for one of the pathways of the American pastoral, wherein “the city becomes sinister, forests become innocent, pastoral, diversionary, *comic*.”¹¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin outlines three modes of the Shakespearean carnivalesque: “images of the material bodily lower stratum, of ambivalent obscenities, and of popular banquet scenes,”¹¹⁴ reinforcing the “diversionary, *comic*” vision of the environment in Shakespeare. Thus the nods to *The Tempest* throughout *Mason & Dixon* go far in explaining the Ecocritical significance of the persistence of Pynchon’s digressive and comic forays into Shakespearean wilderness zones. Capt. Shelby, a fellow surveyor encountered by Mason and Dixon, narrates a fire-side tale of the “Lambton Worm”, a folkloric legend of the English countryside, lamenting that, “the river then was purer and wilder, not yet altogether converted to the service of the Christian God.” (588) Shelby’s elegiac pastoral, a digression in the tale of the “Lambton Worm” (itself a diversion within the narrative writ large), conforms to the Shakespearian inversion of aligning corruption with the urban centers of institutional Christianity and the wilderness as a zone of wild innocence. It is crucial that Shelby notes the naturalistic river-site does not “serve” the Christian God, for Pynchon reminds that “the Holy Ghost” is “conducting its own Settlement of America,” (261) signaling the deeply rooted connection between Christianity and the legacy of Native displacement and environmental degradation in the Americas.

The historical Mason and Dixon were born roughly a century after Shakespeare’s death in 1616, an elapsing of time which witnessed the emergence of global capitalism, which

¹¹² Harrison, 100

¹¹³ Harrison, 100

¹¹⁴ Bakhtin, 275

Raymond Williams singles out as *the* driving force behind the dialectical approach to civilization and nature in pastoral English literature. He contends that capitalism's "abstracted economic drives, its fundamental priorities in social relations, its criteria of growth and of profit and loss," had, even by the lifetime of Mason and Dixon, "altered our country and created our kinds of city."¹¹⁷ Pynchon's novel declares that in the New World, " 'The true War...is between the City and the back inhabitants...far from Philadelphia,' (309) a deft awareness of Williams' central dilemma regarding the pastoral. Dixon later echoes the Puritan John Winthrop's famous vision of the American experiment as "a city upon a hill" when he attempts to relate his dream of " 'a City to the West of here...at some great Confluence of Rivers...a large City,--busy, prospering, sacred.' " (609) The Westward drive of secularized Enlightenment capitalism never fully extricated itself from the Puritan ethos of America as the exemplary "light of Christ" to the rest of the world. Indeed, as Williams concludes, capitalism's "final forms of imperialism," the very mode furnishing much of Mason and Dixon's paranoia regarding They/Them throughout the novel, "has altered our world."¹²⁰ Pynchon's pastoral aesthetics, then, encompass the dialectical tensions created by emergent global capitalism, whose aftereffects reverberate through the global literature so central to Ecocriticism.

The Prophetic Gaze: Pynchon's Sermons for the Earth

The jeremiad of the Biblical prophets is perhaps *the* favored ancient literary mode of environmental writing, and is central to the postsecular vision of *Mason & Dixon*. Mark Stoll defines the Judeo-Christian prophets as those "on the *margins* of society, apart both from everyday life and from ordinary religious and priestly organizations"¹²¹, which resonates deeply with the thematic interests of Thomas Pynchon and Ecocriticism. In its secularized mode, the

¹¹⁷ Williams, 302

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Stoll (1997), 43

jeremiad of the Biblical prophets to repent of one's sins and convert to faith in God is reconfigured as "repenting" of one's environmentally destructive behavior and converting to a more ecologically sound lifestyle. These "sermons for the earth" have become the de facto literary voice of environmental writers, whether in the Augustinian "confessions" of Thoreau in *Walden* or Rachel Carson's more explicit channeling of Jeremiah's urgency regarding the cessation of DDT use. Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the United States Forest Service, typified the secularized tonality of this naturalistic prophetic gaze. After witnessing the endgame of East Coast old-growth forest clearance, he declared a "perfect orgy of forest destruction"¹²² was underway, eliminating any possibility for future generations to believe that the region once boasted the famed primeval forests encountered by the first settlers. Importantly, Pinchot conflates apocalyptic environmental degradation with orgiastic fervor, a combination Pynchon revels in throughout *Mason & Dixon*, which will be explicitly catalogued in the final section on the carnivalesque of this thesis.

Expanding on Mark Stoll's sense of "marginality" in regards to the Biblical prophets, Belden C. Lane notes that the "preeminence of placelessness" in these jeremiad writers. Biblical prophets "call men and women to a God who stands alongside displaced peoples everywhere...who is known more clearly in exile than in the security of any given locale,"¹²³ highlighting the importance of empathy for the marginalized on a global scale, furthering the centrality of Pynchon as a *prophetic* Ecocritical voice. In the novel, Dixon maintains that while he is " 'seldom all the way outside their Perimeter,--yet do I Make an effort to keep to the Margins close as I may.' " (69) The margins are difficult for Mason and Dixon to reside in permanently because of their societal positioning, but nonetheless their narrative "placelessness"

¹²² Whitney, 191

¹²³ Lane, 253

as they venture from the Cape of Good Hope, to St. Helena, to the American colonies rife with slavery and skirmishes with Natives, illuminates a commitment to the marginalized. Thomas Cole, a leading member of the Hudson River School of painters, lamented after the unveiling of his 1836 masterpiece *The Oxbow* that the “beauty of such landscapes are quickly passing away—the ravages of the axe are daily increasing—the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation.”¹²⁵

Anticipating Pinchot’s bleak evaluation of American deforestation, it is clear from statements like Cole’s that prophetic utterances of the environmental crisis, which was birthed in the Enlightenment, continued and heightened during the Industrial era immediately following Cherrycoke’s time of narration. When the Rev’d solemnly intones, “great Percussions upon the Earth are heard...Trees push’d over, crash to the ground. Bears, Bobcats, and Wolves come fleeing before whatever is just behind,” (490) it demonstrates Pynchon’s acuity to the ecological apocalypse(s) instigated by the deforestation accompanying the “civilizing” of the American landscape, echoing themes raised a quarter of a century earlier in William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Mr. LeSpark, the entrepreneurial arms dealer, echoes Pinchot in his prophetic warnings to Mason and Dixon about the fate of the American wilderness and Native peoples. “‘You don’t know what I see back in this Country. Bribes, Impersonations, Land Fraud, Scalp-stealing, Ginseng Diversion. Each Day brings Spectacle ever more disheartening,’” (430) foreshadowing the displacement of Native peoples from their lands, a process long since solidified by Pynchon’s own birth in 1937. In another scene, a band of Natives camouflage themselves in paint “black as Coal-dust.” (243) This is indeed troubling comparison of Native peoples with one of the fossil fuels most responsible for global warming in ensuing centuries, not to mention its destructive effect upon those mining and extracting it. To describe Native

¹²⁵ Stoll (2015), 16

Americans as the “dust” of this finite resource, is a subtle, symbolic prophetic utterance regarding the impending genocide of Native Americans. Thomas Pynchon is thus continuing the tradition of secularizing the Biblical jeremiad for environmental concerns, a process which began in large part in the 19th century.

The critic *par excellence* of late Victorianism, John Ruskin, famously remembered for navigating an aesthetic path taken up magisterially by Marcel Proust at the height of European Modernism, also initiated a prophetic mode for which he is ill-remembered today. His *Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884) was a jeremiad directed against modernity and the increased presence of technology in society, employing the tropes and language of Biblical prophets. The focal point of the *Storm Cloud*’s distrust of modernity was Ruskin’s concern over the unprecedented “phenomenon of atmospheric pollution.”¹²⁹ The Ruskinian, of applying the sermonic power of the Biblical jeremiad to the secular realm of climate crisis, is clearly the foundation of the Ecocritical strain continued most prominently in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Jonathan Schell’s *The Fate of the Earth* (1982). These heirs to Ruskin’s *Storm Cloud* confirm John Gatta’s claim that, where nonfictional Ecocritical works are concerned, the “broadest popular appeal has centered attention not on life’s origins but an imagined endtime.”¹³⁰ Gatta singles out *Silent Spring* as a continuance of “the classic American jeremiad sermon”, for it “maintains hope in the future”¹³¹ as a thematic balance to the gloomy, apocalyptic urgency of its call for action. Furthermore, Lawrence Buell singles out apocalypse as the “most powerful master metaphor”¹³² of Ecocriticism in the modern age, confirming the persistence of apocalyptic environmental prophesying from an early source like Ruskin, who died in 1900, to

¹²⁹ Szerszynski, 94

¹³⁰ Gatta, 147

¹³¹ Gatta, 170

¹³² Buell, 285

Pinchot, who died in 1946, to the still active Thomas Pynchon. Douglas Robinson claims that the “ideology that American writers at their most mythic invariably engage is *apocalyptic*.”¹³³ This compounds Buell’s specifically environmental diagnosis, while providing a broader foundation in the American literary tradition, which aligns with Pynchon’s thematic interests. In the final analysis, the argument for Pynchon’s elevation to the forefront of Ecocriticism becomes crystalline when locating his unique postsecular vision, culled from ancient spiritual traditions across the globe, within the continuum of the “sermons for the earth” so essential to the environmental movement.

¹³³ Robinson, 2

Chapter II. The Spectacle of The New

Enlightenment & Environment: Voices of the New Age

The Enlightenment world of *Mason & Dixon* is arguably the most estranging setting of all of Thomas Pynchon's novels, which is saying a great deal. Pynchon's narrative worlds have always been grounded in the recent past, from the dawn of the 20th century to the present day, despite the many opportunities he takes to insert wormholes into fantastical zones, particularly ones which defy standard chronology. The 18th century in Western culture remained a predominantly monarchial one until the American and French upheavals in 1776 and 1793, respectively. Christianity, despite the bloodletting of the Reformation, was as influential for the lives of Europeans as it had ever, whether they were Catholic, Lutheran, or any of the endlessly multiplying sects emerging in the wake of Martin Luther. The Enlightenment was to rupture the foundations of Western culture in a manner had not happened since Charlemagne's consolidation of Christendom at the start of the Medieval period. In particular, the status accorded to the sciences was unprecedented, and the effects of the new sciences upon the Enlightenment's relationship with the natural world is of central concern to this investigation. As the religious dimension of *Mason & Dixon* is essential to its status as a core Ecocritical text, the relationship of Enlightenment science and religion must be foregrounded in order to comprehend Pynchon's large-scale critique of the Enlightenment in the novel. The militant drive of Enlightenment rationalism to demonstrate mastery over the Christian past runs throughout *Mason & Dixon*, and a chorus of exemplary voices from this radically new era of cultural thought will be surveyed in order to contextualize the critiques outlined in Pynchon's novel.

Francis Bacon is by and large the Enlightenment thinker *par excellence* for embodying the desires of the age. In *The New Atlantis*, he presented a sustained utopian vision of a world redeemed by scientific mastery¹³⁸ over the forces of nature. Akin to his contemporary Rene Descartes, he proposed this (highly secular) utopian vision within the framework of Christian vocabulary and iconography¹³⁹. In the Christian worldview, the postlapsarian human race had been subjected to ceaseless natural disasters ever since Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden. Yet, by the 16th and 17th centuries, a prevailing belief that "through faith and perseverance", humanity, while still "fallen", had finally "gained the means to re-create the Garden of Eden on Earth through the scientific methodology"¹⁴⁰ of the new Enlightenment rationalism. Lewis Mumford distinguished Thomas More's *Utopia* and Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* as "utopias of reconstruction", a radical sea change of utopian thought from the Augustinian mode of "utopias of escape"¹⁴¹, such as the *City of God*. The paradigm had shifted from utopias favoring abandoning the tribulations of the natural world in favor of spiritual redemption, towards a belief that through scientific striving, humanity could "re-create" the previously hostile world. Bacon came to symbolize these shifts between "belief in the idea of providence and belief in the idea of progress"¹⁴², a shifting of only six letters for five on the *linguistic* level, but, on the cultural plane, a shift whose aftermath is still reverberating through the pages of Thomas Pynchon. In *The New Atlantis*' vision, the deference adopted towards the clergy and the canon of saints in the Christian past becomes radically secularized, for "progress was placed in the hands

¹³⁸ Again, Horkheimer and Adorno's controversial thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* singles out Francis Bacon as typifying the Enlightenment's drive towards mastery, but in the interest of examining new pathways regarding the Enlightenment and the environmental crisis (i.e. Pynchon's postsecular Eco spirituality, the ecological carnivalesque, etc.) I have willingly decided not to engage with their work, as the critical discourse is already extensive, varied, and immensely contested.

¹³⁹ Oelschlaeger, 82

¹⁴⁰ LaFreniere, 131

¹⁴¹ LaFreniere, 139

¹⁴² LaFreniere, 148

of a group of scientists and technicians.”¹⁴³ *Mason & Dixon* explores this tension through Rev’d Cherrycoke’s often strained relationship to the surveying party of the Mason-Dixon Line; the “commission” the astronomers receive is explicitly paralleling the “Great Commission” of the resurrected Christ to his disciples, demanding their spreading of the gospel to the ends of the earth. *The New Atlantis* drew its most potent imagery from recent cultural memory: the courtrooms of Renaissance England. Bacon had witnessed the phenomena of witch-trials sweep across the English society of his lifetime, and *The New Atlantis*’ treatment of “nature as a female to be tortured through mechanical investigations”, reflects the influence of the “interrogations of the witch trials and the mechanical devices used to torture witches”¹⁴⁴ upon his radically *new* scientific methodology and aspirations. A strong divergence from the Greco-Roman view of “Mother Nature” which thrived from Antiquity through Medieval Christendom, and exemplary of yet another *linguistic* alteration embodied in Baconian thought, for the word “*Materia* means wood—the usable wood of a tree—...the same root—yes, root—as the word *mater*, or mother.”¹⁴⁵ Cherrycoke’s niece, Tenebrae¹⁴⁶, channels this *mater* of the natural world when she exclaims, “‘Twas Love for the Planet Herself.” (102) This remark, coming as it does in the “interregnum” of Cherrycoke’s narration (between the Revolution and the Civil War), hints at an alternative history of America which Pynchon suggests *could have* offered a route away from Baconian *materialism* and a return to the “Mater-Nature” of the ancient past, as the pantheistic delights of his postsecular Orphic eco-spirituality attest. Yet, the historical record in America of

¹⁴³ Merchant (1980), 180

¹⁴⁴ Merchant (1980), 168

¹⁴⁵ Harrison, 28

¹⁴⁶ The absence of female protagonists in *Mason & Dixon* is significant, given that Pynchon’s most commonly taught novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, is a variation upon the heroic quest but with a female protagonist. I speculate that along the lines of Carolyn Merchant’s argument regarding the conflation of the witch-trials and Baconian mastery, Pynchon has deliberately made the cast of characters overwhelmingly male, to illustrate an overarching gender imbalance during the Enlightenment. A gender studies approach would do well to address these issues, particularly as they relate to issues of Enlightenment objectivity.

Bacon's witch-trial-inspired materialism would be far from the love for Mother Earth of which Tenebrae speaks.

In colonial America, the “millennial vision”¹⁴⁸ of *The New Atlantis* inspired and energized Puritans of the 17th Century to promote scientific advancements, and to engage in these efforts themselves. The proclivity of the Puritans towards witch-trials, culturally embodied by those overseen by Cotton Mather in Salem, increases the dark legacy of Baconian thought in the New World. The Puritans, and their successors in America, became indebted to Bacon, for his writings, rich in Christian symbolism, appeared to offer a powerful antidote to the broad-sweeping skepticism, even atheism, of Continental *philosophes*. Ironically, in strictly demarcating the religious from the scientific sphere, to allow his speculations to appear non-confrontational to the religious authorities of the day, Bacon accelerated the secularization so detested by the Puritans and other Protestant sects who championed Baconian scientific ideas¹⁴⁹. Where the Puritans misunderstood the ultimate drives of *The New Atlantis*, the Founding Father who currently graces the \$100 bill comprehended it without any attempts to downplay the secularization so explicit in Bacon's writing.

Benjamin Franklin weaves in and out of *Mason & Dixon*, rather akin to the movements of the internationally renowned kite from his 1852 experiment with lightning. Whether in the legion of references to him and his inventions, or in his interactions with Mason and Dixon, Pynchon's attentiveness to Franklin extends far from a simple inclusion of a founding patriarch in this Virgilian “Tale of America.” From an Ecocritical perspective, Franklin's influence upon American environmental thought was infinitely greater than those of the pastoral, Cincinnatus-esque George Washington. The Enlightenment's craze for precision, fueling the Deist belief in a

¹⁴⁸ Stoll (1997), 24-25

¹⁴⁹ Stoll (1997), 24-25

clockwork cosmos (courtesy of the Newtonian revolution)¹⁵⁰, is symbolized in Franklin's "Watch, ever Comforter and Scripture to him." (760) This sardonic quip from Rev'd Cherrycoke clearly illustrates the secularized faith which Enlightenment luminaries placed in the possibilities of the emergent mechanized, technocratic world. Franklin's 1852 kite experiment attained mythological status by the time of the novel's frame-narrative, when Cherrycoke intones to his niece Brae, " 'Once upon a time...there was a magical land call'd *Pennsylvania*;' " (336) the famed residence of Franklin spoken of in the reverential mode which commences fairy tales and mythic sagas. Dixon likewise declares, " 'the entire issue of Lightning in America having been resolv'd by your Friend Dr. Franklin, who draws it off at will, easy as drawing Ale from a Cask,' " (463) likening the tinkering patriarch to a kind of Promethean¹⁵⁴ drunkard. Franklin's beloved Philadelphia is likewise scoffed at by Mistress Edgewise as the " 'most licentious Babylon of America...having, indeed, its own Carnival...' "¹⁵⁵ Through sheer rational inventiveness, Benjamin Franklin, neither the English monarch nor the Bishop of Rome, "had conquered lightning, one of the most dangerous and powerful forces of nature"¹⁵⁶, fulfilling Francis Bacon's "prophecy" of roughly a century earlier that science would lead to the rationalistic domination of the destructive forces of nature he so cheerily anticipated. While an investigation focused centrally on the issue of slavery in *Mason & Dixon* would certainly highlight Franklin's peer Thomas Jefferson as indicative of the tensions of the Enlightenment's emphasis on freedom and domination, the Monticello resident nonetheless provides an intriguing counterpoint to Franklin's mechanized worldview in the novel.

¹⁵⁰ On *Gravity's Rainbow*, 555, it is mentioned that "It was a little early for Isaac Newton, but feelings about action and reaction were in the air," illustrating the overlapping-history aesthetic in Pynchon's earlier work as well.

¹⁵⁴ Franklin is later speculated to be "our American Prometheus?" *Mason & Dixon*, 565

¹⁵⁵ *Mason & Dixon*, 356-57; the explicitly un-carnavalesque attitude of Franklin and his fellow Philadelphians will be highlighted in the final section of this thesis on the ecological carnivalesque

¹⁵⁶ Stoll (1997), 88

Embodying the spirit of the age, whether in the highly rational innovations to his Neoclassicism home of Monticello, or his famous championing of a government firmly divorced from the influence of the church, Thomas Jefferson provides an insightful window into the relation of religious visions and the American wilderness, so foundational to *Mason & Dixon*. Jefferson believed “the ideal experience of America” involved becoming temporarily immersed in the “wild landscape and then to emerge on a high plane of thought,” affording one the proper perspective to “analyze the significance of the spectacle below him.”¹⁵⁷ Fondly reminiscing to his nieces and nephews, who would come of age during the Jeffersonian Republic (1801-09; Cherrycoke narrates to them in late 1786), Rev’d Cherrycoke recalls the moment during his time with Mason and Dixon’s Line surveying party when, “we all topped the Allegheny Ridge together, and stood looking out at the Ohio Country,--so fair, a Revelation, meadow’d to the Horizon...” (7) This *naturalized* “high plane” of Jeffersonian thought is significant in its alignment of a “revelation” *a la* John of Patmos, with an unfettered vision of the American West awaiting its “civilizing.” Indeed, when the Italian poet Petrarch famously ascended to the peak of Mount Ventoux in 1336 (often cited as the birth of the Renaissance) he first admired the natural beauty of the vista, then, feeling a curious pang of guilt, turned to his volume of St. Augustine speaking of perfection in the spiritual life. The deeply engrained stance of Petrarch’s Christian culture, which would remain largely intact until the Romantics, was this: however beautiful the peak of Ventoux may have been, it paled in comparison to the beauty of Augustine’s exegesis of the Gospel. Thus, Jefferson and Cherrycoke both illuminate the shift in epiphanic, revelatory environmental experiences during the Enlightenment, anticipating the ecstasies of the Romantics atop high peaks and expansive vistas. Such epiphanies were made possible for the Rev’d

¹⁵⁷ Slotkin, 247

courtesy of Pynchon's titular protagonists, men embodying the new sciences of the Enlightenment, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon.

The European imaginary was ablaze after travel narratives, such as those by Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo, and indeed the fictional one supplied by Cherrycoke, generated new modes of escapism. The swashbuckling tales of exotic, unknown, and even undreamt of lands, “took one away from a world of intellectual stability into a world of movement and flux.”¹⁵⁹ *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon's variation on the adventure narratives so ubiquitous to the literary moment of the novel's setting, such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) succeeds in presenting the illusion that it is indeed a literary product contemporary to these works. The historical Mason and Dixon were astronomers and surveyors, adding an intriguing dimension to the pair as rambling, picaresque adventurers in the mode of Swift's Lemuel Gulliver. No known portraits¹⁶⁰ of the pair exist, furthering their obscurity, marginality and anonymity, all beloved hallmarks of Pynchon. The most substantive “portrait” available to modern scholars is the *Journal* compiled by Mason and Dixon while surveying the Line in colonial America. Pynchon occasionally features dialogue culled directly from the *Journal*, but its relevance to the novel is purely that of providing skeletal character outlines. Charles Clerc notes that in the *Journal* Mason “omits, for the most part, valuable information about Indians in the wilds,”¹⁶¹ and “except for an occasional comment about a cavern or mountain or valley, [he] pays scant attention to terrain.”¹⁶² Thus the historical figures of Mason and Dixon have not gifted to posterity a document of nature writing in the Americas comparable to works by Alexander von Humboldt, Henry David Thoreau, or John

¹⁵⁹ Hazard, 28

¹⁶⁰ Clerc, 42

¹⁶¹ A clear divergence from Pynchon's novel, where Mason and Dixon become embroiled in a global conspiracy involving Native Americans, Jesuits, and Chinese astronomers in the American wilderness.

¹⁶² Clerc, 62

Muir. Despite the skeletal amount of information available on Mason and Dixon, Pynchon employs this to his imaginative advantage, for their status as exemplars of the new science of the Enlightenment is crucial to the Ecocritical reading of the novel.

Jeremiah Dixon was a member of the Royal Society in England (est. 1660), the monarchically sponsored group of astronomers and scientists, while Charles Mason simply shared in the commissions from the Society while not being a member like his famous partner. A cutting edge institution of the Enlightenment, the Royal Society, as Paul Hazard reminds, was “the admiration of Europe.”¹⁶³ For this was the first major historical epoch wherein science was “becoming an idol, an object of worship”, eventually being equated with “happiness”, a concept central not just to the American Revolution but the era’s broader ideas of progress¹⁶⁴. The sponsorship of the English monarchy is a prime example of the phenomenon witnessed across Europe at this time, “enlightened despotism.” Monarchial support for the Royal Society was not perplexing at the time, for the telescopes of its members, and those wielded by Pynchon’s protagonists, “were uncovering a vast, orderly cosmos;”¹⁶⁵ ideal findings for nominally Christian kings professing divine instituting of their rule. The newfound “professionalization” of scientists in the eighteenth-century world of *Mason & Dixon* drew on the “corporate logic in the style of the *Ancien Regime*,” so that not only were institutions like the Royal Society modeled on “an antiquated view of society and its institutions,” but such a structure “paradoxically contributed to its success.”¹⁶⁶ American Founding Father John Adams was similarly inspired by the Royal Society’s findings, exclaiming, “A prospect into futurity in America is like contemplating the

¹⁶³ Hazard, 309

¹⁶⁴ Hazard, 318

¹⁶⁵ Marx, 96

¹⁶⁶ Ferrone, 76

heavens with the telescopes of Herschell.”¹⁶⁷ Robert A. Ferguson views this as a prime example of the American Enlightenment’s coherence of “science, nature, history, and religion.”¹⁶⁸ The profound optimism surrounding the new science of astronomy attempted to ignore a rotten apple in this Enlightenment Eden of progress. The infamous trial of Galileo by the Inquisition was a favored, nigh mythologized, story for Enlightenment thinkers, with its indictment of institutional religion’s hindrance of scientific progress.

What few of the *philosophes* cared to remember was that Galileo’s findings were inflammatory to the Catholic Church for a reason far more disturbing than scientific progress: entropy. Galileo’s famed telescope revealed “spots in the moon and sun, implying that those celestial bodies too suffered degeneration.”¹⁶⁹ These were places thought to be free of the corruption and decay wrought upon nature by the human sins of Adam and Eve, so to propose that the entire universe was a victim of equally distributed entropic forces was too unnerving to bear for Christian Europe. In the novel, Dixon asks his teacher William Emerson, “ ‘If we are arriv’d in the Age of Newton transcended,’ ” (318) and is later troubled¹⁷¹ while questioning with Mason if “ ‘All our assumptions about the Conservation of Energy, the *Principia*, eeh...? our very Faith, as modern Men, suddenly in question like thah’...?’ ” (319) These scenes witness Pynchon’s overlapping history aesthetic, with its intrusion of the post-Einstein-ian entropic cosmos of relativity, black holes, loss of “all idea of their centers of Gravity,”¹⁷³ the heat death of the universe, etc. Entropy, the cause of Galileo’s scandal, has been a favored theme of Thomas Pynchon’s, stretching from his early short story of the same title published in 1960 through

¹⁶⁷ Ferguson, 29

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Nicolson, 104

¹⁷¹ Earlier in the novel Dixon “blurts” that Isaac Newton is his “deity,” (116) so the intrusion of entropic thought is doubly alarming for a man like himself.

¹⁷³ *Mason & Dixon*, 117; the phrase also echoes Stephen Dedalus’ remark “My centre of gravity is displaced” (589), during the particularly apocalyptic, carnivalesque “Circe” episode of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

latter-career masterpieces like *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*. Thus, while the astronomers Mason and Dixon synthesize the broader cultural trends of the Enlightenment, particularly the deference paid towards those in the new sciences (recalling Bacon's *New Atlantis*), the overlapping history aesthetic in Pynchon's novel allows for the intrusions of contemporary revelations such as entropy and relativity. This situates Pynchon within the broader trend of Ecocriticism, focusing on how contemporary scientific findings are challenging the Enlightenment's notions of order, balance, and harmony, whether on the level of plants or of planets. Yet, Mason and Dixon all too often experience themselves in the service of the most irrational "black holes" of the Enlightenment: emergent global capitalism and the global slave trade.

The Commodification of the New World: Consumption & Black Chattel

Mason & Dixon's setting during the "pregnancy" of the American Revolution allows Pynchon to explore the complexities of a world on the verge of a colossal paradigmatic shift. The novel boldly pivots towards emergent global capitalism, and its attendant consumerism, as the most influential moving force of the Enlightenment era. For Pynchon's literary imagination, the omega point towards which the novel moves is undoubtedly 1776, the year, coincidentally, of the American Revolution's opening salvo and the publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. The rise of global capitalism and the birth of the United States are for Pynchon a unified event, synthesizing a millennium of Continental intellectual upheavals, confirmed by Mason's speculation to Dixon that "Charter'd Companies may indeed be the form the World has now increasingly begun to take." (252) Peter Gay's analysis that emergent global capitalism

“questioned customary ways, despised tradition,”¹⁷⁵ provides a logical framework for why the young American republic, which had successfully defied the monarchical imperialism at the heart of European culture stretching back to Charlemagne and the Caesars, so readily accepted capitalism as its dominant economic mode. Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* operates as on the assumption that “an ‘invisible hand’ orchestrates the actions of all these selfish, pleasure-seeking consumers.”¹⁷⁶ This anonymous determining force of global scale mirrors the They/Them which Mason and Dixon uneasily witness replacing the omnipresent YHWH of the Old Testament and the supreme monarch as the force(s) controlling the world. Yet, the secularization which capitalism propelled may be traced to an unusual moment just before the Enlightenment. The Renaissance, an era often touted as a highlight of Christian cultural production, is cited by Kirkpatrick Sale¹⁷⁷ as fostering the earliest roots of global capitalism. Materialism, Sale notes, was already the *lingua franca* of artists of the age, whether “in the love of objects in precise detail that obsesses Durer...or especially Leonardo”¹⁷⁸; two loves, of material objects and of precision, which became hallmarks of Enlightenment global capitalism. Renaissance materialism metamorphosed into Enlightenment consumerism, as global capitalism’s emergence in the New World ushered in a new wave of unprecedented access to exotic items previously meted out to only the richest of society, or even wholly unknown. Cherrycoke contemplates whether “unchecked consumption of all these modern substances at the same time, a habit without historical precedent...be creating a new sort of European?” (330)

Once again, the overlapping history aesthetic becomes a vehicle for Pynchon to critique the conspicuous consumption of Late Capitalist American society. For example, “every new

¹⁷⁵ Gay, 45

¹⁷⁶ Oelschlaeger, 287

¹⁷⁷ interestingly enough a friend of Pynchon’s while undergraduates at Cornell (the two collaborated on the unfinished dystopian musical “Minstrel Island”)

¹⁷⁸ Sale, 42

location, no matter how remote,” which Mason and Dixon venture to, always “offers Starbucks-style coffeehouses,”¹⁸⁰ a contemporary corporation *par excellence* of environmental degradation and exploitation of agricultural communities, whose multinational scale lends comparisons to the omnipresent anonymity of They/Them in the novel. The proliferation of coffeehouses in Mason and Dixon’s lifetime was largely due to their becoming the “preferred site for raucous debate and progressive political discussion”¹⁸¹; the Founding Fathers often quarreled over the potentialities of American democracy in these locales. While the novel’s coffeehouses contain aspects of the utopian possibilities embedded in carnivalesque sites,¹⁸² Pynchon is also aware of a supremely dark irony. The liberal, democratic zones of the coffee house, which nurtured the radical politics of the American Revolution, were made possible by the “consumption of the exotic imported goods now so readily available through the expansion of the Atlantic trade system...dependent on the labor of chattel slavery.”¹⁸³ The very name of the Rev’d Wicks Cherrycoke speaks to the overlapping history aesthetic, for “Cherrycoke” blends one of the early drivers of industrialism, “coke”¹⁸⁴, a heavily polluting fossil fuel, with the cherry flavored variant of Coca-Cola, another company typifying the multinational character of Late Capitalist consumer culture. As Mason and Dixon pilgrimage between sacred sites of colonial America, Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia to George Washington’s residence in Mount Vernon, they consume a meal inside their carriage, then “carelessly throw the refuse, plates and all, out the window...acting surprisingly like twentieth-century motorists.”¹⁸⁵ Herein contemporary issues like motorway-induced pollution overlap within the trappings of an 18th century English novel. Pynchon

¹⁸⁰ Hinds, 12

¹⁸¹ Thill, 57

¹⁸² Discussed in great detail in the final section of this investigation concerning the ecological-carnavalesque

¹⁸³ Thill, 57

¹⁸⁴ Mentioned by Lady Lepton as residing in the wilderness along with coal, *Mason & Dixon*, 418

¹⁸⁵ Clarke, 92-93

complicates the scene when, much later in the novel, Mason reassures the wilderness-surveying party that, in regards to briefly entering Native lands, “ ‘We’ll clean up ev’ry trace of our Passage.’” (646) The optimism chillingly resonates for contemporary readers who are all too aware of the despoliation of Native lands by centuries of Anglo-American “progress.” When the surveyors arrive in Philadelphia, Cherrycoke meticulously chronicles the “Objects of Oceanick Commerce” in the Port, as “underfoot lies all the debris of global Traffick, shreds of spices and teas and coffee-berries, splashes of Geneva gin and Queen-of-Hungary water, oranges and shaddocks fallen and squash’d” (259) a catalogue of the *already*-polluted waters of the New England coastline, ripe with the detritus of global consumer goods. Voltaire, while exiled from France in England, boldly equated the riches generated by British commerce with the very freedom of its citizens;¹⁸⁸ America would become plagued even more drastically by this association of freedom with wealth. Commodities flooding the European consumer market, such as coffee, tobacco, cotton, and sugar, were the harvest fruits of global capital’s darkest element: black chattel slavery.

Vincenzo Ferrone points to the chilling, and sobering, historical record that during the roughly three and a half centuries of the global slave trade of Africans (which displaced some ten million peoples from that continent) “the greatest portion were transported during the Age of Enlightenment.”¹⁸⁹ The superabundance of slavery in the novel attests to this colossal scope, articulated particularly well by a Quaker character, a member of a Christian denomination with a historically fierce abolitionist legacy. He contends that the Triangular Trade system is, “ ‘A sweetness of immorality and corruption, bought as it is with the lives of African slaves, untallied black lives broken upon the greedy engines of the Barbadoes.’” (329) Rev’d Cherrycoke, another

¹⁸⁸ Gay, 24

¹⁸⁹ Ferrone, 124

religious figure, “journalizes...to himself” about “the unpriced Coercion necessary to yearly Profits beyond the projectings even of proud Satan.” (412) Here the unbounded potential of consumer-capitalism yielded by the global slave trade is conflated with the Devil, a figure whom William Blake would associate with the appearance of industrial mills in England at the dawn of Romanticism.¹⁹²

Carolyn Merchant persuasively argues that the global slave trade, like the highly profitable deforestation of New England in the colonial era, was premised upon an immediacy without regard to future consequences. Generating a simultaneous “destruction of black bodies and...rapid degradation of southern soils,”¹⁹³ the omnipresence of slavery in *Mason & Dixon* is a powerful example of Pynchon’s commitment to Postcolonial issues, as well as the inextricable Ecocritical linkage between slavery and environmental destruction. Brian Thill argues that the novel’s “activist impulse” arrives not in the form of violent, radical action¹⁹⁴, but rather in the “radical unmasking of the interrelationship between the slave economy and the burgeoning consumption of new global commodities”¹⁹⁵ in colonial America. Late in the novel, a stunning instance of this “unmasking” occurs, as Mason and Dixon debate about the essential nature of their Line. Dixon deems it, “ ‘this great invisible Thing...devouring all in its Path,’ ” to which Mason bluntly acknowledges, “ ‘Well! of course it’s a living creature, ‘tis all of us, temporarily collected into an Entity.’ ” (678) The “radical unmasking” is that the Line, by no means an architectural marvel *a la* Hadrian’s Wall or the Eiffel Tower, becomes a Jung-ian synecdoche for the European subconscious of domination, exploitation, etc., in the Americas. The harshest speculation by Dixon is that the Line is a “tree-slaughtering Animal, with no purpose but to

¹⁹² See his 1808 poem, “And did those feet in ancient time.”

¹⁹³ Merchant (2004), 156

¹⁹⁴ Thill contends that the critically “famous” scene of Dixon striking a slave-driver in Baltimore (698-99 of the novel) is a rather peripheral one when considering the “radical unmasking” of his argument.

¹⁹⁵ Thill, 53

continue creating forever a perfect Corridor over the Land,” whose “intentions, beyond killing ev’rything due west of it,” (678) he cannot comprehend. Applying Thill’s argument to the aforementioned claim of Carolyn Merchant, it is possible to argue that Mason and Dixon engage in Ecocritical activism, “unmasking” the environmental *and* human degradation produced by global capitalism’s slave-reliant economy during the Enlightenment.

The “radical unmasking” of the Ecocritical approach to *Mason & Dixon* furthermore reveals that the degradation to black bodies and American soil was fueled by the impact of Enlightenment science upon emergent global capitalism. The prolixity of newfound knowledge about the natural world inspired Enlightenment political theorists as well as economists. David Hume and Adam Smith both viewed nature as “a model of self-regulating balance that justified their own faith in market exchange,” which was conversely employed to illustrate the market’s supremacy as “the best means of managing the balance of nature.”¹⁹⁹ Even the French naturalist the Comte de Buffon viewed nature as typifying the ideal capitalist worker. He experienced “a worker [nature] perpetually alive...ceaselessly active, who knows how to employ everything,”²⁰⁰ darkly reminiscent of the Chaplinesque visions of industrialism in the 1930’s, rather than resounding with contemporary knowledge of the fragility of ecosystems. Environmental historian William Cronon expands on this vision of nature and economics employed by Hume and Smith by noting that, “seeing landscapes in terms of commodities meant something else as well: it treated members of an ecosystem as isolated and extractable units.”²⁰¹ While the new science could provide evidence from the natural world of economically applicable notions like balance and regulation, Enlightenment science also introduced the emotionally powerful notion of infinity into views of the natural world. Even the figure of George Washington in *Mason &*

¹⁹⁹ Jonsson, 3

²⁰⁰ Gay, 153

²⁰¹ Cronon, 21

Dixon expresses an uneasy dread²⁰², because of this "...Chaos. Markets appearing with their unwritten Laws, upon ev'ry patch of open ground, power beginning to sort itself out..." (281) The profusion of scientific discoveries, even new fields of science at this time appeared to be endless.

Puritan preacher extraordinaire Jonathan Edwards remarked that America's contribution to global capitalism was merely "a forerunner of what is approaching in spiritual things, when the world shall be supplied with spiritual treasures from America."²⁰⁴ A disquieting marriage of global capitalism with eschatological nationalism, echoed in Rev'd Cherrycoke's hope that America might become "a third Testament." (353) In age when nature appeared to possess infinite variety and endlessly revealing resources, global capitalism proved the ideal economic mode to stoke the flames of the environmental crisis. Westward Expansion, synonymous with Manifest Destiny, was more than the fulfillment of self-proclaimed prophecies by Puritan America²⁰⁶. The fervor of rapid forest clearance "became an end in itself, and clearing techniques designed to extract quick profits from forest resources encouraged movement onto new lands."²⁰⁷ Thus Westward Expansion can be viewed as the culmination of a doctrine rooted in environmental destruction, spurred by the unprecedented profit margins which motivated the first generations of global capitalists. Cherrycoke's speculative prophecy of "the Fleets of Conestoga Waggon, ceaseless as the fab'd Herds of Buffalo, further west," (650-51) is all the more vivid for contemporary readers, for whom the "infinite" buffalo herds of the American West

²⁰² While Pynchon certainly satirizes Washington to an extent, he receives only a fraction of that accorded to Benjamin Franklin. As previously noted, it is possible that the pastoral nature of Washington, particularly his decision not to become a king after the Revolution, is evidence of Pynchon's Ecocritical negotiation with the mode of the pastoral.

²⁰⁴ Stephanson, 12-13

²⁰⁶ *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role*, Ernest Lee Tuveson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL, 1968, print., remains one of the seminal texts on the subject; further time for research would involve placing *Mason & Dixon* in dialogue with Tuveson's work.

²⁰⁷ Cronon, 118

encountered by the first waves of pioneers have dwindled to the brink of extinction. William Cronon furthers this claim, outlining how “New England ecology was transformed as the region became integrated into the emerging capitalist economy of the North Atlantic. Capitalism and environmental degradation went hand in hand.”²⁰⁹ Pynchon’s entrepreneurial arms dealer, Mr. LeSpark, embodies the disenchantment of the natural world in emergent global capitalism. For him “the Forest, where the supernatural was less a matter of Publick-Room trickery or Amusement...not, in this case, God, but rather, Business,” becomes a storehouse for his “sources of supply,--Gunsmithies, Forges, Bloomeries, and Barrel Mills,” through which he tours “potential customers.” (411) During a heated exchange between the Kabbalistic Rabbi of Prague and a forge-keeper in the wilderness, Pynchon furthers this notion when the Rabbi solemnly declares, “this Age sees a corruption and disabling of the ancient Magick,” with its “Projectors, Brokers of Capital, Insurancers, Peddlers upon the global Scale,” (487) figures who signal the connectivity of emergent global capitalism and the Enlightenment’s disenchantment of nature. From an Ecocritical perspective, then, *Mason & Dixon* is a prime candidate for inclusion in the environmental canon because of its unique setting in New England precisely at the height of the global slave trade, and twin births of global consumer-capitalism and the present climate crisis.

The Enlightenment of *Mason & Dixon*: Environmental Destruction in the Age of Reason

Mason & Dixon’s pre-Revolutionary and pre-Industrial setting is crucial for comprehending Pynchon’s vision of the current climate crisis. Long before the upheavals wrought by the transcontinental railroads and the pollution of multinational corporations, America was beset with irreversible environmental crises, birthed in the “Age of Reason.” The

²⁰⁹ Cronon, 161

clearing of American forests is exemplary of the divergence between Europe and America where the *newness* of this era was concerned. Western Europe underwent a process of forest clearance spanning from the expansion of the Roman Empire through to the lifetime of Martin Luther; in America, the same process was “condensed to decades.”²¹⁴ The culmination of this extensive forest clearance was the solidification of Europe as a primarily agricultural continent; indeed, agriculture could only be possible with such a flattened landscape. In the New World, agriculture was the dominant framework of land use and food production, and its homogenization of the landscape would rapidly eclipse the hunter-gatherer nomadism of the Native Americans. When *Mason & Dixon* speaks of America as an “Edenick Dairy-land,” (465) the sense of the primacy of agriculture on “the green fecund Continent” (57) is indicative of this mentality. Benjamin Franklin declared agriculture to be “the great Business of the Continent”²¹⁷, solidifying a connection between the drastic alterations to the environment from European-style agriculture and the blessings of the Founders. The seemingly benign agricultural system would have as deteriorating an effect on the landscape as the aforementioned alterations wrought by capitalism.

Chronic shortages of English timber began in the 16th Century, instigating one of the first government-mandated conservation projects in the West. The Royal Society was commissioned by the Royal Navy to “study the state of the King’s forest reserves”²¹⁸, an early instance of imperialism engaging in conservation and resource management. John Evelyn, in his 1664 treatise *Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest-Trees*, responded to this crisis with recommendations including “the removal of most iron mills to New England, lest they ‘ruin Old England.’”²¹⁹ Effectively equating nationalist sentiment with an arbitrary attitude towards the removal of

²¹⁴ Whitney, 5

²¹⁷ Whitney, 132

²¹⁸ Merchant (1980), 236

²¹⁹ Merchant (1980), 239

industrial waste, Evelyn's prescription reveals the awareness to environmental degradation caused by human activities among Mason and Dixon's contemporaries, and is an early root of the attitudes towards waste disposal during Pynchon's lifetime (consider the Texas-sized "island" of trash floating in the Pacific Ocean). Even in the New World, Cherrycoke casually notes about a wilderness locale wherein "all noxious smokes and gases were being vented someplace distant, invisible," (411) a troubling alignment of America as infinite with disregard for industrial waste. When Mason and Dixon encounter their fellow Englishman Mr. Knockwood in Lancaster, "a sort of trans-Elemental Uncle Toby,"²²¹ this pastoral character laments, "Acres of Forest no longer exist!" (364), exemplifying of Pynchon's awareness of the scope of the English timber crisis at the time. Mason feels the pollution wrought upon the English countryside by the ruinous forces of proto-industrial capitalism during the Enlightenment as he reflects upon "Old England." He laments that on his "home soil, the Ground for growing any such Wonders has been cruelly poison'd, with the coming of the hydraulick Looms and the appearance of new sorts of wealthy individual." (313) This Romantic elegy for an irretrievable lost time vividly reflects the environmental crisis of the England of his lifetime, signaling Pynchon's contention that the present climate crisis was birthed early in the Enlightenment. Across the Atlantic, colonists felt the potency of this recent English resource scarcity, especially timber.²²⁵

The collective memory of scarcity would paradoxically fuel the intensified forest clearance efforts in the New World with the belief that the forests were infinite, "as if they would *last forever*."²²⁶ The connection of infinity and blind depletion of New World natural resources reinforces the conviction that the European attitude towards the Americas "was one of almost

²²¹ referencing Sterne's character in *Tristram Shandy*, a novel of much aesthetic influence upon Pynchon's corpus, particularly *Mason & Dixon*; his digressive, encyclopedic aesthetics are often considered an early instance of what Postmodernism would later bring to the forefront of literature.

²²⁵ Cronon, 168

²²⁶ Cronon, 111

single-minded extraction, the high point of which, in the years from 1550 to 1650, we may appropriately term the Century of Exploitation.”²²⁷ This mindset was distinctively *new*, for its consideration of the human “as existing without natural limits”²²⁸, was a divergence from Greco-Roman Antiquity and even Christendom’s approach to relating with nature²²⁹. Notice that Kirkpatrick Sale dates this grisly relationship as reaching its apex in 1650: the pre-industrial date is startling, furthering the status of *Mason & Dixon* as a seminal Ecocritical text given the unique historical epoch it centers around. The Scandinavian Pehr Kalm, an apostle of the encyclopedically minded naturalist Carl Linnaeus²³⁰, helps to justify Pynchon’s project of locating the roots of the ecological crisis in pre-Revolutionary America. In 1748, decades before the Revolution, Kalm lamented that the “decline of many forms of wildlife was apparent to all second-generation Americans.”²³¹ Indeed these pre-revolutionary generations had “already accept[ed] crisis as their accustomed frame of experience,”²³² helping to reinforce the apocalyptic mood omnipresent in *Mason & Dixon*. In the following year of 1749, Kalm offered another prophetic vision, when he solemnly noted, “We can hardly be more violent toward our woods in Sweden and Finland, than they are here: their eyes are fixed upon the present gain, and they are *blind to the future*.”²³³ Yet again, Pynchon’s novel is uncannily aware of such dilemmas, beginning on the marginal tropical island of St. Helena. The Royal Astronomer Arthur Maskelyne laments that, “ ‘In thoughtless Greed, within a few pitiably brief Generations,’ ” the Europeans who have been fueling the consumption of the island’s exotic goods have “ ‘devastated a Garden in which, once, anything might grow,’ ” an action which he believes will “

²²⁷ Sale, 259

²²⁸ Oelschlaeger, 69

²²⁹ Recall the previous discussion of Francis Bacon’s stark divergence from prior Western approaches to the issue.

²³⁰ Mentioned in his *encyclopedic* nature in *Mason & Dixon*, 360

²³¹ Whitney, 304

²³² Ferguson, 50

²³³ Cronon, 122

‘disobey [them] into Oblivion.’” (135) Maskelyne’s prophetic utterance about environmental behavior in the Americas is crucial for its grounding of an eco-apocalypse upon a *marginalized, global* site like St. Helena. As the Line penetrates deeper into the wilderness, Pynchon subtly weaves in the significant presence of “ ‘Scandinavians! yes, the famous Swedish loggers’” (443) whose environmental destruction is likened to a perverse religious devotion. Dixon compares these loggers to “Parts of a single great Machine,--human muscle and stamina become but adjunct to the deeper realities of Steel that never needs Sharpening, never rusts,” (443) a disquieting association of the infinite with the mechanization of the human in the industrial age. The Scandinavian loggers further concretize the widespread historical consensus that the resource scarce and feudally-defined lands of Europe unleashed terrifying attitudes of infinity that were almost always accompanied by a blindness to future consequences. It is the crucial overlapping historical aesthetic of Pynchon’s novel which allows for the Enlightenment’s visions of the future to be balanced by the realities of its historical legacy, something which has inspired a particularly potent apocalyptic strain throughout American environmental literature.

Chapter III: Visions of Futurity

Christianity & the Age of Reason: The Nightmare of Environmental History

The Enlightenment sent a message in a bottle to its dreamed-of utopian future created by rational science and technology, and in the present age Thomas Pynchon heard this most clearly as the screaming coming across the sky which so famously commenced *Gravity's Rainbow*. Deciphering the detritus of the Enlightenment's future is of central concern for Ecocriticism, particularly its complex interrelationship with Christianity. The alignment of Christianity with many of the damning, and detrimental, activities of the Age of Reason has proven problematic to its contemporary legacy within the environmental movement. Mark Stoll contends "Christian humanism and missionary zeal were allied closely with imperialism and trade interests in the colonization of the New World."²⁵² These include the global slave trade, where Christian preachers often twisted Biblical passages regarding slavery to justify chattel slavery, and the militant conversion and displacement of Native Americans, continuing to ensure that Ecocritical relations with Christian environmental thought will be significantly strained for the foreseeable future.

Calvinism typifies the troubling and paradoxical Christian legacy for Ecocriticism. Rev'd Cherrycoke's alignment of the "The Pilgrim, however long or crooked his Road...as the American Ranger," (212) is powerfully indicative of the transposition of Calvinist notions of the sacred journey of the pilgrim (as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) with the "lone ranger" archetype so dominant in the stories²⁵⁷ of cowboys and other frontiersmen eternally warring with

²⁵² Stoll, 97; Recall that the Spanish monarchy funded Christopher Columbus' adventure to the New World because of the potential it could have for spreading the gospel.

²⁵⁷ It is worth remembering that the nieces and nephews Cherrycoke is narrating to will come of age in the early to mid 19th century, when these stories were at the forefront of American culture.

the Indian Other. In the opening of the *Institutes* (1536), John Calvin “argued that nature was the most important source of knowledge of God outside the Bible,”²⁵⁸ paralleling notions of his fellow Swiss luminary, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Calvin was awestruck by God’s cosmos, interpreting it “as a spectacle for God’s glory...a dazzling theater,”²⁵⁹ a curiously *theatrical*²⁶⁰ sentiment, but one which became commonplace in the early American republic where “current events were...reenactments of the Scriptures,”²⁶¹ reinforcing the prevalence of the carnivalesque in *Mason & Dixon*. Yet, paradoxically, and far more consequentially, Calvinism’s hyper-productive worldview, whose God “could never be ‘idle,’”²⁶² meshed well with emergent capitalism, and Stoll is quick to remind that the American Calvinist legacy has left behind “industrial pollution, scarred landscapes, and deforestation...ecological degradation”²⁶³ in exchange for the heavenly purification such overworking of the land was supposed to ensure. Puritan theology, such as that of Cotton Mather, continued the Calvinist interpretation of “nature as inherently flawed and of little ontological or epistemological value to man,”²⁶⁴ which goes far in explaining why the wilderness imagery often triumphed over Edenic ones in the sermons and writings of American Puritans. Cherrycoke echoes the Puritan sentiment towards the wilderness, contemplating whether crossing the Schuylkill River in Pennsylvania “were to transgress...to fall from Quaker simplicity into the Perplexity, uncounted times broken and re-broken, of the World after Eden.” (433) Westward Expansion, in this view, is to leave an earthly “City of God” for the fallen-ness of America’s wild places. While the convoluted legacy of Calvinism in relation to

²⁵⁸ Stoll (2015), 21

²⁵⁹ Ibid

²⁶⁰ *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*, Evan Berry, University of California Press, Oakland CA, 2015, print., shows that ““The material world had long been understood as the **backdrop** for the **divine drama** of the Creation, Fall, and redemption.” (pg. 27)

²⁶¹ Stephanson, 8

²⁶² Stoll (2015), 24

²⁶³ Stoll (1997), 33-34

²⁶⁴ Jeske, 61

capitalism's alteration of the landscape is justifiably cause for Ecocritical concern, there is a more pernicious Christian legacy from the Enlightenment for environmentalism to contend with: the notion of objectivity.

The scientific objectivity promulgated by the Enlightenment was itself a secularization of the objectivity²⁷² accorded to the Church in Europe's Christian past. Ecocriticism must reckon with the splintered teleology resulting from the "objective" scientific progress of the Enlightenment. The advances to civilization provided by the findings of Enlightenment scientists like Kepler, Galileo, Brahe, and Newton, are undeniable in their positive contribution to environmentalism. Indeed, in an age where prominent American politicians still refuse to admit that the climate crisis is caused in large part by human disturbances to the environment, the findings of climate scientists are invaluable to activists and Ecocritics. Yet, these achievements must be balanced in the light of the catastrophic employment of technologies made possible by science in the World Wars and the other endless horrors of the 20th and 21st centuries. The Newtonian God, whose central characteristic was that he was "distinct from the world and has real dominion over it,"²⁷³ came to resemble secular scientists more than anything theological over the course of the Enlightenment. The prophesy of *The New Atlantis* appeared to come to fruition during the Age of Reason, with institutions like the Royal Society assuming a position of objective esteem previously reserved for the Catholic Church. For example, early ecological studies sought to make objective claims about the whole of nature's processes from an "Archimedean point outside worldly human interests."²⁷⁴ This detached worldview attempting

²⁷² Further research will examine the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas as the blueprint for the Enlightenment project of the *Encyclopedie*; two works which attempt an ahistorical, objective presentation of knowledge on a sweeping, encyclopedic scale. The tension of Pynchon's classification as an "encyclopedic" novelist will be examined in that of the complex interconnection, and legacy of, Aquinas and the Enlightenment.

²⁷³ Stewart, 176

²⁷⁴ Szerszynski 264

objectivity has become controversial and fiercely revised in the wake of Arne Naess' previously discussed breakthroughs in deep ecology, which seeks to place humans, even scientific observers, *within* nature, rather than the "Archimedean" viewpoint of the Enlightenment. Deep ecology continues to advocate for a more globalized view of humanity's relationship with nature, particularly the global character of the environmental crisis, as well as for the incorporation of naturalistic philosophies not connected with the dark legacy of Christianity and the Enlightenment.

Alternative Visions for a Global Climate Crisis

While the middle section of *Mason & Dixon*, entitled "America", is the longest and heftiest of the novel, containing the vast majority of the thematic interests for critics thus far, some of the novel's most moving scenes addressing environmental collapse occur geographically elsewhere. From an Ecocritical perspective the novel's engagement with the marginal Atlantic island of St. Helena offers a compelling case for Pynchon's awareness of the field's central concerns. Now-infamous images of a denuded and increasingly barren Brazilian rain forest came to embody climate change concerns as the 20th Century drew to a close. St. Helena, roughly 2,500 miles to the east of Rio de Janeiro, is a fascinating setting, as Pynchon employs it as a synecdoche for the *global* scale of the climate crisis. Mason's sojourn on the island with fellow Royal Astronomer Maskelyne yields a scene of powerful environmental elegy, as the pair "stand in the scent of an orange-grove,--as tourists elsewhere might stand and gape at some mighty cataract or chasm." (134) The elusive, exotic fruit yields a dark insight into what awaits the American continent in the novel's future. Their naturalist-pilgrimage, which has lasted "all the

long declining Day,” concludes with this encounter with “the last Orange-Grove upon the Island,--a souvenir of a Paradise decrepit.” (134) In a single, shattering moment, Pynchon conflates the environmental degradation wrought upon marginal tropical zones like St. Helena at the birth of global capitalism, the sense of the looming apocalypse (“long declining Day”) and the despoliation of the virginal, Edenic America which Mason himself will witness later in the novel. Henry David Thoreau was in the midst of revising *Walden* when, in 1850, the conception of “tropical deforestation” emerged “as a global problem.”²⁸¹ Recalling Lawrence Buell’s aforementioned prediction, Ecocriticism is likely the finest candidate for creating a truly “global literature”, and Thomas Pynchon’s career-long interest in illuminating marginalized locales on a global scale, from Malta in *V.* through *Mason & Dixon*’s St. Helena and Cape of Good Hope solidify his standing as an environmental writer exceptionally acute to the core issues of the field.²⁸² Pynchon proves to be the literary heir to environmentalist figures like Alexander von Humboldt, whose vision of “man’s influence on nature as global, not just local or national”²⁸³ provides a lens with which to revitalize *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s famous utterance, “Everything is connected.” The British Isles to which Mason and Dixon return after their long foray in colonial America (a site of gluttonous consumption) are beset by “Food Riots,” (737) a disquieting prophetic nod to the *global* scale of this issue in the contemporary world, inseparable from the drastic climate changes dramatically affecting the availability of basic foods to marginalized populations across the globe²⁸⁵. Furthermore, Pynchon’s global Ecocritical attentiveness encompasses not just those geographically and cultural marginalized zones, but

²⁸¹ Barton, 6

²⁸² It is worth highlighting that Ecocriticism really gained momentum as a theoretical field of its own after the year 2000; the fact that Pynchon’s novels from before this date were already addressing the fundamental concerns of Ecocriticism is certainly intriguing.

²⁸³ Barton, 16

²⁸⁵ Rob Nixon’s magisterial *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) has become a foundational Ecocritical text, and is centrally concerned with these same issues.

also displays how his aforementioned postsecular spirituality, global in scope, corresponds to the current critical task of incorporating voices of environmental thought from outside of the Enlightenment- and Christian-influenced West.

Amongst *Mason & Dixon*'s freewheeling cast of characters, perhaps the most bizarre for a novel nominally concerned with the mapping of a boundary Line in colonial America is the Chinese astronomer Captain Zhang, who is, in typically Pynchonian fashion, embroiled in a global Sino-Jesuit conspiracy. Zhang's presence in the novel brilliantly weaves together the various strands of the old, the new and the future navigated throughout the novel. Rev'd Cherrycoke strikes a dissident note to the Expansionist drives of his contemporaries when he sermonizes that “ ‘to journey west...in the same sense as the Sun, is to live, raise Children, grow older, and die, carried alone by the Stream of the Day—whilst to turn Eastward, is somehow to resist time and age, to work against the Wind, seek ever the dawn, even, as who can say, defy Death.’ ” (263) Reading this “turn Eastward” as referencing the Far East of the Enlightenment imaginary, it is clear that Pynchon views Westward Expansion as conforming with societal norms of the West (i.e., domination, imperialism, slavery—all various forms of death), while the cultures of the East present possibilities of immortality. The “disappearance” of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s Tyrone Slothrop into the Zone has hitherto been read as a highly innovative challenge to the conventions of character in the Western literature, but Hindu teachings of reincarnation and the Buddhist emphasis on the death of the self/Ego would appear to align with Cherrycoke's “Eastward” speculations. The Far East of China and Japan are being consulted by Ecocriticism to divine if Buddhist relationships with the environment may provide an antidote to the anthropocentrism of the post-Christian, and post-Enlightenment West. Thus the presence of

Captain Zhang, and the repeated references to *Feng-Shui*²⁸⁷, are more than postmodern cuteness or Pynchon poking fun at interior design trends of his beloved Californians.

1697 marked the final attempt of the Jesuit order to convert their would-be disciples of the Far East²⁸⁸; the Good News did not fall upon the ears of Asia, and consequently the region remained cloaked in Orientalist intrigue in the European imaginary. China, in particular, became an all-encompassing cultural item for radical free-thinkers of the Enlightenment²⁸⁹, which makes Pynchon's possible criticism of the European craze for "exotic" China even more complicated, given his noted status as a "counter-cultural" novelist. The exotic, even forbidden, airs surrounding the cultures of the Far East did not cease with the Boxer Rebellion or Commodore Perry's arrival in Tokyo Harbor. These attitudes have continued into the present day, so that even environmentalism, so committed to prevailing against the natural disasters and climate change (first birthed by the anthropocentrism of Biblical religions and the "rational" Enlightenment), is nonetheless guilty²⁹⁰, to a degree, of engaging in the very Orientalist-type attitudes they would surely condemn in the mindset of Enlightenment thinkers. If *feng shui* becomes a frenzied item of the interior design zeitgeist simply because of its exotic flair, then, on the Ecocritical level, there must be a sober examination of the appropriation of Eastern religious-philosophical thought purely because of its similarly exotic, non-Christian images and ideals. Captain Zhang is exasperated by Mason and Dixon's explanation of the function of the Line's Visto as a "Boundary, nothing more," retorting, " 'Ev'rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature,--coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks,--so honoring the *Dragon* or *Shan* within, from which Land-

²⁸⁷ See *Mason & Dixon* 542, where Zhang declares that the Visto of the Mason and Dixon Line has "Terrible *Feng-Shui* here. Worst I ever saw. You two crazy?"

²⁸⁸ Hazard, 21-22

²⁸⁹ Hazard, 22

²⁹⁰ A tremendous irony this quest for ancient wisdom of holistic environmental living from the Far East is that China and India, the homelands of sages like Confucius and the Guatama Buddha, are today among the world's greatest polluters and stresses upon fragile ecosystems.

Scape ever takes its form.” (542) The principle of aligning architectural design with an ancient Chinese form of ecology reveals that while Pynchon may begin the passage with what appears to be a Postmodernist joke about *Feng-Shui* and its cultural appropriation in 1990s consumer American culture, the fundamentals of *Feng-Shui* actually contain ideas crucial for Ecocriticism. Roderick Frazier Nash contrasts the Biblical view of the wilderness as a satanic abode, with the ancient Chinese, who “sought [wild places] out in the hope of sensing more clearly something of the unity and rhythm that they believed pervaded the universe.”²⁹² *Feng-Shui*, then, is a vital element of Pynchon’s postsecular ecological vision in the novel, an attempt to perceive the increasingly few remaining wild places on the planet as essential for a harmonious relationship with the cosmos.

Pynchon’s Orphic spirituality merges with the naturalist visions of the Far East when Zhang declares, “To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon’s very Flesh, a sword-slash, a long, perfect scar.” (542) Herein ecological alteration by an arbitrary technological creation, like the Line, is rendered as being not just environmentally damaging but instigating a spiritual-scarification²⁹⁴ upon the Earth, imbuing Pynchon’s postsecular Orphic attentiveness to the natural world with Chinese religious principles. Zhang’s remark also echoes a sentiment of one of the Enlightenment’s most infamous contrarians, one whose outlook was decidedly at odds with the encyclopedic rationality prevailing at the time. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, engrossed in his solitary walks of reverie, was bold enough to secularize the temptation in the Garden of Eden, viewing “the original sin” not as a groping for godlike knowledge but rather “the turn to agriculture, and its inevitable accompaniment: private

²⁹² Nash, 20

²⁹⁴ Chapter 26 of *Mason & Dixon* begins with an excerpt from the fictional epic poem *The Line*, by Timothy Tox, containing lines, “To mark the Earth with geometrick Scars,” 257.

property.”²⁹⁵ The predominantly agricultural European continent of Rousseau’s lifetime owed its firm sense of division, particularly in the variations on the feudal hierarchy still present during the Enlightenment, to the demarcated worldview courtesy of the seemingly benign system of agriculture. Thus, the presence of Cap’t Zhang in the novel allows for the most acute critiques of the Enlightenment’s environmental destructiveness to merge with Pynchon’s own postsecular vision as well as the global voices Ecocriticism seeks to incorporate into its ever-expanding response to the climate crisis. Yet, for all of *Mason & Dixon*’s globetrotting ambitions, it remains firmly aligned with the predominant response of American environmental literature to the legacy of Enlightenment destruction: apocalypse.

Apocalypse at Walden Pond: *Mason & Dixon* & Ecological Eschatology in American Literature

The apocalyptic imagination of Christian Europe before the settlement of the New World is essential to comprehending environmental attitudes in American literature, especially *Mason & Dixon*. While Christopher Columbus’ fleet was en route to the Caribbean, Europe in the late 15th century was a continent plagued by apocalyptic thought. The end of the world was “a somber, terrifying prediction based solidly on the divine wisdom of biblical prophecy and the felt experience of daily life.”²⁹⁹ Pynchon’s novel contends that “ ‘By the time of Columbus, God’s project of Disengagement was obvious to all,--with the terrible understanding that we were to be left more and more to our own solutions.’ ” (487) A variation on the Nietzschean death of God, wherein the Enlightenment’s “divinely inspired” secularization becomes infused with the

²⁹⁵ Oelschlaeger, 111

²⁹⁹ Sale, 29

apocalyptic fervor of the pre-Colombian era, the remark, while seemingly atheistic, brilliantly encapsulates the predominant cultural of somber terror. To survive this cavalcade of “misery and suffering and violence that seemed to be rushing the world to its end”³⁰¹ was no simple task when this apocalyptic future was always on the verge of happening *tomorrow*. Martin Luther may be seen as the profound spiritual representative of this somber apocalyptic mood. His favored image of the Deluge propounded his beliefs that “the whole world degenerates and grows worse every day ...the last day is already breaking...the world will perish shortly.”³⁰³ The Dutch Calvinists at the novel’s geographical end of the world (the Cape of Good Hope) typify Luther’s apocalyptic mood, for they “carry on as if Judgment be near as the towering Seas and nothing matter anymore, especially not good behavior, because there’s no more time.” (78) This observation is all the more noteworthy for Ecocriticism, given its alignment of apocalyptic thinking (and its attendant anarchic spirit), with a locale which is both culturally and geographically a highly marginalized site; “the towering Seas” are difficult for a contemporary reader to encounter and not be reminded of the impending “apocalypses” awaiting so many coastal cities like the Cape in this age of rapidly rising sea levels. However, in order to fully comprehend the import of apocalyptic thought in American literature, one must understand the very distinct notions of time in the Christian apocalyptic framework.

The Christian Apocalypse is the dawning of a new age, the unveiling of God’s Second Coming, treated in the theological category of *eschatology*. Norman Cohn’s classic work on the ancient millenarian tendency, i.e. the eschatological belief in the apocalypse’s occurrence at the dawn of a new millennium, illuminates the centrality of such thought where American literature is concerned. The millennium, for the eschatologically alert, would be “a cataclysm from which

³⁰¹ Sale, 46

³⁰³ Nicolson, 102-103

the world is to emerge totally transformed and redeemed.”³⁰⁶ He defines the outlooks of millenarian movements as believing that their “aims and premises are boundless,” echoing the many of the fundamental ideals of the American Revolution, for these apocalyptic struggles are not “for specific, limited objectives, but as an event of unique important, different in kind from all other struggles known to history.”³⁰⁷ The sense of the “American experiment” as something staggeringly unique proves, ironically, to be merely another instance of a belief stretching back to before the birth of Jesus. In the Christian church, the liturgical season of Advent (from Christmas to the Epiphany) is categorized as eschatological, for its emphasis upon the ushering in of a new age, i.e. the incarnation of Christ into the world. Appropriate, then, is Thomas Pynchon’s narrative organization of both *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* within the Advent-Christmas seasons. Rev’d Cherrycoke’s narration follows an Advent to Epiphany structure³⁰⁸, as befitting an exiled preacher spinning a winter’s fireside yarn, but the apocalyptic undertones of this eschatological time of year are Ecocritically significant as well. Recalling Martin Heidegger’s previously discussed essay on Rainer Maria Rilke, (“What are Poets for?”) the eschatological underpinnings of *Mason & Dixon*’s narrative timeline are illuminated with particular clarity. Heidegger stipulates, “The essence of technology comes to the light of day only slowly. This day is the world’s night, rearranged into merely technological day. This day is the shortest day. It threatens a single endless winter.”³⁰⁹ The progressive shortening of daylight during the winter of Cherrycoke’s narration thus becomes, in this Heideggerian reading, an apocalyptic ushering in of the “technological day” so eagerly anticipated by the Enlightenment, one which leads from the Industrial Revolution immediately succeeding the novel’s setting to the

³⁰⁶ Cohn, 281

³⁰⁷ Ibid

³⁰⁸ Clerc, 89

³⁰⁹ Heidegger, 115

post-1945 threats of “nuclear winter” in Pynchon’s lifetime. Pynchon’s *Against the Day* drew its title from the Second Letter of Peter³¹⁰ indicating a modification to the Ecocritical jeremiad: Pynchon’s postsecular ecological spirituality thus becomes a marked stance “against the technological day” of the Enlightenment’s aftermath. Cherrycoke’s tale unfolds in pre-Civil War New England, “Christmastide of 1786” to be precise, but one that has already experienced the first tremors of the Industrial Revolution. Even the upheavals of 1776 are understood by Cherrycoke to have been existentially significant, as he tells the familial audience, “ ‘Twas a more tranquil time, before the War, when people moved more slowly...”³¹¹ The eschatological framework of Pynchon’s frame narrative thus prompts a linguistic alteration: is the Advent setting a sly nod to the reality that Cherrycoke is relating his tale during what may be deemed the “Industrial *Revelation*”? The apocalyptic quality of Advent takes on new Ecocritical undertones when considering the culturally unsettling “advent” of industrialism to the American landscape.

Leo Marx’s now-canonical *The Machine In the Garden* famously grounded its thesis by wedding W.W. Rostow’s claim that America’s “industrial revelation” occurred roughly around 1844, coincidentally the same year when Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Sleepy Hollow* episode³¹² epitomized the *already-arrived* presence of industrialism in American nature writing. The pre-Civil War date of 1844 also lends itself to complementarity with the “interlude” moment of Cherrycoke’s narration (between the Revolution and the Civil War), firmly grounding Pynchon’s novel in a canonical tradition of American environmental writing. The 1840’s witnessed the

³¹⁰ “Against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”

³¹¹ *Mason & Dixon*, 352; the significance of “slowness” in relation to the novel’s postsecular spirituality will be explicated in detail in the following discussion of the Ecological Carnivalesque

³¹² Hawthorne, of course, being a leading member of America’s “first significant literary generation. The episode essentially recounts Hawthorne’s jaunt into the wilderness, experiencing tranquility in the natural setting for a time, only for the noise of a nearby train to jolt him out of his blissful episode; thus, the “machine in the garden.” Marx, 27

simultaneity of the coining of the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny” and the appearance of an “apocalyptic Protestantism...unmatched since early colonial times”³¹⁴, making the Advent season all the more appropriate for Cherrycoke’s fireside “tale of America.” Already in Pynchon’s novel, Cherrycoke contrasts the increasingly faithless European continent with America, where there “is little *but* Faith,--church-spires on every town skyline, traveling ministers who draw congregations by the hundreds and thousands, across flooded pastures, beneath rain-combed skies and in under the outspread wings of their white tents, singing far off in the woods, full of fervent strange harmonies.” (543) Herein proto-Romantic imagery of foreboding weather is fused with a prophetic vision of the Great Awakening which overwhelmed American Christianity in the 1840s with its apocalyptic fervor, presaged in the novel by the Dutch Calvinists at the Cape of Good Hope who “each strenuous Sunday profess belief in the Great Struggle at the End of the World.” (63) Andrew Jackson’s presidency, which concluded in 1837, defined the ensuing decade, with its cultural prizing of the “western man-on-the-make, the speculator, and the wildcat banker...and when men like Davy Crockett became national heroes by defining national aspiration in terms of so many bears destroyed, so much land preempted, so many trees hacked down, so many Indians and Mexicans dead in the dust.”³¹⁷ Cornelius Vroom, the Dutch patriarch hosting Mason and Dixon while they observe the Transit of Venus at the Cape, is a prophetic character, in that his literary tastes anticipate those of the Jacksonian era. Vroom is “an Admirer of the legendary Botha brothers, a pain of gin-drinking, pipe-smoking Nimrods of the generation previous whose great joy and accomplishment lay in the hunting and slaughter of animals much larger than they.” (60) The curious note is that these proto-Davy Crockett Botha brothers are *already legendary* by the time Mason and Dixon encounter Vroom

³¹⁴ Stephanson, 5

³¹⁷ Slotkin, 5

in the mid 18th century, illustrating the depth of Pynchon's condemnation of the long history of dominating attitudes in the Western relation to nature. The children listening to Cherrycoke's Schezerade-esque oration are thus listening to an elegy for the Jeffersonian "republic of reason" which would become eclipsed by the time of their maturity during Jacksonian Democracy. The "machine in the garden thesis" of Leo Marx then balloons out from this hyper-attentiveness to the Jacksonian era, to encompass nearly all of American literature.

Leo Marx is especially attentive to the thread of apocalyptic pessimism, which is conflated with the natural world throughout American literature, from Jonathan Edwards' sermons through the elegiac closing pages of *The Great Gatsby*. He highlights as a prime example of this apocalyptic pessimism the ending of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, "After all this long journey...here was it all come to nothing, everything all busted up and ruined."³¹⁹ It is difficult not to read *Mason & Dixon*'s final brief section as a coda echoing Twain's, particularly in the ruinous England that the pair returns to after their Rabelaisian foray into the American wilderness. In a remark during the novel's overture, Rev'd Cherrycoke offers a sentiment to his familial audience deeply reminiscent of the conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn*. He relates, " 'Twas not too many years before the War,--what we were doing out that in that Country together was brave, scientifick beyond my understanding, and ultimately meaningless,--we were putting a line straight through the heart of the Wilderness, eight yards wide and due west, in order to separate two Propietorships, granted when the World was yet feudal, and but eight years later to be nullified by the War for Independence." (8) The "everything all busted up and ruined" of *Huckleberry Finn*'s picaresque through the American South is transferred onto the legacy of the Mason-Dixon Line, an Ecocritical symbol of Enlightenment ideologies of dominating nature and the stain of American slavery, something "ultimately meaningless." The apocalyptic pessimism

³¹⁹ Marx, 339, Twain, 203.

is thus that while Christian eschatology promises a profound “revelation” in the sense of the ultimate meaning of reality being disclosed, Cherrycoke has merely been an accomplice to an “ultimately meaningless” demarcation of private property on the very landscape promised to be a return to the Garden of Eden.

Robert A. Ferguson, writing on the American Enlightenment, supports Marx’s thesis by contending, “loss is the elusive variable in determining voice in early republican literature.”³²¹ The generation of National Hawthorne embodied this, where in these early literary works “over everything looms a vague nostalgia about what is passing or missing.”³²² This was a “sense of loss...heightened by the inevitable lapsing of communication with the homeland, the divergence of colonial from homeland historical experience, and the rise of new generations more acculturated or acclimated to the wilderness, less like the remembered grandparents in the fixed image of Europe.”³²³ These “new generations”, many of whom would participate as pioneers in the massive endeavor of Westward Expansion and Native displacement, have an unusual legacy within Ecocriticism. For in the wake of the smog-infested and sedentary industrial era, many environmentalists experienced “nostalgia for the perceived heartiness and independence of the pioneer,”³²⁴ a sense of loss which has become difficult to justify in recent decades. The wellspring of nostalgia for what is lost or quickly passing away is palpable in *Walden*³²⁵, Mark Twain, and finally *Mason & Dixon*, which solidifies Ferguson’s claim that “this ever-moving sense of regret is, in large measure, the story of American literature.”³²⁶ The relationship of nostalgic, apocalyptic pessimism with the loss of irretrievable natural places is thus central to the

³²¹ Ferguson, 191

³²² Ibid

³²³ Slotkin, 18

³²⁴ Berry, 131

³²⁵ As outlined in the earlier discussion of the supposedly Edenic state of the American wilderness.

³²⁶ Ferguson, 191

environmental vision within American literature, and situates Pynchon's novel as an invaluable contribution to this centuries-long discussion. However, while *Mason & Dixon* has demonstrated its capacity thus far to be conversant with a major of the thematic and aesthetic concerns of American environmental literature, and Ecocriticism writ large, the most significant critical intervention of this thesis remains to be elucidated, one which demonstrates Pynchon's fierce divergence from the apocalyptic pessimism just outlined: the ecological carnivalesque.

Conclusion: *The Ecological Carnavalesque*

“ ‘Jesus!’ I said, ‘so this is a new world!’”³³²
-Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

In an influential essay from 1976, “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon,” Edward Mendelsohn sought to create a canon of the titular genre, claiming that he “[knew] of only seven: Dante’s *Commedia*, Rabelais’ five books of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Goethe’s *Faust*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and now, I believe, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*.”³³³ His canon was certainly influenced by a similar litany produced by Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), when defining the fantastical, scatological, digressive, encyclopedic genre of the Menippean satire. Frye’s exemplary texts began with the Antiquity of *The Golden Ass* and *Satyricon*, zooming to the present age via *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Voltaire’s *Candide*, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and lastly Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*³³⁴. For one of the most critically respected American novelists of the post-1945 era, who has yet to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, this list of aesthetic peers has to be one of the finest compliments a writer can ever hope to attain. While *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* contained elements of the encyclopedic aesthetic, *Gravity’s Rainbow* solidified Pynchon’s entry into the elite strata of literary goliaths. Excepting the Francophone Marcel Proust and the Germanic Robert Musil, *the novel* of the 20th Century in English can rightly be said to have two parts, *Ulysses* for the first half, *Gravity’s Rainbow* for the latter. Mendelsohn’s canon is also composed of incredibly challenging works, each one of which redefined what its particular aesthetic and generic form was capable of, and simply by their nature as *encyclopedic*, these

³³² Rabelais, 157

³³³ Edward Mendelsohn, “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon,” 1267, <http://www.columbia.edu/~em36/EncyclopedicNarrative.pdf>

³³⁴ Frye, 309-312

works defy easy explanation, all with multiple points of entry, and breathtaking innovations in formal and thematic interests. Which is to say, Mendelsohn's encyclopedic canon does not parallel the Ecocritical canon thus far. The Ecocritical reticence towards Thomas Pynchon becomes much clearer in light of the peers which Mendelsohn assigns to the *Gravity's Rainbow* novelist: these are incredibly challenging works, often requiring many years simply to contemplate their full aesthetic power. As demonstrated throughout this investigation, American Ecocritical writers in particular have favored the *prophetic mode* of the Biblical traditions, secularizing their content to create powerful "sermons for the earth," exemplified by Thoreau and Rachel Carson. The sermonic mode lends itself towards concise rhetorical *and* emotional persuasion, with the intended effect of the audience converting their behavior relatively quickly after reading such works. While *Mason & Dixon* has been shown to exemplify these "sermons for the earth" and other qualities of Ecocriticism, whether in its emphasis on the global scale of the environmental crisis, on marginalized locales and peoples affected by eco-crises, the modifications to the pastoral genre, its emphasis on the elegiac in regards to lost or disappearing natural places, the attentiveness to postsecular non-institutionalized sources of spiritual inspiration to confront the climate crisis, it is abundantly clear that the scope of Pynchon's ambitious critique cannot be contained within the "canonical" modes of environmental writing. In order to fully encompass his broad-sweeping vision of the ancient past, the Enlightenment present of the narrative, and his alternative environmental visions of the future, Pynchon requires the encyclopedic aesthetics of the ecological carnivalesque.

The carnivalesque aesthetic of *Mason & Dixon* (and Pynchon in general), wherein the kaleidoscopic interchange of voices and timeframes causes readers to become "lost in the funhouse" (to nod to fellow Postmodernist John Barth), has hitherto been neglected by

Ecocriticism. Curiously enough, the 18th century novel which *Mason & Dixon* most closely resembles is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, whose (in)famous digressive narrative displacement of time and space reads as prophetic of the post-Einsteinian era of relativity which Dixon uneasily anticipates in the novel. Sterne's novel has been classified as exemplary of the "subjective grotesque" wing of the carnivalesque, wherein the "world concept" perfected in *Don Quixote* and *Gargantua and Pantagruel* becomes "transposed" into the "new subjective language of the age,"³³⁵ those innovations in the literature of *the self* following the Cartesian breakthrough of the 17th century. Thus, one of the aesthetic hallmarks of *Mason & Dixon*, its subversion of linguistic and narrative expectations in the mode of Sterne, connects with the "ecological carnivalesque," as will be demonstrated. The groundbreaking work by the Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965), has been consulted extensively for establishing the connection between the carnivalesque, the encyclopedic, and now, the Ecocritical, in *Mason & Dixon*. The Enlightenment setting of Pynchon's novel proves to be a revelatory starting-point for comprehending the innovations of the ecological carnivalesque.

In a dazzling summation, Peter Gay contends "it is not extravagant to see the *Encyclopedie* itself—with its profusion of articles on arts and crafts, philosophy and politics, theology and language, and with its sly and informative cross references—as a striking display...of the variety, wealth, and energy of eighteenth-century civilization."³³⁶ Gay's exegesis of the grand achievement of the French *philosophes* resounds startlingly well with the typical diagnoses of Pynchon's encyclopedic style. *Mason & Dixon*, in this sense, is indeed exemplary of the Enlightenment's encyclopedic project, where as a novel purported to be contemporary to *Tristram Shandy* it would seemingly not appear eccentric or surreal in the least. Furthermore,

³³⁵ Bakhtin, 36-37

³³⁶ Gay, 26

Gay notes that there was “no distinctive Enlightenment style in the arts. The eighteenth century lived amid a profusion of tastes, techniques, and subject matter,”³³⁷ aligning neatly with the profusion of literary forms, Enlightenment interests, and esoteric knowledge inherent in Pynchon’s novel. According to Gay’s definitions of Enlightenment aesthetics, *Mason & Dixon* appears to mirror its setting quite well, yet the absolutely essential Rabelaisian strain of the carnivalesque in the novel complicates its status as a fictional “Enlightenment text.”

The Age of Reason ranks as one of the worst epochs³³⁸ for cultural appreciation of the beguiling and bizarre 16th Century Frenchman Francois Rabelais, the progenitor of the carnivalesque aesthetic in the modern sense. Writing shortly after the Enlightenment, the French historian Jules Michelet wrote that Rabelais “collected wisdom from the popular elemental forces of the ancient Provencal idioms, sayings, proverbs, school farces, from the mouths of fools and clowns. But refracted by this foolery, the genius of the age and its prophetic power are revealed in all their power.”³³⁹ The silly songs which appear in nearly all of the novel’s chapters, the drawing on early American folkloric sources to create the fantastical wilderness zones, the playfulness with which historical figures like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin are depicted, and the orgiastic emphasis on scenes of extreme sexuality, gluttony, debauchery, etc., are all evidence of Pynchon’s continuance of the Rabelaisian appropriation of prophetic wisdom from unusual, perhaps even non-canonical sources. Bakhtin argues that the Enlightenment project, with its “abstract and rationalist utopianism, a mechanistic conception of matter,” ensured they would be “quite incapable of understanding and appreciating Rabelais.”³⁴⁰ One might assume that the fiercely anti-institutional Enlightenment thinkers would have found in

³³⁷ Gay, 216

³³⁸ Bakhtin, 116-117

³³⁹ Bakhtin, 2

³⁴⁰ Bakhtin, 116-17

Gargantua and Pantagruel, with scenes such as Gargantua drunkenly drowning nearly all of Paris in his urine from the spire of Notre Dame, a predecessor for their own project of undermining organized religions and authoritarian monarchies. Yet, it was none other than Voltaire, who has become such a powerful representative of the Enlightenment's satirical battle with ancient institutions, who declared Rabelais "a drunken philosopher who wrote only when he was drunk."³⁴¹ Pynchon's continuance of the Rabelaisian carnivalesque is therefore a determined aesthetic and thematic decision to confront the Enlightenment project, with its disastrous environmental legacy centered on notions of extreme domination and mastery. The "encyclopedic knowledge and the extraordinary richness" of the world constructed by Rabelais' highlights the carnivalesque commitment to "all that is new, fresh, or primary... This is the encyclopedia of a new world."³⁴² The ecological carnivalesque of Pynchon's novel is premised upon these qualities of Rabelais' vision in order to present his unique contribution to the literature of the environmental crisis, particularly his postsecular spiritual vision in the time of eco-apocalypse. As Bakhtin highlights the "new world" presented by Rabelais, Pynchon's vision of a new world courtesy of the ecological carnivalesque must be explicated as operating in defiance of the prevailing ideologies of history in the "new age" of the Enlightenment.

Edward Gibbon, historian of the Enlightenment *par excellence*, is a specter in Rev'd Cherrycoke's *Christ and History*, excerpted at the opening of several chapters. The most potent instance is Cherrycoke's homiletic that "History is not Chronology, for that is left to lawyers,-- nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People." (349) The indictment of Gibbon's style of history so predominant in at the time is furthered when Cherrycoke reminds his audience "a spirit of whimsy pervades the entire history of these Delaware Boundaries, as if in

³⁴¹ Bakhtin, 116-17

³⁴² Bakhtin, 455

playful refusal to admit that America, in any way, may be serious.” (337) Bakhtin is so bold as to declare that, “No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with Rabelaisian images,”³⁴⁵ illuminating a profound implication of the carnivalesque aesthetics of the novel. The exiled priest reaches his most magisterially Rabelaisian when he sermonizes that, “‘She,’” (the vision of History as practiced by Gibbon), “‘needs rather to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiterers, 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) Indeed, this carnivalization of history is necessitated precisely to retain universality of remembrance, the “true history,” as belonging to “the People.” In this carnivalesque manner, Cherrycoke subverts the legalistic chronology favored by the rationalist-materialist teleological utopianism of the Enlightenment in order to present a more authentically democratic vision of American history. Bakhtin writes that “carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people...it is universal in scope,”³⁴⁷ conjoining the universality of communal remembrance with the universality created by the emancipatory potential of the carnivalesque subversion of the established ideology and authority of the monarchy and the Church in Medieval-Renaissance Europe. In this manner, Pynchon’s opposition to the dogmatism of the Enlightenment itself illustrates that the carnivalesque is not bound to critiques of a single epoch, and indeed, the Romantics owed a great debt to the carnivalesque in their own reaction to the Age of Reason.

Bakhtin defined the “Romantic grotesque,” that movement iteration of the Rabelaisian vision, as “a reaction against...the self-importance of the Enlightenment...against the cold

³⁴⁵ Bakhtin, 3

³⁴⁷ Bakhtin, 11

rationalism, against official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism.”³⁴⁸ These characteristics parallel the contribution of Romanticism to the founding of environmentalism, particularly the long-standing battle of environmentalists with government institutions. Romanticism also laid the seeds for the postsecular vision of Thomas Pynchon, for the Romantics rebelled against the clockwork materialism of the Enlightenment, opting instead for spiritualizing, and thus removing from a context of doctrinal adherence, many elements of Europe’s Catholic past³⁴⁹ in their quest for sublime experiences of the natural world. Additionally, the Romantics famously culled much of their inspiration from the pagan ruins of Greco-Roman Antiquity, illustrating the debt Pynchon owes to Romanticism in his incorporation of Orphic spirituality. Yet it was not merely the ruins of Antiquity which fueled the Romantic carnivalesque, but also the agrarian spirituality and rites of ancient paganism, which spurred early environmentalists to reconsider their “earthly roots” when the industrial age seemed to alienate humanity more and more from the cycles of the natural world. While Pynchon is clearly indebted to the Romantic iteration of the carnivalesque, particularly in response to the Enlightenment’s view of historicity, he develops an aesthetic uniquely his own throughout *Mason & Dixon* to fashion his critique of the Age of Reason, which leads one step closer to comprehending his ecological carnivalesque

The overlapping historical technique of *Mason & Dixon* falls broadly into the literary genre of alternative history. Douglas Keeseey’s survey of the initial wave of reviews of the novel led him to conclude that its “carnivalization of history should be approached ‘with the assumption that comedy is *not* incompatible with history, but a key route to other pasts and futures—an alternative history.”³⁵¹ Furthermore, Pedro Garcia-Caro concludes that such a

³⁴⁸ Bakhtin, 37

³⁴⁹ Recall Pynchon’s incorporation of St. Francis of Assisi’s spirituality while not being a “Catholic novelist” in the sense of a Georges Bernanos.

³⁵¹ Garcia-Caro, 107

carnivalization “voices a disagreement with the established discourses”³⁵² of the Enlightenment. Rev’d Cherrycoke confirms this aim of the carnivalesque when he notes, “These times are unfriendly toward Worlds alternative to this one.” (359) John A. McClure highlights that “the communities founded or discovered by postsecular pilgrims are dramatically small, fragile, and transitory...”³⁵⁴ The carnival of Rabelais was similarly ephemeral yet its aesthetic power has persisted into the present age of Thomas Pynchon, whose postsecular spirituality clearly aligns with these Rabelaisian hallmarks. The alternative world which Pynchon outlines is one where a postsecular vision of earth-centric spiritualities, a veritable theological carnival of voices and visions, offers *another road*, away from the supposed “Age of Reason” which has thus revealed a teleology not of utopian rationalism but rather one of entropic apocalypse, particularly where the environment is concerned. The literary precedent for such a “carnavalesque conception of the historical process” is none other than Rabelais, whose “relation of play and prophecy”³⁵⁵ is mirrored by Pynchon’s approach to *Mason & Dixon*: alongside the silly songs, talking dogs, and tyrannical mechanical ducks of a culinary variety, there exists prophetic utterances about the roots of, and the present manifestations of, the contemporary climate crisis. It is carnival laughter, the communal moment of utopian potential fostered by *comedy*, which revolts against totalitarianism, whether the monarchical Catholicism of Rabelais’ lifetime or the legacy of domination fostered by the Enlightenment for Pynchon’s age.

The utopian potential of communal emancipation is at the very core of Bakhtin’s exegesis of Rabelais. If the Enlightenment promised a utopian re-creation of an Edenic future via science, technology, rationality, materialism, etc., then the utopian aspect of Pynchon’s “ecological carnivalesque” must be addressed. Rev’d Cherrycoke begins one of his most beautiful

³⁵² Garcia-Caro, 110

³⁵⁴ McClure, 4

³⁵⁵ Bakhtin, 232

ruminations with the question, “Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?” (345) Clearly echoing one of American literature’s masters of alternative history, Philip K. Dick (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), Cherrycoke locates a route for an alternative history in the carnivalesque nocturnal realm of dreams; consider James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, often dubbed his “book of the night.” The dream world of America, here, is quite distinct from the “dreams” of re-creating Eden or America as a Lockean *tabula rasa*. It is the possibility of pre-Revolutionary America taking a different, less nihilistically destructive path than it indeed did. Bakhtin argues that “popular-festive forms,” whether in Rabelais, or eventually, in Pynchon, “look into the future. They present the victory of this future, of the golden age, over the past. This is the victory of all the people’s material abundance, freedom, equality, brotherhood.”³⁵⁷

This prophetic alignment with the “victory” of the communal in the carnivalesque is essential to the alternate visions of the future presented in Pynchon’s text. For example, when Cherrycoke speculates upon Westward Expansion, he declares, “Sure as Polaris, the first structure to go up would be a Tavern,--the second, another Tavern,” (650) a subtle injection of alternative history, for instead of the church-spires which were typically the first permanent structures in these frontier settlements, the carnivalesque site of the tavern, zone of communal laughter, is favored. Earlier in the novel, Captain Volcanoe expressly refutes the Christian vision of apocalypse (with its divisions of the saved and the damned), prophesying “ ‘in the world to come, all boundaries shall be eras’d.’ ” (406) Volcanoe’s powerful rejoinder to the arbitrary permanence imposed by the Mason-Dixon Line echoes the erasure of social divisions which accompanied the carnival of Rabelais’ Europe. Indeed, Bakhtin illustrates that “carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was

³⁵⁷ Bakhtin, 256

immortalized and completed.”³⁶⁰ The Enlightenment’s obsession with precise classification, evidenced particularly well by Carl Linnaeus’ approach to nature, is also to be discarded in the utopian carnivalesque visions of Rabelais and Pynchon. The carnivalization of history favors *that which is becoming*, which has profound implications for the ecological carnivalesque of *Mason & Dixon*.

Recall the earlier discussion of the ecological havoc wrought by the English Christians’ insistence upon permanent settlements in the New World, and the Ecocritical significance of the carnivalesque’s hostility to the ideas of permanence so central to the Enlightenment is quite illuminating. When Cherrycoke wonders, “ ‘Is ours not the Age of Metamorphosis,’ ” (53) the ecological aspect of the novel’s carnivalesque aesthetic comes to the fore. The Romantic heirs of Rabelais discovered in the grotesque “a rejection of that which is finished and completed, of the didactic and utilitarian spirit of the Enlighteners,”³⁶² and this spirit of metamorphosis has profoundly influenced Ecocriticism. As contemporary evolutionary biology and ecology reveals a natural world of dynamism and constant change, both the rigidity of Enlightenment scientific classification, and the conceptions of nature as an infinite cornucopia are being dramatically challenged by Ecocriticism. Bakhtin’s definition of the grotesque as “reflect[ing] a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis of death and birth, growth and becoming,”³⁶³ illustrates quite clearly how the carnivalesque aesthetics of Pynchon’s novel reflect one of the central concerns of Ecocriticism. The emphasis upon *becoming* is essential to understanding perhaps the most crucial element of Pynchon’s ecological carnivalesque: the underworld.

³⁶⁰ Bakhtin, 10

³⁶² Bakhtin, 37

³⁶³ Bakhtin, 24

Mythic frameworks, whether in the Gospel narratives beloved by preachers contemporaneous to Rev'd Cherrycoke, or the Orphic spirituality of Pynchon's postsecular vision, typically involve a transformative descent into an underworld zone, wherein the protagonist emerges in a radically altered state. Bakhtin highlights that for the "Rabelaisian system of images the underworld is the junction where the main lines of this system cross each other: carnivals, banquets, fights, beatings, abuses, and curses."³⁶⁴ Rabelais did not wholly invent this underworld junction, for "the eleventh-century Norman historian Orderic Vital," presents "one of the oldest descriptions of carnival...in the form of a mystic vision of the underworld."³⁶⁵ The centrality of the underworld in Orphism heightens the Ecocritical innovation of Pynchon's engagement with the carnivalesque in *Mason & Dixon*. While the religious aesthetic of the jeremiad, favored by much of American environmental writing, has been demonstrated to be highly evident in Pynchon's novel, the "ambivalent character"³⁶⁶ of the carnivalesque as defined by Bakhtin certainly appears at odds with the "canonical" thematic and formalistic interests of Ecocriticism. The thematic interests in the novel of religious visions of apocalypse, ecological apocalypse, and the carnivalesque finally coagulate with the introduction of the underworld into this discussion. For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque underworld "contains the past, the rejected and the condemned, as unworthy to dwell in the present, as something useless and obsolete. But it also gives us a glimpse of the new life, of the future that is born, for it is this future that finally kills the past."³⁶⁷ A future assassination of the past echoes the overlapping historical project of Pynchon's novel, and it is precisely in the underworld zone of *Mason & Dixon* where the ecological carnivalesque is must fully embodied, for the pantheistic postsecular vision of

³⁶⁴ Bakhtin, 386

³⁶⁵ Bakhtin, 391

³⁶⁶ Bakhtin, 409

³⁶⁷ Ibid

Pynchon's heavily Orphic spirituality collides most powerfully with They/Them, the dominating, totalitarian agents of the Enlightenment whose fruits of slavery and environmental destruction³⁶⁸ the novel most clearly confronts.

Cornelius Vroom ushers Mason and Dixon into the novel's most profound carnivalesque underworld, his "Local" brothel and tavern in the Cape of Good Hope named, appropriately enough, "The World's End." (148) Within the "World's End," there is "something a bit too Churchlike for Dixon...a devotion to ritual and timing," juxtaposing queasily with the "high Humor" of Cornelius who giddily points out to the pair "secret Pornoscopes...where Burghers may recline, grunting expressively, and spy upon one another in Activities that may be elephantine, birdlike, over in a flash, long as Church;" this lustful excess is typically "schedul'd, splashing outside the Church-drawn boundaries of marriage, as across racial lines." (150-51) The commodification of black female bodies, of brothel voyeurism in regards to animalistic sexuality, are certainly powerful examples of "the rejected and the condemned" inhabitants of carnivalesque underworlds. Curiously, Cherrycoke narrates that "there persists along the Company nerve-lines a terrible simple nearness to the Night of the 'Black Hole,' some Zero-Point of history, reckoning whence, all the Marvels to follow,--Quebec, Dr. Halley's Comet, the Battle of Quiberon Bay, aye and the Transit of Venus, too—would elapse as fugitive as Opium dreams, and mattering less." (152) This places the infamous Black Hole of Calcutta incident³⁷² firmly into the negative aspect of carnival underworld for these geographically fringe Calvinists. The nefarious happenings of the World's End brothel thus ironically bring the Company men

³⁶⁸ It is worth noting that Bakhtin isolates a series of minor natural disasters in France just before Rabelais began writing *Gargantua* on 340, signaling an interesting connection between Rabelais and Pynchon as an Ecocritical writer.

³⁷² This historical event is central to Pynchon's novel. It involved the seizure in 1756 of Fort William in Calcutta by Indian troops, wherein 146 British prisoners of war were kept hostage in the small dungeon later dubbed the "black hole." 123 of these prisoners died from the cramped conditions which produced swift suffocation and heat exhaustion.

directly into contact with their “omega point” of history, the Black Hole of Calcutta which witnessed the violent reversal of slavery and imperialism thrust back upon Europeans in India. The World’s End becomes a narrative space for Pynchon to explore the spectacle of the underworld, wherein the utopian potentials of carnivalesque descent are staggered by the meaninglessness of the spectacle.

Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger’s recent exegesis of overlooked philosophical influences upon *Gravity’s Rainbow* reveals searing implications for *Mason & Dixon*, particularly the ecological carnivalesque. In particular, they illuminate the specter of Herbert Marcuse’s thought in Pynchon’s novel, citing his “leisure society” argument, wherein “advanced industrial society has created numerous possibilities for shallow pleasure and happiness, mindless pleasures,”³⁷³ thus providing a philosophical framework to analyze the spectacle-centric They/Them of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The “leisure society,” with “its endless attractions, events, and spectacles, however, requires a constant focus on productivity and therefore leads to the individual’s increasing repression.”³⁷⁴ Herein lies the perverse, obverse reflection of Bakhtin’s utopian dreams of the carnivalesque. Certainly the “ambivalent character” of carnivalesque aesthetics arises, for discerning where Pynchon is revealing the utopian potential of carnival (especially its Orphic postsecular ecological potential), and where the negative, spectacle-centric descent into the underworld resides, is not clearly delineated. Song lyrics throughout the novel, such as “With rangers and strangers, the/Frenchies out there call it/*Rap-ture de West*,” (670) and “Those Trees! Those Hills! Those Vegetables so high!” (753) exemplifies the light-hearted spectacle which apocalyptic Westward Expansion and European traveler’s accounts of the Edenic New World become in the hands of They/Them. The marginal locale of St. Helena is

³⁷³ Herman and Weisenburger, 35

³⁷⁴ Ibid

deemed “A little traveling Stage-Troupe...all Performance,” (133) a dark reminder of the potential for tragedy, whether environmental or human, to be perverted into mere spectacle. Recalling Cherrycoke’s earlier differentiation between History and Remembrance, Uncle Ives cynically notes “ ‘No one has time, for more than one Version of the Truth,’ ” leading Mr. LeSpark to declare, “ ‘Then, let us have only Jolly Theatrickals about the Past,’ ” (350) revealing the profound hostility in the Age of Reason towards alternative visions of the past, and the future. Pynchon’s aesthetics certainly provide “more than one Version” of the institutionalized teleology of the Enlightenment and its legacy, but *Mason & Dixon*, for all of its Rabelaisian revelry in the cartoonish and the buffoonish, is *not* a “Jolly Theatrickal” about the founding of America. Such a “genre” belongs firmly to They/Them, who would seek to anaesthetize the past, so that “all Pain and failure, all fear, are bleach’d away,” (35) mentioned earlier as the “dream” of the Enlightenment. The clearest “anesthesia” experienced in the novel is the hyper-productivity expounded by the Age of Reason.

For Herman and Weisenburger, central to Marcuse’s condemnation of the “leisure society” is the “constant focus on productivity,” which is to be rewarded by They/Them in the form of “endless attractions, events, and spectacles.” Dixon’s visit to the Philadelphia “All-Nations Coffee-House” provides a stunning synthesis of Marcuse’s ideas. It is related that the “serving-girls” in this eccentric locale “are costumed in whimsical versions of the native dress of each of the coffee-producing countries,--an Arabian girl, a Mexican girl, a Javanese girl...a Sumatran girl as well,--a constantly shifting Pageant of allegorical Coffees of the World.” (299) This dizzying spectacle of the Global South, “a constantly shifting Pageant,” focuses once more upon the dilemma of the exploitation of colonial lands for consumer goods such as coffee, wherein the exploitation of those laborers is rendered here with a heavy emphasis on the sexual

dimension. The crucial element of this passage, however, is that the “All-Nations Coffee-House” is located in Philadelphia. Peter Gay notes that the Enlightenment thinkers John Locke and the French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, in particular, “regard[ed] restlessness or *inquiétude* as the mainspring of life”; David Hume “regarded activity as essential to felicity,” the *Encyclopedie* editor Denis Diderot “exalted Hercules, the man of action,” and finally, Voltaire, surprising enemy of the Rabelaisian spirit, “polemicized against the profusion of religious holidays, which kept men from productive labor.”³⁸¹ Gay’s litany is alarming because it reveals just how deeply the Enlightenment affected the new conception of the laborer in industrialism, and anticipates the workaholism of Thomas Pynchon’s time of writing. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon records the trans-Atlantic pollination of Continental restlessness, with Cherrycoke being disturbed by “the Gentlemen from Philadelphia, their Watches either striking together with eerie Precision ev’ry Quarter-hour or, when silent, forever being consulted and re-pocketed, must examine for Productivity each of their waking Moments.” (327) Philadelphia, home of the Promethean Benjamin Franklin, is a site for Pynchon to overlap history, wherein the obsessive productivity and mindless spectacles of Marcuse’s “advanced industrial society” are shown as rooted in the space of the American Enlightenment’s most exemplary proponents of restlessness. The juxtaposition of the spectacle of imperialism via coffee and the objectification of the female body, with its implication that the men frequenting the “All-Nations” are obsessed with precision and productivity, is a revelatory exposition of Pynchon’s characters navigating, like Orpheus, the underworld zone created by They/Them, directly confronting Their attempts to mindlessly convert the “nightmare of history” into a “Jolly Theatrical.” In solidifying the novel’s ecological carnivalesque, Pynchon supplies a curious antidote the established narrative of Enlightenment hyper-productivity: sloth.

³⁸¹ Gay, 45-46

While writing *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon contributed an article in 1993 on “sloth” to a *The New York Times* series about the traditional “Seven Deadly Sins,” entitled “Nearer, My Couch, to Thee.” For Pynchon, Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street,” (1853) is the clearest genesis of the modern iteration of sloth, wherein the “acedia” which Thomas Aquinas defined as a moral-spiritual failing, is “now an offense against the economy.”³⁸³ Melville’s protagonist, “just sits there in an office on Wall Street repeating, ‘I would prefer not to,’” instigating the “first great epic of modern Sloth, presently to be followed by work from the likes of Kafka, Hemingway, Proust, Sartre, Musil and others.”³⁸⁴ Brian Thill summarizes Pynchon’s essay by noting that, after Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to,” “sloth becomes an offense against the smooth running of capitalism.”³⁸⁵ Pynchon’s nods to the European masters Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust and Robert Musil is intriguing, given that their respective micro- and macro-fictions defy the “smooth running” of capitalism’s intrusions into literature³⁸⁶. Pynchon’s essay concludes with the speculation, “Perhaps the future of Sloth will lie in sinning against what now seems increasingly to define us—technology.”³⁸⁷ *Mason & Dixon* contains just such a moment of slothful “sinning.” Nearing the finale of their venture deep into the American wilderness, Cherrycoke narrates that Mason and Dixon “make it to the great River just at Dawn,—the Rush of the Water loud as the Sea,—stunn’d by the beauty of it they forget, they linger, they overstay all practickal Time, and are surpriz’d by a Party of Indians in elaborate Paint-Work.” (680) The poetics with which Pynchon renders this epiphanic moment is all the more beautiful for its situation of the anti-technological sloth within the ecological

³⁸³ <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-sloth.html>

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*

³⁸⁵ Thill, 65

³⁸⁶ Aside from Paul Thomas Anderson’s 2014 adaption of *Inherent Vice*, none of Pynchon’s works have been turned into cinema, following the defiance of Kafka, Proust and Musil to be translated into celluloid coherently.

³⁸⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-sloth.html>

carnavalesque. As opposed to the Franklinesque Philadelphians who live in bondage to the technological innovations which make them ever more productive and precise, Mason and Dixon, in an ephemeral but profound moment, “prefer not to” and simply experience the natural world. It is in their disregard for “all practickal Time” that they encounter a group of Native Americans, and the ensuing relations with them is one of curiosity and humanity, not of militarist antagonism. Just as the moment of carnival was ephemeral, as postsecular communities also exist in ephemeral timeframes, so too does the “ecological sloth” occur as ephemeral, but in the broader vision of Pynchon’s carnivalesque, it represents a desperately needed antidote to the hyperproductivity and meaningless spectacles of contemporary society, particularly where humanity’s relationship to the natural world is concerned. As the ecological sloth aids in restoring a true sense of relationship to the ways in which humanity views and encounters nature, the final, and perhaps most crucial, aspect of the ecological carnivalesque is its postsecular redemption of the human body itself.

Pynchon channels a deeply apocalyptic Rabelaisian current, when Cherrycoke breathlessly records the paradoxes of the World’s End into his “Day-Book.” In this infernal site, “with all squirming together in a serpent’s Nest of Limbs and Apertures and penises, immobiliz’d in a bondage of similarly bound bodies, lubricated with a gleaming mixture of their own shar’d sweat, piss, and feces, nothing to breathe but one another’s exhausted breaths, moving toward some single slow warm Explosion,” (153) the bodily implications of the ecological carnivalesque are brought to the fore. The bodily degradation of this passage, where sexual exploitation and the heat death of the universe are stunningly conjoined, points to a truly revelatory aspect of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque. He firstly qualifies that “to degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction,” such as the

Black Hole of Calcutta or the “single slow warm Explosion” of the World’s End, but also “to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place...it is the fruitful earth and the womb.”³⁹⁰ The Orphic descent to the carnivalesque underworld, thus, must first confront the initially “degrading” before the regenerative, nigh-redemptive, state is reached. Pynchon presents a radically subversive moment of the “fruitful earth and the womb” being accessed after the hellish degradation/descent of the underworld zone of the World’s End. The Vroom family’s slaves are recorded as one morning (after a night where Cornelius surely visited the World’s End), “out in the Storm, doing their Owners’ Laundry, observing and reading each occurrence of Blood, Semen, Excrement, Saliva, Urine, Sweat, Road-Mud, dead Skin, and other such *Data of Biography*.” (88) Bakhtin points out that the bodily element of the carnivalesque, evidenced in this passage from the novel, “is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body.”³⁹² While the Vroom family, a synecdoche of sorts for colonialism, global capitalism, and apocalyptic Calvinism, “renounce” their earthy connections (i.e. their “Blood, Semen, Excrement, Saliva, Urine, Sweat, Road-Mud, dead Skin”), it is their slaves, seemingly degraded in the Vroom’s eyes for cleaning such “filth,” who achieve a profound unification with the earth. Pynchon writes that they “observ[e] and read” each of these bodily “records,” illustrating a dutiful desire on their behalf *not* to fear the earthly, whether the very ground they stand upon or the excretions of their masters. Their doing so during a rainstorm is all the more telling, for the cleansing nature of rain hints at a new postsecular vision of the traditional baptism motif. Bakhtin reaches his most mystical when he concludes, “the grotesque body is cosmic and universal. It stresses elements common to the entire cosmos:

³⁹⁰ Bakhtin, 21

³⁹² Bakhtin, 19

earth, water, fire, air; it is directly related to the sun, to the stars. It contains the signs of the zodiac. It reflects the cosmic hierarchy. This body can merge with various natural phenomena, with mountains, rivers, seas, islands, and continents. It can fill the entire universe.”³⁹³ Thus, it is the slaves, seemingly the most silenced and exploited members of the Enlightenment era of dominance and repression who, because of their “grotesque” nature in the eyes of their masters, subversively become the characters most profoundly rooted to the earth and to the cosmos. Herein lie the profound, truly cosmic implications of the emancipatory potential of Pynchon’s ecological carnivalesque articulated in *Mason & Dixon*.

³⁹³ Bakhtin, 318

Coda

As the death toll from Hurricane Matthew continues to ravage from Haiti and Cuba to the shores of North Carolina at the time of writing, the reminder of the climate crisis has become all too palpable of a tragedy for countless thousands. The storm, in many ways, is the howling rejoinder of Mother Earth to the centuries of violation wrought upon her bountiful flesh and deepest recesses by the processes begun in large part during the Enlightenment of *Mason & Dixon*'s setting. Natural disasters like Hurricanes Matthew, Sandy, and Katrina will likely only increase in vehemence in the coming century, and there is concern from the Pentagon about the viability of maintaining American naval bases in coastal areas which may soon be submerged. Amongst the spider's web of overlapping factors which escalated the Syrian Civil War was the unsettling knowledge that the years before the conflict witnessed the worst drought in modern Syria, which became magnified even further in the unequal access across ethnic and religious groups to crucial resources like bread and water by the Assad regime. Syria, unfortunately, will not be the last of the resource wars of the modern age, made possible in large part by climate change. The fact that the Republican Party's presidential nominee, Donald J. Trump, believes climate change to be a hoax generated by the Chinese, is something not even the novels of Thomas Pynchon could prophesy. Yet, perhaps the greatest tragedy of the climate crisis is the diminishing diversity of Mother Nature, whether on the level of plants or of the animal kingdom. The endangered species list is a depressing read of a magnitude unmatched by even the likes of a Bret Easton Ellis. Ecocriticism will only continue to increase in its relevance to perhaps the most urgent dilemma of the new millennium, and Thomas Pynchon must be one of its leading voices. Those who would dismiss Pynchon for his initially challenging novels, who simply throw their

disbelieving arms up and prefer the more straightforward jeremiads of Thoreau or Carson must reckon with the complexity and multiplicity of the climate crisis, embodied by no other American novelist as powerfully or as fully-realized as Thomas Pynchon. For it is precisely the approach of Thomas Pynchon, to seek out the silenced histories from across the globe, to allow readers to peer into the dazzling kaleidoscope that is reality, to strive for a novelistic mosaic of the interconnectivity of all things, whether V-2 missiles and sexual liaisons, or British astronomers and Brazilian coffee plantations, which is bold enough to confront the titanic horrors of the climate crisis.

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