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Bordering the Subjunctive in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*

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Any attempt to situate border studies at the center of American Studies is bound to transgress. Whether the tropologies in question concern the sundry presences of people of Spanish-speaking heritages within the United States or, conversely, the assorted interventions of the United States in hispanophone regions outside its own geographical limits, any project of positioning borders in the heartland of the American national imaginary necessarily entails re-envisioning what is conventionally deemed as peripheral (a language, a geographic space, a population) as metropolitan. The marginal, in short, is to be (re)viewed as central. Within modern American fiction, this can be done by canonizing any number of texts that challenge the very border-ness of borders, that is, the idea that a periphery is necessarily peripheral. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* perhaps the most widely read and taught such text, challenges the marginality of the ostensible margin by envisioning the Southwestern border zone as a hybrid, plural and creative space and therefore a central one, contestatory of American culture from any number of borders (gender and economic as well as linguistic and geographic) that are at once productive loci of new culture. Yet for all the borders crossed by Anzaldúa and most other border theorists since, there is one that seems to remain firmly in place: the invisible line in sand and water that geographically separates the United

States from Mexico. However many times crossed in however many ways, that border and its unbordering – its demarginalizing – almost inevitably demarcates any project envisioning the American center from its periphery. And the hegemony of this particular border tends to limit, ironically, the more general potential for borders to be recognized as unbordered. Yet there is another border already at the center of the United States, one so foundational to the national imaginary that it existed before the nation itself did, and it even already has an epic novelist in Thomas Pynchon. Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* is easily the most ambitious work of border fiction never to be mentioned in border studies, yet its depiction of border writing as an imposition of the metropolitan declarative over the multipolar subjunctive constitutes a valuable contribution to any discussion of how to envision key border discourses at the center of the United States itself.

At first glance, Pynchon seems entirely marginal to any discussion of margins. Known principally as the postmodernist author of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, he is far more likely to be taught alongside a contemporary like Don DeLillo rather than Gloria Anzaldúa. Evaluations of his work tend to emphasize his predilections for wordplay and arcane symbolism, his engagement with the alienated and the esoteric rather than the social and quotidian.[1] His family's ethnic origins seem far removed from the sort of immigrant story or minority experience that gives birth to so many border writers and theorists; indeed, his family has been in America so long that one forebear arrived in New England soon after the Pilgrims, while others appear as the fictionalized protagonists (the Pyncheon family) of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. Given this background, it is easy to see why his texts rarely if ever appear in ethnic studies departments or in border studies discussions. And yet *Mason & Dixon* is nothing less than a vast attempt to reimagine all of America through a border and a border zone that lies at its heart. Including Pynchon alongside other novelists and poets of borders can only widen and deepen the space within which those discourses emergent from border studies can redefine American literature and culture. As Russ Castronovo has suggested in an essay in *Border Theory*, an anthology otherwise emphasizing the border zones of the Southwest,

> An inquiry into the cultural history of the Mason-Dixon line, however, can be useful for reframing the critical narratives that describe the outcome of contact in the border zones. The attempt to translate 'border theory' from the Tex-Mex region to the Mason-Dixon fails to produce an easy fit, not simply because of the chronological, cultural, and specific historical discrepancies involved, but because the narrative inherent to a good deal of theorizing about *la frontera* does not adequately tell the story of other historically significant borders.
>
> (197)

Castronovo's article, by situating the Mason-Dixon Line and African American slave narratives as viable topics within the realm of border studies, successfully enlarges the central American ground in which border studies themselves may be seen as taking place. Although Castronovo does not discuss Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*[2] and offers an argument counter to many common premises of border theorizing,[3] his recognition of the Mason-Dixon line as a border integral to narrative tropes of the United States is an astute one.

Pynchon's novel takes place in a colonial environment about to turn postcolonial: the American Revolution is embryonic and so too a national imaginary. The unlikely witnesses of this gestation are Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, who find themselves writing a border narrative upon the nascent country and erasing multiple alternative and contestatory narratives in the process. In Pynchon's reimagination of their enterprise, Mason and Dixon are the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of the American theater, bit players in a continental drama of Conquest whose vague outlines they barely grasp, if at all. Charged with imposing linearity upon uncharted western spaces, they find a land filled with narrative possibilities that disappear before them even as they engage in their own project of inscription. This writing takes the form of a line of latitude that Mason and Dixon are commissioned to draw due west between the British colonies of Maryland and Pennsylvania. Mason is an astronomer, Dixon a surveyor, and their paired scientific skills allow them to mark with mathematical precision this eerily straight line that begins just south of the throbbing metropolis of Philadelphia – this is in the 1760s, when the future home of the Declaration of Independence was the largest anglophone city in the world after London[4] – and scrolls forth ever westward into the American unmapped. Like all lines of latitude and all borders, the Mason-Dixon Line is written in invisible ink, but that hardly undercuts its powers and presence. Thousands of trees disappear in its path, thousands of indigenous people vanish too as it unfurls: this writing on the earth entails multiple erasures of massive proportions. Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* thereby recognizes that the foundational mapping of the United States was marked as much by what was being elided as by what was being inscribed, by a border that unwrote plural alternative realities even as it was written itself.

Although in its historical particulars the Mason-Dixon Line was intended only to resolve a boundary dispute between the proprietors of two colonies within the same empire, the division it created came to represent (as it does to this day) the borderline between North and South. This in turn lent it far more symbolic importance than a mere geographic partitioning, for the line in the sand led (as they often do) to opposition – North *and* South transubstantiating into North *versus* South – and all the sharply-viewed (if inherently problematic) binary antitheses that follow: free vs. slave, capitalist vs. feudal, developed vs. underdeveloped, etc.[5] As John H.B. Latrobe declared in 1854, just a few years before the U.S. Civil War,

> There is, perhaps, no line, real or imaginary, on the surface of the earth – not excepting even the equator and the equinoctial – whose name has been oftener in men's mouths during the last fifty years. In the halls of legislation, in the courts of justice, in the assemblages of the people, it has been as familiar as a household word. Not that any particular interest was taken in the line itself; but the mention of it was always expressive of the fact, that the States of the Union were divided into slaveholding and non-slaveholding – into Northern and Southern...Its geographical thus became lost in its political significance; and men cared little, when they referred to it, where it ran, or what was its history – or whether it was limited to Pennsylvania, or extended, as has, perhaps, most generally been supposed, from the Atlantic to the Pacific.
>
> (5-7)

The Mason-Dixon Line became an invisible wall between continental neighbors, symbolically looked to as a preserver of cultural difference and yet as a result an artificer thereof. As but one example, when Southern regionalists fought and lost a war in the name of "Dixie," it was Jeremiah Dixon's whose surname was being invoked.[6] Drawn when the national project was but inchoate, the Line came to stand as the border at the center of the nation itself. [7]

In Pynchon's novel,[8] the surveyors are charged with measuring with utmost accuracy a line that, as it unscrolls westward from Philadelphia, gradually leaves behind the urban, creole and immigrant coast, and penetrates into territories increasingly populated by indigenous peoples. The Line, therefore, represents an imperial intrusion, an insertion of artificial writing that implies a narrative of Conquest to be etched upon the West and a concomitant elision of all those narratives that abound ahead in its path. Mason and Dixon[9] take great pains to measure the exact progress of their journey, keeping daily logs such as the one with which they mark the end of their Line:

> Their last ten-minute Arc-Segment, this time out, lands them about two miles short of the Summit of Savage Mountain, beyond which all waters flow West, and legally the Limit of their Commission. They set a Post at 165 Miles, 54 Chains, 88 Links from the Post Mark'd West and, turning, begin to widen the Visto, moving East again, Ax-blows the day long. From the Ridges they can now see their Visto, dividing the green Vapors of Foliage that wrap the Land, undulating Stump-top yellow, lofty American Clouds a-sailing above.
>
> (614-15)

For all the attention given here to the objective coordinates of western travel, the real importance lies not in the numerical data but in the narrative that emerges from it. Mason and Dixon are not mere apolitical

cartographers of America because their very mapping is itself a line of destruction: the trees felled along the parallel divide the continent in half. Mason and Dixon are literally logging their position. And indigenous peoples in the way of the Line are sure to read this border story as a scripting of territorial displacement; as one observant character tells Mason, "clearing and marking a Right Line of an Hundred Leagues, into the Lands of Others, cannot be a kindly Act" (573). Thus the critic David Seed comments, "The novel demonstrates a postcolonial alertness to mapping as a culturally inflected exercise, an exercise in territorial appropriation where the first casualties to be displaced are the native Americans" (98). And Arthur Saltzman writes, "Drawing out the Mason-Dixon Line . . . serves a policy of aesthetic coercion, of domestication by geometry. Thus map-making is another imperialistic transgression" (65). In Pynchon's epic, Mason and Dixon are hardly conquistadors in a traditional sense, as they themselves have no interest in colonization per se and Dixon, a thoughtful Quaker, is particularly aware of the moral implications of their work as demarcators. Yet they are caught up in advancing the imperial process all the same through their superimposition of one linear narrative over many possible others.

Pynchon's key concept in this regard is a tension between declarative and subjunctive Americas, that is, between Mason and Dixon's inscription of a rationalizing, Western European narrative of the continent on one hand and the concomitant erasure of multiple hypothetical and unmapped Americas on the other. Rather than the border zone of the Line constituting a fertile mestizaje and multiplicity of discourses that challenge a nationalizing and consolidating project, the border comes into being precisely in order to flatten and align such fecund plurality. Thus Pynchon writes,

> Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream? – in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen, – serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *may yet be true,* – Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe till the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments, – winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair.
>
> (345)

This passage is pregnant with twinnings of a foreboding nature. Mason and Dixon are the declarative midwives sent by Britannia, the empire, to assist the birth of a brave new colonial world; and yet this creation comes only at the death of all that America whose unknown coordinates they are marking over. Every measurement they take writes the colonies further into the empire, the uninscribed periphery into the text of the metropole, eliding all alternative continental narratives beneath the indicative indications of their measuring instruments and the foreign hegemon that funds them. Subjunctive America, the antithesis of declarative imperialism, is that unmapped and atemporal space where alternative possibilities yet abound, where plural local realities exist side by side, a culturally creative place that is distinct from, and therefore resistant to, the imperial cartography imposed upon the New World. As Brian McHale notes, Pynchon posits "the American West as subjunctive space, the space of wish and desire, of the hypothetical and the counterfactual, of speculation and possibility" (44). The cartographic colonialism inherent to all border drawings and to the Mason-Dixon Line in particular is designed to suppress all contestatory narratives of America, both those that already exist and those that hypothetically could come into being.

Furthermore, Pynchon clearly stresses that this dialectic of the declarative versus the subjunctive represents no parochial tension within the British empire but rather the history of the entire American continent itself, including what became its Spanish-speaking parts and ultimately the source of Latinidad in the United States. After all, it was Christopher Columbus, not Mason, who thought he might have found the "Earthly Paradise" in the New World; and it was Juan Ponce de León, not Dixon, who sought the "Fountain of Youth." These are not the dreamscapes of only the future United States but of a subjunctive transAmerica in a continental or even hemispheric sense. The dialectic of border inscription and elision is pan-American, not restricted to Britannia's thirteen southeastern mainland colonies.[10] Underlining this point, non-British imperial presences pervade Pynchon's novel, from French armies near the Great Lakes to irredentist Swedes in the mid-Atlantic region, Spanish privateers in Delaware, and Spanish Jesuits in Quebec. Indeed, Spanish colonial influence repeatedly surfaces, particularly via the frequent (and sinister) Jesuit presence, but also in such notable passages as when the Mason-Dixon party chooses Castilian as the language for "The Anthem of the Expedition, as it moves into the Unknown" (477). That a Spanish song should be sung by British imperialists in Pennsylvania is not surprising, for the New World is effectively a single theater, its particular national players but usurpers determined to impose declarative borders upon the same subjunctive land. That their anthems borrow from each other makes sense: so do their respective wills to hegemony. For Pynchon, the juxtaposition of Spanish and English in border zones takes places not only in Southwestern narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries but along the Mason-Dixon Line of the eighteenth century as well.

Elsewhere in the novel, Pynchon repeatedly makes it clear that the elision of the continental subjunctive by the imperial declarative is not

the unique foundational crime of the United States but of the New World as a whole. As but one example, Zhang, a feng shui geomancer, rails against "the inscription upon the Earth of these enormously long straight Lines" (546) and notes that the Mason-Dixon Line

> acts as a conduit for what we call *Sha*, or, as they say in Spanish California, Bad Energy . . . Ev'rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature, – coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks, – so honoring the Dragon or *Shan* within, from which Land-Scape ever takes its form. To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-slash, a long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year 'round to see as other than hateful Assault.
>
> (542)

Zhang links here the "hateful Assault" of the Line to his previous knowledge of Spanish imperialism in America, even though the vast spaces separating "Spanish California" from Pennsylvania were unknown and perhaps inconceivable in the 1760s: like the Mason-Dixon party singing in Castilian as they move westward, Zhang recognizes that the distinctions between the far-flung periphery of one European empire and another pale before the common attempt to narrate the New World with border writing.[11] As a feng shui expert, Zhang wants humans to coexist harmoniously and naturally with geography, whereas this is exactly what the Line and its doppelgangers in Spanish California are meant not to do. As a result, Zhang sees the Line as metonymic not to a squabble between two small British colonies but to the far greater affront that is rendering a plural America singular.

This is what Columbus did three centuries earlier; it is what all conquistadors do too. All are inscribers of parallels that are parallel foundational crimes: all superinscribe the linear declarative over the multipolar subjunctive. All are cartographers not of blank spaces but elided ones. Another Pynchon character speaks of "a great current of Westering. You will hear of gold cities, marble cities, men that fly, women that fight, fantastickal creatures never dream'd in Europe, – something always to take and draw you that way"[12] (671). But beyond the fantasies of New World conquistadors, in what does subjunctive America consist? In *Mason & Dixon*, it is not one narrative or narratological element but many, all extraordinarily varied and some even opposed to each other, and yet all share the same thing: all contest the idea of a single hegemonic reality imposed from without, i.e., that which Mason and Dixon synecdochically represent: the Conquest of the New World itself. Subjunctive America is filled with plural realities and unrealities; it is the very unresolvability of this plurality that makes it subjunctive in the first place. Among the novel's cast of surreal characters are talking dogs, talking clocks, and an invisible time-traveling talking mechanical duck; there are also Brobdignagian-sized vegetables, an enormous runaway cheese, a legendary golem, and an extraordinary array of ghosts,

real and imagined. Not all of these figures surface in the American section of Mason and Dixon's journeys, but those that do are as believable and as valorized as those that appear in Britain or at sea. In Mason and Dixon's America, as in their experiences elsewhere, the magic realism and phantasmal visions that populate so much Latin American and Latino literature emerge time and again. There is even an imaginary trip westward by a Mason and Dixon who find they cannot stop at the end of the Line but must go on ever writing it westward, unto infinity.

Indeed, time and space are consistently out of joint in the novel, as Pynchon celebrates their every resistance to linearity – that same imperial linearity represented by the border inscriptions of Mason and Dixon. Regarding time, as but one instance, the vanished eleven days of September 1752 are a frequent topic; this is when Britain, in order to change from a Julian to a Gregorian calendar, declared by government fiat that the day after September 2 would be September 14.[13] Mason himself claims that he lived through that nonexistent week and a half in an ectoplasmic Britain populated by "certain Beings invisible" (560). The ghostly temporality of those atextualized days is matched by the phantasmal spatiality of the Delaware Wedge, a tiny region of the mid-Atlantic colonies whose boundaries were inherently imprecise due to the conflicting royal charters that governed the surveying of Mason and Dixon. There in the Wedge, "strange lights appear at Night, figures not quite human emerge from and disappear into it, and in the Daytime, Farm animals who stray too close, vanish and do not re-emerge . . . To be born and rear'd in the Wedge is to occupy a singular location in an emerging moral Geometry" (323). Amid such unjointed spatiality, it makes perfect sense that a member of Mason and Dixon's party decides to eat in the Wedge an uncanny watch that never has to be wound: in subjunctive America, the fantastic and the hypothetical are at home in any temporality and spatiality that resists the teleological linearity of imperial narration. This malleability of time and space recalls any number of scenes in modern Latin American texts like García Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*).[14]

The surreal and the imaginary, however, are only subcategories of the subjunctive. Unenclosed possibility itself – ontological alterity – is the profound constituent of the America that Mason and Dixon are declaratively overwriting. Indigenous peoples, therefore, form part of subjunctive America just as much as any time-traveling duck or impossible geographic anomaly, not because they are equally fantastic but because they too represent an alterity faced with elision by linear European superinscription. In their case, of course, the process of "changing all from subjunctive to declarative" (345) represented by Mason and Dixon is particularly egregious because the alterity being erased is not a dreamscape or ghost or mythical beast but human beings of flesh and blood. Mason and Dixon first encounter this conflict directly when news reaches them in a Philadelphia coffee-house of a massacre of unarmed indigenes by the Paxton Boys, a motley group of frontiersmen:

> "At Lancaster, – day before yesterday, – the Indians that were taking refuge in the Gaol there, were massacr'd ev'ry one, by local Irregulars, – the same Band that slew the other Indians at Conestoga, but week before last."
>
> "So finishing what they'd begun," contributes an Apron'd Mechanick nearby. "Now the entire Tribe is gone, the lot."
>
> "Were there no Soldiers to prevent it?" Dixon asks.
>
> "Colonel Robertson and his Regiment of Highlanders refus'd to stir, toasting their Noses whilst that brave Paxton Vermin murder'd old people, small children, and defenseless Drunkards."
>
> (304)

As news of the extermination of "the entire Tribe" in Lancaster sinks in, "Mason and Dixon look at each other bleakly. 'Well. If I'd known 'twould be like *this* in America . . .'" (306). They are allegedly in the New World as apolitical men of science, hired measurers and little more, and yet it slowly begins to dawn on them that they are participating in the same westward expansion that just has produced the genocidal Paxton Boys. They have not yet begun to write their Line and yet erasures already have taken place near its projected script. Literally and figuratively, alternative narratives and narrators of America have been rubbed out.

The moral implications of their role in this drama gradually come to haunt the border writers. As if to face the ghosts of the exterminated indigenes, Mason and Dixon travel to Lancaster to visit the site of the massacre. Suspected by locals after asking too many questions, they disguise their moral concerns in the language of the Enlightenment. "'We're men of Science,'" Dixon explains, "'– this being a neoclassickal Instance of the Catastrophick Resolution of Inter-Populational Cross-Purposes, of course we're curious to see where it all happen'd'" (343). This is a purposeful feint by Dixon, for he knows that he cannot pose his questions in terms of ethics, as that runs the risk of delegitimizing the presence of the frontiersmen he is facing and indirectly his own presence in America as well. He uses European scientific discourse here to cloak his moral concerns, an ironic manipulation given that he gradually realizes that is his very science that is being used in the service of genocide. He knows something is out of joint here, that a foundational crime has been committed in Lancaster that can be extrapolated to the whole of the continent, and so upon visiting the site of the butchery he silently prays for the dead indigenes:

> Nothing he brought to it of his nearest comparison, Raby with its thatch'd and benevolent romance of serfdom, had at all prepar'd him for the iron Criminality of the Cape . . . Yet is Dixon certain . . . that far worse happen'd here, to these poor People, as the blood flew and the Children cried, – that at the end no one

> understood what they said as they died. "I don't pray enough," Dixon subvocalizes, "and I can't get upon my Knees just now because too many are watching, – yet could I kneel, and would I pray, 'twould be to ask, respectfully, that this be made right, that the Murderers meet appropriate Fates, that I be spar'd the awkwardness of seeking them out myself and slaying as many as I may, before they overwhelm me. Much better if that be handl'd some other way, by someone a bit more credible. . . . " He feels no better for this Out-pouring.
>
> (347)

Dixon realizes there is a wrong to be set right here and yet he suspects that he himself is not "credible" enough to play that role. Somehow, he vaguely understands, he is part of the same imperial narrative as the Paxton Boys, that somehow he too is complicit in this massacre that horrifies him. Contemplation of the slaughter thus quickly metamorphoses into contemplation of America, as he wonders aghast, "What in the Holy Names are these people about?" (347) The continent he is charged with delineating has represented itself to him as a border story so brutal that he can scarcely believe it. It is not a coincidence that the central passage of *Mason & Dixon*'s nearly 800 pages of text – the aforementioned paragraph that opens "Does Britannia, when she sleep, dream? Is America her dream?" and speaks of the Earthly Paradise and "changing all from subjunctive to declarative" – lies at the heart of the Lancaster chapter. Immediately prior to that passage, Mason and Dixon arrive in Lancaster to inquire about the massacre; immediately after it, they visit the site of the killing and wonder what it means. The border they are writing at the center of America is not a space of plural, hybrid, creative and transgressive discourses but rather a foundational erasure of all thereof: the nation is being born in a border zone conceived in linearity and dedicated to the proposition that not all narrators are created equal.

Somewhere beyond Mason and Dixon's border, then, reside the plural contestations of cultural hegemony that writers like Gloria Anzaldúa locate in the border zone itself. These distinct but complementary depictions of the lines that divide America are well worth juxtaposing, for in doing so studies of borders and of margins in general can be perceived more transparently as at the very center of the American national imaginary: borders need not be on the border. Making visible the presence of a major American writer like Pynchon within border studies can only deepen and enrich the field as such. Why not, after all, read *Mason & Dixon* alongside border-crossing texts and rewritings as seemingly disparate as, for instance, Tomás Rivera's . . . *Y no se lo tragó la tierra* or Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*? Doing so could only unveil the diverse richnesses of border zone discourses, illuminating them mutually and further unbordering border studies themselves by opening more spaces wherein Latino texts and authors can be seen as

viable interlocutors with their canonized American peers. The form of the field then would follow neatly what may be its principal function, the celebrating of the very multiplicity of possibility (i.e., subjunctivity) that border writers and theorists consistently demonstrate and vindicate. Such juxtapositions would force critical reevaluations of any number of premises about the nexus of border studies and the American national imaginary and open the way for further creative pairings. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, for example, could be read alongside border texts such as *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, a folk music album by an archetypal American artist whose roots are not too far from the Mason-Dixon Line: the profoundly unacademic and entirely relevant Bruce Springsteen.

Recognizing border writing as not only the province of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo but of the American center is like acknowledging the presence of the subjunctive – a verb tense of the hypothetical and alternative – in the English language itself. Though mostly identified in American language classrooms with Spanish, the subjunctive does indeed persist both in English and in those lands where that language currently dominates. Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* shows how the act of writing a border is an attempt to convert a subjunctive continent into a declarative one, but the plural resistances of the subjunctive may still be hoped for and celebrated and, indeed, made visible at the very center of America. Diverse narrative possibilities and the concomitant contestation of linearity is a principal legacy of both the subjunctive and border studies, and like all legacies they gain force to the extent they are recognized as such.

Notes

1. At the moment, there remains very little published criticism on *Mason & Dixon*. This is partly due to its relatively recent publication date (1997) and probably also in large part to its striking divergence in style from Pynchon's previous work: many of the numerous scholars who have long praised Pynchon as a postmodernist *par excellence*, a view founded on texts like *Gravity's Rainbow*, are less likely to be attracted to the historical and figurative engagements of *Mason & Dixon*. In contrast, the humanistic leanings of the novel are highlighted by Mark Knopfler, a commentator well outside the academy in his customary role as lead singer, songwriter and guitarist for the rock group Dire Straits. The title track of Knopfler's 2000 solo album *Sailing to Philadelphia* is a reimagination of the transatlantic journey of Pynchon's Mason and Dixon as they near the shores of America. The song is a duet in which Knopfler adopts the optimistic voice of Dixon and folk singer James Taylor that of melancholy Mason as they envision their role in the drawing of the Line that lies ahead. Whereas Taylor's Mason muses "The West will kill us both . . ./You talk of liberty/How can America be free," Knopfler's Dixon responds, "Now hold your head up, Mason/See America lies

there.../Another day will make it clear/Why your stars should guide us here" (liner notes).
2. The article appeared the same year as the novel.
3. Castronovo suggests that "'Border theory,' and the narratives of resistance and subversion that it supplies, does not travel well; it too readily formulates a perspective that overlooks the force and appeal of the nation-state...the Mason-Dixon line...provides a site for examining the pitfalls of racial ideology and the cul-de-sacs of inescapable nationalism predatorily inherent to borders" (197-98).
4. For a brief description of Philadelphia's modernity in this era, see Pynchon's "Nearer, My Couch, To Thee," *The New York Times Book Review,* 6 June 1993 : 3.
5. This opposition of North and South need not be conceived as stopping at the cartographic lines that separate the United States and Latin America. For instance, Gabriel García Márquez says that William Faulkner stands among his strongest North American influences for reasons "más geográficas que literarias. Las descubrí mucho después de haber escrito mis primeras novelas, viajando por el sur de los Estados Unidos. Los pueblos ardientes y llenos de polvo, las gentes sin esperanza que encontré en aquel viaje se parecían mucho a los que yo evocaba en mis cuentos" (50). ("more geographic than literary. I discovered them long after having written my first novels, traveling through the South of the United States. The burning towns filled with dust, the people without hope whom I met on that voyage, seemed very akin to those whom I evoked in my short stories.") Similarly, it is often observed that the southern United States shares with Latin America a history of plantations, slavery, underdevelopment and, especially, traumatic defeat at the hands of the same industrialized northerners. Viewed as such, the Mason-Dixon Line can be read in lieu of the Río Bravo/Rio Grande as the more compelling symbolic border between North and South in the New World.
6. Dixie is "a name for the Southern States of the United States; of uncertain origin, first recorded in American English in 1859 in the folk song *Dixie's Land* by Daniel Decatur Emmett...three sources of the name have been advanced: 1) that *Dixie* is a modification of Dixon abstracted from *Mason and Dixon's line* (1779, the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland, surveyed 1763-67 by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon; the line was regarded as separating the slave states from the free states.)" (292) *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology,* Ed. Robert K. Barnhart (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1988). The first usage therefore came on the eve of the U.S. Civil War (1861-65), the paramount showdown between North and South in the country.
7. It is worth keeping in mind that at the time of the surveying of the Mason-Dixon Line, the geographic contours of the future United States were unknown and unknowable. Whole swaths of what would become the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas were part of the Spanish empire, for example. In the 1760s, the thirteen British colonies

from Massachusetts to Georgia were but a sliver of the geographic entity that is the modern United States Yet the Line proved always available to a continent and to continental visions long before they themselves were conceived, which is to suggest that regions of the Southwest were bordered by it even before they came into existence as states. For example, when Texas and California joined the Union many decades later, they did so on either side of a North-South division that ultimately led to the U.S. Civil War and which was symbolized, as Latrobe suggests above, by the Mason-Dixon Line, still a potent symbol for the entire nation (and arguably for the whole continent) quite despite its ending no further west than Pennsylvania.

8. In his 1854 address on the history of the Line, Latrobe accurately predicts that one day an epic national novel will arise from the details of the border creation: "The temptation is strong to fill up the meagre outline here given of the boundary controversy, between Pennsylvania and Maryland, with some details of the border life of the period in question. But time does not permit. The prose and poetry of Scott have made the borders of Scotland immortal. The same great novelist would have found in the feuds of the Peninsula, and along the northern confines of Maryland, as ample materials for his genius to combine, as much diversity of character and as thrilling incident, as magnificent scenery, and as wild adventure, as were furnished him by the history of his native land" (28). He adds in the following paragraph, "These are themes for the future novelist, however, rather than the historian" (30).

9. References to Mason and Dixon herein refer to the characters in Pynchon's novel and not the historical personages. For information on the historical Mason and Dixon, see *The Journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon*, Ed. A. Hughlett Mason (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1969); Hubertis M. Cummings, *The Mason and Dixon Line: Story for a Bicentenary 1763-1963* (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1962); and Edwin Danson, *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2001).

10. The British empire had other seaboard colonies in North America that chose not to revolt in 1776; these later coalesced to become Canada.

11. Pynchon's reference to Californian concepts of "Bad Energy" also may be read as a lighthearted reference to the popularity of New Age ideas on the West Coast.

12. Columbus too hears of golden marvels, noting in his diary, for example, "una isla . . . adonde . . . la gente de ella coge el oro con candelas de noche en la playa," (57) ("an island . . .where . . .its people gather gold with candles by night on the beach") heard on November 12, 1492; and "había isla que era todo oro" (96), ("there was an island that was all gold") noted on December 17, 1492. Regarding "women that fight," Columbus hears of "una isla adonde no había sino solas mujeres" (122) ("an island where there were only women") on January 6, 1493, and again on January 16, 1493 (131-32); presumably he supposes these

women to be the legendary Amazons. In terms of "fantastickal creatures never dream'd in Europe," Columbus hears, for example, "que lejos de allí había hombres de un ojo y otros con hocicos de perros que comían los hombres" (54) ("that far from there there were men with one eye and others with dog snouts who ate men") on November 4, 1492. All these things always lie just around the next bend – "something always to take and draw you that way" – in that "great current of Westering" of which the Pynchon character speaks. Historically, these images all arise out of medieval narrations of what lay beyond known borders, e.g., the writings of Marco Polo and others.

13. The original Gregorian reform took place in 1582 and, according to Stephen Jay Gould, "The truly improved Gregorian calendar was quickly accepted throughout the Roman Catholic world. But in England, the whole brouhaha sounded like a Popish plot, and the Brits would be damned if they would go along. Thus, England kept the Julian calendar until 1752, when they finally succumbed to reason and practicality – by which time yet another 'extra' day had accumulated in the Julian reckoning, so Parliament had to drop eleven days (September 3-13, 1752) in order to institute the belated Gregorian reform." (175)

14. Perhaps not coincidentally, Pynchon is one of the few major United States novelists who reads his Latin American contemporaries in Spanish. He implies as much in "The Heart's Eternal Vow" (342), his review of García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Pynchon's other contacts with Latin America include his living in Mexico while writing much of his novel *V.* and his close friendship with Richard Fariña, a writer of Cuban-American heritage who was his undergraduate roommate at Cornell University. Fariña's self-associations with a Cuban and Cuban-American identity, however, were sporadic and apparently embellished; for more on this topic and on Fariña's relationship with Pynchon, see David Hajdu's *Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Fariña and Richard Fariña.*

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