

Title	A way beyond ... if there is : Pynchon's postmodern theology in Mason & Dixon
Sub Title	PynchonのMason and Dixonにおけるポスト・モダニスト神学
Author	麻生, 享志(Aso, Takashi)
Publisher	慶應義塾大学藝文学会
Publication year	1998
Jtitle	藝文研究 (The geibun-kenkyu : journal of arts and letters). Vol.75, (1998. 12) ,p.220(161)- 237(144)
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	山本晶教授退任記念論文集
Genre	Journal Article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00072643-00750001-0237

慶應義塾大学学術情報リポジトリ(KOARA)に掲載されているコンテンツの著作権は、それぞれの著作者、学会または出版社/発行者に帰属し、その権利は著作権法によって保護されています。引用にあたっては、著作権法を遵守してご利用ください。

The copyrights of content available on the KeiO Associated Repository of Academic resources (KOARA) belong to the respective authors, academic societies, or publishers/issuers, and these rights are protected by the Japanese Copyright Act. When quoting the content, please follow the Japanese copyright act.

A Way Beyond . . . *if there is* :
Pynchon's Postmodern Theology in
Mason & Dixon

Takashi Aso

Mason & Dixon is a story about Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, a pair of British scientists known for drawing the so-called Mason-Dixon line in Colonial America in the late eighteenth century. Set in "the Age of Reason" (22) the story is historical and, as it is focused on the lives of the two historical persons, biographical. Furthermore, since the story is narrated by the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke at the "Christmastide of 1786" (6), *Mason & Dixon* is a kind of religious narrative. This is not to say that Pynchon's fifth and latest novel is a hagiography consecrating the two British scientists' achievement, but there is a certain distinction between Pynchon's presentation of Cherrycoke as the third-person narrator in *Mason & Dixon* and his postmodernist finesse taken in his early stories with which to caricature modernist third-person narrators. While, in "Entropy," Callisto is presented to parody the third-person narrative figure of Henry Adams in *Education* and, in *V.*, the voice of Herbert Stencil, a pseudo-third-person narrator in the novel, is hardly reliable with the contents of his narrative always derived from some unauthentic sources, Pynchon, in *Mason & Dixon*, presents the voice of the clergyman narrator with minimal interventions so that what is related by Cherrycoke would be accepted as it is.⁽¹⁾ After having speculated on various possibilities of writing fiction in the postmodernist, experimental fashion, does

Pynchon finally return to the rather conventional method of presenting the stable voice of the third-person narrator? Can we trust the voice of Cherrycoke as he relates a story of Mason and Dixon? Is Cherrycoke the most reliable narrator ever present in the works of Pynchon?

It is true that, as we read and understand the story, there is no alternative but to trust Cherrycoke, for we have no other narrative voice but his in *Mason & Dixon*. So, the credulous mind wants to jump at the possibility that *Mason & Dixon*, narrated by the clergyman, is composed under the auspices of God and therefore justifiable in the presence of the divine authority. But the fact that Cherrycoke is the only story-teller present in the novel does not necessarily support the authenticity of his narrative voice ; it rather demonstrates its singularity and even its eccentricity. In early pages of the novel before he starts narrating his story of Mason and Dixon, Cherrycoke, born British, confesses the cause of his exile in America for his treacherous sin of youth, that is, the crime of writing in anonymity, which outraged "Grandshire Cherrycoke" to such an extent that the clergyman was bade to leave Britain once and for all :

"'twas one of the least tolerable of Offenses in that era [. . .] the Crime they styl'd 'Anonymity.' That is, I left messages posted publicly, but did not sign them. I knew some night-running lads in the district who let me use their Printing-Press,—somehow, what I got into printing up, were Accounts of certain Crimes I had observed, committed by the Stronger against the Weaker,—enclosures, evictions, Assize verdicts, Activities of the Military;—giving the Names of as many of the Perpetrators as I was sure of, yet keeping back what I foolishly imagin'd my own, till the Night I was tipp'd and brought in to London, in chains, and clapp'd in the Tower." (9)

In the eighteenth century when the literary marketplace underwent radical modernization, the concept of intellectual property was among the central topics of discussion. According to Susan Stewart, as the old court-style patronage system had declined with the rise of the mass market in emerging capitalist society, the modern law required “the invention of a mass-market subjectivity of authorial ‘stardom’ within a context of deepening anonymity.” This is to say that authorship established in the modern legal system is not originally to protect the ownership of one’s intellectual property but to secure the system, for “the rapid production, dissemination, and disappearance of cultural objects” would threaten the order of the market, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the law controlling the marketplace (Stewart 5). In this historical context, it is easy to understand the reason that Cherrycoke’s anonymous accusation of “the Stronger” is taken as a menace to the system’s authority and thus incurs serious indictment. One is required to put one’s name on one’s writing in the modern period not just for declaring one’s propertyship but for submitting oneself to the order of the system. As Pynchon’s criminal clergyman states, “my name had never been my own,—rather belonging [. . .] to the Authorities” (10). Name as it is given by the system as a code does not signify one’s acquisition of the self, but it witnesses the “entire loss of Self” (10) to the system’s despotic control.⁽²⁾

Like Cherrycoke, those who refuse to name themselves in the public are condemned to be incarcerated so as to redress their mental misdemeanor and, in the eighteenth century Europe, says Cherrycoke, “Sea Voyage” is “the standard Treatment for Insanity” conducted for “the best of Medical reasons” (10). Importantly, Pynchon’s clergyman narrator is one of those sea prisoners when he happened to meet with two young British scientists, Mason in early thirties and Dixon still in

late twenties, aboard the *Seahorse* on January 9, 1761 at the port of Portsmouth (cf 29). Given that this is the possible origin of Pynchon's story of Mason and Dixon, one may wonder why he chooses as his narrator of *Mason & Dixon* the exiled clergyman whose mental condition is best considered, by the eighteenth century European standards, anything but ordinary. Does Pynchon want his fifth novel to be taken as a text written by the deranged mind of the sinful prisoner? Is it more appropriate for the novel to be narrated by someone with more rational sense, since the story is about the historical Mason-Dixon line that served as an infra-structure to establish America as the modern states? Or does Pynchon suggest that Mason and Dixon's achievement is far from rational because their deeds led to the defloration of the virgin land rather than the declaration of the scientific triumph in the Age of Reason, as the Mason-Dixon line "[changed] all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that [served] the ends of Governments" (345)?⁽³⁾ How can we possibly read *Mason & Dixon* as it is related by the exiled clergyman?

Before going into further discussion in this direction, however, it should be pointed out that Cherrycoke's statement of his having been deported for the medical reasons appears to be rather anachronistic, for it is unlikely that madmen in the eighteenth century England were banished aboard for the treatment, while criminals were either "executed, transported, or whipped to satisfy community wrath" in those days (Porter 305). If Cherrycoke had been executed as a political offender, then it would be understandable that he was set aboard. But it would be controversial if, as he claims, he had been deported for his mental disorder because, as Roy Porter suggests, madness in the eighteenth century was regarded "as a disease of the body and later as one of the mind" curable if treated properly and, therefore, madmen were incar-

cerated for the medical treatment in either private institutions, if they could afford it, or houses of correction and poor-houses when they were destitute (304). This indeed undermines the historical authenticity of Cherrycoke's account. One may suppose then that, when Pynchon writes *Mason & Dixon*, what is on his mind is the so-called "ships of fools," which Michel Foucault claimed in his influential *Madness and Civilization* "often" seen in medieval Europe as a social mechanism for madmen to be isolated from communities (Foucault 8) and yet whose historical presence has been denied by Winifred and Brendan Maher arguing that the notion of "ships of fools" is literary rather than historical and has been most likely derived from the Lenten processions with boats in medieval Germany where there often was a "ship of fools" (cf. Mahers 760). Still, since Pynchon utilizes this notion of "ships of fools" in *Mason & Dixon*, we may refer to Foucault's analysis in order to clarify the underlying meanings of Cherrycoke's statement. Even though the presence of such ships must be suspect in historical terms, Foucault's analytical insight remains still effective insofar as Pynchon sticks to the idea of madmen on the sea. So let us turn to Foucault's argument in *Madness and Civilization*.

According to Foucault, while the European practice of "hand-[ing] a madman over to sailors" made it permanently sure that "he would not be prowling beneath the city walls"; that "he would go far away" (10-11), the madman aboard is, despite the state of his imprisonment, "in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads": "He is the Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of the passage" (11). Foucault's argument suggests an equivocal state in which the madman is placed aboard: confined to the ship, he is a prisoner deprived of freedom, yet, at the same time, in the midst of the freest realm possible on the globe, he is least restricted

aboard with his imagination unrestrained at all. Furthermore, since he is never allowed to return home with his destination totally unknown, the madman on the sea, says Foucault, “has his truth and his homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him” (11). In a word, he is at once banished by and released from the law to the freest, though farthest as well, place ever possible in the world where to redress his deranged mind or, I would rather say, his imagination in exile as it ought to be. If, as Foucault claims, the madman is “the Passenger *par excellence*,” then he is a man ever at liberty working for his exiled spirit to be at home. At the bottom of the narrative of Cherrycoke lies this agony of the imagination out of place. *Mason & Dixon* is the product of the inner struggle of the exiled clergyman for a familiar place.

So, putting aside the problem of the qualification of Cherrycoke for the narrator of the historical narrative of Mason and Dixon, what informs Pynchon’s fifth novel is that it is narrated by “the nomadic Parson” (9) seeking a familiar place. This is to say that at stake in *Mason & Dixon* is not the authenticity of what is related by Cherrycoke but the acceptability or, more precisely, familiarity of his act of storytelling: whether or not Pynchon’s clergyman narrator speaks of the truth comes after the possibility of his assimilating himself, a parson out of place, into a familiar place in the act of narrative. So, though being a “Family outcast” (9) exiled in America, Cherrycoke finds himself, in the Christmas season a time for the family gathering, relating to his assorted relatives a story of Mason and Dixon, adventurous, exotic, and yet still unfamiliar to them, and, in so doing, settling his place in his sister’s family dwelling where he is allowed to stay “for as long as he can keep the children amus’d” (6). This Scheherazade-like situation in which Cherrycoke is placed demonstrates that Pynchon’s

narrator is taking advantage of his disadvantage, that is, his exile, in order to talk himself out of the state of out-of-placedness/mindedness. As he is talking (because) of his exiled experiences, he is moving, in the course of story-telling, out of the estranged state of exile/madness into a familiar site/state of being at home. In a word, Cherrycoke's narrative consists in his recitation/relation of the state of his exile/madness at/to the family place.

What is in fact focused on in Pynchon's fifth novel is, therefore, the family relationship, although it is not a stable one of the settled family but the one characterized by separation, as Cherrycoke's banishment from his father's home typically illustrates. Still, separations brought up to our attention in *Mason & Dixon* do not end up in the state of total oblivion. In spite of or rather because of his excommunication from the Cherrycokes, Pynchon's clergyman narrator renews his relationship with his sister's family in America. To put it differently, it is because of his cherished memory of his separated family that brings Cherrycoke to present himself, though in his exile, at his sister's place where his narrative of Mason and Dixon, which is also a narrative testifying to his own presence, is unfolded. In Pynchon's fifth novel, thus, the separation of the family members serves as the moment of or the momentum for reconstructing the family relationship and reconsidering how the family ought to be related when separated.

With this in mind, it is quite understandable why Pynchon in *Mason & Dixon* so frequently draws our attention to Mason's bereavement of his wife Rebekah, without which the British astronomer would not have left his country and the rest of his family including his young sons, William and Dr. Isaac, for the scientific researches abroad assigned by the Royal Society and, therefore, would not have appreciated his wife as he ought to. It is in chapter 15, in which Mason, left alone

in St. Helena by his partner Dixon going back to Cape Town for some assignment, is persuaded by Nevil Maskelyne, his nemesis at the Royal Society, to move to “the other side of the Island” and thereby exposes himself to “an unremitting and much-warn’d-against Wind” (158), that he hears Rebekah’s voice, for the first time since her death, echoing in the wind “clean of all intervention” (164). While Mason, a man of science, confounded by the possible resurrection of his dead wife’s spirit, “tries to joke with himself” so as “to deny her,” he understands at the same time that “she must come, that something is important enough to risk frightening him too much, driving him further from the World than he has already gone” because “Rebekah, who in her living silences drove him to moments of fury, now wrapt in what should be the silence of her grave, has began to speak to him” (164). Hearing “the unabating Wind, that first Voice, not yet inflected,—the pure Whirl,—of the very Planet” (159), Mason finds himself alone in this world separated from the familiar voice of the living Rebekah and, instead, facing up to the unfamiliar presence of the apparitional Rebekah belonging, in fact, to the other world and suggesting to Mason that he, too, is someday to cross over the line to where she is:

“But wait till you’re over here Mopery.”

“You refer to . . . ,” he twirls his hand at her, head to toe, uncertain how, or whether, to bring up the topick of Death, and having died. She nods, her smile not, so far, terrible. (165)

Mason is naturally “afraid” (164), that is, he is afraid, on the one hand, of her spirit still present in this world to haunt him and, on the other, of his unwilling desire for the spirit of Death seen through Rebekah’s reappearance. So he wonders, as he later confides to Dixon, whether there might ever be “other Modalities of Appearance” that cannot be explained by the sense of reason:

“Damme, she was here. . . . Was it not her Soul? What, then? Memory is not so all-enwrapping, Dream sooner or later betrays itself. If an Actor or a painted Portrait may represent a Personage no longer alive, might there not be other Modalities of Appearance, as well? . . . No, nothing of Reason in it.—In truth, I have ever waited meeting her again.” (165)

It is true that Mason would not have met and would never meet again Rebekah without “other Modalities of Appearance” that transcend or, at least, escape the rational notions of life and death. One way to suppose such a magical—from a rationalist point of view—possibility of our communion with the dead is to take a different stance on the problem of temporality. There is, for example, presented in *Mason & Dixon* the “Asiatick Pigmies” (196) who “live’d in quite another relation to Time,—one that did not, like our own, hold at its heart the terror of Time’s passage,—far more preferably, Indifference to it, pure and transparent as possible” (195). How much “careless of Sequences in Time” these people are is demonstrated by the structure of their language: there are no verbal tenses except for “Nouns Case-Endings” and, since this enacts another, in a sense, positive attitude toward death, the gender system of their language includes “the Third Sex [. . .] Dead” in addition to Male and Female and thereby enables “the emotional relations between Male and Dead, Female and Dead, Dead and Dead” (195). The presence of such a people with such a language certainly would appeal to the rational mind like Mason who aspires after, rather romantically, the life after death. In fact, to take a different gesture toward death is not to communicate with the dead as they are living but *as if* they are alive so as to make it possible to respond to the calls of the dead when one believes oneself hearing them. The dead are dead all the same still distinguishable from the living,

(152)

male or female, as the presence of the gender category of the dead clearly illustrates in this Asian language system, while these Asians are sensible enough to give the dead a proper place in their language so as not to romanticize the life of the dead as “the After-life” (281), a sort of representational limit in the Western dialectic. Thus, when reflecting on “Rebekah’s visits at St. Helena” and trying not to overromanticize them, Mason simply acknowledges that they “were profoundly like nothing he knew” :

whilst she assum’d that he well understood her obligations among the Dead, and would respond ever as she wish’d. Yet how would he? being allow’d no access to any of those million’d dramas among the Dead. They were like the Stars to him,—unable to project himself among their enigmatic Gatherings, he could but observe thro’ a mediating Instrument. The many-Lens’d Rebekah. (195)

A stargazer as he is, Mason’s response to the apparitional Rebekah is least romantic in that he refrains from making and dramatizing a sense of her return and yet somehow irrational in that he believes in the presence of her spirit still somewhere around himself.

Precisely speaking, the rules of the dead is beyond our knowledge and, when they are represented, they are so, as Mason well understands, necessarily in mediated form. Furthermore, since what is mediated is in fact that which is more or less reflected in our consciousness as the text of *V.* is more or less “Stencilized” (*V.* 228) to present itself as represented forms of Herbert Stencil’s desire for the lady *V.* in Pynchon’s first novel, it can be considered that what Mason actually hears as/in Rebekah’s voice, if he ever keeps *believing* in himself hearing her, is his inner response to the possibility of the other state of himself, that is, his death, as is predicted by Rebekah, always already

latent within himself. To this possible other in himself, Mason has, as Dixon sagaciously suggests, no alternative but to “get on with it” (165), for, even if *it* is the other, *it is* there still inside him, belonging to himself as his *other* self. The death of Rebekah, without which Mason would not have left his home in England, makes him aware of the future possible state of his self within himself and also of the possible relationship of himself to his other self.

The family relationship focused on in *Mason & Dixon* is, therefore, not just one’s relations with the other family member(s) but also one’s inner relations with one’s other self. Importantly, one’s relation to one’s possible other is not realized in the process of self-reflection in which one sublates the other so as to become a higher state of being but in a process in which the presence of the other as such within oneself is not only recognized but also accepted as part of self: the other is not there to be overcome but to be familiar with. Needless to say, this is not one’s dialectical return to the self-same beyond the state of the speculative other but one’s centrifugal re-turn to the other as such in order to be familiar with the other and thereby to make the other at home. Only when one acknowledges this inner relationship of oneself to the other can one possibly believe in one’s other self latent in oneself, accepting the possible state of death in the future.

It is only in this light that Mason’s return to America in the final pages of *Mason & Dixon* can be fully appreciated. While “madness” (758) is suggested to be the cause that brings Mason, who did not desire to stay in America after his mission had completed, back to the new continent with his new wife and children this last time together, the death of Dixon, who “wish’d to remain” in America but “could not” (717) do so for some reasons, seems to be the real cause of Mason’s last transatlantic voyage to Philadelphia, the journey that would cost his

(154)

life, as he understands even before the departure. Though knowing that “[Mason and Rebekah] would never be buried together” (758) should he go to America, Mason close to the end of his life still needs to be there in America as if it were “the way journeymen became masters, and the ingenuous wise,—it is a musikal piece returning to its Tonick Home” (762).

Does Mason, then, find America, his exiled place, home? Mason’s death at Philadelphia sends Mary, his second wife, and her children back to England, but William and Dr. Isaac, Rebekah’s sons, decide to stay in America to “be Americans” (772). This suggests that they inherit Mason’s will, which was not clearly spoken out but silently transmitted back at home in England to Dr. Isaac who came with his father to Dixon’s funeral:

“Dad?” Doc had taken his [Mason’s] arm. For an instant, unexpectedly, Mason saw the little Boy who, having worried about Storms at Sea, as Beasts in the Forest, came running each time to make sure his father had return’d safely,—whose gift of ministering to others Mason was never able to see, let alone accept, in his blind grieving, his queasiness of Soul before a life and a death, his refusal to touch the Baby, tho’ ’twas not possible to blame him. . . . The Boy he had gone to the other side of the Globe to avoid was looking at him now with nothing in his face but concern for his Father.

“Oh, Son.” He shook his Head. He didn’t continue.

“It’s your Mate,” Doctor Isaac assur’d him, “It’s what happens when your Mate dies.” (768)

While, as a son, Isaac sees what is on Mason’s mind and yet does not quite articulate it, Mason as a father reads in Isaac’s face “concern for his father,” a sign of Isaac’s understanding what Mason has come

through and what Isaac himself will go through in the future: the face of the son is for his father a text in which to read both what is to be himself and what is to be other than himself. If Isaac truly inherits Mason's will, then he is not just to repeat all over again what his father has done but also to go one step further, acknowledging what Mason has left unachieved. To stay to "be Americans" together with his brother William so as to continue further on the path yet untrodden by Mason is Isaac's response to his father's will, which is also his own will, to settle himself at home where he is *yet to be*. Mason's centrifugal re-turn to America thus conceives another possibility of further history of the Masons on the continent still yet to be familiar with.

Now I want to return or rather re-turn to my initial question of Pynchon's reason to present his fifth novel in the third-person narrative of Cherrycoke in *Mason & Dixon*. On one of a few occasions when Pynchon intervenes in Cherrycoke's narrative, he describes the clergyman narrator to be "there in but a representational sense, ghostly as an imperfect narrative to be told in futurity" (195).⁽⁴⁾ This demonstrates not only the lack of authenticity in Cherrycoke's voice, as has been already discussed, but, more importantly, the possible transmission of the clergyman's narrative in the future: despite his lack of the authorial voice, which he gave up back when, in his youth, accusing the authority in his anonymous voice, Cherrycoke's story is suggested to be circulated to, that is, to be related to and thereby relate those who are to hear it. This possibility of further circulation of his story beyond his own presentation signifies not the romantic "After-life" of the story but the possible presence of a future community in which Cherrycoke's narrative of Mason and Dixon is to be shared not because of the authenticity of his narrative voice but owing to the fabulous power, as in oral literature, given, in exchange of the clergyman narrator's authorial

signature, to the story itself to be spread among the people aurally.⁽⁵⁾ Cherrycoke's voice in exile, caused by his juvenile delinquency of concealing his name in the public and, at the same time, functioning as the very cause of his present narrative or the narrative of his presence, is thus to be re-cited in a future possible community related, in his absence, by his-story or just an-other history of Mason and Dixon.

Indeed, what is on Pynchon's mind when he is writing *Mason & Dixon* with Wicks Cherrycoke as the narrator of the story is to renew the category of historical narrative, thereby undermining the traditional notion of history as the compilation of officially approved facts. In other words, "[i]f the traditional historical novel attempts to replicate a way of life, speech and costume," then, as T. Coraghessan Boyle argues, Pynchon's "post-modernist version seeks only to be just that, a version" (9). In order to achieve this goal, he gives up the so-called authorial voice in his own writing, for it would necessarily establish the major narrative thread to leave out all the other possible voices. So what Pynchon intends with this new type of historical narrative is to present a writing which reminds us that "there may ever continue more than one life-line back into a Past" (349). This is to say that history is, to quote Cherrycoke in his *Christ and History*, one of inside narratives in *Mason & Dixon*, "not a Chain of single Links," which would "lose us All" should any single line be broken, but "rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common" (349). According to this renewed notion of history, "the Historian's duty" is not to establish a single authentic discourse of established facts but "to seek the Truth, yet must he do ev'rything he can, not to tell it" (349), for history is "too innocent, to be left within the reach of anyone in Power,—who need but touch her, and all her

Credit is in the instant vanish'd, as if it had never been” (350) : history is susceptible to any purposive political hands. Instead, as Ethelmer a vehement supporter for the Cherrycokian notion of history claims, history should be “tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiters, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev'ry Radius, Masters of Disguise to provide her the Costume, Toilette, and Bearing, and Speech nimble enough to keep her beyond the Desires, or even the Curiosity, of Government” (350), since it is such a fabulist interpretation of history alone that could, with its self-disseminating, centrifugal force, present history without contaminating it with the usurping power that any authentic discourse of the officialized history would necessarily assume.⁽⁶⁾

From this point of view, Pynchon's application of the third-person narrative voice to his fifth novel should not be regarded as his return to modernist objectivity, but it is his re-turn to the otherness in his narrative. Instead of telling the story in his own voice which would sound, most likely, authoritative, Pynchon lets Cherrycoke relate the whole story of Mason and Dixon from the clergyman's own point of view, while being cautious enough not to give too much authenticity to the voice of the clergyman narrator by characterizing him as a family outcast exiled in America for the crime of writing in his youth. Being a text written in a fabulist style of the exiled narrative of Cherrycoke who “had tried to follow the advice of Epictetus, to keep before him every day death, exile, and loss, believing it a condition of his spiritual Contract with the world as given” (30), *Mason & Dixon* neither belongs to nor serves to anyone, but, foregrounding Pynchon's bearing on a way beyond himself toward the possible state of his being other, the story contributes to a great, though disorderly, network of Pynchon readers as we listen to ourselves reading the yet-to-be familiar passage of the

exiled clergyman or the other voice of Thomas Pynchon.

Notes

- (1) Critics have long discussed Pynchon's appropriation of the modernist third-person narrative in "Entropy" and *V*. See for example Plater (esp. 54-55) and Seed (40-43, 85). Also see my "Deconstruction of Aesthetic" for a close examination of the way in which Callisto's discourse parodying the modernist style anticipates the final breakdown of the third-person narrative system.
- (2) Discussing "offenses against the public *peace*" (142) in the eighteenth century English law, Sir William Blackstone, the first Vinerian professor of English law at Oxford, notes that "any writings, pictures, or the like, of an immoral or illegal tendency" is taken "in their largest and most extensive sense" as "*libels*" and that "malicious defamations" of "a magistrate" should be regarded as most offensive because it would "expose him to public hatred, contempt, and ridicule" (150). He also points out that "to send any *letter* without a name, or with a fictitious name, *demanding* money, venison, or any other valuable thing, or *threatening* (without any demand) to kill, or fire the house of, any person, is made felony" (144). Importantly, speaking of "the liberty of the press," Blackstone considers the freedom of expression "indeed essential to the nature of a free state" (151) and argues against "the restrictive power of a licenser" (152), while insisting on the importance and necessity of the legal procedures for punishing "any dangerous or offensive writings," when published, for "the preservation of peace and good order, of government and religion" (151).
- (3) Reviewers of the novel regard "[t]he settling of America" as "an allegory for the way getting people to think alike depletes the world" (Menand 25) and, therefore, *Mason & Dixon* as "an epic of loss" (Gray 54).
- (4) Whenever intervening in Cherrycoke's narrative, Pynchon puts in parentheses the passages that apparently do not belong to the clergyman narrator so as to make them secondarized and thereby less authoritative. This, however, does not mean that these passages are insignificant. Pynchon just tries not to give too much narrative

authenticity to these other voices than Cherrycoke's in his text.

- (5) In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon draws our attention to the possibility and power of the oral transmission of poetic language in the episode of the Kirghiz Light (cf. *Gravity's Rainbow* 336-59). See my "Gravity's Rainbow ni okeru 'Kakukoto' no Allegory (Pynchon's Allegory of Writing in *Gravity's Rainbow*)" (32-33).
- (6) Pynchon's fabulist notion of history in *Mason & Dixon* can be comparable to Fredric Jameson's Althusserian notion of history as "an absent cause" in *The Political Unconscious*: "history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious" (35). Obviously, both Pynchon and Jameson share the idea that history as such can never be representable yet somehow operative as "an absent cause." But, while Jameson pays more attention to the structure of the historical process, Pynchon is concerned with the possibility of probing into an ambiguous space latent "between 'anachronism' and 'chronicle' as between alternative and official histories, with 'what could have been' or 'might yet be' challenging 'the way it was' and 'must be'" (Keeseey 171). In a sense, Pynchon's stance is less structural and yet more realistic than Jameson, for, as T. Coraghessan Boyle points out, history in *Mason & Dixon* serves as "a place in which to live, one version of many, a novel unfolded and unfolding still to affect us in any number of unforeseen ways" (9).

Works Cited

- Aso, Takashi. "Deconstruction of Aesthetic : Pynchon's Body-Politique in 'Entropy.'" *Kyorin University Review of the Faculty of Foreign Languages* 10 (1998): 155-74.
- . "Gravity's Rainbow ni okeru 'Kakukoto' no Allegory (Pynchon's Allegory of Writing in *Gravity's Rainbow*)."
America Bungaku (The Journal of Tokyo American Literary Society) 57 (1996) : 27-38.
- Blackstone, William. *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. A Facsimile of the 1st Ed of 1765-1769. Vol. 4. Chicago : U of Chicago P, 1979. 4 vols.

- Boyle, T. Coraghessan. "The Great Divide." Rev. of *Mason & Dixon*, by Thomas Pynchon. *New York Times Book Review* 18 May 1997: 9.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. 1965. New York: Random-Vintage, 1988.
- Gray, Paul. "Drawing the Line." Rev. of *Mason & Dixon*, by Thomas Pynchon. *Time* 16 Jun. 1997: 54
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. 1981. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.
- Keeseey, Douglas. "Mason & Dixon on the Line: A Reception Study." *Pynchon Notes* 36-39 (1995-96): 165-78.
- Maher, Winifred Barbara, and Brendan Maher. "The Ship of Fools: *Stultifera Navis or Ignis Fatuus?*" *American Psychologist* 37 (1982): 756-61.
- Menand, Louis. "Entropology." Rev. of *Mason & Dixon*, by Thomas Pynchon. *New York Review of Books* 12 Jun. 1997: 22, 24-25.
- Plater, William M. *The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978.
- Porter, Roy. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century: The Pelican Social History of Britain*. London: Penguin, 1982.
- Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. 1973. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1987.
- . *Mason and Dixon*. New York: Henry Holt, 1997.
- . *V*. 1963. New York: Harper-Perrenial, 1990.
- Seed, David. *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*. Iowa: U of Iowa P, 1988.
- Stewart, Susan. *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

- * A shorter version of this paper was presented in Japanese at the 37th Annual Conference of the American Literature Society of Japan held at Hiroshima Jogakuin University on October 17, 1998.