



Preprint

2016

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Dixon

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**How to cite**

MADSEN, Deborah Lea. Captivity without Redemption: Pynchon's Allegories of Empire in Mason & Dixon. 2016, p. 16.

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:88197>

*Pynchon Notes*, in press.

## **Captivity without Redemption: Pynchon's Allegories of Empire in *Mason & Dixon***

Deborah L. Madsen

In chapters 53 and 54 of *Mason & Dixon* (1997), Thomas Pynchon inserts a remarkable narrative interpolation. "The Captive's Tale," as it is subsequently named, represents the popular colonial captivity narrative but in simulacra or pastiche, correct in its details but substituting a peculiarly contemporary set of references for the colonialist ideology of the early narratives.<sup>1</sup> Pynchon uses the captivity narrative, a popular vehicle of imperialistic values, to deconstruct the metanarrative of American Exceptionalism.<sup>2</sup> The theory of allegory reveals the mechanisms at work in Pynchon's interpolated narrative. He uses the inherent doubleness of allegorical representation, present in colonial captivity narratives, to emphasize the contingent relationship between literary signifier and historical signified. The failure of semantic closure sustains a linguistic doubleness that is matched in Pynchon's narrative by a motif of historical anachronism, which recalls the narrative anachronism of *V* that simultaneously distances and brings together "then" and "now." As I intend to show, linguistic and chronological doubleness in *Mason & Dixon* works with various structural forms of doubling that articulate a sense of entrapment from which there can be no escape: characters are situated in a liminal state between putative "inside" and "outside" spaces that, like the Moebius strip, converge and refuse to be separated. In this way, patterns of inclusion and exclusion are articulated in the very texture of the narrative as Pynchon places in question the issue of sovereignty as the power to create what Giorgio Agamben calls "states of exception."<sup>3</sup> Exceptional individuals and groups can benefit from exemption from the law by the intervention of a sovereign power whose sovereignty and own transcendence of law is confirmed by the act of creating the exception. Though this exception is enacted as exceptional, Agamben points out that in fact such exceptions prove the rule of sovereign power and confirm the impossibility of distinguishing inside from outside in relation to systems of power.<sup>4</sup> In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon takes the seemingly exceptional case of captivity as a paradigm of the rule of power under Empire, a boundless transnational order where we are all held captive without the prospect of redemption.

In this novel, Pynchon allegorizes the captivity narrative and, in so doing, provides a starting point for my exploration of his critique of the discourses of Empire.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, I explore the ways in which Pynchon creates a patina of authenticity by writing a captivity narrative that conforms superficially to the colonial narrative model. This narrative is broken up and its mechanisms revealed by Pynchon's subversion of the very authenticity he has created. The ontological status of the characters is placed in question as the narrative of Rev. Cherrycoke is juxtaposed with Eliza Field's first-person narrative; this story is then revealed to be an installment in the fictional Ghastly Fop series, yet in chapter 54 Eliza and Zhang enter the main narrative as they arrive at the camp of *Mason and Dixon*. The demarcation of fiction from experience is thus rendered impossible, and this impossibility serves to underline the constructed nature not only of the narrative but also of the metanarrative that informs it.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon observes of America, "Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on" (*GR*, 842). It is the "impulse to empire," embedded in forms such as the colonial captivity narrative and their legacy to American history, that Pynchon explores in *Mason & Dixon*. Not by accident is the novel's frame narrative set in the immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary War, and it is precisely at this moment, when America ceases to be a colony and becomes a post-colonial nation, that Pynchon sets his powerful critique of America's ideology of empire.<sup>7</sup> In *Mason & Dixon*, Thomas Pynchon finally brings home the meditation on modern western history and his unfolding history of "America-in-the-world" that has consumed texts like *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Mason & Dixon* ends, in prose of great lyrical beauty, with the commitment of Charles Mason's sons to the new Republic and to a future in which the evil of colonialism, represented by the Line, will be defeated.<sup>8</sup> All of Pynchon's work, but most explicitly *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), has addressed the question of why America, the land of promise, should have become a land of conformity. In *Mason & Dixon* he looks to Anglo-America's colonial roots to analyze the culture, the psychoses, the epistemology of colonialism, and attempt to answer the famous question asked by the contemporary of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, Hector St Jean de Crèvecoeur, who landed at New York in 1759: "What is an American?"

### **Allegory and the State of Exception**

Colonial settlers looked to God for an answer to the question of New World identity and interpreted the trials they suffered exceptionally, as signs of God's "merciful chastisement" of His chosen people. Starvation, Indian attack, disease, and internecine conflict all symbolized God's concern for their spiritual welfare and for the success of their historical mission. Hardship was God's means of warning the community of the dangers of complacency as well as of "backsliding," moving away from instead of towards their exceptional destiny. The concept of "punitive typology," typology used as punishment and threat, informs the popular genre of the captivity narrative in powerful ways. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon uses the power of captivity narrative to invoke and to critique the American metanarrative of Exceptionalism. In what follows, I want to establish some context and historical background in support of this claim.

Perhaps the best known of the colonial captivity narratives is Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (published 1682, describing her abduction and ransom in 1676). Mrs. Rowlandson interprets her experience as punishment for her neglect of religion. She interprets her ordeal in relation to the images she finds in the Bible she providentially receives, and this interpretive effort brings her to an awareness of her special spiritual destiny, as she renounces her earlier selfish and complacent ways and surrenders herself to the knowledge of God's absolute power and sovereignty. Her physical redemption thus comes to mirror her spiritual redemption. Her eventual restoration to the community of the elect in Boston prefigures the future destiny of her soul among the saints of heaven. Further, Mrs. Rowlandson claims for her experience an exemplary significance as an indication of the special destiny reserved for God's chosen people of New England. Her liberation from suffering, her rescue from the moral and geographical wilderness, prefigures, in her account, the future liberation of the American community of saints from the bondage of worldly sin into the freedom of heavenly bliss.

Mary Rowlandson and other women like her – Hannah Swarton and Hannah Dustan, for example – who were otherwise denied a public voice, found a voice in the genre of the captivity narrative. It was a compromised voice, and Mrs. Rowlandson's narrative included in the first editions a sermon by her husband as if to legitimate her story, but still the captivity narrative provided a means by which the otherwise silenced and marginalized subject could articulate her sense of her role within the exceptional destiny of the New World.<sup>9</sup> Other marginalized groups have also found in Exceptionalist rhetoric a potent force for the expression of their position within American culture.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern as one who has been "written out" of history, whose story cannot be told within the parameters of official history, is very powerful. However, this concept offers only a partial description of the condition of women such as Mary Rowlandson who were excluded from the narrative of national formation by reason of their gender but were included by reason of their elite position within the Massachusetts colony. Those who were the subject of this New World colonizing effort, the colonized themselves, find that their position cannot be articulated within the terms of Exceptionalist rhetoric. Exceptionalism attempts to erase from the historical record the indigenous voice of the colonized New World subject. However, the adoption of Exceptionalist rhetoric as a strategy for "writing back" against this erasure is a powerful decolonizing gesture and the primary rhetorical tool used in this effort is allegory.

An explanation for the doubleness in allegorical expression is offered by the post-structuralist account of the ambivalence that lies at the heart of representation itself and allegory in particular. Post-structuralist analyses of allegory are located within the symbolism-versus-allegory debate. Against the Romantic claim to make present in literature an epiphanic moment when subject and object, language and meaning, become one, post-structuralist critics, following the work of Paul de Man, point to the incommensurability of language and thought or spirit and reality. Mimetic representation then is impossible; words cannot make present the material reality they signify, and what happens in literary texts that attempt representation is the enactment of the failure of language to represent. This rhetorical failure is what de Man calls allegory. As soon as thought enters language, it ceases to be pure consciousness and becomes subject to the constraints of grammar; this is what de Man means when he writes that allegories are "allegories of the most distinctively linguistic (as opposed to phenomenal) of categories, namely grammar" (775). Gayatri Spivak follows de Man in assuming that allegory is not a narrative style or genre but a tendency within all language, that allegory in fact reveals the true nature of linguistic functionality. Allegory resides in the reading process, which attempts to overcome the alienated relationship between sign and referent. This double structure of referentiality is realized in the interpretive activity of transforming signifiers into signifieds, which allegory does not attempt to conceal. The contingent relationship between language and reference then opens a space for the articulation of what Spivak calls "subaltern" voices, voices that are written out of the colonizer's language but which can intervene in the space opened by the failure of language to achieve referential closure.<sup>11</sup> Such intervention is always belated, as the unresolved gap between signifier and signified is transmuted in temporal terms to the space between "now" and "then."

The indeterminacy at the heart of allegorical reference, the capacity of allegorical rhetoric to signify several things, is used by marginalized subjects to unanchor the colonizer's rhetoric from the mythology of American Exceptionalism and turn that rhetoric against itself, to enact a subversion of the very mythology it should represent. Because allegory is indeterminate in this way, allegorical narratives have recourse to privileged texts (in Western tradition the Bible) that will constrain the signifying potential of the rhetoric to a single authoritative meaning. We see

this in Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative where her Bible provides the terms for interpreting every event that befalls her. The allegorical rhetoric of American Exceptionalism characteristically invokes the power of sacred history, inscribed in Scripture, to limit its potential for dissident or subversive meaning. Subaltern writers disrupt the relationship between the American national mythology and its invocation of providential history by introducing a distinct historical discourse – the historical narrative of invasion and colonization. Marginal writers, in this way, use the ambivalence of allegory to create a space for otherwise subaltern voices within the privileged discourse of US colonialism.

Pynchon's interpolated narrative, "The Captive's Tale," which occupies chapters 53 and 54, is located within this space of referential ambivalence. The narrative functions within the novel in the style of the "reader-trap" that Bernard Duyfhuizen has identified at work in *Gravity's Rainbow*.<sup>12</sup> That is, the interpolated narrative disrupts the reading process and focuses our attention upon the ways in which we have been producing meaning. The captive, Eliza Field, is a fictional character in the story *The Ghastly Fop*, the "sinister Volume" as the narrator describes it, read by Tenebrae and Ethelmer. In fact, the fictional status of the story, which begins with the opening of chapter 53, is explained only in the midst of chapter 54, when the narrator tells how Tenebrae has discovered this book in her cousin's room, "lying open on a Copper-plate Engraving of two pretty Nuns, sporting in ways she finds inexplicably intriguing ..." (Pynchon's ellipsis, 526). The Fop himself is of uncertain ontological status, appearing to some to be a ghost and to others all too human: this figure constitutes a floating signifier that recurs throughout the narrative, reminding the reader of the contingent relationship between all signs and their meanings. But the question of stable ontology, of stable meaning, is explored primarily in relation to the figure of Eliza. As Tenebrae and Ethelmer settle down to continue the story, their reading process is described by the narrator as a detour from "the Revd's narrative Turnpike onto the pleasant Track of their own mutual Fascination, by way of the Captive's Tale" (529). Of course we, the readers of *Mason & Dixon*, have just read more than a chapter about this captive, under the impression that Eliza is a character in the Reverend's tale and not a narrative detour. So already, her semantic character in relation to the primary narrative is in question. We follow the story along with Tenebrae and Ethelmer, to the point where Eliza escapes from captivity in the company of Zhang and the two ride into the camp of Mason and Dixon. This is a radical shift in her ontological status, from a character in a fiction-within-a-fiction to a character within the primary narrative. In a further ontological twist, the narrator tells us that Eliza is staying in the tent occupied by Zsuzsa Szabó, a character who is reminiscent of the Hollywood celebrity and Hungarian actress, Zsazsa Gabor. Zsuzsa, like Zsazsa, introduces herself: "'Hello, Boys, -- it's Zsuzsa.' She has a charmingly un-English way of saying this" (535), the narrator observes. So here the narrative nods in the direction of historical reality even as it indulges in one of the many chronological anachronisms that mark this narrative.<sup>13</sup> The final ambiguity in relation to Eliza's ontological status comes shortly after this, when the surveyors visit her in her tent and Mason is overwhelmed by Eliza's resemblance to his dead wife, Rebekah. At this point, the character of Eliza functions much like a floating signifier, like the Ghastly Fop himself; it is a matter of debate among the other characters whether she is a ghost or a living woman. What this continual undercutting of the reader's ontological assumptions achieves is a radical undermining of the semantic grounds upon which we have been generating meaning from this novel.<sup>14</sup> Historical meaning – and, with it, histories of captivity – becomes ambivalent as it is allegorized.

"The Captive's Tale" functions within the novel of *Mason & Dixon* in much the same way that "The Courier's Tragedy" functions within *The Crying of Lot 49*. In both cases, Pynchon

recreates a historical genre in such convincing detail that the interpolated narratives appear at first glance to be genuine. The fact that they are not authentic opens the frame narratives in which they are embedded to questions of semantic authenticity: what is real historical meaning? How can we judge historical authenticity? What signifies authenticity and what would be a signifier of authenticity? Pynchon creates a contingent relationship between language and reference, which does not allow referential closure. Allegory appeals to a transcendental signifier, an authoritative external arbiter of meaning (such as the Bible), but at the same time Pynchon's allegory is unable to discover any absolute semantic authority. Indeed, his pastiche of Puritan typology simultaneously invokes this reliance upon a transcendental interpretive authority and debunks the idea that such an authority is available.

In the interpolated captivity narrative, Pynchon recreates a genre that was popular in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Pynchon's narrative of the captivity and escape of Eliza Field conforms in its broad details to the experiences recorded by the eighteenth-century British colonists who were taken by Indians as part of the spoils of war. More than this, Pynchon recreates the narrative style written by the captives of the French, who were taken to the French colony of Quebec and the city of Montreal, where they were held by Jesuits or Native tribes allied with the French. In 1700, New France had a population of approximately 15,000, compared to the 100,000 in New England. The taking of English captives was, then, a means of increasing the numbers of the Quebec colony and, a strategy borrowed from traditional Native practices, also a way of preventing New English incursions on to French colonial territory. Marcel Fournier has identified 455 captives from New England who settled in New France between 1675 and 1760, a not insignificant fraction of the population. These captives wrote of an experience of captivity that was quite different from those taken by Natives but ransomed back into New England society. So rather than Mary Rowlandson's narrative, it is narratives like Elizabeth Hanson's *God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty* (1728) that Pynchon recreates so convincingly. Pynchon chooses to highlight the experience of captivity that does not culminate in "redemption." For many of the New England captives taken to New France, captivity as transformed into cultural integration became the condition of their lives.

Elizabeth Hanson describes her capture in 1724, with her four children and a servant girl, and their subsequent sale to the French who forcibly took her youngest child for Catholic baptism. Her eldest daughter Sarah remained among the French, despite repeated attempts to redeem her; she was converted to Catholicism and married a French Canadian militia captain. The efforts of Canadian Jesuits to convert the captives held by their Indian allies are described in detail by John Williams in his narrative, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion* (1707). Williams, a Puritan minister, tells how he was tempted by the Jesuits to enter a Catholic church to pray; threatened by his Indian master with physical violence if he would not attend the Catholic church, cross himself or wear a crucifix; kept apart from other surviving members of his congregation in order that they could not pray together; and spied upon by the priests to ensure that the captives were kept spiritually weak and vulnerable to conversion: "Sometimes the guard was so strict that I could scarce go aside on necessary occasions without a repulse; and whenever I went out into the city ... there were spies to watch me and to observe whether I spake to the English" (Vaughn & Clark, 190). The effectiveness of this twin strategy of isolation and intimidation is demonstrated in the case of Williams's seven-year-old daughter, Eunice. He was able to see her only once before he was redeemed, and then she confessed to the difficulty she experienced remembering her catechism and the Scriptures her father had taught her when she had no one to instruct her and was being forced to pray in Latin. Eunice converted to Catholicism, married a Caughnawaga

Indian (the tribe by which she was held) and never returned to New England (Vaughn & Clark, 188).

Another celebrated captive who never returned to her New England family was Sara Allen who was twelve when, like the Williams family, she was taken captive by a combined French and Native force during the Battle of Deerfield (1704). Sara was one of 109 captives taken in that attack. The captives made a forced march through the winter snow to Canada. Richard I. Melvoin, in *New England Outpost: War and Society in Colonial Deerfield*, reports: "Sarah arrives at Fort Chambly at the beginning of April 1704. The next official record we have is her baptism on May 30, 1705 at Ste-Anne de Bout de L'Ile. At that time she is a domestic in the home of Jean Quenet at Baie D'Urfé. Five years later she marries Guillaume Lalonde and this Lalonde family has 13 children, 9 boys and 4 girls." One year after her captivity, Sara Allen had ceased to be an English-speaking Protestant and had become a French-speaking Catholic named Marie-Madeleine Hélène Sire. In 1710, King Louis XIV granted her, and some forty others, citizenship of New France and eventually she died, at the age of 82 in 1764, without having ever been reunited with her family. The perpetual captivity of Sara Allen, or her coerced integration into the society of New France, provides a paradigm of the subject that is created by the power of the sovereign exception. Although Allen was not a French subject nor was she born in New France, King Louis XIV made of her and her fellow captives an exception that allowed the outsider to become an insider and the excluded to be included. In this act, the French king asserted and proved his sovereignty over the colony of New France. But this traffic in colonists carries greater significance in the context of Pynchon's historical anachronisms. Later in his text this transcolonial traffic in human flesh becomes the global slave trade and the issue of national, as opposed to deterritorialized, sovereignty becomes even more complex.

Colonial captivity narratives, and the experience of captivity without redemption, provide Pynchon's model in "The Captive's Tale." The coercive nature of Jesuit captivity is powerfully conveyed in "The Captive's Tale" but with an emphasis on sexuality that is repressed, if mentioned at all, in the original narratives. Indeed, the interpolated story falls into two sections, divided on this issue of sexuality. The early part of the story conforms in subject matter to historical captivity narratives. The Indians attack on a quiet and peaceful day; the captive has the impression that she was meant to be taken and that her abduction is a punishment, in this case "Her Lapse had been to ignore the surprizing Frailness of secular Life" (512). So her ordeal is a kind of punitive typology: God is dealing her this suffering in order to make her consider how she has failed to match the great destiny awaiting the colony. She has allowed herself to be distracted by "secular Life" from the life of the spirit that motivates the American colonial experiment. She describes the long journey to Canada and her sense that, the further she is taken, the less likely her captors are to kill her. And the narrator states on Eliza's behalf, as is conventional in captivity narratives of this time, that she was not sexually molested in any way: "They did not bind, or abuse, or, unless they must, speak to her. They were her Express, – she was their Message" (513). The suggestion that the Natives are "delivering" her, as one might deliver a message, is a complex conceit. Again, it underlines the status of her ordeal as kind of punitive typology though the play on the concept of "delivery" introduces multiple meanings. She is, in typological terms, being delivered to God or to her true destiny from the false secular life she has been living. However, from the point of view of Pynchon's interest in transnational trade networks, the Indians are delivering a commodity to their Jesuit allies. The metaphor also echoes the travel imagery used by Rev. Cherrycoke to describe his narrative digression, thus

anticipating the self-conscious metafictional link between the frame narrative and the narrative digression that follows Eliza's putative escape from Montreal.

The nature of "The Captive's Tale" shifts once Eliza is indeed delivered into the hands of the Jesuits in Montreal. In this latter part of the narrative, the theme of sexuality takes on a contemporary cast, in contrast to the muted treatment of sexuality in colonial captivity narratives. Of particular interest is the narrator's quasi-pornographic description of Eliza's initiation into the group of nuns named, not the brides of Christ, but Las Viudas de Cristo (the Widows of Christ). These "anti-nuns" appear to be in the sexual service of the Jesuits who use them to pursue their political agenda, which was grounded in the ambition that Catholicism become the universal religion. Eliza is introduced to the idea of self-mortification as punishment of her carnal desire. The self-mortification takes the form of the "Las Viudas Cilice." Now, a cilice generally refers to coarse hair cloth or a hair shirt such as might be worn for the purpose of mortification of the flesh. The only instance of a "cilice" of the kind Pynchon describes is used by the radical Catholic organization known as Opus Dei. Members of this group, which has been likened by some to a Catholic "cult," are required to use the cilice, a spiked chain worn around the upper thigh, for two hours each day, except for Church feast days, Sundays, and certain other times of the year. The cilice is then another of Pynchon's anachronisms that simultaneously distances and links "then" and "now"; it is a contemporary icon representing an organization the reputation of which in some quarters emphasizes Pynchon's interest in global conspiratorial networks. Thomas Pynchon loves such conspiracy theories and his work has always addressed the issue of the psychology of conspiracy theorizing. What he does in the interpolated narrative "The Captive's Tale" is to suggest that the Jesuit conspiracy pursued by Zarpató and his arch-enemy Zhang, who eventually assists Eliza in her escape, has a contemporary parallel. This also serves to undermine the historical referentiality of Pynchon's narratives at each level by placing in question the concept of historical signification.<sup>15</sup> All historical meaning is rendered uncertain by the paranoid projection of meaning backwards and forwards in time, which exposes the allegorical gap between sign and meaning or, in historical terms, then and now.<sup>16</sup>

### **Captivity: The Exception that Proves the Rule**

The importance of the sexualization of Eliza's experience as a captive lies in the connection to the transnational trade in female flesh. In "The Captive's Tale" Pynchon stresses the connection between gender, sexual desire, and the desire for power because his interest is in the sexual pathology of colonialism, of which captivity and enslavement forms but one aspect. "The Captive's Tale" is the most explicit articulation of a theme that is explored throughout the novel in terms of the history of slavery and the psychology of enslavement. The narrative figure that provides a link between the colonial captivity narrative and the thematics of slavery is the figure of the black bondmaid. Pynchon emphasizes this connection through Las Viudas de Cristo, the Widows of Christ. In chapter 41, during an evening entertainment at Castle Lepton, one of the serving slaves is described by Lord Lepton:

Yes lovely isn't she, purchas'd her my last time thro' Quebec, of the Widows of Christ, a Convent quite well known in certain Circles, devoted altogether to the World, – helping its Novices descend, into ever more exact forms of carnal Mortality, through training as, – how to call them? – not ordinary Whores,



though as Whores they must be quite gifted, but as eager practitioners of all Sins (419).

Of course, this episode precedes "The Captive's Tale" by some twelve chapters. Here Pynchon is establishing a transnational trade in women's bodies that is extended by Eliza's experience as a captive in Quebec. Indeed, upon a second reading of the novel, the frisson in Dixon's response to Lord Lepton's slavegirl – "She seems to know him. For a frightening moment, he seems to know her" (419) – suggests that, except for her blackness, this girl might be Eliza (or a slave Dixon encountered in the Cape Colony). The trade in women across the New France/New England border, both captives and slaves, serves to generalize the experience of Eliza as represented in her captivity narrative. While she tells herself that she has been taken exceptionally as part of a punitive typological scheme, which would ensure her redemption and that of her exceptional American community, in fact there is no release from the captivity into which she is taken. Her exceptional experience is, indeed, the rule for the women trafficked as slaves and whores. This generalizing tendency is taken further by the figure of the indentured servant whose position is little better than that of chattel slaves. The "Slave Orchestra" that plays during the entertainment at Castle Lepton is comprised of "the best musicians the Colonies, British and otherwise, have to offer (415): these players come from New Orleans, New York, and "the Forests of Africa." Lord Lepton has bought their contracts as another man might buy works of art. These contracts may be contracts of indenture or simply bills of sale. As Stephan Talty has shown, for many indentured servants the conditions of life differed little from those who had been enslaved, and for some their indenture lasted a lifetime.<sup>17</sup> The plight of the captive white woman, or of the enslaved black woman, is paradigmatic of the condition of all who are caught in the snares of Empire. I write "the enslaved black woman" but of course in *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow* it is the black African man whose story tells an interracial homosexual captivity narrative.

In Africa and America, for colonized men and women alike, Pynchon represents colonialism as a will to control, to dominate, and to possess. The final victory of the colonial enterprise comes when the colonized adopt the voice and perspective of the colonizer: when the captive holds herself enslaved. It is the colonized subject, controlled and manipulated by imperial authority, that is the object of metropolitan desire. If s/he is to speak at all, the colonized subject (like Enzian in *Gravity's Rainbow*, though not in *V*, where he is silent) must speak in European terms. This is true not just of the individual; in *Gravity's Rainbow* the Hereros as a subaltern people do not speak but come to be "spoken by" Europe. In the Cape Town observed by Mason and Dixon, masters beat their slaves "who reply in Bush tongues, to which, soon enough hoarse with Despair, with no hope of being understood, they return, as to childhood homes. . ." (101, Pynchon's ellipsis). Native language is a solitary refuge from the horror of life in the Dutch colony, but it precludes understanding and therefore perpetuates the psychology of enslavement. There is no position external to the colonial system, no privileged "outside" to which the enslaved might escape.

The slave who is most fully represented in the narrative is Austra, owned by the Vroom family who hope to "breed" her with Mason and profit from it. The gentle treatment Austra experiences, she purchases at a great price: she embraces the language and the discourse of her owners, adopting their values and making their corruption her own. The narrator speculates: "Johanna [Mme Vroom] can almost see those Babies now, up on the Block, adorable enough to sell themselves, kicking their feet in the air and squealing, ... whilst Austra finds herself calculating which of the [men] shall be easiest to seduce, and which, if any, more of a

Challenge" (100, my ellipsis). Austra has identified her interests, and her self, entirely with those of the Vroom family and, while she loses her integrity, she does gain a voice. Austra represents the complex position of the subaltern subject who is able to find a voice: by embracing the conditions of her own enslavement, Austra is included in Cape society even as she is excluded by virtue of her position, her interpellation, as "slave."

This complex condition of qualified inclusion that is nothing but a modified form of exclusion is explored in Pynchon's 1966 New York Times essay, "Journey Into the Mind of Watts." Pynchon identifies precisely this same imposition of white values upon black subjects in the attempts by welfare workers, operating in the aftermath of the Watts Riots, to persuade the black citizens of Watts, the poorest neighborhood of Los Angeles, to accept and conform to white values: to embrace the terms of their ongoing "enslavement." Pynchon describes how

the outposts of the establishment drowse in the bright summery smog: secretaries chat the afternoons plaintively away about machines that will not accept the cards they have punched for them; white volunteers sit filing, doodling, talking on the phones, doing any kind of busy-work, wondering where the "clients" are; inspirational mottoes like SMILE decorate the beaverboard office walls along with flow charts to illustrate the proper disposition of "cases," and with clippings from the slick magazines about "What Is Emotional Maturity?" ...

The idea the counselors push evidently is to look as much as possible like a white applicant. Which is to say, like a Negro job counselor or social worker. This has not been received with much enthusiasm among the kids it is designed to help out, and is one reason business is slow around the various projects (Pynchon, 1966).

I think it is significant that Pynchon chooses the phrase, "the outposts of the establishment" to describe the south-central area of Los Angeles – the phrase alludes to the more common reference, "the outposts of the empire." In this way, Pynchon suggests the unspoken neo-colonial dimension of black-white relations in this community.

It is this psychology of power that underpins colonialism. Austra's position as a member of a subject people is expressed by her surrender to the dominant European discourse of her master. Like the gendered subaltern of whom Gayatri Spivak has written, Austra has no voice of her own that can be understood in her colonized community; if she is to be heard, she can speak only the language of her oppressor. Her interpellation as slave in the society of the Cape Colony is an exercise of sovereignty on the part of those – her masters – who choose to include her, even in this most qualified way. Such inclusion is an assertion of power; Austra's acceptance of the colonizers' terms is a gesture of submission. Pynchon's awareness of this community of those who are possessed but also dispossessed, who are included yet are excluded, is reflected in such episodes as the ghostly parade at the end of the novel of some of those who have no voice within the narrative:

slowly into the Room begin to walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese Sailors, the overflow'd from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia, – as if something outside, beyond the cold Wind, has driven them to this extreme of seeking refuge. They bring their Scars, their

Pox-pitted Cheeks, their Burdens and Losses, their feverish Eyes, their proud fellowship in a Mobility that is to be, whose shape none inside this House may know" (759).<sup>18</sup>

Their experience is unknowable; it is subaltern knowledge because it is unspeakable – the subaltern has no access to a language comprehensible to, because wielded by, the masters, the colonizers, those to whom Pynchon has referred in the past simply as "Them."

Acting in the interests of "Them," making the new conform to the old, is what Mason and Dixon do as they carve a passage westward, from the Atlantic across the continent, that takes its parameters from western metaphysics. A recurrent motif is the idea that the heavens (and hell too) can be mapped onto earth but with mysterious consequences. The surveyors of the Line, then, are transcribing a European reading of the skies on to the wilderness of the New World, making America an image of the European metropolis in the finest colonial fashion.<sup>19</sup> Certainly Mason and Dixon discover that the class divisions of Dixon's County Durham and Mason's West Country have preceded them first to Cape Town, then to Philadelphia, to the American back-country and to the American South. By opening up the continent to European knowledge, by laying a conceptual grid upon the land, the surveyors have marked the beginning of the end. As Mason, dying, tells Ben Franklin: "'tis a Construction ... a great single Engine, the size of a Continent. ... Not all the Connexions are made yet, that's why some of it is still invisible. Day by day the Pioneers and Surveyors go on, more points are being tied in, and soon becoming visible, as above, new Stars are recorded and named and placed in Almanacks" (772). The topography of the New World, in this description, is a globalized network of transnational relations – transnational because it is "the size of a Continent" and yet America did not at this time occupy the continent from Atlantic to Pacific. With this anachronistic comment, Mason gestures towards the imperialistic ambitions, the westward course that American empire would take. Mason's disjuncture between "then" and "now" evokes a moment at the beginning of the globalized world in which Pynchon's readers live.

It is the dawning awareness that Mason and Dixon have contributed to the unleashing of evil upon an unsuspecting land, that they have become enslaved in some way to the workings of Empire where they had expected only to perform a job of work, that lends the historical record pathos and drama. The representation of this historical consciousness also links *Mason & Dixon* as a novel to the major theme of Pynchon's other works: the painful awareness that no one and nowhere are truly innocent. There is no American Adam and no pristine "New" World separate from the corruption of the Old. The relationship between the Old and New Worlds marks the culmination of the narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as the completely insane Blicero describes how the American colony has perfected colonialism's obsession with control and destruction. The New World has always already been part of the Old World, which Pynchon describes in terms of the European "impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death" (*GR*, 842). In Blicero's perception, shared by the narrator, the American empire of death finally brings its pernicious harvest back to Europe. Of course, Blicero's is not the authoritative voice in the narrative, yet the insight he articulates is enacted in the narrative through the complicated network of power relationships, relationships of domination and submission, that are acted out simultaneously on the historical, political, personal, and subconscious levels depicted in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Blicero's counterpart in *Mason & Dixon* is the mad Jesuit priest, Father Zarpazo, variously nicknamed "the Wolf of Jesus" and "the Lord of the Zero," who resembles other of Pynchon's

characters like Brock Vond in *Vineland* and Weissman/Blicero in *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Mason & Dixon* describes the development of Blicero's "death colonies" (GR, 842). If *Gravity's Rainbow* addresses the re-colonization of Europe by America, then *Mason & Dixon* represents that first colonial enterprise, the first transplantation of the European will to dominate to the New World. With great pathos, Pynchon shows that the protagonists of *Mason & Dixon*, those who draw the boundaries and erect the walls, come to understand too late the profound political significance of their efforts. The recognition that they cannot situate themselves outside the colonial system in which they work represents Mason and Dixon as part of the rule proven by the "exceptional" captivity of women like Eliza and Austra. Initially, Eliza mistakenly interprets her experience-as typical of a subject in exceptional America. She expects not only liberation but redemption, in the double meaning of the word. However, Eliza escapes the narrative digression of "The Captive's Tale" only to find herself in another narrative. There is no escape. There can be no escape. Where there is no meaningful distinction between inside and outside, escape is impossible.<sup>20</sup>

### **Conclusion: Captivity Without Redemption**

All of Pynchon's novels are characterized by a political context that is defined by the proximity of a crisis that has not yet happened – like the Fashoda Crisis in *V* – or is defined by the emerging consequences of a crisis that has just happened – like the closing stages of World War Two in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In both cases, and in *Mason & Dixon*, the reader is anachronistically placed in a position of knowing the historical outcomes of these crises. The Revolutionary War functions in much the same way in *Mason & Dixon*, where power relations are shifting and changing but have not yet crystallized. These three examples – the Fashoda Crisis, World War Two, and the American Revolution – are all presented by Pynchon as moments of change in the nature of the global imperial project. It is the global yet deterritorialized nature of Empire that gives rise to paranoid suspicions and conspiracy theories. The narrative points to, but never makes conclusive, a conspiracy between the Royal Society and the British East India Company to obtain ownership of astronomical data that will assist the development of trade routes. The election of Nevil Maskelyne (brother-in-law of Clive of India) to the position of the Astronomer Royal, rather than the assistant to the previous incumbent, James Bradley, and his more obvious successor, Charles Mason, brings this conspiracy and other paranoid suspicions to bear upon the characters' deepest motivations. Who is making the decisions that move the surveyors across the world like pawns across a chess board? Who possesses this transnational sovereignty? As readers, we share these questions with the characters.

The logical connections among the characters and the narrative episodes depend upon a paranoid point of view.<sup>21</sup> The incommensurable signs and significances of allegorical expression point to the absence of the desired viewpoint that would offer a privileged because transcendent perspective. In the absence of such a point of view, paranoia offers the most effective means of creating networks of meaning. For example, the sequence of events leading to Mason and Dixon's arrival in the Cape Colony, rather than Sumatra, to observe the Transit of Venus, lends credence to their growing suspicion that they were deliberately kept from Sumatra. Dixon speculates that perhaps "we were never meant at all to go to Bencoolen,– someone needed a couple of Martyrs, and we inconveniently surviv'd...?" (44). The paranoid connection between the politics of the Royal Society, Mason and Dixon's employer, and the East India Company –

described by Dixon as the "Company which is ev'rywhere, and Ev'rything" (69) – is made through the person of Nevil Maskelyne. Maskelyne's relationship with Clive of India, the favor with which he is treated by the Royal Society, and his power to act as sometime patron of Charles Mason's work, all take on a sinister cast when, in an aside at the start of chapter 11, the primary narrator, Wicks Cherrycoke, remarks: "St. Helena was a part of the Tale that I miss'd, and along with it the Reverend Dr. Maskelyne, who has continued, even unto our Day, as Astronomer Royal, publishing his Almanack and doing his bit for global trade" (105, my emphasis).

As we attempt to make sense of the narrative we read, so the characters attempt to make sense of the events that befall them – this same relationship of homology characterizes the relationship between the protagonists and readers of all Pynchon's novels. And conspiracies certainly abound in the narrative: from the sexual intrigues concocted by Mme Vroom as she endeavors to drive Mason into a liaison with her slave Austra, through to the repressive paranoia expressed by the officers of the all-controlling Company. The sinister omniscience of "the Company" is effectively represented by the character of Police Agent Bonk. It is he who introduces Mason and Dixon to the colony, with the following warning:

From Guests of our community, our Hope is for no disruptions of any kind. As upon a ship at sea, we do things here in our own way, - we, the officers, and you, the passengers. What seems a solid Continent, stretching away Northward for thousands of miles, is in fact an Element with as little mercy as the Sea to our Backs, in which, to be immers'd is just as surely, and swiftly, to be lost, without hope of Salvation. As there is nowhere to escape to, easier to do as the Captain and Officers request, eh? (59)

He emphasizes the fact that there is no escape, no position "outside" the control of the Company. The sovereignty of the Company exceeds that of the colony, encompassing as it does the entire continent. The compulsion to control, which Bonk describes as the fundamental characteristic of the Company, is not separable from the desire for a providential viewpoint. To see all and to control all, in the manner of God who engineers the punitive typological experiences of exceptional Puritan women like Mary Rowlandson, is to possess the meaning of all events, all history. It is this kind of authority that the Company seeks but, ironically, as it systematically destroys all positions that might be "outside" itself so it destroys the possibility of occupying a privileged external space. While there is no definitive inside, so there is no absolute outside either. The agents of the Company, like the readers of Pynchon's novel, remain captive within the complex signs of conspiracy, unable to achieve the transcendent view that would bring all into a state of total meaning, unable to determine where the conspiratorial network of signs begins and ends.

Dixon remarks that all the places the surveyors have been sent by the Royal Society share in common the practice of slavery and from this he speculates that if their commission has served the interests of trade, and if trade is inseparable from slavery, then surely his work and Dixon's has served the trade in human commodities. The transnational network of relations that emerges most clearly from *Mason & Dixon* is the global trade in human flesh: from the transatlantic slave trade to the intercolonial trade in captive colonists. Pynchon's interpolated narrative "The Captive's Tale" draws attention to itself initially because of the radical disruption of the reader's assumptions concerning the ontology of the fiction. When Eliza Field flees her narrative and

rides into the frame narrative, she generalizes her experience from the marginal to the normative, from the exceptional to the rule. Through her narrative, enslavement is articulated as the rule of Empire; captivity is the condition of human experience. And so, like Eliza, who escapes from one form of captivity only to find herself imprisoned in another, we discover in this novel the complex strategies by which we are all placed within imperialistic networks of control and captivity from which there is little hope of redemption.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Here, and throughout the essay, I use the term colonialism to refer generally to a geopolitical extension of national sovereignty and specifically to the pre-Revolutionary period in US history and culture. Imperialism is the term I use to refer to deterritorialized structures of power and domination, including power over "domesticated" communities such as Native Americans; Empire refers to the contemporary globalized imperial order identified by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

<sup>2</sup>Olster discusses Pynchon's critique of American Exceptionalism in the context of the formation of the nation-state and particularly the issue of mapping.

<sup>3</sup>Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (2005) and also *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and the Bare Life*, trans. Werner Hamacher & David E. Wellbery (1998).

<sup>4</sup>"The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order. . . . the sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, legally places himself outside the law" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15).

<sup>5</sup>By referring here to "Empire" I am making reference to Hardt and Negri's analysis and critique of the new decentered and deterritorialized imperial order of globalization, which supplants earlier imperialist orders, in *Empire* (2000).

<sup>6</sup>Tabbi has shown persuasively how the categories of "inside" and "outside" are rendered impossible in contemporary fiction where, as in all information systems, the regulation of the system depends on the "re-entry" of data from environments that are not properly called "external" because the distinction upon which such a term would be based has been rendered meaningless.

<sup>7</sup>See the discussion of US constitutionalism and the role of the Founding Fathers in relation to the emergence of Empire in Hardt & Negri, 160-182.

<sup>8</sup>McHale's essay (in Malin & Horvath, 43-62) offers an insightful reading of Pynchon's use of the subjunctive mode in *Mason & Dixon*.

<sup>9</sup>See the Salisbury edition of Mrs. Rowlandson's narrative that includes Joseph Rowlandson's sermon.

<sup>10</sup>See the discussion of Native American responses to, and uses of, exceptionalist rhetoric in Madsen, 41-69.

<sup>11</sup>Gayatri Spivak's comments on allegorical expression are made in her 1972 essay, "Thoughts on the Principle of Allegory." The notion of the subaltern is developed most famously in her 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" but Spivak does not make the connection between marginal voices and the indeterminacy or doubleness of allegory.

<sup>12</sup>Duyfhuizen's important essay identifies "a strategy for reading Thomas Pynchon's postmodern text [*Gravity's Rainbow*]. This strategy rests on the formal element of the 'reader-trap': stylistic and thematic techniques that on the one hand court the conventional readerly

desire to construct an ordered world within the fictional space of the text, but that on closer examination reveal the fundamental uncertainty of postmodern textuality," para.1.

<sup>13</sup>Of course this fleeing nun, Eliza Field, is also reminiscent of television's Flying Nun, played by Sally Field, in the 1960s US sitcom of that name. Another instance of chronological anachronism is the "Learnèd English Dog," subsequently referred to in the narrative by the acronym "LED" which, to Pynchon's readers, is more likely to signify the "Light-Emitting Diodes" (LEDs) of our contemporary electronic appliances. Another is the response to Lord Lepton's comment about the Great Chain of Being: Captain Dasp suggests "it is not a straight vertical line at all. Perhaps it is a Helixxx [here he articulates a double x] ... wound about something" (417), which we may interpret anachronistically as the double helix of DNA. Two illuminating essays on Pynchon's use of anachronism are Hinds and Solomon.

<sup>14</sup>The authoritative account of Pynchon's treatment of ontology in relation to issues of epistemology and narrative language is McHale (1987).

<sup>15</sup>Burns's essay on Pynchon's use of the "parallactic method" proposes that "in *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon's temporal or historical coordinates are the mappable difference, measurable via his synchronization of the 1760s chartered alongside the 1990s. His readers thus will interpret history as a dialogue between the differences and the uncanny similarities of that time's 'angle' and their own. ... Pynchon recasts Mason and Dixon as implied historians, developing through the novel's language an oddly contemporary perspective from within the eighteenth-century perspective," para. 3. I am suggesting that the significance of Pynchon's use of doubleness includes but goes beyond the parallactic method.

<sup>16</sup>An engaging and learned historical account of Pynchon and the writing of history is found in Bové.

<sup>17</sup>Talty describes the kidnapping and enslavement of indentured children, some of whom were dyed black before they were sold on as slaves (56); Northern orphanages that sold white children as light-skinned black slaves; and white immigrants who, in one case, were sold by the boatload into Southern slavery (58). For an extensive historical account see Hoffman.

<sup>18</sup>This phrasing, "their proud fellowship in a Mobility that is to be," is reminiscent of Hardt and Negri's characterization of the "multitude" who hold the best hope against the contemporary global power structures of Empire: "Empire creates a greater potential for revolution than did the modern regimes of power because it presents us, alongside the machine of command, with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them" (393).

<sup>19</sup>Seed discusses this dimension of *Mason & Dixon* in "Mapping the Course of Empire in the New World" in Malin & Horvath, 84-99.

<sup>20</sup>See Hardt & Negri's discussion "There is No More Outside," 186-190.

<sup>21</sup>An early but nevertheless still relevant and informative discussion of Pynchon's use of paranoia is found in Sanders.

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