

LUKÁCSIAN AESTHETICS IN A POST-MODERN WORLD: UNDERSTANDING
THOMAS PYNCHON'S *MASON & DIXON* THROUGH THE LENS OF GEORG LUKÁCS'
THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

by

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Abstract

This thesis project seeks to reconcile the literary criticism of Marxist critic and advocate of literary realism Georg Lukács with the writing of postmodern author Thomas Pynchon in order to validate the continued relevance of Lukácsian aesthetics. Chapter 1 argues that Lukács' *The Historical Novel* is not only a valid lens with which to analyze Pynchon's own historical novel, *Mason & Dixon*, but that such analysis will yield valuable insight. Chapter 2 illustrates the aesthetic transition from the historical drama to the historical novel by using Lukács' ideas to explicate *The Courier's Tragedy*, a historical drama found within the pages of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. Chapter 3 applies Lukács' ideas on the "world-historical" figure and the "mediocre" hero of the classic historical novel to *Mason & Dixon*. Chapter 4 asserts that *Mason & Dixon* enables contemporary readers to experience the novel as what Lukács calls a "prehistory" to the present. This chapter also illustrates how the prehistory of *Mason & Dixon* anticipates Pynchon's nonfiction essay "A Journey into the Mind of Watts." Finally, this chapter demonstrates how Pynchon avoids the pitfall of modernization in *Mason & Dixon*, which Lukács defines as the dressing up of contemporary crises and psychology in a historical setting. Chapter 5 ties together the work of the previous four chapters and offers conclusions on both what Pynchon teaches us about Lukács, as well as what Lukács helps us to learn about Pynchon.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my wife Megan who has, with great grace and unimaginable patience, sacrificed her valuable time to enable me to make this thesis a reality.

CHAPTER 1 - Why Pynchon and Lukács?

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" to the 20th Party Congress on February 25th, 1956 ushered in an ideological crisis for the political Left. Khrushchev's thorough unmasking of Stalin's prodigious crimes against humanity committed during the purges of the 1930s and 40s forced many to reconsider their attitudes toward Soviet styled Marxism-Leninism. Despite the disclosure of the indefensible nature of Stalinism's ugly realities, some intellectuals in the West, such as former *New Masses* editor Mike Gold, remained faithful adherents to orthodox Marxism-Leninism. This shattering of the Soviet Union's image as a revolutionary paragon, however, caused a large number of others on the political Left to rethink traditional Marxist principles. As a result, the late 1950s and early 60s gave rise to the "New Left." The New Left committed itself to a more democratic implementation of socialist ideals while distancing itself from the heavy-handed and authoritarian brand of socialism which pervaded the Second World. In the course of establishing this distance, the intellectuals and ideals of the Old Left, especially among those with direct ties to Stalin, greatly fell out of favor. One such intellectual was Georg Lukács. Lukács lived and worked in Moscow at the time Stalin's crimes reached their murderous apex. His decision to remain in Moscow in the presence of the purges is interpreted by many as Lukács' tacit if not fearful approval for what was happening around him. Aside from the damage that the long shadow of Stalin wreaked on Lukács' reputation, his aesthetic theories soon became regarded by many as outmoded and ill-equipped to explain and account for art in the 20th Century. In Lukács' case, a close association with an evil dictator while espousing seemingly arcane notions of aesthetics should likely consign him to irrelevance. In the introduction to Lukács' *The Historical Novel*, contemporary

Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson summarizes these dual objections to the man: “Lukács incarnates a *moralizing* approach to literary and cultural texts that has become repugnant to many of us; and he is at the same time irredeemably tainted by his association with Stalinism...” (5). In my estimation, the emotional gravity of the latter weighs much more heavily on contemporary opinions of Lukács from within the New Left than do any perceived limitations to his aesthetics. As such, I believe Lukács’ work deserves a fresh look and must be judged exclusively on its own merits and explanatory power, unburdened by whatever moral culpability (however possibly damning) Lukács owns for Stalin’s purges. This analysis will demonstrate that not only are heretofore marginalized Lukácsian aesthetic lenses appropriate for apprehending contemporary fiction, but that real, positive knowledge is attainable through their use. To test this thesis, this project will employ specific Lukácsian lenses to evaluate the important historical fiction of postmodern writer Thomas Pynchon.

Thomas Pynchon has earned a reputation among literary critics as one of the most important postmodern American authors to emerge in the years following World War II. Pynchon gained notoriety in publishing seven critically acclaimed novels in addition to a variety of articles and essays over a 45 year career. Remarkably, his acclaim continues to thrive despite the fact that he leads an almost entirely reclusive existence. Though his career is approaching half a century in length, the public’s interaction with Pynchon has thus far been limited to the periodic publication of his novels, an occasional essay, and two recent cameo appearances on *The Simpsons*. His reclusiveness is neither random nor unjustified. Book critic Arthur Salm humorously notes of Pynchon that:

the man simply chooses not to be a public figure, an attitude that resonates on a frequency so out of phase with that of the prevailing culture that if Pynchon and Paris Hilton were ever to meet — the circumstances, I admit, are beyond imagining — the resulting matter/antimatter explosion would vaporize everything from here to Tau Ceti IV.

For Pynchon, a public persona is not only antithetical to his personal worldview, but also as a hindrance to his creativity. In all likelihood, Pynchon views an active engagement with his fame as threatening to his ability to roam freely and anonymously in the world he seeks to capture in his characteristic fractured postmodernist style.

Given Pynchon's unique style, it follows that certain modes of literary criticism mix about as poorly with his writing as fame does with the man. Lukácsian aesthetics would, upon initial inspection, seem to be this type of poor fit. Naturally, one could surmise a host of problems that would surface when pairing a literary critic (who is an avowed advocate of realism) with a postmodern author (who consistently conceals notions of typicality in a hazy pastiche of postmodern camouflage). Consider the disparate depictions of certain Enlightenment ideals offered by Pynchon and one of Lukács' favorite early 19th-century realist writers as evidence for this seeming ill-fit—one "typical" and one "anything but." Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, for example, embodies the proto-egalitarian values of the Enlightenment. Scott conveys this important Enlightenment-era theme through a remarkably fair and even handed treatment of his characters across spectrums of race, class, religion, and politics. Scott's progressive sensibilities are evident in Sir Edward Waverley's immersion in a variety of socio-economic spheres populated by soldiers, peasants, merchants, and even princes. Pynchon, on the

other hand, less subtly embraces Enlightenment attitudes in his 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon*. Like Scott, Pynchon depends on character depictions within *Mason & Dixon* to illustrate Enlightenment values. A sense of typicality is abandoned, however, when Pynchon conveys the promise of the Enlightenment through the erudite musings of a talking dog. This “Learnéd English Dog” articulates the great possibilities for human progress and scientific discovery that this historical moment offers in barking, “‘Tis the Age of Reason, rrrf?” (22). In this small example it is clear that the aesthetic attributes of a talking dog represent a firm challenge to Lukácsian notions of typicality. In light of this challenge, what makes Pynchon a suitable contemporary author on which to test Lukácsian aesthetics? The impetus behind this pairing, as it turns out, is their mutual interest in historical fiction.

Despite the aforementioned appearance of a decidedly ahistorical talking dog, critics universally consider Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* to be part of the historical novel genre. Exactly 60 years before Pynchon’s 1997 release of *Mason & Dixon*, Georg Lukács published *The Historical Novel*. In it, Lukács dedicates his most expansive piece of literary criticism to this same genre. To test the contemporary utility of Lukácsian aesthetics, this project will use *The Historical Novel* as the primary body of theory from which to analyze *Mason & Dixon*. This common interest of Pynchon and Lukács in historical fiction, while providing an initial spark to investigate the feasibility of the project, is not however sufficient to see it through to conclusion. First, Pynchon’s interest in historical fiction may be imposed by his status as a postmodern writer. Fredric Jameson notes with irony that a postmodern artist may owe his interest in history not to personal curiosity, but rather to aesthetic necessity: “[postmodern] producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture” (17-18, *Postmodernism*,

Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism). Additionally, Lukács' understanding of and hostility toward Modernism (and by logical extension, *postmodernists* such as Pynchon) must be properly accounted for. Accordingly, it is to a reconciliation of Lukács' aesthetics and Pynchon's work that I will dedicate the first chapter of this thesis project.

Throughout his career Georg Lukács established himself as a staunch defender of literary realism. This defense, as well as his critical assault on modernism (which he regarded as 'anti-realism') is most powerfully articulated in his essays, "Realism in the Balance" and "The Ideology of Modernism." Given both Lukács' affinity for realism and hostility toward modernism, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Lukács would be summarily dismissive of Pynchon's postmodern aesthetic form.¹ To be fair, the hostility between Lukács and the Modernist movement cuts both ways, even among Marxists. For example, Patricia Waugh recalls German playwright and committed Marxist Bertolt Brecht's "scornful dismissal of Lukacsian realism" which Brecht described as "a kind of Madame Tussaud's panopticon, filled with nothing but durable characters from Antigone to Nana and from Aeneas to Nekhlydov" (Waugh, 148). There is also, of course, fellow Marxist critic Ernst Bloch, who takes Lukács' narrow view of worthy artistic enterprises to task for its rejection of Expressionism:

[Lukács] resolutely rejects any attempt on the part of artists to shatter any image of the world, even that of capitalism. Any art which strives to exploit the *real* fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices,

¹ For the purpose of discussion I, perhaps unjustly, simplify postmodernism by referring to it as a "form" or "style," and not as a "cultural dominant" which Fredric Jameson compellingly argues is "a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features" (*Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 4). This simplification should not invalidate my discussion nor any conclusions which are subsequently derived.

appears in his eyes merely as a willful act of destruction. He thereby equates experiment in demolition with a condition of decadence. (*Aesthetics and Politics*, 22)

In Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, Lady Lepton's description of her bodice is one of many instances that embody the type of art that Bloch accuses Lukács of rejecting:

Indeed, 'tis but an ephemeral Surface, rising out of the Spaces that billow ambiguously below the waist, till above melting...here, into bare *décolletage*, producing an effect, do you mark, of someone trying to ascend into her natural undrap'd State, out of a Chrysalis spun of the same invisible Silk as the Social Web, kept from emerging into her true wing'd Self, —perhaps then to fly away, —by the gravity of her gown. (419)

Pynchon's prose in this passage has a smoky and dreamlike quality that is emblematic of *Mason & Dixon*'s postmodern style. The reader does not apprehend the essence of Lady Lepton's bodice via concrete, realistic description, but rather through an uneven absorption of Pynchon's flowing, yet fragmented details. Despite ostensible antagonism between Lukácsian realism and, in this example, Pynchon's postmodern form, a close reading of Lukács' books and essays reveal that Lukácsian critical theory is not utterly incompatible with portions of Pynchon's work. Indeed, Hegelian dialectics—the exploration of and search for the unity between apparent opposites—are central to Lukács' critical outlook. Jameson's introduction to *The Historical Novel* notes that “Lukács' book remains therefore a vital lesson for us in the dialectical unity of a criticism which, engaging the historical specificity of the past, never loses sight of its commitments and responsibilities in our own present” (4). Therefore, in the way that Jameson

argues *The Historical Novel* synthesizes temporal elements of past and present, this project seeks to reconcile the literary opposition of Lukácsian aesthetics and Pynchon's postmodern form—a Hegelian dialectical enterprise of which Lukács (despite his somewhat ironic position as the subject of one dialectical pole under consideration) would likely approve. A fruitful place to begin this exploration is on Lukács' end, specifically, in his arguments on literary style and technique.

In “The Ideology of Modernism,” Georg Lukács condemns modernist writers and critics for placing an unjustified premium on literary form and technique. Indeed, Lukács cautions that “an exclusive emphasis on formal matters can lead to serious misunderstanding of the character of an artist's work” (396). Lukács is not the lone Marxist critic to suggest that a subject must be viewed in a totality which considers its content as well as its historical, social, political, and economic contexts. Trotsky famously declared in his 1923 essay “The Social Roots and the Social Function of Literature” that “The methods of formal analysis are necessary, but insufficient.” Although a distinction exists in that Trotsky's essay focuses on the role form plays in performing *critical analysis* whereas Lukács is concerned with form as a *literary technique*, their arguments share an important premise. For both Lukács and Trotsky, the consideration of form is fine, so long as it is not to the exclusion of the other aforementioned contexts. Lukács articulates these ideas in a time when formal innovation came to dominate literature—Pound's imagist movement, Hemingway's sparse prose, and Joyce's “stream of consciousness” and come to mind. Lukács contrasts Joyce with Thomas Mann, as both writers employ the formal innovation of interior monologue. He does this to differentiate Mann, for whom form assists in the achievement of a particular artistic end, from Joyce, for whom form *is* the artistic end:

[W]ith Joyce the stream-of-consciousness technique is no mere stylistic device; it is itself the formative principle governing the narrative pattern and the presentation of character. Technique here is something absolute; it is part and parcel of the aesthetic ambition informing *Ulysses*. With Thomas Mann, on the other hand, the monologue interior is simply a technical device, allowing the author to explore aspects of Goethe's world which would not have been otherwise available. ("The Ideology of Modernism," 395)

This analysis conveys the opinion that formal literary or artistic innovations are not, in of themselves, anathema to Lukács. Instead, Lukács voices his concern that inordinate emphasis on these techniques, as seen in modernists, can become fetishes. So long as such innovations serve a greater purpose than themselves (such as helping characters apprehend the social, historical, and economic nuances of their realities), Lukács offers his approval. That Lukács is amenable to formal innovation under these circumstances creates an opening to possibly view Pynchon's writing through these theories, and thereby achieve the dialectical synthesis necessary to pair this realist critic and a postmodern writer.

This opening depends on the following: Pynchon's fractured postmodern style must be subordinate to and in service of themes and values Lukács deems important, and not simply developed for its own sake. Proving this requires us to penetrate the thick cloud of hazy pastiche on the exterior of Pynchon's work to find what Lukács calls "a deeper probing of the real world." (*Aesthetics and Politics*, 37). Thus we have discovered our first necessary precondition to applying the ideas of Gerog Lukács to Thomas Pynchon. We must demonstrate that Pynchon's work contains an underlying essence of reality beneath his fractured postmodern form; without

it, our dialectical pairing could conceivably suffer the same cataclysmic result as Arthur Salm's hypothetical Thomas Pynchon/Paris Hilton meeting.

Lukács' concern with the literary and artistic elements in Modernism extends beyond his questions regarding this movement's premium on form and technique. Indeed, Lukács is quite straightforward in articulating his overarching concern with the Modernist movement, something apparent in his decision to name his most influential essay, "The Ideology of Modernism." To Lukács, the "why" of Modernism—its purpose, motivation, etc.—constitutes its "ideology" and is just as important as the "what" is to understanding the movement. In short, he characterizes Modernism as an artistic response to what, in Lukács' estimation, are the alienating effects of the post-1848 era of monopoly capitalism. While Lukács sympathizes with this alienation insofar as it registers the loss of progressive impetus within bourgeois culture, the manner in which that feeling is rendered in Modernism and its resulting message give him pause. Lukács notes that for modernist writers, "Man...is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings." The historically specific phenomenon of alienation is projected as a timeless human condition. This is in sharp contrast to the great realist literary characters of history such as, "Achilles and Werther, Oedipus and Tom Jones, Antigone and Anna Karenina" whose "individual existence...cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment." He sees the main strength of these characters in the fact that their "human significance [and] their specific individuality cannot be separated from the context in which they were created" ("The Ideology of Modernism," 396-397). Lukács thus sees literature as providing a cognitive window through which to apprehend important social, economic, and historical realities, and finds that Realist literature provides this view with the highest degree of effectiveness. Rather than providing insight into a particular historical and social environment,

modernist literature tends to wall these things off. Accordingly, the story of Modernism—indeed, its “ideology”—is one of negation. It is a “negation of history,” a “negation of outward reality,” and ultimately, “the negation of art” (397, 400, 412). Lukács explains how a modernist typically approaches the first:

The negation of history takes two different forms in modernist literature. First, the hero is strictly confined within the limits of his own experience. There is not for him—and apparently not for his creator—any pre-existent reality beyond his own self, acting upon him or being acted upon by him. Second, the hero himself is without personal history. He is “thrown into the world” meaninglessly, unfathomably. He does not develop through contact with the world; he neither forms nor is formed by it. The only “development” in this literature is the gradual revelation of the human condition. (397)

Lukács’ explanation reveals what he sees as the grave flaws of the types of characters who populate modernist fiction. To him, they are *ahistoric*, *asocial*, and ultimately *areal*. They display a sense of perverse individuality unnaturally detached from history and their fellow human beings.

This conclusion brings us to our second precondition for a successful application of Lukács to Pynchon. The veil of Pynchon’s fractured form notwithstanding, Lukácsian aesthetics demand that his characters *must* maintain some identifiable connection with history, society, and each other. I argue that Pynchon does indeed establish these social-historical connections which Lukács deems critical throughout *Mason & Dixon*. Subsequent analysis will verify these connections as Pynchon immerses his characters in the genuine historical crises of the time:

Slavery in South Africa and North America; the deepening fissures of the institution of colonialism and its alienating effects; complex and often hostile relations with Native Americans; the inexorable approach of the American Revolution. Pynchon's Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon cannot retreat from the series of great crises that history sets before them, and instead must confront them together one by one.

Negation, as Lukács argues, can weaken or even completely overshadow a work's real social-historical connections as well as its underlying essence of reality. Pynchon's postmodern form means *Mason & Dixon* will inevitably contain some instances of negation which would ostensibly affect these areas. These cases of negation appear to take the form of anachronism—the invention of pizza, Dixon's trip to the espresso bar, a Jesuit conspiracy to destroy Feng Shui, or the appearance of a mechanical duck.² Additionally, the ahistoric lampooning of “world-historical individuals” like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin also constitutes a form of negation.³ Although these instances of negation provide somewhat of a goofy or off-beat mellowing to the otherwise incredibly serious historical crises of Mason and Dixon's time, they are clearly subordinate to these crises. As such, they in no way constitute a broader “ideology” that Lukács would summarily reject. Subordinate that these instances of negation may be, their presence in a postmodern writer's repertoire must be accounted for. Accordingly, I will largely defer to Fredric Jameson to help articulate why these instances of negation are not only expected for literature produced after 1848 but also inevitable.

² This apparent negation is accompanied by the charge of modernization—a historical novelist placing contemporary items, problems, psychology, etc in the clothes of history—a technique Lukács rejected. Chapter 4 discusses these instances in greater detail and demonstrates that what appears to be Pynchon's reference to something contemporary actually has firm grounding in the history of the Enlightenment. This practice gives readers a sense of “what was true then is true now” and compliments his construction of a prehistory in *Mason & Dixon* to our present moment.

³ Chapter 3 discusses in detail the unexpected manner in which Pynchon presents Washington and Franklin.

Fredric Jameson provides valuable insight which, while not undercutting the Marxist aesthetics of Lukács, offers important clarification to and expansion of his ideas. Jameson expresses some reservations about these critical methods in his chapter devoted to Lukács in *Marxism and Form*:

Lukács sets himself the task of exploring the conditions of possibility of precisely those works which have been able to “reflect” social reality in its most concrete historicity, in short, of accounting theoretically for the existence of what he will call the great realists, of Goethe and Scott, Balzac, Keller, Tolstoy. That he will shift, *more questionably*, from description to prescription and attack modern writers in the name of some a priori model of realism does not invalidate this starting point, where the word merely designates the empirical existence of a concrete body of works to be explored. (191, emphasis added)

While he contends that Lukács’ ideas on the modernist movement are open to question, Jameson remains careful to stipulate Lukács’ important theoretical contributions to aesthetic appraisals of realist writers. It is no secret that Lukács, like any other faithful adherent to Marx, commands a formidable understanding of history. Jameson’s criticism of Lukács’ approach to Modernism, however, emerges from what I judge to be his superior understanding of the historical nature of modernist and postmodernist culture.

Jameson is able to draw extensively on the Ernest Mandel’s periodization of capitalism to develop a corresponding periodization of art, literature, and culture at large. He recalls from Mandel that,

[T]here have been three fundamental moments in capitalism, each one marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage. These are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own, wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational, capital [Late Capitalism]... At any rate, it will also have been clear that my own cultural periodization of the stages of realism, modernism, and postmodernism is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel's tripartite scheme. (*Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 35-36)

These periods, according to Mandel, lasted roughly from 1700-1848, 1848-1960s, and the 1960s until the present. Jameson sees not only a general alignment with each cultural mode of production he pairs with its respective counterpart period in the history of capitalism, but in each case the latter's direct shaping of the former. Lukács of course understood the profound artistic changes which marked the 100 plus years following the middle of the 19th Century. His error, as Jameson demonstrates, is assuming these changes somehow constitute the voluntary expression of a particular ideology rooted in negation—hence, the central thesis of “The Ideology of Modernism.”

In contrast to Lukács' thesis, Jameson asserts that the ideology in "The Ideology of Modernism" isn't an ideology after all, but rather constitutes a necessary and inevitable outcome of a particular historical moment. He says,

This is perhaps the moment to comment on the rejection of modern art and of modernism in general which is implicit in this idea of Lukacs... It is both diagnosis and judgment: yet the whole dimension of judgment rests on an

ambiguity, for *it presupposes that the modernist writer has some personal choice in the matter, and that his fate is not sealed for him by the logic of his moment in history.* (*Marxism and Form*, 198, emphasis added)

The very title of Lukács' "The Ideology of Modernism," (especially the word "ideology") suggests that for him, Modernism contains strong undertones of a specific social or political agenda; that there must be some underlying political or ideological motivation which drives the production of modernist art. Contrary to Lukács' suggestion, these instances of negation present in Modernism are not, however, things that modernists *wanted* to say. Rather, as Jameson asserts, they are things that they *had* to say. Modernism, like realism before and postmodernism after, is a necessary and inevitable outcome of a particular historical moment. This fact is why Jameson finds Lukács' dogmatic embrace of realism to be problematic outside of its assigned economic and cultural mode of production. In contrast to Modernist art,

For the realistic mode of presentation, the possibility of narration itself, is present only in those moments of history in which human life can be apprehended in terms of concrete, individual confrontations and dramas, in which some basic general truth of life can be told through the vehicle of the individual story, the individual plot. *Yet such moments have become relatively rare in modern times.* (*Marxism and Form*, 200, emphasis added)

Jameson suggests that significant opportunities for aspiring realist writers have all but evaporated not on account of any specific artistic limitation, but because of the fractured and contradictory times in which we live. One might be tempted on the basis of this analysis to conclude prematurely that Lukácsian aesthetics are irrelevant for any non-realist work produced after

1848. What Jameson and other Marxist critics identify as limitations to Lukács, however, do not consign him to irrelevance. Tim Dayton notes that,

In a sense, Lukács' aesthetics appear arrested at the Greek stage in Hegel's schema, wherein content and form are seamlessly joined in a perfect adequacy to one another [and that] Lukács' historical schema posits an unsupportable homogeneity within historical epochs, rather than unevenness and disparity. These two points combine to explain to a great extent the conceptual limitations that make Lukács unable to treat modernist and/or avant-garde art in a complete fashion. (Dayton, "Problems of Marxist Aesthetics")

As I'm certain Dayton and Jameson would agree, "unable to treat modernist and/or avant-garde art in a complete fashion" is a distant cry from rendering Lukácsian aesthetics explanatorily powerless in approaching art and literature produced in the era of Modernism and beyond. The efforts of a critic applying Lukács to art outside the box of realist fiction can and does yield positive knowledge, so long as the critic understands the limitations to this particular lens.

I think an apt analogy to describe the progressive decline in the still significant explanatory yield of a Lukácsian approach to art produced after around 1848 occurs in geography (perhaps even more apt given Mason and Dixon's own geographic enterprises). Consider the Mercator projection of planet earth. This particular map's chief benefit lies in its constancy of linear scale in all directions around any point, thus making intersections of latitudinal and longitudinal lines rendered with perfect 90 degree angles on a flat sheet of paper. The projection shows its limitations in the distortion of large objects as the North and South poles are approached—this accounts for the abnormally large depictions of Greenland and

Antarctica. These distortions do not, however, unilaterally deplete all value from the map. Greenland and Antarctica remain readily identifiable, awkward distortions and all. The same can be said of Lukács' work when used to understand literature written after 1848. Despite the progressive increase in difficulty in applying his aesthetics to artists the further we get diachronically from 1848 (and well beyond when Modernism gives way to its Postmodern successor), these accompanying problems do not make calling on Lukács' ideas a fruitless exercise. Jameson himself maintains that Lukács' continued relevance is assured (his chapter in *Marxism and Form* is, after all, entitled "The Case for Georg Lukács"). Accordingly, the optimal approach involves an even appreciation of both the still-useful explanatory power of Georg Lukács as well as the theoretical gaps exposed by Marxist literary successors in Jameson, et al.

The previous analysis suggests that the theory of Georg Lukács and the work of Thomas Pynchon are not inherently and irreconcilably antagonistic to one another. To prove the suitability of applying Lukács to Pynchon in order to yield positive knowledge, the text of *Mason & Dixon* must demonstrate the following: 1) The novel must contain an underlying essence of reality beneath its pastiche postmodern form, 2) Pynchon's characters *must* maintain some tangible and identifiable connections with history, society, and each other, and 3) This underlying reality and these social-historical connections must be strong enough to offset any instances of negation in his work which would constitute the broader type of "ideology" to which Lukács would be stubbornly opposed. Additionally, this analysis should also suggest that a glove-like fit of *Mason & Dixon* to the concepts and principles Lukács outlines in *The Historical Novel* is neither expected nor possible. Elements of distortion are certain to emerge. Indeed, this seems particularly inevitable given Lukács' aforementioned regard for Sir Walter

Scott whom Lukács identifies as the pioneer of the modern historical novel. A cursory reading of *The Historical Novel* supports two ready conclusions: Scott is the standard by which Lukács prefers to judge subsequent historical novels, and this standard is accordingly one that few authors in the historic fiction genre are able or even inclined to attain. Thus if Pynchon, through *Mason & Dixon*, fails to achieve in totality the standard of the historical novel set by Lukács via the works of Scott, then he'll have good company: Lukács identifies other authors of realist historical fiction such as Alessandro Manzoni, James Fenimore Cooper, Alexander Pushkin, and Leo Tolstoy who, despite inarguable and lasting contributions to the historical fiction genre, still fail to fully embody the principles used with such efficacy by Scott. For example Lukács writes of Manzoni that “[d]espite all the human and historical authenticity, despite all the psychological depth which their author bestows upon them, Manzoni’s characters are unable to soar to those historically typical heights which mark the summits of Scott’s works” (71). In light of the failings of Manzoni and these other great authors to follow lockstep behind Scott, we can thus confidently apply Lukács’ criticism of the historical novel to a writer like Pynchon *without* the fear that inevitable misalignments between aspects of Lukács’ theory and some elements of *Mason & Dixon* will render the effort null. Accordingly, this project will faithfully analyze not only the areas of the historical novel where Lukács’ theories and Pynchon’s work agree, but also where they diverge.

CHAPTER 2 - The Historical Drama and *The Courier's Tragedy*

In charting the development of the historical novel, Georg Lukács gives careful attention to its important predecessor, the historical drama. Lukács' critical discussion concentrates on the interwoven relationship between these two subsets of the historical fiction genre—1) how the historical novel and the historical drama each bear important stylistic fingerprints from one another, and 2) how they each maintain essential differences in form and content. Lukács explains how the historical drama anticipates the historical novel while, at the same time, the latter continues to look back on the former:

[The] modern drama—including that of the Renaissance, even of Shakespeare—has from the outset certain stylistic tendencies which in the course of development take it evermore in the direction of the novel. And conversely, the dramatic element in the modern novel, particularly in Scott and Balzac, though arising primarily from the concrete historical and social needs of the time, is nevertheless by no means uninfluenced artistically by the preceding development of drama.

(90)

This relationship between historical drama and the historical novel, while interesting in its own right, would appear to have at best tangential relevance to Pynchon; it seems perhaps limited to illuminating contrasts between the generic form of the historical drama form and *Mason & Dixon's* structure as a historical novel (indeed one of these specific contrasts will occupy the near entirety of Chapter 3 of this project, which discusses the historical novel's use of the everyday "mediocre hero" as its main character versus the historical drama's dependence on the

“world historical individual” as its principal protagonist). Given that Lukács devotes a full quarter of *The Historical Novel* to offering important analysis of the historical drama, I would be remiss in failing to fully incorporate these critical insights into this project. Fortunately, Pynchon’s own experimentation with the form of historical drama provides this opportunity to apply Lukács’ ideas on the subject, albeit outside the context of *Mason & Dixon*.

Thomas Pynchon explores the dramatic sub-genre of historical fiction in his second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*. In *Lot 49*, Pynchon executes his own miniature historical drama by way of a “play within a play” technique. This device, used famously by Shakespeare in both *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*, enables the depiction of a Jacobean Revenge play called *The Courier’s Tragedy* within the framework of Oedipa Maas’s larger story. Given the important critical observations found in the portion of *The Historical Novel* which explicates the historical drama, as well as *The Courier’s Tragedy*’s status as one of Pynchon’s first, however brief, forays into historical fiction, I propose to deploy Lukács’ critical insights regarding the historical drama to conduct a formal analysis of *The Courier’s Tragedy*. This analysis will yield several important benefits. First, although Chapter 1 devotes significant space toward arguing the theoretical compatibility between Pynchon and Lukács, the practical consequences of this pair are heretofore unseen. Accordingly, *The Courier’s Tragedy* is a comparatively low-stakes testing ground for Lukács’ theories; at just 10 pages within what is already Pynchon’s shortest novel, *The Courier’s Tragedy* is but a small fraction of *Mason & Dixon*’s prodigious size. Second, an examination of the *The Courier’s Tragedy* allows for the intriguing possibility that the arc of Pynchon’s writing career partially mimics what Lukács identifies as a larger aesthetic transition from the historical drama to the historical novel. Lukács argues that the historical dramas of Shakespeare, which capture the emotions and raw human

conflict that accompanied the unraveling of feudalism, anticipate the historical novel epitomized in Scott. Similarly, Pynchon's brief experiment with his (excessively graphic) historical drama in *Lot 49* anticipates his own historical novel in *Mason & Dixon*.

Before examining *The Courier's Tragedy*, I will provide an overview of Lukács' core critical assertions about the historical drama. Lukács begins by contrasting epic and drama against the lyric. Unlike the lyric which seeks to convey human feelings and emotions, tragedy and epic “present the inner life of man only insofar as his feelings and thoughts manifest themselves in deeds and actions, in a visible interaction with objective, outer reality” (90). In further contrast, the successful rendering of tragedy and epic depends on the ability of these artistic forms to capture the totality of life. Totality has a *big* connotation, and its artistic portrayal instinctively seems impossible. Lukács concedes that “no literary character can contain the infinite and inexhaustible wealth of features and reactions to be found in life itself” (91). Because of this inherent limitation, he charges artists to create what is necessarily a “relative, incomplete image to appear life like itself, indeed in a more heightened, intense and alive form than in objective reality,” a task he describes as a “general paradox of art” (91-92). In summary, since a rote recording of life's myriad of details is impossible, dramatists must select from their available facts and observations. Once the dramatist selects what he believes to be a representative sample of historical experiences, he, through his artistic and creative process, condenses, magnifies and ultimately transforms this information into art. The final product impacts the viewer viscerally with an immediate, though subjective awareness of life's totality—this sense is felt despite the absence of the great majority of objective facts, observations, or experiences which the artist necessarily ignored during the creative process. These creations “owe their deep effect, their central and epoch-making importance in the entire cultural life of

mankind to their ability to arouse this feeling in the recipient. If they have been unable to do so, *they have completely failed*" (92, emphasis added). This, Lukács argues, is the *raison d'être* of epic and tragedy.

In addition to demonstrating *what* a dramatist must do achieve a sense of totality in his work, Lukács also explains *how* he accomplishes it. Of the life-details which an artist selects, he must ensure that the "essential features and all-important laws of life must appear in a new immediacy as the unique personal features and connections of concrete human beings and concrete situations" (92). Earlier I described the selective process which necessitates the artist's continuous need in his creative process to jettison facts and observations which would dilute the experience of immediate totality in the recipient. History itself aids in this process, because as Lukács notes, there are "a very limited number of men and human destinies [which can] arouse the feeling of the totality of life" (92). What separates these historical grains of gold—seeds of drama—from the far more voluminous chaff of life, is the presence of a great dramatic collision. Here Lukács defers to Hegel:

Dramatic action...rests essentially upon colliding actions, and the true unity can have its basis only in *total movement*. The collision, in accordance with whatever the particular circumstances, characters and aims, should turn out to conform so very much to the aims and characters, as to cancel out its contradiction. The solution must then be like the action itself, at once subjective and objective. (93)

In effect, history does a large part of the work for the dramatist, since important historical collisions are readily identifiable from more ordinary or mundane moments. Lukács cites Shakespeare's *King Lear* as the archetypical tragic drama which depends upon such a collision

which precipitates the disintegration of the feudal family. He sees the “relations of Lear and his daughters, Gloucester and his sons” as “extreme and—in their extremity—typical movements [which] form a completely closed system, the dialects of which exhaust all the possible human attitudes to the collision” (93-94). The isolation of this closed system is important to Lukács. He argues that any attempt to branch off of this system (whether in the form of additional characters, plot lines etc.) is “impossible...without committing a psychological and moral tautology” (94). Lukács opposes this type of tautology since any “superfluous” additions such as this compromise the immediacy of the experience of totality. He summarizes:

This psychological richness of the contending characters grouped around the collision, the exhaustive totality with which, complementing one another, they reflect all the possibilities of this collision, produces the “totality of movement” in the play. (94)

Lukács does concede that, while Shakespeare’s plays do contain a level of diversity which exceeds that of his Greek predecessors, this results from “the increasing objective, social-historical complexity of human relations, [thus] the structure of the collision in reality itself became more involved and manifold” (95). Despite this rise in complexity, Lukács notes that Shakespeare takes care to ensure that the resulting “diversity is reduced to what is typically necessary” while maintaining “principles of dramatic composition [that] are fundamentally the same as those of the Greeks” (95). Here, in addition to having a powerful influence on content, Lukács asserts the importance history in determining specific forms of drama.

Lukács acknowledges the impact social-historical forces have on specific eras in drama. He observes that: “It is certainly no accident that the great periods of tragedy coincide with the

great, world-historical changes in human society” (97). Just as the emergence of the Greek polis coincided with the tragedies written by Sophocles and Aeschylus, Shakespeare’s great work developed within “the second flowering of tragedy during the Renaissance” (97). Lukács observes that in the latter case “the world-historical collision between dying feudalism and the birth pangs of the final class society provides the preconditions in subject-matter and form for the resurgence of drama” (97). While history guides form and subject matter for a dramatist, it also has immeasurable effect on character choices.

Among historically influenced character choices, of particular importance is *how* the dramatist selects as his or her protagonist. History certainly does a good bit of the work filtering away situations (and thus candidates) unworthy to take the lead in a drama. Those remaining are often “world-historical” in nature. The “world-historical individual” is one who, in the course of his or her life, exercised unique power and influence at apex of, and in the subsequent resolution to, a great historical crisis. Recall Shakespeare’s *Lear*. Lear is a classic tragic “world-historical” figure in that, as a man with ostensible material power and influence, he futilely attempts to preserve these power structures when they are under assault from the overwhelming social-historical forces which accompanied the collapse of the feudal mode of production. Metaphorically, Lear would be better served trying to hold down a rocket launch with his bare hands. Hegel summarizes this type of figure: “These are the great human beings in history whose own particular purposes contain the substantial, which is the will of the world spirit. This content is their true power...” (103). The great human beings whom Hegel discusses are, in Lukács’ opinion, the optimal and indeed the only choice for a dramatic lead. He notes, “The ‘world-historical individual’ has a dramatic character. He is destined by life itself to be a hero, to be the central figure in drama” (104). These “world-historical” figures described by Lukács

often find themselves in recurring types of collisions. Identifying the nature of these collisions will assist in making structural conclusions about the historical drama.

The tragic collision, as Lukács argues, is essential to dramatists conveying the powerful, immediate sense of totality upon which the success of their art depends. Briefly, he asserts that via collision, the “dramatic form generalizes a typical fact of life and makes of it an intense experience” (99). Two artistic conventions assist the dramatist in the construction of these collisions. The first is what Lukács calls the “parting-of-the-ways in the lives of individuals and society” (100). This is Lukács’ way of describing how, in the course of a dramatic collision, the “world-historical” figure must make important decisions at certain moments. He is careful to qualify that “these decisions are not free in the sense of an idealist voluntarism, [and] that they do not represent human independence in a vacuum” but instead are made “within the historically given, necessarily prescribed framework of all human activity and as a result of the contradictory basis of all social and historical development...” (100). I again refer to *Lear*. The weight of Lear’s crown is doubtlessly increased by the same social-historical pressures which would eventually lead to the disintegration of the feudal order. These pressures compel Lear to prematurely relinquish power to his daughters Goneril and Regan, thereby initiating the collision that ends tragically. Shakespeare’s accompanying story of Gloucester, Edmund, and Edgar further illustrates the dubious nature of gaining and maintaining what is inherently unstable power in the late feudal period. This is what Lukács means when he says that decisions made by “world-historical” figures are not made in an atmosphere of freedom, but are rather coerced by the powerful social-historical forces of the age.

Lukács describes the second convention typical of great collisions in drama as the “calling to account” (101). The “calling to account” constitutes a “day of reckoning” in which the cumulative effect of a series of decisions reaches a climax—most frequently in a period of crisis. Lukács describes this effect in general terms:

Parties have gradually ceased to be real representatives of the class interest in whose defense they were founded, and have heaped failure upon failure in this respect without incurring any real consequences. Then “suddenly” there is a social crisis, and a party which yesterday was powerful is “suddenly” discredited and abandoned before the eyes of its previous supporters. History is full of such facts, and, obviously not only with regard to political parties in a narrow sense (101).

Lukács cites Sophocles’ *Oedipus* as an example of how the drama’s titular character, in swift fashion, is called to account for the series of decisions which lead to the drama’s tragic climax. In summary, Lukács argues that dramatists use the two chief conventions to express collision: “the parting-of-the-ways” and “calling to account.” These collisions, however, must happen *somewhere*, and Lukács is careful to account for this space.

Lukács keenly notes that a spatial requirement exists for each of these collisions to fully manifest itself. He observes that while “The driving forces of life are represented in drama only insofar as they lead to these central conflicts, insofar as they are motive forces of these actual collisions,” these forces are necessarily struggling over something spatial (107). It is irrelevant whether these struggles occur on a material or psychological plane—the point is that these struggles, these collisions, originate on and usually take place over some sort of shared “turf.”

Lukács explains: “Every action, every translation of a collision into deeds requires a certain common territory between the opponents, even if this “community” is one of sworn social enmity. Exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed may have this territory for their struggle” (113). Even if space, along with the aforementioned conventions of dramatic collisions, is satisfactorily employed, a drama’s success still hinges upon the effectiveness of its public character. Lukács explains simply that “The dramatic conflict must be experienced by spectators as something immediate, with no need of special explanation, otherwise it can have no effect” (129). To Lukács, a drama’s mass impact isn’t everything—it’s the only thing. Because of Lukács’ belief in the critical nature of drama’s ability to impart a totalizing experience to a mass audience, he asserts this necessity has profound influence on dramatic form and content:

The actual, immediate dependence of dramatic form on immediate mass impact has very deep consequences for its entire structure, for the organization of its whole content, in sharp contrast to the formal requirements of all large epic works which lack this *direct* connection with the multitude, this necessity of immediate impact upon the multitude. (130-131)

Lukács explains the long historical dormancies of drama as times when historical circumstances prevented dramatists from conveying a mass public impact: “Dramatic form stands or falls with the direct public character specific to it” even arguing that it may on occasion “disappear from life” (133-134). These disappearances tend to correspond with relatively “stable” periods of social-historical-economic orders, while the emergence of drama with a strong public character coincides with periods of change (the emergence of the polis in Greece or the decline of feudalism/emergence of capitalism in the Renaissance).

Let us briefly recap the main Lukácsian assertions regarding the historical drama that we will apply to *The Courier's Tragedy*. First, dramatists must use their artistic prowess to transform important yet objectively incomplete historical information into a subjectively complete experience of immediate totality for their audience. Their effectiveness as artists depends upon creating a closed system of intense collision; this framework avoids extraneous plot elements that Lukács cautions can lead to “psychological and moral tautology” (94). Second, while Lukács considers this immediate totality of a drama essential regardless of its period of composition, he acknowledges that the complexity in which dramatic elements interact and convey this totality varies according period. We will show the complexity of Pynchon’s drama exceeds that of Shakespeare in the way that the complexity of Shakespeare’s drama exceeds that of Sophocles. These varying degrees of complexity, however, do not invalidate the fundamental Lukácsian rules of drama. Third, the “world-historical individual” of manifest power and influence at a time of crisis is the necessary star of the drama. Dramatists principally employ two chief conventions to express collisions involving the “world-historical individual”—Lukács calls them “the parting-of-the-ways” and “calling to account.” These conventions which convey collisions must occur spatially on a shared or contested form of territory; this territory need not be physical, as an ideological plane (such as class) suffices. Lastly, the drama’s dependence on public character explains its cyclical emergence and dormancy. An understanding of these theoretical assertions enables us to move forward with a Lukácsian analysis of *The Courier's Tragedy*.

The first element of *The Courier's Tragedy* to view through the Lukácsian lens of the historical drama is Pynchon’s selection of historical material. Recall Lukács’ observation that the dramatist must forsake insignificant details of life or history to enable the magnification and

intensification of those details which will then facilitate the creation of the essential experience of totality. One's immediate impression of *The Courier's Tragedy* is that, despite its brevity, in it Pynchon bites off and presents a dizzying chunk of history. Absent a close reading of the text, the story appears to be torturously convoluted—the large number of characters and violent interactions whiz by the typical reader at a frantic and disorienting pace. The story's fast-paced complexity aside, its historical basis is still firmly rooted in the same crisis of feudal decay as Shakespeare's *King Lear* and other historical dramas of the period. Obviously, a reader's response to *The Courier's Tragedy* and just about any of Shakespeare's historical dramas will differ despite their roots in the same historical crisis. These different responses are a consequence of form; form, as we've discussed in Chapter 1, is itself largely a consequence of the period in which an artist lives. Accordingly, Shakespeare's historical dramas—composed during feudalism's decline and the “birth pangs” of capitalism—will have a significantly different look and feel than Pynchon's postmodern efforts in the era of Late Capitalism. Pynchon himself tries to emphasize these contrasts between the fictional author of *The Courier's Tragedy* and Shakespeare. Shortly after *The Courier's Tragedy* is performed, Oedipa Mass speaks to Randolph Driblette, who directed the play. He is exceptionally curt with her: “‘You came to talk about the play,’ he said. ‘Let me discourage you. It was written to entertain people. Like horror movies. It isn't literature, it doesn't mean anything. Wharfinger was no Shakespeare’” (*The Crying of Lot 49*, 60). Although Driblette's warning serves the greater plot purpose of attempting to dissuade Oedipa from uncovering the mystery of the Trystero and the W.A.S.T.E. system, it enables Pynchon to give a quiet nod to the differences between his postmodern vision of the historical drama and that of his predecessor Shakespeare. A full accounting and understanding of these differences greatly facilitates the use of Lukács' ideas on

The Courier's Tragedy. While the contrasts in form between a traditional dramatist like Shakespeare and the postmodernist Pynchon are obvious (the latter's *The Courier's Tragedy* appears to be at best a fragmented and incomplete summary of a Jacobean tragedy), the chief difference between the two centers on the nature of the conflicts or collisions that Pynchon includes for his play to provide the sense of intensity and totality Lukács deems critical.

Pynchon designs the ostensible central collision of *The Courier's Tragedy* around three characters. On one side of this collision is the Duke of Squamuglia, named Angelo, and his illegitimate son Pasquele. Together Angelo and Pasquele oppose Niccolo, the play's hero. Prior to the play Angelo poisoned Niccolo's father, his rival the Duke of Faggio—this enabled Angelo's illegitimate son Pasquale, who was growing up in the Faggio court, to take over as regent of Faggio. Niccolo, the rightful heir to the Faggio Dukedom, is forced to flee from the murderous intentions of Pasquele. He disguises himself and finds employment as a courier in Angelo's court. As Pynchon explains, "the real reason Niccolo is waiting around is of course to get a crack at the Duke" (50). This central conflict, however, can easily be lost among the convoluted weaving of the play's countless side stories. These include orgies, [Pasquele and Angelo each host one at one point in the play, (53,57)], incest [Angelo, who had been sleeping with his sister Francesca, plans to consolidate power by having her marry her own son Pasquele "the Faggian usurper," (53)], sadistic torture [Angelo forces a Cardinal who refuses to sanction this incestuous marriage to perform a deplorable mock rite of consecration. After Angelo has the Cardinal's big toe cut off, he "is made to hold it up like a Host and say, 'This is my body,'" (53)], and a large helping of death and destruction ["Every mode of violent death available to Renaissance Man, including a lye pit, land mines, a trained falcon with envenom'd talons, is employed. It plays, as Metzger remarked later, like a Road Runner cartoon in blank verse" (58)].

These numerous “side collisions” can mean two different things according to Lukács. The first, and less attractive option is that these conflicts constitute egregious “psychological and moral tautology” outside the central collision of Angelo, Pasquale, and Niccolo, thereby inhibiting the play’s ability to convey a sense of immediacy and “totality of movement” to the audience. The typical reader’s difficulty in immediately apprehending *The Courier’s Tragedy* would support this view. The other approach attributes these complexities in *The Courier’s Tragedy* to the era in which Pynchon wrote *The Crying of Lot 49*. Recall that Lukács acknowledges the increased level of diversity and complexity in Shakespeare’s work compared to his Greek predecessors, explaining that “the difference between the two is a historical one” (94). If, as Lukács argues, the complexity of drama is a function of history when comparing the drama of the Greeks and Shakespeare, would not history’s influence remain the unchanged when comparing Shakespeare to the hyper-complex Pynchon? The judgment as to whether Pynchon, Shakespeare, and the Greeks all share the same “principles of dramatic composition” must not be made on content or form, as history has great power to shape these (95). Pynchon’s true value in his brief foray into historical drama must be measured by effect—namely how well *The Courier’s Tragedy* appreciates “the necessity of immediate impact upon the multitude” (131).

The public effect of immediate totality conveyed by *The Courier’s Tragedy* determines the ultimate success of Pynchon’s fragmented intra-novel summary of a Jacobean tragedy. As asserted earlier, the public effect of *The Courier’s Tragedy* on the reader of *The Crying of Lot 49* is poor. The play’s public effect suffers from its aforementioned quixotic form and tautological plot strings. Rather than there being one central collision or “explosion” which resolves the dramatic tension, the reader is subjected to a series of miniature collisions which buzz past him like machine gun fire. As a result, the reader has little choice but to keep his head down and

hope to survive long enough to rejoin Oedipa on her quest. Thus, often lost alongside this sense of immediacy and totality is the central mystery of *The Courier's Tragedy*, which is that Angelo and Niccolo both die through the machinations of the Trystero⁴. While the play's easily missed riddle and dubious public effect generally constitute a failure of historical drama for the reader of *The Crying of Lot 49*, we must remember, however, that *The Courier's Tragedy* is really a "play within a story." Hence, we must not only account for the play's public character for the reader of *The Crying of Lot 49*, but also for Pynchon's fictional characters who watch the play take place in the novel. Recall Lukács' observation that "The dramatic conflict must be experienced by spectators as something immediate, with no need of special explanation, otherwise it can have no effect" (129). This experience of totality is in no way diminished by the time that has passed between a drama's composition and ultimate viewing. Lukács writes,

We have to experience a happening of long ago as if it is actually taking place in the present and has direct reference to us. If mere antiquarian interest, mere curiosity can ruin the effect of a historical novel, then the experience of mere prehistory will not evoke the immediate and sweeping impact of drama. Thus, while the essence of a collision must remain historically authentic, historical drama must bring out those features in men and their destinies which will make a spectator, separated by these events by centuries, feel himself a direct participant of them. (152)

⁴ As the play reaches its climax, Angelo sends Niccolo (his courier) to his enemy Gennaro with a letter containing a false offer of peace. Angelo then, learning Niccolo's true identity, dispatches the Trystero to kill him. The Trystero, after killing Niccolo, replaces the original letter with a forged one containing not only a reference to Niccolo's death, but also a "miraculously a long confession by Angelo of all his crimes, closing with the revelation of what happened to the Lost Guard of Faggio (57)." Gennaro is thus inspired to destroy Angelo (holed up in his castle having an orgy) and his city.

Lukács' analysis shows that contemporary audiences can experience the tragedy of *King Lear*, for example, with the same vibrant sense of totality as did the playgoers of Shakespeare's time. It then follows that Oedipa, despite not being a Jacobean-era playgoer herself, can and does experience *The Courier's Tragedy* as something immediate. She approaches Driblette after the play *precisely because* she feels that visceral sense of immediate totality as she watched the performance. This powerful connection between Oedipa and the play stems from her innate understanding of the Trystero and *The Courier's Tragedy* as a prehistory to the historical crisis of her own time—a crisis of alienation wrought upon individuals pushed to society's margins—the same ones whom the Trystero's W.A.S.T.E. system seeks to accommodate.⁵ As a result, we see a curious dialectic emerge with respect to the play's public character. While *The Courier's Tragedy* is ineffective in conveying a sense of immediacy and totality to the typical reader of *The Crying of Lot 49*, it strongly succeeds in providing the same to the novel's protagonist. Accordingly, Lukács' mandate that a drama requires a strong public character is satisfied, albeit on the intra-novel level. Pynchon's decision to evince a strong public character for *The Courier's Tragedy* only to his characters watching the play indicates a high level of complexity in his composition. This complexity emerges from Pynchon's efforts to describe a Jacobean tragedy within the powerful indigenous social, economic, and historical forces of Late Capitalism.⁶

⁵ Pynchon's effective use of the Lukácsian idea of *prehistory* within the framework of *The Courier's Tragedy* suggests his own awareness of the overarching relationship between the historical drama and the historical novel. To the degree that Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, as a historical novel, captures this sense of *prehistory* to contemporary readers will be discussed in Chapter 4.

⁶ Recall Jameson's observation that "[postmodern] producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture" (17-18, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*). In light of this, Pynchon's decisions to revisit and appropriately adjust the Jacobean revenge play to his purposes, (especially within a postmodern novel that freely samples from history, religion, politics, culture, etc.), are more easily understood.

The Courier's Tragedy, while displaying the pastiche content and form expected from a drama composed in the historical epoch of Late Capitalism, still ultimately aligns with Lukács' ideas on public character and diverse complexity. Lukács' ideas on the nature of collisions in historical dramas ("parting-of-the- ways" and "calling to account"), as well as the spatial requirement for these collisions, can be applied to *The Courier's Tragedy* conventionally if not anti-climactically. Angelo, Pasquale, and Niccolo are all "called to account" for their decisions when the play arrives at tragic resolution in their deaths. The space in which these collisions take place is in the geographic and structural power arenas of the Sqaumuglia and Faggio Dukedoms. While these Lukácsian tenets are applied to *The Courier's Tragedy* with little difficulty, his ideas on the problem of the "world-historical individual" requires deeper analysis.

Pynchon's *The Courier's Tragedy* dually achieves both the satisfaction of Lukács' theoretical requirements for the "world-historical" individual to have a leading role in a historical drama, while at the same time previewing the "world-historical individual's" role in the historical novel. Earlier I described Lukács' idea of a "world-historical individual," one whom, in the course of his or her life, exercises unique power and influence at the apex of, and subsequent resolution to, a great historical crisis. Angelo, Pasquale, and Niccolo all ostensibly meet this definition of a "world-historical individual." Each acts in a manner typically expected (at least as far as Pynchon goes) to confront the threat to their respective power structures precipitated by the historical crisis of feudal decay. Pynchon employs a plot device in his historical drama, however, which arguably anticipates the historical *novel*. Lukács argues that while in the historical drama the "world-historical individual" is the principal hero or protagonist, in the historical novel, he is necessarily a minor figure. Lukács credits Honore de Balzac with the following observation:

[I]n the classic historical novel, not only is the “world-historical individual” a minor figure, but in most cases he only ever appears when the action is nearing its climax. His appearance is prepared by a broad picture of the times, which allows us to perceive, re-experience and understand this specific character of his significance. (128)

If we view *The Courier's Tragedy* as an anticipation of the historical novel and look at it briefly in terms of the Lukácsian historical novel, who then is the “world-historical individual”? From this point of view, we can exclude the play's original “world-historical individuals” Angelo, Pasquale, and Niccolo, since all are present throughout the play's duration. The only one who meets the qualification of appearing “when the action is nearing its climax” isn't an individual, but a group. The Trystero, in its murder of Niccolo and his betrayal of Angelo, shapes the climactic resolution of *The Courier's Tragedy*. Hence, when *The Courier's Tragedy* is seen as a preview to the historical novel, only the anonymous members of the Trystero satisfies the Lukács/Balzac criteria as a “world-historical individual.” Recall Lukács writing in general terms that the “flowering of drama precedes the great development of the novel” while the “modern drama...has from the outset certain stylistic tendencies which in the course of development take it evermore in the direction of the novel” (90). Based on the aforementioned analysis, I believe Lukács' general thesis of the historical drama paving the way for the historical novel translates to the specific writing career of Thomas Pynchon.

In conclusion, Pynchon accurately recapitulates Lukács' sense of the general relationship between the historical drama and the historical novel in his own writing career as reflected in the specific relationship between *The Courier's Tragedy* and *Mason & Dixon*. The strikingly

uncanny parallels demonstrated between these two arcs raise what I believe to be some really intriguing questions: Did Pynchon plan these parallels on some level or are they merely coincidental? If these parallels were intentional, how much Lukács, (or other thinkers from the Western or Frankfurt traditions of Marxism) has Pynchon read? To what degree have these influences permeated not only *Mason & Dixon* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, but his other novels as well? Unfortunately, the reclusive Pynchon won't be available to answer these questions publicly in the foreseeable future, and as such, any conclusion derived regarding the specific relationship between Pynchon and the Western School remains therefore speculative in nature. Given, however, Pynchon's unrivaled ability to incorporate an enormous and diverse range of subjects into his work (including elements of culture, society, history, politics, literature, philosophy, religion, and economics), as well as Pynchon's seemingly innate grasp of concepts within *The Historical Novel*, it would be foolhardy to rule out the influence of Western Marxists on his writing. Despite the necessarily inconclusive nature of our aforementioned analysis, the preponderance of evidence suggests that Pynchon's influence from the Western Marxist tradition is more likely than not. This possibility lends new support for this project, which to paraphrase Jameson, is to make a case Georg Lukács. As we prepare to evaluate Lukács' theoretical assertions regarding role of the "world-historical individual" versus the "middle of the road hero" as they each appear in *Mason & Dixon*, it is worth pondering the non-insignificant possibility that Pynchon may owe a hidden debt of influence to Lukács as well as other important thinkers of the Western Marxist tradition.

CHAPTER 3 - Embrace Mediocrity and Flout Greatness—The Mediocre Heroes of *Mason & Dixon*

In the last chapter, our discussion of the theory of the historical drama covered Lukács' assertion as to what type of character must assume the dramatic lead, namely the "world-historical individual." The "world-historical" figure's role in the historical novel, however, has a significantly smaller scope. Recall that when viewing *The Courier's Tragedy* through the Lukácsian lens of the historical novel, the designated "world-historical individual," the Trystero, only emerges during the climactic resolution of the play's central collision. If the "world-historical individual" is eliminated as a candidate to be the main protagonist of a historical novel, what type of character must fill this role? Georg Lukács contends that the only logical choice for a historical novel's lead is the "mediocre" or "middle-of-the-road" hero. As such, the first area for analysis is as follows: If as Lukács proposes, the "middle-of-the-road" hero is of central importance to the historical novel, how well do the titular characters of *Mason & Dixon* fit that classification? I will argue that the evidence presented within *Mason & Dixon* consistently and conclusively demonstrates that the heroic duo exemplify Lukács' notion of the "mediocre" hero. This presentation of Mason and Dixon as "middle-of-the-road" heroes helps satisfy the dual Lukácsian mandate of having an underlying essence of reality in the novel, as well as having the characters maintain genuine connections with history, society, and each other. Additionally, I will address the problem of *Mason & Dixon*'s true "world-historical" figures—Benjamin Franklin and George Washington—deviating from Lukács' assertion that "world-historical individuals" only appear during the historical novel's climactic resolution. While we will

demonstrate that the curious depictions of Washington and Franklin constitute a form of negation that must be addressed, this negation is of secondary importance. Pynchon primarily introduces Washington and Franklin to falsely signal a climax in his historical novel that he knows isn't coming. Through this stylistic device, Pynchon demonstrates awareness of and indeed relies on Lukács' theory of the historical novel. Although he does not follow Lukács' formula exactly, Pynchon clearly uses it to create the type of "red herring" that famously vexes his readers and critics alike.

To determine the extent that Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon meet the criteria of the "middle-of-the-road" hero, it is essential to know what the phrase means to Lukács. Rather than give an outright definition of the term, Lukács believes that the best way to illustrate the concept of the "middle-of-the-road-hero" is to provide concrete examples of characters from literature that embody it. The first example given by Lukács is Nathaniel Bumppo, the hero of James Fenimore Cooper's novels. Lukács describes Bumppo as an "illiterate, simple English huntsman" who seeks a new life in the colonization of America (64). Lukács describes Bumppo:

a plain man of the people, an Englishmen [*sic*] of puritan outlook, [who] is deeply attracted to the simple, human nobility of the Indians and enters into an inseparable human bond with the survivors of the Delawares...his moral attitude on the whole remains that of a European, but his uncurbed love of freedom, his attraction to a simple, human life bring him closer to these Indians than to the European colonizers with whom he belongs in objective social terms. (65)

The commonality and outright plainness of Bumppo singles him out in Lukács' mind as the archetypal "middle-of-the-road" hero. He is distinguished by neither his education nor his

class, but rather by his small presence within geopolitical, economic, and world-historical forces vastly larger than himself. Bumppo thus experiences, in an intimate way, these forces which inexorably portend ever expanding Euro-colonial power and influence in the New World. The tragedy and irony of Bumppo's situation is not lost on Lukács; that is, the freedom that Bumppo seeks in emigrating from England to America is destroyed by his actions and the actions of others like him. Lukács quotes socialist-realist pioneer and Russian/Soviet author Maxim Gorky in his assessment of Bumppo:

As an explorer of the forests and prairies of the “New World” he blazes new trails in them for people who later condemn him as a criminal because he has infringed their mercenary and, to his sense of freedom, unintelligible laws. All his life he has unconsciously served the great cause of the geographical expansion of material culture in a country of uncivilized people and—found himself incapable of living in the conditions of this culture for which he had struck the first paths.

(65)

Restating Gorky's assessment of Bumppo, Lukács declares that a “world-historical tragedy could be portrayed through the destiny of a mediocre man of the people.” A hero's personal mediocrity is not, in itself however, a sufficient foundation for an effective historical novel; an author must first make appropriate diachronic considerations for the story. Accordingly, Lukács lauds Cooper for his deft consideration of the time period in which he sets his characters. Lukács observes that the artistic rendering of a tragedy such as Bumppo's increases in power if set in a time period “where the immediate economic contrasts and the moral ones arising from them

grow organically out of everyday problems” (65). Cooper’s successful incorporation of characters and historical epoch thus solidifies his legacy within the historical fiction genre.

Lukács continues his discussion in acknowledging another author who employs in his work the “middle-of-the-road” hero used with great effect in the historical novels of Cooper. He identifies Alexander Pushkin, writer of the historical novel *The Captain’s Daughter* and the novel fragment *The Negro of Peter the Great*, as building upon the some of the same principles as Scott and Cooper. Lukács writes that in his work,

Pushkin also follows Scott in introducing his “middle-of-the-road” heroes into great human conflicts during a historical crisis, and in imposing exceptional tests and conditions beyond their previous averageness, in order to bring out the true and humanly genuine qualities in them and in the people. (72)

Lukács again stresses, in the example of Pushkin, how historical circumstances fundamentally and ultimately decide the destinies of otherwise average characters, while providing additional evidence that the author’s diachronic considerations buttress the significance of Pushkin’s historical fiction. With Lukács’ ideas about the “middle-of-the-road” hero in mind, we are now able to explore how well they apply to *Mason & Dixon*’s titular heroes.

At first glance the historical figures Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon seem to be a dubious choice to assume the lead roles of historical fiction, which Lukács argues best belong to average “middle-of-the-road” characters. There are indeed some readily identifiable contrasts between the pair and the other mediocre heroes which populate the historical novels of Scott and Cooper. In comparing Pynchon’s Mason and Dixon to Cooper’s Bumppo these differences are easily seen; among the most apparent are class and education levels. Recall Lukács’ description

of Bumppo as an early colonial “illiterate, simple huntsman.” Bumppo stands in contrast to Mason and Dixon, who despite lack of conspicuous wealth, are educated (education an obvious prerequisite to the respective professions of Astronomy and Surveying), well traveled (Great Britain, Cape Town, Saint Helena, and British colonies in North America), and somewhat famous (on account of surveying the Pennsylvania-Maryland-Delaware border which continues to bear their names). I believe Pynchon understands how these genuine historical considerations make the “real” Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon initially appear to be anything but “average.” Pynchon, however, takes great pains to emphasize the average, mediocre, and fundamentally “middle-of-the-road” aspects of the two in a way that would dampen their extraordinary qualities. This “dressing down” of Mason and Dixon demonstrates that Pynchon strongly embraces Lukács’ idea that historical novels are optimally populated by average protagonists. This fact again raises the question first posed near the conclusion of Chapter 2: Given Pynchon’s stout determination to make his heroes appear average and ordinary, how much has *The Historical Novel* influenced his artistic decisions? Knowingly or unknowingly following Lukács’ formula, Pynchon continually accentuates the mediocre and unremarkable characteristics of Mason and Dixon. Pynchon’s desire to portray his heroes in a typical and unassuming light is apparent from the novel’s onset in his choosing of the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke as the story’s narrator.

Mason and Dixon maintain an iridescent historical gloss which has for centuries illuminated the minds of readers as a result of generations of history text-books. Pynchon’s savvy selection of Reverend (anachronistically abbreviated Rev^d) Cherrycoke as the unofficial keeper of oral history concerning all matters relating to the surveyors, however, serves as his first indication that he intends to grind down the extraordinary (and decidedly un-average) veneer of

historical stature built up around the two. In doing so, Pynchon makes the real, human qualities of the two accessible to his readers in a way that conventional history, learned from the sterile pages of textbook, cannot. He soon reveals that Rev^d Cherrycoke's primary motivation in telling the story is self-serving. Pynchon writes that,

[Cherrycoke] has linger'd as a Guest in the Home of his sister Elizabeth, the Wife, for many years, of Mr. J. Wade LeSpark, a respected Merchant active in Town Affairs, whilst in his home yet Sultan enough to convey to the Rev^d, tho' without ever so stipulating, that, for as long as he can keep the children amus'd, he may remain,— too much evidence of Juvenile Rampage at the wrong moment, however, and Boppo! 'twill be Out the Door with him, where waits the Winter's Block and Blade. (6)

Barely two pages into the novel Pynchon gives the reader ample reason to question the reliability of his narrator. The breakdown of Cherrycoke's reliability as a narrator anticipates Pynchon's intended erosion of the gloss which coated the real-life historical figures of Mason and Dixon. Essentially, Cherrycoke must tailor his narrative in order to produce a palatable story for his nephews Pliny and Pitt, as well as for the rest of the LeSpark household. Cherrycoke's shaping of the narrative consists of relating the adventures of Mason and Dixon from an average, everyman perspective, thus making them more accessible to both his family and to the reader. This intended accessibility is apparent in Cherrycoke's description of Dixon:

Dixon is a couple of inches taller, sloping more than towering, wearing a red coat of military cut, with brocade and silver buttons, and a matching red three-corner'd Hat with some gaudy North-Road Cockade stuck in it. He will be the first to

catch the average Eye, often causing future strangers to remember them as Dixon and Mason. But the Uniform accords with neither his Quaker Profession, nor his present Bearing,— a civilian Slouch grown lop-sided, too often observ'd, alas, in Devotees of the Taproom. (16)

In the first part of the description Pynchon gives the reader an impressive sense of Dixon not unlike what they would imagine from history books. He is quick, however, to qualify this illustration by stating that this appearance deceives the essence of Dixon's otherwise Quaker sensibilities, poor posture, and penchant for drinking beer among common, everyday folks. Pynchon thus demonstrates that the reality of Dixon's nature cannot be apprehended simply through considering visual clues alone. In situations such as Dixon's, Lukács provides insight as to why evaluating appearance is an inadequate means to fully apprehend reality. In his essay "Realism in the Balance," Lukács writes that, "the crux of the matter is to understand the correct dialectical unity of appearance and essence. What matters is that the slice of life shaped and depicted by the artist and re-experienced by the reader should reveal the relations between appearance and essence without the need for any external commentary" (34). We can see now that, in just a few sentences, Pynchon stunningly achieves this dialectical unity with Dixon. The arresting yet illusory appearance of Dixon derived from history books is supplanted by a true everyman, whose "middle-of-the-road" essence is decidedly at odds with the former—an essence well suited for the role of hero in Pynchon's historical novel.

Pynchon also takes care to humanize Dixon's partner Mason by casting him in a similar "middle-of-the-road" light. Mason laments the passing of his first wife Rebekah throughout the novel yet struggles to present an appearance which diminishes the seriousness of

this pain. A moment during the pair's voyage to Cape Town upon *The Seahorse* reveals the inner grief with which Mason wrestles:

[The Captain] find[s] Mason busy at the same Arts, morose and silent, beetle-back'd against the Wind, keeping Vigil all day and night of 13 February, the second Anniversary of his Wife Rebekah's passing, touching neither Food nor Drink,— with no one upon the Ship, including Capt. Grant, willing to approach too near, — till the final eight Bells, when Mason reaches for a Loaf and a Bottle and becomes upon the instant convivial as anyone has ever seen him. (52)

Mason's shipmates would doubtlessly recognize his happy appearance following this episode to be at best, fleeting, and at worst, an outright false cover of his inner and essential melancholy. Pynchon insists on imbuing Mason with this type of core sadness in order to affirm his humanity and, perhaps more importantly, his "middle-of-the-road" commonality. In sum, even though the dialectical unity of essence and appearance proves relatively easy to identify in Mason (as mentioned the other characters would have little problem making this resolution), it is no way less powerful than the less obvious dialectical resolution required of Dixon. In an observation that applies neatly to both Mason and Dixon, Lukács writes that the "middle-of-the-road" heroes' "relative lack of contour to their personalities, the absence of passions which would cause them to take up major, decisive, one-sided positions, their contact with each of the contending hostile camps etc. make them specially suited, to express adequately, in their own destinies, the complex ramification of events in a novel" (128). Lukács would thus agree that the essences of both Mason's painful struggle with loss, along with Dixon's carefree approaches to both posture and free-flowing beer, together provide Pynchon the precise average "middle-of-the-road" characters

he needs to build his historical novel. Additionally, the dialectical unity of essence and appearance in *Mason and Dixon* allows us to fully apprehend the reality of their characters. Lukács demands that good historical fiction maintains an underlying reality; Pynchon provides it to us by way of this dialectical unity of essence and appearance in his main characters.

Beyond conveying the average and ordinary nature of *Mason & Dixon*'s titular characters through offering glimpses into their personalities, Pynchon reinforces their everyday status with carefully calculated and well placed vignettes of the two en route to their culminating survey of the Pennsylvania/Maryland/Delaware borders. These wide-ranging revelations facilitate the erosion of any remaining surplus historical stature of Mason and Dixon, including Mason's fruitless flirtations with the town coquette at the hanging of Lord Ferrers (111), Mason's receipt of a horoscope from astronomy mentor Nevil Maskeylyne (138-139), the pair's observation of high stakes gambling by Soldiers on the Wind (159), Mason and Dixon's unexpected fist fight (315), and Dixon's partaking of "arguably the first British pizza"—an ad hoc concoction of a risen loaf, *Ketjap*, leftover cheese, and pickled anchovies (234-237). Mason himself reflects on his current station in life and his undistinguished origins. He muses to Dixon,

Someday, someone will ask, How did a baker's son get to be Assistant to the Astronomer Royal? How'd a Geordie Land-Surveyor get to be his Second on the most coveted Star-gazing Assignment of the Century? Happen 'twas my looks...? Thy charm...? Or are we being us'd, by Forces invisible even to thy Invisible College? (73)

Mason demonstrates an awareness of just how ordinary he and Dixon are. Further, he astutely understands that there are forces at work shaping his destiny that are much larger than he. Later

in the novel, while completing his survey work in America, Mason recognizes the pressure of these forces:

“Why *am* I doing this?” Mason inquires aloud of no one in particular, “-Damme, that is an intriguing Question. I mean, I suppose I could say it’s for the Money, or to Advance our Knowledge of,—” “Eeh, — regard thaself, thou’*re reacting*,” says Dixon. “Just what Friend Cresap here said not to do, — thou’*re doing it...?*”
(642)

Lukács would quickly recognize that these same geopolitical, economic and world-historical forces which initiated the tragic alienation of Cooper’s Bumppo are now accomplishing the same in the form of a passive and reactive posture of Mason. Indeed, at the conclusion of *Mason & Dixon*, the two heroes find themselves in a situation not unlike that of Bumppo. Recall Gorky’s observation that Bumppo “found himself incapable of living in the conditions of this culture for which he had struck the first paths.” The corresponding alienation of Mason and Dixon is strikingly similar. When the time arrives for their retirement, Pynchon explains a restlessness that can only be attributed to this disaffection. He writes that “[b]etwixt themselves, neither feels British enough anymore, nor quite American, for either side of the Ocean. They are content to reside like Ferrymen or Bridge-keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless Spectacle of Transition” (713). The social-historical connections of Mason and Dixon are thus clearly present for both characters, as each suffers considerably on their account. There is further evidence that each man is unsuited and indeed repulsed by the world he helped bring into being, as both men unknowingly created a line that helped to geographically institutionalize slavery. Dixon laments,

Didn't we take the King's money, as here we're taking it again? Whilst Slaves waited upon us, and we neither one objected, as little as we have here, in certain houses south of the Line,— Where does it end? No matter where in it we go, shall we find all the World Tyrants and Slaves? America is the one place we should *not* have found them. (693)

The collision of Mason and Dixon with the institution of slavery—which in Chapter 4 I argue constitutes Pynchon's construction of a prehistory to contemporary problems of race—is wrought with tragic undertones. Accordingly, Gorky's sobering assessment of Bumppo now fully applies to Pynchon's heroes: The “world-historical tragedy” of Mason and Dixon unravels for each as “the destiny of a mediocre man of the people” (65).

Both the personalities and exploits of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon demonstrate their suitability as “middle-of-the-road” heroes. Lukács postulates that since the adventures of a “middle-of-the-road” hero constitute the bulk of a historical novel, then a historically significant figure will necessarily be relegated to a minor role. He explains this phenomenon:

The great historical figure, as a minor character, is able to live himself out to the full as a human being, to display freely all his splendid and petty human qualities. However, his place in the action is such that he can only act and express himself in situations of historical importance. He achieves here a many-sided and full expression of his personality, but only insofar as it is linked with the big events of history. (45)

The great historical figure must thus, according to Lukács, only emerge during certain key moments of the narrative. This intentional limitation of the “world-historical individual's”

exposure therefore avoids his placement in typical or mundane situations which inevitably dulls his great historical luster. Lukács cites Otto Ludwig's praise of Scott's Rob Roy as illustrating the ideal placement of a great historical figure within a historical novel. Ludwig writes that "[h]e can appear all the more significant, because we do not follow his life step by step; we see him only at moments when he is *significant*; he surprises us by his omnipresence, he reveals himself only in the most interesting attitudes." The historical novel's message or "portrait of the age," which is primarily addressed through the lives of the dominant middling characters, becomes crystallized through short and sporadic yet unfailingly intense appearances of these great historical figures (128). Recall Lukács crediting Honoré de Balzac for observing that the brief appearances of a historically significant figure, "...allows us to perceive, re-experience and understand the specific character of his significance." While Lukács' idea of the "middle-of-the-road" hero applies demonstrably and convincingly in *Mason & Dixon*, his rules concerning the "world-historical individual," while explicating certain parts of the novel with precision, do not apply quite as seamlessly.

Several "world-historical individuals" appear throughout *Mason & Dixon*. They include famed astronomer Nevil Maskelyne, "eminent Philadelphian" Benjamin Franklin, and future Commander in Chief of the Continental Army and eventual first President of the United States George Washington (266). As towering figures of the American Revolution, the characters of Franklin and Washington are most readily identified as "world-historical individuals" in *Mason & Dixon* and will thus together occupy the majority of my discussion on the subject. Lukács' mandate that the great historical figure appear in brief and sporadic episodes throughout the historical novel applies well to both Franklin and Washington. Mason and Dixon first encounter Franklin in the back alleys of Philadelphia "quite by chance" (266). The little group soon finds

its way to a pub where Franklin leads toasts, introduces Mason and Dixon to two of his “students,” Molly and Dolly, and extols the virtues of Ben’s Universal Balm (266-271). This meeting of Benjamin Franklin with Mason and Dixon is notable, however, for what fails to happen. Franklin fails to meet Lukács’ directive that, within the historical novel, the world-historical figure appears ideally at a moment of crisis or climax. Indeed, the closest Franklin comes to appearing at such a moment happens when he foreshadows the crisis that will manifest itself in the American Revolution. Franklin wryly observes that,

Alas, the British,— bloody-minded to the end, so long as it be somebody else’s Blood. Thus the Board of Trade, thus the House of Commons.... Up there, day after day, instructing them, gently,— a Schoolmaster for Idiots.— Sooner or later, no offense, Gentlemen, Americans must fight them.... (271)

Franklin’s appearance thus serves to compliment Mason and Dixon’s workman-like illustration of the “portrait of the age” without, however, the sort of high-impact crystallization at a climactic moment that Lukács’ expects his great historical figure to provide.

Mason and Dixon’s meeting with George Washington is similarly bereft of such outstanding moments. Pynchon’s first indication that no “blockbuster” moment awaits Mason and Dixon during their introduction to George Washington is found in Pynchon’s selection of Washington’s title of address. Pynchon introduces him as “Col^o Washington,” a reminder of the rank he held during his service in the French and Indian War. In doing so, Pynchon reminds his readers that Washington’s eventual roles as “Commander in Chief of the Continental Army” as well as “First President of the United States” still remain off in the future. Like Franklin, the

closest Washington comes to appearing at a moment of great historical crisis happens during his own anticipation of the Revolutionary War:

Think ye, there will be any third Coercion? At what cost, pray? Americans will fight Indians whenever they please, which is whenever they can,— and Brits wherever they must, for we will be no more contain'd, than tax'd. The Grenville Ministry ignores these *Data*, at their Peril. (277)

Throughout the rest of their encounter with Washington, Pynchon reprises the often bizarre nature of Mason and Dixon's antecedent meeting with Franklin. Though serious moments of discussion occur relating to Mason and Dixon's future survey work, the conversation takes an utterly unforeseen itinerary including stops discussing the political expediency of Deism, buried electrical plates of magical qualities, and the morality of Washington's Jewish slave Gershom breaking prescribed kosher practices in order to prepare his guests some Hog Jowls—all while smoking “a Bowl of the new-cured Hemp” and fighting their expected hunger with Mrs. Washington's “Tarts, Popovers, Ginger-bread Figures, fried Pies, stuff'd Doughnuts, and other Units of Refresh-ment the Surveyors fail to recognize” (278-280, 286). The unorthodox nature of the respective meetings that Mason and Dixon have with Franklin and Washington suggests that Pynchon partially inverts Lukács' ideas on the role of the “world-historical individual” within the historical novel. This inversion constitutes an instance of negation which, as an ostensible threat to the novel's underlying reality as well as the real social-historical connections of both Mason and Dixon, must be accounted for.

In Chapter 1, I noted that while instances of negation in *Mason & Dixon* appeared to be anachronistic in nature (the invention of pizza or the appearance of a mechanical duck), that

elements of negation also surface in Pynchon's ahistoric depictions of Washington and Franklin. The question, thus, is how seriously the negation from Washington and Franklin's characters compromise *Mason & Dixon*'s underlying reality and social-historical connections? My conclusion is "not much." There are three reasons for the minimal effect of negation on the novel. First, as "world-historical individuals," Franklin and Washington appear in *Mason & Dixon* briefly and episodically. Even in stipulating what is debatably a powerful effect of negation in their characters, they're simply not around enough to seriously threaten the novel's underlying essence of reality and social-historical connections. The second critical reason that this negation is largely benign is due to Pynchon firmly grounding the novel's underlying essence of reality and social-historical connections of his protagonists in the genuine historical crises of the period. These crises include slavery, atrocities against Native Americans, and other dark consequences of colonialism. It is for this reason that, while we can laugh as Mason and Dixon smoke marijuana and gorge on pastries with George Washington, we still recoil with no less horror at the novel's gut-wrenching depictions of these crises.

Pynchon's overarching artistic aim of *Mason & Dixon* stands as the third and final reason the negation resulting from his unconventional depictions of Washington and Franklin is merely incidental and ultimately of little consequence. Evaluating this aim alongside Pynchon's stylistic tendencies supports this assertion. In his writing, Pynchon likes to lead readers down any number of dead ends. He further enjoys building toward climaxes that never come. Although this tendency of Pynchon can frustrate readers and sometimes leave them unsatisfied, it has proven to be an indispensable component of the pastiche form so readily identified with his writing. For example, readers of *The Crying of Lot 49* will recall that Oedipa never actually solves the mystery of the Trystero and the W.A.S.T.E system. We never determine if W.A.S.T.E

is a real, functioning alternative to the Postal Service, or simply a trick contrived by a deranged billionaire to play on his ex-girlfriend from beyond the grave. In a similar way, Pynchon uses the appearances of Washington and Franklin to portend a climax that he knowingly won't deliver. Recall again Lukács' citation of Balzac's observation that, "in the classic historical novel, not only is the 'world-historical individual' a minor figure, but in most cases he only ever appears when the action is nearing its climax" (128). Pynchon takes advantage of what appears to be his familiarity with Lukácsian tenets of the historical novel to playfully trap readers into expecting a climactic resolution to coincide with the appearances of Washington and Franklin. Instead of having these men appear to help resolve a great historical crisis—for example, Franklin signing the Declaration of Independence or Washington crossing the Delaware—Pynchon insists on portraying them in humorous yet unfailingly ordinary circumstances. It is thus clear that the Lukácsian model of the historical novel offers Pynchon a promising opportunity to manipulate reader expectations. Therefore we can conclude that Pynchon really doesn't deviate from Lukács, but instead closely follows his model of the historical novel in a precise, albeit *negative* fashion.

This chapter has limited the discussion of *The Historical Novel* and *Mason & Dixon* to applying Lukács' ideas of the "middle-of-the-road" hero to Mason and Dixon, his assertions on the "world-historical individual" to Washington and Franklin, and the effect the negation resulting from ahistoric depictions of the latter has on *Mason & Dixon*'s real social-historical connections and underlying essence of reality. In the first case, I conclude Mason and Dixon can be safely designated archetypal Lukácsian "middle-of-the-road" heroes. In the second case, however, applying Lukács' ideas on the "world-historical individual" to George Washington and Benjamin Franklin appears more uneven. The major theoretical success is that Franklin and

Washington's brief and episodic appearances in *Mason & Dixon* conform to Lukács' ideas on how often a "world-historical individual" should appear in the historical novel. The nature of their appearances, however, suggests tension between Lukács' theory and Pynchon's novel. While Lukács would expect Washington and Franklin to show up at a moment of historical crisis, the best Pynchon offers are their anticipatory allusions to the Revolutionary War. Aside from these tangential references to the inevitable British-American conflict, Pynchon rambunctiously devotes the majority of his space in these meetings to writing about marijuana, beer, food, and girls. While these depictions constitute an ahistoric negation of these titans of American history, they serve a greater purpose to Pynchon. A student of Lukács or the classic historical novel would expect the appearance of Washington and Franklin to accompany the novel's climactic resolution. The absence of such a climax amounts to a sophisticated trick Pynchon plays on his reader and constitutes a clever inversion of this portion of Lukács' theory. This inversion and its accompanying "gotcha," however, ultimately has a negligible effect on the novel's underlying essence of reality and the genuine social-historical connections embodied in its titular characters. Our conclusions are therefore twofold. First, Pynchon devotes the entire novel to meticulously and systematically erasing the body of historical gloss from *Mason and Dixon* to afford readers access to the pair in ways conventional history cannot provide. Similarly, in the cases Washington and Franklin, Pynchon intends to humorously scratch their historical veneer to turn Lukács' understanding of the role of the "world historical individual" in the historical novel upside down; this is in order to mischievously goad his readers into patiently awaiting a climactic resolution that he never plans on providing.

The final chapter will address the remaining major assertions that Lukács makes in *The Historical Novel* and apply them to *Mason & Dixon*. These issues include the historical novel as

a “prehistory” to the present, as well the problem of modernization. Only when these issues receive proper attention can an assessment of the totality of application of *The Historical Novel* and *Mason & Dixon* be faithfully made, and thus a firm conclusion regarding the continued relevance of the literary theories of Georg Lukács.

CHAPTER 4 - Prehistory and Modernization

Chapter 1 of this project discusses the suitability of applying Lukácsian aesthetics to a postmodern writer like Thomas Pynchon. There I concluded that such an application is possible, so long as Pynchon presents tangible social-historical connections and underlying essence of reality beneath his postmodern pastiche. Satisfying these two preconditions therefore enables an optimal application of Lukácsian aesthetics. This chapter explores the critical role that “history” plays in a historical novelist’s illustration of reality and genuine social-historical connections. Accordingly, Pynchon’s faithfulness to history serves as a positive indicator of the explanatory power of Lukácsian aesthetics. I will therefore demonstrate that both Lukács’ criticism and Pynchon’s fiction share a deep appreciation for the importance of history. Further, I will show how *Mason & Dixon* enables readers to experience the novel as what Lukács calls a *prehistory* to the present moment. Lastly, I will illustrate how Pynchon both avoids yet finds a way to play with the practice of modernization in the historical novel—defined as the dressing up of contemporary problems and psychology in the costume of history—something Lukács considers to be a significant pitfall for writers of historical fiction.

Most Marxist thinkers understand that history has a profound influence on humanity’s social being. Lukács illustrates this in noting the mass impact of the Napoleonic wars. Unlike previous conflicts limited in region and scope, Napoleon’s conquests transformed “the whole of Europe” into “a war arena.” Since these wars affected virtually everyone in Europe, they constituted a “mass experience of hundreds of thousands, of millions.” Therefore, according to Lukács, these clearly significant historical events illuminated “the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in

history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them” (*The Historical Novel*, 24). In short, Lukács argues that not only does history matter, but that in some circumstances, such as Napoleon’s conquest of Europe, the degree in which it matters becomes starkly apparent. *Mason & Dixon* demonstrates that Pynchon shares Lukács’ opinion on history’s importance. In a respite from narrating the astronomers’ story, Rev^d Cherrycoke discusses historical consequences of the Resurrection of Christ with Cousin Ethelmer. Cherrycoke declares that “History is the Dance of our Hunt for Christ, and how we have far’d. If it is undeniably so that he rose from the Dead, then the Event is taken into History, and History is redeem’d from the service of darkness,—with all the secular Consequences, flowing from that one Event, deisgn’d and will’d to occur,” consequences which Ethelmer quickly notes include “ev’ry Crusade, Inquisition, Sectarian War, the millions of lives, the seas of blood” (*Mason & Dixon*, 75-76). The examples here from Lukács and Pynchon admittedly differ in tense: Lukács judges Napoleon’s wars to have had a real time *present* impact on the historical consciousness of early 19th Century Europeans, while Pynchon cites the *past* Resurrection to show the inevitable (perhaps unfair) association between the Christian Church’s founding event and eventual atrocities committed in the name of Christianity. Despite the former’s *real time* impact versus the latter’s *cascading* effect, each event firmly demonstrates the importance of history on both humanity’s destiny as well as its collective consciousness.

Pynchon underscores this pervasive effect of history on human consciousness with an excerpt from Rev^d Cherrycoke’s book *Christ and History*. In it, he argues that History is neither “Chronology,” nor “Remembrance,” nor even “a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All...” Rather, History is “a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common” (349).

Pynchon suggests here through Cherrycoke that despite the inherently complex and contradictory nature of history, humanity still possesses the capability to instinctively apprehend its sum total on collective level. History's ability to permeate the collective consciousness constitutes a tremendous power, one Pynchon clearly recognizes. This recognition is evident in the reflections of Uncle Ives:

History is hir'd, or coerced, only in Interests that must ever prove base. She is too innocent, to be left within the reach of anyone in Power,— who need but touch her, and all her Credit is in the instant vanish'd, as if it had never been. She needs rather to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiters, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev'ry Radius, Masters of Disguise to provide her the Costume, Toilette, and Bearing, and Speech nimble enough to keep her beyond the Desires, or even the Curiosity, of Government. (350)

Although history is demonstrably powerful, it is also extremely vulnerable to manipulation. Cognizant of this danger, Pynchon's characters reveal a deep skepticism in leaders or government officials using history to suit their ends. *Mason & Dixon* therefore illustrates competing definitions of history and historiography—primarily democratic approaches in which history's custodians are not ruling elites, but common writers. Lukács asserts that writers of the “great social novel of England”—a forerunner of the historical novel contemporaneous with the period which Pynchon sets *Mason & Dixon*—begin to embrace this precise role. This novel “drew the attention of writers to the concrete (i.e. historical) significance of time and place, to social conditions and so on, it created the realistic, literary means of expression for portraying this spatio-temporal (i.e. historical) character of people and circumstances” (21). Accordingly,

we can deduce that both Pynchon and Lukács see the novelist as one of these logical custodians for history. Other passages in *Mason & Dixon*, however, appear to contradict this conclusion.

Pynchon seemingly undermines the case for the novelist in Uncle Ives' subsequent musings. Although previously suggesting that history must remain the domain of "fabulists and counterfeiters," Ives demonstrates disdain for the emerging novel form. He explains,

I cannot, damme I cannot I say, energetically enough insist upon the danger of reading these storybooks,— in particular those known as 'Novel.'...[With its] irresponsible narratives, that will not distinguish between fact and fancy...Alas, every reader of 'Novel' must be reckoned a soul in peril,— for she hath made a D——l's bargain, squandering her most precious time, for nothing in return but the meanest and shabbiest kinds of mental excitement. 'Romance,' pernicious enough in its day, seems in Comparison wholesome. (351)

There are two primary reasons for this apparent contradiction. The first is Pynchon's general propensity to lead a reader down one path, only to abruptly change direction. The result of this tendency is that one of these directions Pynchon walks his readers through is obviously a false lead. Recall in Chapter 3 how the appearances of "world-historical individuals" George Washington and Benjamin Franklin portend a climactic resolution in *Mason & Dixon* that never happens. That instance demonstrates how Pynchon creates one set of reader expectations, while he playfully and somewhat mischievously moves his novel on an entirely different path. It further illustrates Pynchon's continual challenge to his readers to stay on the right path by avoiding these sorts of dead ends. The second reason for Pynchon's contradictory view of the novel and the novelist, I believe, answers this question of which view or "path" is correct. Self-

irony is important to Pynchon. Accordingly, he sees in Uncle Ives an unmistakable opportunity to achieve this irony by undercutting his own profession as a novelist. Consider again Washington and Franklin. If the lives of great historical figures such as these are fair targets for this type of comic undressing—one that can both poke fun at a figure while acknowledging his historical importance—then the assertion that Pynchon extracts a few laughs at the expense of his own significant career is one that follows logically. Since Pynchon's desire for self-irony stands as the primary reason for Uncle Ives' diatribe against the novel, the novelist's role as a custodian for history remains intact.

Lukács and Pynchon both agree that the novelist has an important role in the preservation and maintenance of history for present and future generations. Lukács asserts that Sir Walter Scott, more than any other writer, fully realizes his potential in this endeavor. He explains Scott's effectiveness:

To awaken distant, vanished ages and enable us to live through them again he had to depict this concrete interaction between man and his social environment in the broadest manner. The inclusion of the dramatic element in the novel, the concentration of events, the greater significance of dialogue, i.e. the direct coming to grips of colliding opposites in conversation, these are intimately linked with the attempt to portray historical reality as it actually was, *so that it could be both humanly authentic and yet be re-livable by the reader of a later age.* (40, emphasis added)

Here Lukács lists the techniques Scott uses from his literary repertoire with such great success, including those elements borrowed from the historical drama. What is more important, however,

is Lukács' assertion that the success of a historical novel depends on the work enabling a reader to relive a historically authentic experience. On the surface, this metric seems difficult to satisfy. Learning about history—names, dates, events, etc.—is a basic and attainable educational outcome for students of all ages. Lukács understands that “reliving” these same things irretrievably sealed behind the vast expanse of generations' worth of time is another matter, and therefore explains what circumstances are necessary to make such a reliving of history possible.

For an individual to relive history, he or she must have a connection with it. Lukács contends that history is an innate part of our social being. Accordingly, this relationship between history and consciousness provides the connection a reader needs to truly relive history. Pynchon provides this type of instance when Mason describes to Dixon a moment from his courtship with Rebekah. While visiting Stonehenge, Rebekah confides to Mason, “It’s too familiar. I’ve this feeling...I know the place, and *it knows me*. Could it be our ancestors? Even so long ago, in your family, or mine?” (210). Here Rebekah experiences the history of Stonehenge on a visceral rather than intellectual level. The history of the place deeply, if inexplicably, resonates with her. Rebekah’s uncanny feeling of familiarity is akin to what a reader of great historical fiction experiences. Lukács calls this experience a “felt relationship to the present”—one that provides the necessary connection needed for a reader to relive history. Accordingly, it is his chosen yardstick to measure the success of a particular piece of historical fiction:

Without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible. But this relationship, in the case of really great historical art, does not consist in alluding to contemporary events...but *in bringing the past to life as the prehistory*

of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it (53, emphasis added).

As we will demonstrate, Pynchon constructs in his novel this kind of powerful prehistory to the present historical moment that enables *Mason & Dixon* to deeply resonate with contemporary readers.

Pynchon creates the experience of prehistory for *Mason & Dixon*'s readers by careful illustration of the historical antecedents to present-day historical crises. In doing so, Pynchon closely follows in the footsteps of those historical novelists whom Lukács deems to write at artistic heights. Lukács observes:

The extension of the historical novel into an historical picture of the present, this extension of the portrayal of prehistory into the portrayal of self-experienced history has, of course ultimately, not aesthetic, but social and historical causes. Scott himself lived in a period of English history in which the progressive development of bourgeois society seemed assured, and thus he could look back upon the crisis and struggles of the prehistory with epic calm. (84)

Lukács is arguing that since Scott sensed a particular historical trajectory, he could with deliberate dispassion step outside his contemporary moment to write about the great historical collisions of generations long passed. Applying this type of scenario to Pynchon raises two obvious questions: First, what present day historical crisis or crises does Pynchon temporarily “step away” from to construct a prehistory in *Mason & Dixon*? Second, what is the nature of the historical crises Pynchon illustrates within the novel's prehistory? The key to answering the first

question is relatively straightforward—Pynchon’s present day historical crises will correspond to those found in Late Capitalism. The socio-economic crises of Late Capitalism are many. These include, among other things, racism, sexism, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, environmental destruction, a rapidly expanding wealth gap, and an unsustainable explosion in sovereign debt levels. Given the large number of issues this inexhaustive list presents, it is necessary to discern which of these problems are important enough to Pynchon for him to explore in the context of *Mason & Dixon*’s prehistory. Although Pynchon’s lack of public interviews makes finding explicit expressions of his social and political concerns difficult, he hasn’t remained entirely silent on these matters. Pynchon’s non-fiction essay “A Journey into the Mind of Watts” constitutes one the rare instances when he offers direct commentary on one specific crisis endemic to Late Capitalism.

The concerns that Pynchon expresses on matters of race relations within “A Journey into the Mind of Watts” anticipates the nature of the prehistory he constructs in *Mason & Dixon*. In this essay Pynchon explores life in the Los Angeles community of Watts one year following the infamous riots of August 1965. Pynchon’s observations are searing. His essay begins describing the shooting death of Leonard Deadwyler, an African-American pulled over by two Los Angeles police officers following a 50-block chase. The cop who shot Deadwyler claimed that “the car lurched suddenly, causing his service revolver to go off by accident.” Mr. Deadwyler’s pregnant widow, on the other hand, vehemently asserted that this cop committed “cold blooded murder and that the car had never moved.” Although the cop was officially cleared of any wrongdoing, the incident sparked fears of a repeat of the previous summer’s riots. Things remained generally calm, however, and riots of the magnitude previously experienced in Watts would not occur until 1992—this following the acquittal of four LAPD officers in the videotaped beating of Rodney

King. The two starkly different accounts of Mr. Deadwyler's death parallel what Pynchon identifies as "the heart of L.A.'s racial sickness," namely, "the coexistence of two very different cultures: one white and one black." The contrast between these cultures, as Pynchon demonstrates, is profound. He notes that,

While the white culture is concerned with various forms of systematized folly—the economy of the area in fact depending on it—the black culture is stuck pretty much with basic realities like disease, like failure violence and death, which the whites have mostly chosen—and can afford—to ignore.

Pynchon's unflinching depiction of the near-hopeless socio-economic reality of the predominantly black citizens of Watts underscores his deep concern for issues involving race. He asks rhetorically, "Why is everybody worrying about another riot—haven't things in Watts improved any since the last one? A lot of white folks are wondering. Unhappily, the answer is no." Putting Pynchon's observation in the context of history's major racial issues—slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, etc—it seems that these issues don't so much "go away" or as Pynchon says "improve" but rather evolve into new problems. Therefore, we can infer from Pynchon's essay that the problems of Watts constitute a contemporary manifestation of Western civilization's centuries-long failure to achieve racial equality. From this inference, Pynchon's construction of a prehistory in *Mason & Dixon* largely concerned with the problems of racism and slavery—foreshadowers to the racial injustice of Watts—is demonstrably consistent.

Pynchon explores several forms of racial oppression in *Mason & Dixon* to establish a prehistory of the troubles he depicts in "A Journey to the Mind of Watts." The first area relates to the economic relationship between blacks and whites. In both the book and his essay,

Pynchon is particularly interested in how whites exploit blacks for economic gain. Mason and Dixon's visit to Capetown, South Africa provides the first of a series of encounters the astronomers experience with the institution of slavery. In Capetown they stay as guests of Cornelius Vroom, a slaveholder and father of three adolescent girls. There, the girls make overt sexual advances toward Mason that succeed in arousing him. He does not learn the true motivation behind these advances, however, until the Vrooms' slave-girl Austra climbs into bed with him in the middle of the night, hoping to exploit his state of arousal. There, Austra expresses that the Vrooms' "Wish is that I become impregnated,— if not by you, then by one of you" (65). Austra next articulates what is an unmistakable economic motivation of the Vrooms in achieving this pregnancy:

All that the Mistress prizes of you is your Whiteness, understand? Don't feel disparag'd—ev'ry white male who comes to this Town is approach'd by ev'ry Dutch Wife, upon the same Topick. The baby, being fairer than its mother, will fetch more upon the Market,— there it begins, there it ends. (65)

Pynchon uses this incident to denote clear economic subservience of blacks. Not only must slaves give their labor power away for free, but as the prospect of a price premium due to fairer skin demonstrates, their bodies can be bought and sold at an owner's whim. As this element of prehistory in *Mason & Dixon* portends, the shadow of slavery's economic injustice lingers and indeed dominates the relationship between blacks and whites in Watts. Pynchon describes those individuals reluctant to extend economic opportunities to African-Americans in Watts as "the little man—meaning not so much any member of the power structure as just your average white L.A. taxpayer, registered voter, property owner, employed, stable, mortgaged and the rest." He

details the frustration of the youth in Watts meeting the “little man” only to know what he’s thinking—“ ‘Bad credit risk’—or ‘Poor Learner,’ or ‘Sexual threat,’ or Welfare chisler’ without knowing a thing about him personally.” In contrast to the unambiguous violence of slavery he illustrates in *Mason & Dixon*’s prehistory, Pynchon’s details show how “the little man” of white Los Angeles can level an evolved form of economic oppression by indirect and subtle means. Pynchon describes the predictable reaction of a young person in Watts to this passive-aggressive treatment from “the little man”:

The natural, normal thing to want to do is hit the little man. But what after all, has he done? Mild, respectable, possibly smiling, he has called you no names, shown no weapons. Only told you perhaps that the job was filled, the house rented.

Here Pynchon exposes the anxiety White Los Angeles has with developing a meaningful, mutually beneficial economic relationship with the people of Watts. There exists a fear that “the pocket of bitter reality” of Watts threatens the economic security, property values, etc. of its white surroundings. Accordingly, the approach of post-riots White L.A. focuses on containing and defusing the entrenched black culture of Watts, instead truly engaging it. One way to help defuse black culture was to deploy an army of education and employment counselors upon Watts. Pynchon wryly notes:

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.

Despite the good intentions of these “poverty warriors,” they unfortunately reinforce the economic subservience of blacks instead of truly confronting the issue. Although the prehistory Pynchon writes in *Mason & Dixon* portends this type economic oppression for blacks, it also anticipates other important social issues.

Mason & Dixon’s prehistory anticipates issues involving power and drug-use that Pynchon discusses in his “Watts” essay. In the case of the former, the slave driver’s whip as seen in *Mason & Dixon* parallels the gun which is indispensable for the police’s patrol of Watts. Pynchon writes,

The Driver’s Whip is an evil thing, an expression of ill feeling worse than any between Master and Slave,— the contempt of the monger of perishable goods for his Merchandise,— in its tatter’d braiding, darken’d to it gets, the metal Wires work’d in to each Lash, its purpose purely to express hate with, and Hate’s Corollary,— to beg for the same denial of Mercy, should, one day, the roles be revers’d. (696)

In Maryland following a failed slave auction, Dixon’s sight of a slave master cruelly and haphazardly flailing this whip around forces him into action—he seizes the whip, punches the slave master in mouth, and unchains his slaves (698-699). Despite Dixon’s heroics, the reality of the whip’s nature remains constant: an object that makes black people, under threat of pain and injury, to do what white people want. In this basic respect, the cop’s gun in Watts is strikingly similar to the driver’s whip. Pynchon’s essay notes that, in Watts’ citizens’ dealings with the police,

...all the cop really has going for him is his gun. “There was a time,” they’ll tell you, “you’d say, ‘Take off the badge baby, and let’s settle it.’ I mean, he wouldn’t, but you’d say it. But since August, man, the way I feel, hell with the badge—just take off that gun.”

In the post-riot world of Watts, this gun (like the driver’s whip that prefigures it) is essential for asserting white dominance. In coping with this racial dominance, the solution for blacks in Pynchon’s prehistory anticipates their approach 200 years later: Drugs and alcohol.

The “Opium-Girls” of *Mason & Dixon* helps to build a prehistory that anticipates substance abuse in Watts. Here Pynchon recounts the story of slave-girl prostitutes addicted to narcotics:

The Opium-Girls are kept in a room of their own...Slave Women are brought here from ev’rywhere in this Hemisphere, to serve as dreamy, pliant shadows, Baths of Flesh darker than Dutch, the dangerously beautiful Extrusion of everything these white brothers, seeking Communion, cannot afford to contain...(151)

Slave women imprisoned in a life of prostitution would naturally gravitate toward something that can assuage the physical and emotional trauma inherent to this dark reality. Opium provides this precise kind of numbing. The story is remarkably similar two centuries later in Watts except that cheap booze replaces opium. Pynchon observes,

At the Deadwyler inquest, much was made of the dead man’s high blood alcohol content, as if his being drunk made it somehow all right for the police to shoot

him. But alcohol is a natural part of the Watts style; as natural as LSD is around Hollywood....But a Watts kid, brought up in a pocket of reality, looks perhaps not so much for escape as just for some calm, some relaxation. And beer or wine is good enough for that. Especially good at the end of a bad day.

Pynchon's anecdote about the "Opium-Girls" provides a connection to contemporary readers who could then identify with modern instances where drugs or alcohol help mask the pain of racial injustice.

Although "A Journey into the Mind of Watts" provides the clearest framework to identify components of prehistory Pynchon builds into *Mason & Dixon*, it is not limited to the mistreatment and exploitation of blacks. Pynchon also dedicates attention to atrocities committed against Native Americans as well as tensions accompanying the emergence of market capitalism. In choosing to address the plight of Native Americans in addition to the challenges faced by blacks, Pynchon builds a prehistory in *Mason & Dixon* largely centered upon the theme of racial injustice. These particular injustices to Native Americans concerned Lukács 60 years earlier in *The Historical Novel*. He noted that "In America...the colonizing capitalism of France and England destroys physically and morally the gentile society of the Indians which had flourished almost unchanged for thousands of years" (64). In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon illustrates how colonizing capitalism violently supplants the primitive communism practiced by the Indians. One such instance was the massacre at Lancaster. Mason and Dixon listened intently as the town Attorney relayed the news: "At Lancaster,— the day before yesterday,—the Indians 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" (304). The Lancaster

massacre is emblematic of the kind of killing and displacing of Native Americans that would characterize the dark side of Manifest Destiny for the next century. In the wake of these atrocities, Native Americans have struggled to completely integrate themselves into the capitalist mode of production—income and employment totals of Native Americans, for example, continue to lag behind their white counterparts to the present day. Despite these socio-economic setbacks, elements of their heritage have impressively continued to endure and thus have helped to shape contemporary culture. Accordingly, readers familiar with these various influences can apprehend the Lancaster massacre and other dealings with Native Americans throughout *Mason & Dixon* as part of their prehistory.

Pynchon rounds out a prehistory in *Mason & Dixon* primarily focused on racial injustice with an exploration of tensions accompanying the emergence of market capitalism. Pynchon first alludes to problems with market capitalism in Mason's daydreaming about Rebekah: "She occupies now an entirely new angular relation to Mercy, to those refusals, among the Living, to act on behalf of Death or its ev'ryday Coercions,— Wages too low to live upon, Laws written by Owners, Infantry, Bailiffs, Prison, Death's thousand Metaphors in the World,— as if, the instant of her passing over having acted as a Lens, the rays of her Soul have undergone moral Refraction (172). Here Mason looks to his remembered love for Rebekah as a brief escape from life's doldrums, including the low wages, owner established rules, etc. precipitated by market capitalism. Pynchon addresses the role of competition in market capitalism where a conversation among the cousins creates an interlude to Rev^d Cherycoke's story. At this time, DePugh indicates that he's considering setting up a medical practice in the West. His uncle offers the following warning, stating that, "any Doctors who're already there will run you out of town, if they don't kill you first, because they don't want the Competition." DePugh protests this

warning, exclaiming, “But it’s America, Sir! Competition is of her Essence!” However, Ives LeSpark confirms the warning of DePugh’s uncle, stating that “Nobody here wants Competition” and that “All wish but to name their Price, and maintain it, without the extra work and worry all these damn’d Up-starts require” (217). This conversation suggests that the idea of competition—mostly taken for granted as part of American economic history—is in fact largely illusory. Competition is not an ideal to be embraced, but rather stands firmly against the rational-self interest of economic actors. The Attorney explains precisely how competition must be quashed: “We are like Physicians, there is always enough Work for us, as we treat the Moral Diseases...nor are we any more dispos’d than our Brother Doctors to meeting other folks’ Prices—hence our zeal in defending Monopoly” (217). Here Pynchon illustrates a nascent tendency in market capitalism for economic actors to gravitate toward monopoly; one that will become dominant around 1848 when the era of Monopoly Capitalism gets formally underway. Accordingly, this instance in Market Capitalism constitutes a prehistory to Monopoly Capitalism, which itself is a prehistory to the current era of Late Capitalism.⁷

Pynchon portrays other aspects of market capitalism in *Mason & Dixon* which prefigure Capitalism’s subsequent iterations. In Chapter 41 Mr. LeSpark ventures into the countryside to visit customers and suppliers. There he experiences a profound feeling that he is “under the protection of a superior Power—not in this case God, but rather, Business.” He then immediately asks himself, “What turn of earthly history, however perverse, would dare interfere with the workings of the Invisible Hand?” (411). Pynchon earlier illustrates, however, that although Smith’s Invisible Hand might be unseen, it is certainly felt. The crushing of the

⁷ See Chapter 1 for a more complete discussion of the three economic and cultural “moments” of Capitalism posited by Mandel and Jameson, respectively.

Weavers' attempt to unionize in Chapter 40 demonstrates capitalism's heavy hand. It is recounted to Mason that,

When the Weavers try to remedy the inequality by forming Associations, the Clothiers bring in Infantry, to kill, disable, or deliver up to Transportation any who be troublesome,— these being then easily replaced, and even more cheaply, by others quite happy to labor in Silence. (407)

This instance, like the nascent formation of the monopoly in response to competition, prefigures and serves as a prehistory to the violent clashes between capital and labor that pervade the late 19th/early 20th Century portion of Monopoly Capitalism.

Thus far we have shown that the prehistory Pynchon constructs in *Mason & Dixon* centers around historical phenomena that have direct connection to issues of the present. This connection must not, however, devolve into simply dressing up contemporary problems in the costume of the past. Lukács reminds us that “Historical novels appear where some hard thinking is required on the part of the reader before he can establish that their stories do not occur in the present” (199). Historical novels which are, beneath the surface, just repackaged stories about the present constitute what Lukács calls a “false inheritance” (60). Accordingly, Lukács prizes writers who avoid this kind of modernization by maintaining fidelity to the real history and psychology of the period—this accounts for Lukács' admiration for Scott as well as his distaste for German Romantics who, despite historically faithful costumes and settings, display a psychology unique to their own present age. Lukács' admonition against modernization of the historical novel appears to present problems for Pynchon, as several things in *Mason & Dixon* seem to be obvious allusions to modern life. For example, Pynchon's inclusion of the story of

“what is arguably the first British Pizza” seems like an unnecessary anachronism, since pizza as a food choice will not peak in popularity until the 20th Century (236). Another instance of a food anachronism happens when Sister Blondelle describes the wonderful food she enjoyed in China:

...the food they eat there is delicious beyond belief,— Shrimps with Hot Chillies and Peanuts! Slic’d Chicken in Garlick and Black Bean Sauce! Cold Sesame Noodles! Sweet Biscuits with Messages folded inside upon Paper you can eat— Ahh! Making m’self hungry just thinking about it...” (525-526)

Blondelle’s list reads more like the menu at Panda Express than it does an authentic historical account. There are also the numerous references to Feng Shui in the novel’s Feng Shui/Jesuit Conspiracy plotline. Although Feng Shui is an ancient Chinese system of aesthetics, it has gained popularity with architects and interior decorators in recent decades. Any reasonable reading of these references will conclude that they each constitute an overt wink to modern life.

Has Pynchon thus violated Lukács’ admonition against modernization? I argue that he does not. That anything, be it some particular food, a mode of aesthetics, etc. has significance in one period of history does not preclude that same thing from realizing significance in a later era. In short, Pynchon covers the flank of these contemporary allusions with real history. Christie Burns makes a similar argument regarding the scene in the novel when Dixon walks into a drinking establishment and orders, "Half and Half please, Mount Kenya Double-A, with Java Highland,— perhaps a slug o’boil’d Milk as well[...]" (298). Of this curious and eerily familiar moment, Burns notes:

However postmodern and Starbuck-esque this scene might be, coffee houses are not an exclusive artifact of the twentieth century. They proliferated in

seventeenth-century Europe, and when in the next century Boston Tea Party activists insisted that it was an American duty to forego tea, coffee's popularity peaked (see Pendergrast 15 and *passim*). Pynchon's seemingly anachronistic introduction of the contemporary attitude in his narrative of America's past allows him to deliver a comical portrait of the nation's early history, joking that in its nascent history Americans were even then as we are now. (“Postmodern Historiography: Politics and the Parallaxic Method in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*”)

The move Burns suggests that Pynchon makes here—illustrating instances where the Enlightenment and the late 1990s are contemporaneous—suggest a sophisticated evolution in the historical novel. Not only does Pynchon provide the rock-solid kind of prehistory in *Mason & Dixon* that Lukács argues is essential to a great historical novel, he also finds a way to incorporate contemporary allusions that have a firm foundation in history. Further, these examples show that Pynchon acknowledges the good and at least neutral elements that accompany the expansion of the capitalist market—basic, of course, to both Lukács' and Marx's understanding of capitalism's dialectical nature. Although Lukács would argue that there is danger in such a overusing a technique like this to the point of becoming a fetish, Pynchon judiciously peppers his novel with historically grounded allusions to the present that in no way detract from the prehistory he works to establish. As such, the solid prehistory Pynchon creates in *Mason & Dixon*, as well as his meticulous avoidance of modernization in his historical novel, confirm both his novel's underlying essence of reality and its defined social-historical connections.

CHAPTER 5 - Summary and Conclusion

This project sought to bring together the unlikeliest of pairs—a Marxist literary critic whose ties to Stalin greatly diminished his standing in the New Left, alongside a postmodern writer of fiction with an affinity for Road Runner cartoons. The impetus behind this pairing is the attempt to make a case for the continued relevance of the former’s literary theories and critical insights that is unburdened by his admittedly unsavory associations. The main thread linking Georg Lukács and Thomas Pynchon—a common interest in historical fiction—initially appears hopelessly overshadowed by their differences: Lukács, as an advocate of the classical realist brand of historical fiction and a declared opponent of modernist innovations, would seem to have little use for Pynchon’s famously distinctive *post*-modern style. Our analysis of Lukács’ writing reveals, however, his cautious openness to stylistic innovations. Lukács permits the use of such techniques so long as they serve the greater purpose of conveying reality. Where Lukács does see potential for problems, though, is when stylistic innovations exist for their own sake, and in effect, become fetishes. Therefore, so long as a work of fiction has genuine social-historical connections and an underlying sense of reality, certain stylistic innovations within the piece do not disqualify Lukácsian aesthetics as an appropriate critical lens. In light of this fact, Lukács could not dismiss Pynchon’s work simply on account of its postmodern style, but only in the event of an exhaustive and fruitless search for reality in his writing. This outcome, as we’ve shown, does not come to pass—*Mason & Dixon* is replete with the kind of tangible social-historical connections and faithfulness to reality Lukács deems to be essential in fiction. Further, any instances of negation found in *Mason & Dixon* are not powerful enough to weaken the novel’s fundamental grounding in history and reality.

We have thus devoted our time to uncovering these social-historical connections and this underlying reality in *Mason & Dixon* to enable the optimal theoretical application of Lukács' *The Historical Novel*. Fortunately, Lukács tells us where to find these things. Successful historical novels, such as those written in the early 19th century by Sir Walter Scott, accurately portray the genuine psychology of a historical period in a way that contemporary readers can identify and connect with. These novels do not simply dress up contemporary problems in the clothes of history—a modernization that Lukács derides and Pynchon, as we've demonstrated, successfully avoids—but are faithful to the social, economic, and historical crises of their respective times. One such way for a historical novelist to achieve this fidelity to history is through telling his story through the actions of the mediocre hero. With great care, Pynchon takes every opportunity to emphasize the average, unspectacular qualities of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon. Another technique to faithfully portray history, Lukács argues, is the sparing introduction of the “world-historical individual” into the historical novel's plotline. Such a figure only appears near the climax or the resolution of the novel's historical crisis. Pynchon introduces “world-historical” figures George Washington and Benjamin Franklin in *Mason & Dixon*. True to Lukácsian form, they appear briefly and episodically. They do not, however, appear to resolve a great crisis—their appearances are marked by humorous yet ordinary interactions with Mason and Dixon. Rather than signifying a major deviation from Lukács' theory, Pynchon actually affirms it. Pynchon plays on reader expectations that the appearance of a “world-historical” figure will coincide with the resolution of a great crisis—a climax Pynchon intentionally fails to provide. While Pynchon's aim is to toy with reader expectations, he could not have this fun without first introducing the “world-historical individual” in a manner that

suggests Lukács theory. Although it is ultimately realized in a negative way, Lukács theory nonetheless remains essential for Pynchon to achieve this particular artistic aim.

According to Lukács, historical fidelity in a historical novel is also achieved through successful construction of a *prehistory*. The solid prehistory Pynchon establishes in *Mason & Dixon*, as well as his meticulous avoidance of modernization in his historical novel, confirm both his novel's underlying essence of reality and its defined social-historical connections. Indeed, it is possible to see *Mason & Dixon* not only as a prehistory to the present, but also as a direct prehistory to his "Watts" essay. This marks the second time we see Pynchon's career loosely follow the arc of *The Historical Novel*. In Chapter 2, Pynchon's *The Courier's Tragedy* anticipates *Mason & Dixon* in the way that Lukács argues that the historical drama anticipates the historical novel. Similarly, as Lukács asserts that a historical novelist pens the prehistory to the present moment, Pynchon constructs a prehistory to a reality *he already captured* in "Watts." This bears repeating the question we first asked at the conclusion of Chapter 2: How much Lukács has Pynchon read, and how much has *The Historical Novel* influenced the writing of *Mason & Dixon* 60 years later? For reasons we've discussed, it is impossible to answer this question definitively. The parallels, however, are too uncanny to dismiss. Identifying these parallels yields what is, in my estimation, this project's most surprising conclusion: I've never actually made the case for Lukács. Instead, I've discovered that it is Pynchon who makes the case for me. Pynchon indeed validates Lukács in his seamless weaving of *The Historical Novel's* theories and critical observations into *Mason & Dixon*, and on a macro-level, his own writing career.

While we have just seen what Pynchon tells us about Lukács, what can Lukács help us conclude about Pynchon? Lukács equates artistic power with fidelity to—and successful rendering of—historical reality. In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács laments that the characters of Manzoni were “unable to soar to those historically typical heights which mark the summits of Scott’s works” (71). With their indispensable role in Pynchon’s vivid construction of an arresting prehistory to the present, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon rise to arguably similar heights. If alive, Lukács might be slow to proclaim an equal to or even a worthy successor for Scott. By his own metrics, however, the artistic quality of Pynchon’s historical novel—pastiche form and all—rates exceptionally high. As such, Pynchon’s postmodern *Mason & Dixon* achieves the highest aims that Lukácsian aesthetics establishes for the historical novel.

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