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Writing Off the Map: The Postcolonial Landscapes of Pynchon, Marshall, Silko, and Véa

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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ABSTRACT

Writing Off the Map:
The Postcolonial Landscapes of Pynchon, Marshall, Silko, and Véa

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Lisa Ann Slappey

This dissertation examines literary renderings of postcolonial American space through close readings of novels by four contemporary American writers: Thomas Pynchon’s Vineland and Mason & Dixon, Paule Marshall’s The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, Leslie Marmon Silko’s Almanac of the Dead, and Alfredo Véa, Jr.’s La Maravilla. My study is grounded in environmental criticism’s emphasis on the relationships between humans and non-human nature, particularly the interactions between peoples and places. I explore questions of domination and subjugation, possession, dispossession, and repossession, and home and homelessness in the world we think we know, and the worlds we can only imagine.

The novelists in this study raise difficult questions about America as a philosophical ideal and as a political entity. Where does this nation fit, historically and currently, within global affairs? To what extent does America have the moral authority it assumes over itself or anyone else? At times, these questions are posed through comparisons, both subtle and overt, between the United States and other regimes more recognizable for their egregious human
rights records, such as Spanish Mexico, Nazi Germany, and Dutch South Africa. The authors then locate oppression at home by addressing the enduring effects of the genocide of indigenous peoples, the slave trade and the Middle Passage, and the creation of a racially diverse American underclass. In each case, human oppression is depicted within the highly-contested social space of the physical landscape and is shown to go hand in hand with environmental destruction.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm in familiar territory, this realm of the last minute, with ten years of graduate study rushing toward a terminus. The writing of this dissertation has been a long and lonely process, as years of avoidance gave way to a race against the clock and to a frantic exercise in grief management. Some of those acknowledged below may not wish to be mentioned in tandem, yet here we are, as Véa would say, all on the same page, and I'm glad for the company.

First, thanks to my committee members for their patience, encouragement, and general good cheer. Since I arrived at Rice University, Walter Isle has been a mentor and friend of the first rank. His courses on postmodern, environmental, and Native American literatures have shaped my thinking and my teaching. He has introduced me not only to many wonderful texts but also to scholars and organizations beyond Rice whose influence and support have proven crucial to my intellectual growth. My second reader, José Aranda, is directly responsible for the inclusion of Alfredo Véa, Jr. in this study. Several years ago, he handed me a copy of La Maravilla, with the brilliant suggestion that it might serve as an interlocutor between Pynchon and Silko. Special thanks go to Bernard Aresu, who took time from his sabbatical to read a very late draft with great enthusiasm and insight. Any and all inadequacies in this work are, of course, my own.

Thomas Pynchon, Paule Marshall, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Alfredo Véa, Jr. have all kept me busy by publishing new novels since this study began. They
have made me a better reader and, I hope, a better person through their shared insistence on accountability.

Rice University has supported me in many capacities. Brown and Will Rice Colleges sponsored my courses on 20th Century Native American Issues in 1998 and 2000. Thanks to Malcolm Gillis, Joan and Arthur Few, Linda Driskill, Mary McIntire, Pam Walker, the Native American Student Association, my own dear students, and Rice's guests, especially Dennis Banks and Russell Means.

Since 1994, I have presented portions of each chapter of this dissertation at professional conferences of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment and the Western Literature Association. In recognizing the importance of environment, indigeneity, and place, these organizations have created a vital community of scholars. Thanks to ASLE members Tom Bailey (Western Michigan), Michael Johnson (Kansas), and Terrell Dixon (University of Houston) for their personal friendship and unwavering confidence in my work; Scott Slovic (Nevada, Reno) for his example of scholarship and dedication; and Mike Branch (Nevada, Reno) for his role in saving my eyesight.

My youngest brother, Alan Slappey, still says I need a "real" job, but I suspect he's proud of me. Carolen Hansard and Richard Handelsman inspired me early on in Lithia Springs, Georgia. At Florida State, Rip Lhamon introduced me to Pynchon and to deadlines. Always a true friend, Amir Geres from FSU suggested that I join him at Rice for graduate school. Pat Gray gave me a home and a job. Puya Alikhani and Ernes Gómez worked harder so I could write. My
friend Reza Abedi never doubted that I would finish this dissertation, someday. Maysam Abedi has been the world's best 12 year-old listener and critic.

I don't know how to thank Mehdi Abedi. His influence on my life is incalculable. Especially during these last few months, he has been incredibly generous in giving me time to write and, before that, time to be with my father. He counters my distraction and moodiness with love and support. Mehdi's pride in my accomplishment is in no way diminished by the fact that he will be delighted when this is over.

This dissertation deals with ghosts, old and new, and so must I. My first mentor, Richard R. Bell, died suddenly in 1986. That loss pushed me from earth science to the humanities, but I have never been able to cut the cord, so I also thank the northwest Georgia mountains, home of my mother's ancestors, and their spirits. During the course of this writing, my maternal grandparents, Elizabeth Bird and Ernest Ringland, died after long illnesses. An even newer ghost, too, is here on this page with me. On November, 12, 2000 my father died. He so wanted to see me graduate, but I was too late. My father's spirit outlasted his heart. In his honor, I defended on his birthday, April 18th, 2001.

My mother took care of them all, and she continues to be my own true champion, correspondent, and best friend. I thank my parents, Elizabeth R. Slappey and the late James L. Slappey, for making sure our humble home was ever the site of mixedblood discourse, for encouraging me to follow my own path, and for loving me all the more. This dissertation is dedicated to them.
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Washyuma Motor Hotel

Beneath the cement foundations
of the motel, the ancient spirits
of the people conspire sacred tricks.
They tell stories and jokes and laugh
and laugh.

The American passersby
get out of their hot, stuffy cars
at evening, pay their money wordlessly,
and fall asleep without benefit of dreams.

The next morning, they get up,
dress automatically, brush their teeth,
get in their cars and drive away.
They haven’t noticed that the cement
foundations of the motor hotel
are crumbling, bit by bit.

The ancient spirits tell stories
and jokes and laugh and laugh.

—Simon J. Ortiz
Woven Stone
INTRODUCTION

"America, Waiting, Someplace"

How does one speak of postcolonial American literature? The dissolution of European colonial empires following World War II gave rise to a new genre of literature and a new field for critical theory as artists and scholars from newly-independent nations began to evaluate their positions vis-à-vis the departing mother countries. Although initially the term "postcolonial" referred primarily to works emerging from Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the Caribbean, it has since expanded to include works from the "settler-invader" nations, such as Canada and Australia. The United States, however, has been slower to recognize that it occupies colonized space and that there are indeed colonized peoples within the political boundaries of the United States as well as within the nation's ever-widening neocolonial hegemonic sphere.

This national manifestation of socio-political denial is reflected in the critical determinations of international "postcolonial" scholars. The editors of Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, acknowledge the amount of work being produced on the subject of postcolonialism in the white settler countries, yet they do not consider these countries as legitimately "postcolonial" as the countries that have achieved
independence since World War II. They seem to define postcolonialism in both
temporal and racial terms, that is, beginning after the white colonial power has
withdrawn from the non-white colony. Part of the problem in the settler-invader
countries is that the colonial power has never left. In their introduction, the
editors quote "Modernism’s Last Post," an article by Stephen Slemon from Past
the Last Post, mostly so they can dismiss it and the book in which it appears and,
by extension, settler countries as postcolonial spaces. However, Slemon’s
interpretation of postcoloniality, given below as it appears in his text rather than
in Williams and Chrisman’s, can be quite useful in considering the postcolonial
aspects of contemporary American literature:

Definitions of the “post-colonial,” of course, vary widely, but for
me the concept proves most useful not when it is used
synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once-
colonised nations, but rather when it locates a specifically anti- or
post-colonial discursive purchase in culture, one which begins in the
moment that the colonising power inscribes itself onto the body
and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted
tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international
relations.²

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¹ Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, “Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An
Introduction,” in their Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader, (New York: Harvester

² Stephen Slemon, “Modernism’s Last Post,” in Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and
Post-Modernism, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press,
1990): 1-11; 3. I use Slemon’s version in part because Chrisman and Williams have changed one
of the words, so that Slemon’s “occulted” becomes their “occluded.” Although the two words
both convey a sense of concealment, the term “occulted” carries within it also a sense of secrecy
and mystery. Among the definitions of occulted is “not manifest or detectable by clinical
methods alone.” These meanings seem crucial in speaking of colonial inscriptions upon resisting
bodies and spaces, the very sites of my investigation.
Williams and Chrisman criticize Slemon's statement because it suggests "an unbroken history of automatic, effortless resistance." They do admit that the idea of associating postcolonialism with an anti-colonial struggle against "intellectual hegemony" could be fruitful for white settler countries like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. They do not mention the United States.

In The Empire Writes Back, editors Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin include the United States in their definition of postcolonial, which for them "cover[s] all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day." Unfortunately (and because of this Williams and Chrisman dismiss them, too, as does Louis Owens in Other Destinies), their concern with the settler colonies has more to do with the plight of the white colonists who had to assert themselves, both discursively and militarily, against Great Britain than with the indigenous peoples who were actually colonized. Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin (again), who use postcolonialism "to signify the lingering legacy of the imperial/colonial relation in all its positive and negative aspects," have the same perspective in Decolonising Fictions. Although they are quick to state that the United States definitely qualifies as postcolonial, they too concentrate on the brave white men who

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3 Chrisman and Williams, op. cited, 13. The quote from Stephen Slemon appears on page 12.
5 Louis Owens, Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel. (Norman, OK and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992). Owens notes that this "groundbreaking 1989 study ... omits any mention at all of American Indian writing, although the authors do consider the Euramerican colonial and postcolonial experience" (7).
struggled to establish their own literary tradition distinct from that of the British Empire. Although the lone white male in my study, Thomas Pynchon, does indeed deal with the United States' conflicted historical relationship with Europe, he is more interested in identifying the effects of the Western world's, and especially the United States', global colonial quest on people from South Africa to the Argentine Pampas, from Central Asia to the Mason-Dixon Line, and from Vietnam to Vineland.

At the outset of Past the Last Post, Helen Tiffin offers a two-pronged definition of post-colonial which includes both “writing from countries or regions which were formerly colonies of Europe” and “a set of discursive practices, prominent among which is resistance to colonialism, colonialist ideologies, and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies.”

Particularly since the second half of the twentieth century, American literature, driven by the strong, emergent voices of the marginalized, has demonstrated an increasing awareness of and resistance to colonialism at work within and beyond the U.S. borders.

This dissertation examines literary renderings of postcolonial American space through close readings of novels by four contemporary American writers: Thomas Pynchon's Vineland and Mason & Dixon, Paule Marshall’s The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, Leslie Marmon Silko’s Almanac of the Dead, and Alfredo

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Véa, Jr.'s *La Maravilla*. My study is grounded in environmental criticism's emphasis on the relationships between humans and non-human nature, particularly the interactions between peoples and places. I explore questions of domination and subjugation, possession, dispossession, and repossess, and home and homelessness in the world we think we know, and the worlds we can only imagine.

The novelists in this study raise difficult questions about America as a philosophical ideal and as a political entity. Where does this nation fit, historically and currently, within global affairs? To what extent does America have the moral authority it assumes over itself or anyone else? At times, these questions are posed through comparisons, both subtle and overt, between the United States and other regimes more recognizable for their egregious human rights records, such as Spanish Mexico, Nazi Germany, and Dutch South Africa. The authors then locate oppression at home by addressing the enduring effects of the genocide of indigenous peoples, the slave trade and the Middle Passage, and the creation of a racially diverse American underclass. In each case, human oppression is depicted within the highly-contested social space of the physical landscape and is shown to go hand in hand with environmental destruction.

The landscapes in these novels are never merely background settings but are instead integral to the texts. Alive with the ghosts of oppression, the places suggest that the potential for human redemption exists only through an acknowledgement of and accounting for unnumbered injustices. By positing
mystery and magic, prophecy and possibility, these novelists suggest the existence of spatial worlds beyond the visible realm. In doing so, they call for a radical rewriting of history (particularly American history) and a radical revisioning of the future. They make the human position on earth seem more precarious and the human responsibility toward each other and toward our environment more pressing.

The function of place in forming identity cannot be overestimated in these texts. By virtue of their race or class, most of the characters in these novels have been in some way marginalized, and are now fighting intrusions by the same imperial powers (usually American) that have pushed them aside: the government, the academy, the economy all pose threats to their existence. If the human and suprahuman characters (for instance, the woge, the little people, and the many ghosts throughout these texts) have anything to substantiate their existence, as individuals and as communities, that affirmation lies in their relationship to place. It is through alliance with place that the characters initiate resistance to various forms of hegemony. Alternative epistemologies emerge through contact with specific physical sites, so self-knowledge and self-empowerment are intimately associated with sense of place.

Cartography offers one means of inscribing what we think we know of the world and of our places within it. Pynchon, Marshall, Silko, and Véa offer us a world in flux, so that cartographic representation is, like other forms of mimesis, at best provisional. The official endings of European colonialism, the Cold War,
and South African apartheid changed the face of the global map in the twentieth century. Countries today change names so frequently that current maps are always obsolete. Contemporary global movements for indigenous empowerment threaten to alter political maps along with political power structures.

Resistance to the mapping process, however, is not limited to socio-political machinations, for the earth itself is ever in transition. Tectonic forces slowly but surely reshape the features of the earth through the subduction and separation of plates leading to earthquakes, volcanic activity, and orogeny. Other “natural disasters” such as mudslides, floods, droughts, and sinkholes occur in direct response to human activities upon and against the earth: drilling, damming, cultivating, clear-cutting, mining, paving, and the myriad other forms of “developing” humans engage in daily. We build private retreats and metropolitan monstrosities on mountainsides and in swamps, along faultlines and on floodplains, then crisscross the surface with all manner of linking devices: superhighways, railroads, pipelines, power lines, cable lines. We are even reconfiguring the celestial map, with our satellites and space stations and floating debris cluttering the night sky, returning on occasion to whack us on the collective head. Twentieth-century atomic activity rewrote the periodic table of elements as ozone depletion and global warming are currently rewriting the weather map. Now, flush with the success of conquest, the Human Genome
Project is writing the genetic map in an attempt to decode the mysteries of the human body.

Humankind's incredible arrogance and total lack of foresight are exposed when the earth rewrites itself just as they are when oppressed peoples repossess their lands and bodies and futures. In taking up questions of cartographic representation, the four authors ask, what do maps reveal and what are they intended to conceal? What political motives underlie the desire to contain on paper physical spaces and human bodies? How do such spaces and bodies defy mastery?

The fluidity of space is reflected in the mobility of humans within that space. The novels in this study are characterized by movement: departures and returns, transits and crossings, exiles and homecomings. The motions in these texts occur not only along the surface of the earth, but extend below to subterranean and above to extraterrestrial realms. More importantly, they move through interfaces into alternative dispensations parallel to, but no less real than, our own. This mobility signals more than changes in human geography. It leads to crossings of all sorts of lines, beginning with political borders and racial bloodlines and continuing through the false boundaries that would separate humans from non-humans and life from death. It creates the potential for Pynchonian counterforces, alliances always temporary and transitional, which serve as local forms of resistance to the seemingly universal "unrelenting forces" (VL 383) that pursue us all.
Why begin a study of post-colonial literature with America’s most canonical white male writer? In a review of *Mason & Dixon*, Louis Menand observes that, “nearly everything Pynchon has written is, essentially, a lament over colonialism.” Pynchon’s novels offer scathing critiques of the colonial enterprise. His spatial tropes—of the interface, the excluded middle, and the zone as sites of resistance—were developed in his early novels and inform my readings of the other texts in this study. The interface is at once a boundary and a connection between disparate bodies, spaces, phases, or dispensations. It is a site of interaction. Pynchon’s excluded middle occupies the gap between binaries, such as the preterite passed over in the Calvinist system of election and damnation, which reveals the flaws inherent in totalizing systems. The zone is a carnivalesque site of convergence (WWII Germany, the Visto) in which transformative epistemologies and actions become possible.

Chapter One examines the mapped and unmapped spaces in Pynchon’s most recent novels, *Vineland* (1990) and *Mason & Dixon* (1997), as a dialogic interface between colonial and post-colonial America. Pynchon asserts that the domination of the earth’s physical landscape is symptomatic of the subjugation by humans of all other forms of life. *Vineland* connects 1960s neoimperialism in Vietnam with 1980s neofascism in America. The war against the southeast Asian jungle and its inhabitants is replayed in the wars on trees, cannabis, and preterite dissenters in northern California. *Mason & Dixon* depicts a pre-revolutionary

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origin of environmental destruction in the drawing of the protagonists’ Visto, the
eponymous boundary line between Maryland and Pennsylvania that turned
American space into two pieces of real estate. The line also signifies the
dispossession of indigenous peoples and the authorization of African slavery
within the American colonies. By invoking in both texts the pre-Columbian
“Vinland the Good,” Pynchon suggests the America that might have been and
perhaps even the America that might yet be.

Chapter Two moves to Paule Marshall’s fictitious Caribbean locale,
Bourne Island, in an exploration of the Middle Passage as an excluded middle in
the American historical narrative. The Brooklyn-born daughter of Barbadian
immigrants, Marshall writes of the physical and psychological duality of bi-
culturalism within the Black Diaspora. Her second novel, The Chosen Place, the
Timeless People (1969), offers a microcosm of the emerging Third World through
which the author demonstrates the complex socio-political interactions between
the newly independent developing nations and the still-present imperial powers.
The specific setting, Bournehills, offers characters a source of local power that is
both mytho-historical and contemporary by bringing forth the memory of the
Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas and exposing the current reality of
economic enslavement. By giving voice to the ghosts of the Middle Passage and
the fallen heroes of resistance, Bournehills generates self-realization and
communal action among West Indians and a visiting American anthropological
research team in response to continuing colonial depredations.
Chapter Three offers a reading of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) as a dialogic border narrative. Whereas *Mason & Dixon* depicts the process of people creating a border, *Almanac of the Dead* exposes the border’s creation of a people. The U.S./Mexico border in this novel functions as a Pynchonian zone of contention, a site of chaos and potential revolution. The indigenous population seeks to repossess its homeland. The desert has no interest in borders, and the native peoples, in transgressing the line, side with the land against the governments of both the United States and Mexico. Like Pynchon’s Visto, the border zone itself is not static, but moves as the consciousness it creates expands north and south of the political line.

Chapter Four discusses Einsteinian relativity as an indigenous epistemology in Alfredo Véa, Jr.’s first novel, *La Maravilla* (1994). This work brings together Pynchon’s technological tropes with Silko’s native prophecies. It also posits, as a form of relativity, the connections among the dispossessed of all races. Véa presents a preterite America positioned in the gaps of both the social fabric and the physical landscape. Set in a junk heap outside Phoenix at the beginning of the Cold War, *La Maravilla* seeks the miraculous in a world strangled by the sameness of the American Dream. The novel suggests that place itself can be transitory. After surviving the torrents of a purgative flash flood, the entire community disappears when Buckeye Road is swallowed up by Phoenix’s urban sprawl. Beto, the young mestizo protagonist, has learned from this place what he needs to survive, even if his site of origin is altered beyond
recognition. Like peyote medicine, the ghosts of his grandparents provide "a
dream that connects" Beto to his home and his ancestry, allowing the possibility
of a future within an increasingly placeless America.

Beset and terrorized by exiled Geordie coal pirates dressed as Indians along
the dark coast of England, Jeremiah Dixon experiences a dreadful sensation of
"America, waiting, someplace" (MD 243). He and his colleague Mason are
unsure of just what, when, or where America might be, but even at the end, they
have not given up on the idea of it. Nor, it seems, has their author. Without
waiting for the rest of the literary world to catch up, Pynchon, Marshall, Silko,
and Véa are in the process of discovering, shaping, and giving voice to the
postcolonial landscapes of this country.
CHAPTER ONE

Drawing the Line: Pynchon's American Interface

I wonder if the ground has anything to say?
—Young Chief, Cayuse, 1855

How can the spirit of the earth like the White man? . . . Everywhere the White man has touched it, it is sore.
—Wintu holywoman

In *Mason & Dixon*, Rebekah Mason’s ghost instructs her astronomer husband to “Look to the Earth.” For the past forty years, Thomas Pynchon has been instructing his readers to do the same. This chapter examines the role of the physical world in Pynchon’s literature through a reading of the mapped and unmapped spaces in his most recent novels, *Vineland* (1990) and *Mason & Dixon* (1997). In short, it is about cartography. We create maps in part to orient ourselves to our surroundings, in part to master those surroundings, and in these respects the subject and the form of my work overlap. In grappling with the organizational difficulties this chapter presented, I decided that what I needed was a good map, for myself as much as for any potential readers. Concerned

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and increasingly frustrated that my work lacked any cohesive structure, linear or otherwise, I traced out how it might look if I gave up (as Pynchon taught me to do long ago) on the clear logic of linear progression. I wrote the names of the sections of this text on note cards and placed them on the floor, hoping that they would line themselves up in some epiphanic yet orderly fashion. They did not.

What I saw on the floor was something quite different. It was a simulacrum of a geologic map that I produced some 15 years ago while charting the Maury Shale formation throughout the southern Appalachian Mountains from northeast Alabama to West Virginia. This map existed in two dimensions and was superimposed upon a line drawing of the geographical map of the southeastern United States. First, it moved laterally across the southeast to show the extent of the formation by linking all of the outcroppings I found, which also suggested the likely extent of the Maury Sea. Second, the map varied in height to depict the thickness of the current Maury formation and, of course, to suggest the relative changes in the depth of the ancient sea. Each outcropping was then portrayed in an individual stratigraphic profile showing the Maury Shale’s relationship to the underlying and overlying formations as well as such details as its weathering pattern, color, nodular content, and phosphate level at each location. Years before I heard of Claude Levi-Strauss or structuralism (with its attendant “posts”) or even the ubiquitous palimpsest, I was in the mountains digging through layers of meaning on my own.
This image of note cards scattered on the floor may well have exposed the origins, never too deeply concealed, of my interest in environmental literature. It is the notion, for me generated by this close contact with the earth, that everything is indeed connected. This chapter on *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon* therefore moves by association, through slender (though I hope discernible) interfaces from topic to topic, with each topic then given a close reading in cross-section. It involves drawing lines of connection while revealing borders of supposed separation. The ideas I discuss here—*Vineland* the Good, maps, the Visto, anomalies, ghosts—are linked intrinsically in Pynchon’s literature. To borrow another metaphor, that of the spider web that Leslie Marmon Silko uses to describe Pueblo narrative technique, they exist all at once as related entanglements. Ideally, one should discuss them simultaneously, which of course defies the narrative structure of a dissertation in English. I would, however, like to hold them all in mind while crossing the terrain of this text.

Pynchon’s literature presents several interrelated topographies, of which I would like to address three: the narrative topography of the text, the social topography of human interactions, and, of course, the physical topography of the landscape. Like Pynchon’s earlier novels, *Mason & Dixon* and *Vineland* feature complex narrative topographies whose passages reflect the crossings of physical interfaces encountered so often in the plots of the texts. *Mason & Dixon*’s primary plot proceeds within a fairly linear chronology, with the surveying of the Mason-Dixon line “sandwiched” between the two astronomical observations of the
Transits of Venus in 1761 and 1769. That said, the cartography of the novel itself becomes complicated by the various structural slippages as narrator, character, commentator, and author intertwine. History and fiction create and re-create one another. The framing narrative, told twenty years later by the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke across the border of the American Revolution, intrudes upon the story of Mason and Dixon with some frequency, and other textual pieces appear within and beyond the plot. Spatially, the main characters themselves remain ever in transit. Their motion takes them back and forth over the Atlantic Ocean from London to Cape Town, James’s Town, and Philadelphia, across the surface of colonial America, below to mysterious subterranean chambers, and above the earth in flights of fantasy. *Vineland*’s narrative topography features what David Porush describes as “three comic acts,” with the betrayal of the 1960s’ radical ideals at the heart of the novel, its “magic middle,” bounded by two sections portraying the consequences of that betrayal, the conservative backlash of 1984 America. Temporal and spatial borders break down, so that Ortho Bob, for example, a young American soldier killed in Vietnam during the war, inhabits the Thanatoid region of Shade Creek in 1984 Vineland County. As is the case in *Mason & Dixon*, *Vineland*’s characters are in constant transition. The

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3 Another critic, in an article I cannot find, has also noted the structural implications of this recurrent “sandwich” motif in *Mason & Dixon*.

interface provides access between territories, realms, and dispensations. The two novels converge in the mythological narrative of Vineland the Good.

The social topography of Pynchon's novels is no simpler to chart than the narrative or physical scapes of his work. The characters include nonhuman sentient (and verbal) beings, the ghosts of humans, the preterite/subjunctive dispossessed, recognizable authoritarian figures, and the nameless, faceless (perhaps even nonexistent) arbiters of totalizing systems of control. Pynchon offers social critiques of human acts of injustice against other humans, other creatures, and against the earth itself. *Mason & Dixon* attacks the Anglo-European social imperatives at the foundation of the colonial project: African slavery and native genocide. *Vineland* focuses more on the personal betrayals that divide families, friends, and lovers, and then demonstrates how these seemingly small-scale treacheries reflect and comply with betrayal on a national level. Both texts denounce the various systems and tools of domination, championing labor over corporations, small nations over colonial giants, spiritual possibility over Western monotheism, and magic over rationalism.

Pynchon has always taken the side of the dispossessed, revealing the injuries inflicted on the Preterite by the Elect. He suggests that although this type of moral exposure may carry consequences for the informer, the witness nonetheless has an obligation to speak out. Rev'd Cherrycoke has been banished from England by his own father for an act of textuality just as his fictional literary predecessor, William Slothrop, was expelled from the Puritan colonies for his
heretical tract, "On Preterition." As a young man, Cherrycoke confesses to posting "Accounts of certain Crimes I had observ'd, committed by the Stronger against the Weaker, — enclosures, evictions, Assize verdicts, Activities of the Military, — giving the Names of as many of the Perpetrators as I was sure of" (MD 9). In Vineland, liberal grandmother Sasha Gates devotes herself to naming the enemy after the McCarthy trials leave her and her husband unemployed in Hollywood; through her, Pynchon reminds us that oppression works on very local levels and that we do have access to resistance. Developing a political awareness, Sasha begins to see injustices "more directly, not as world history or anything too theoretical, but as humans, usually male, living here on the planet, often well within reach, committing these crimes, major and petty, one by one against other living humans" (VL 80).\(^5\) Vineland's Sister Rochelle teaches that we must each recognize and take responsibility for our individual complicity in the present state of affairs, as indeed Mason and Dixon grow increasingly aware of their roles in forming the nascent American republic. In Vineland, Pynchon indicts the usual suspects: "Hitler, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Nixon, Hoover, Mafia, CIA, Reagan, Kissinger, that collection of names and their tragic interweaving" (VL 372) along with the elder George Bush (then waiting in the wings) for authorizing acts of imperialist aggression abroad and repression at home. In

\(^5\) Thomas Pynchon, Vineland (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1990): 80. Future references are noted parenthetically and are abbreviated VL.
Mason & Dixon, he suggests that the unnamable forces behind such faces are even more dangerous.

At the heart of the social and narrative maps, however, is the living earth. Pynchon gauges humanity by both our treatment of other living beings and by our level of responsiveness to the non-human natural world. He reveals and condemns the tendency to subjugate, shut out, or replace the natural world and its processes. The physical landscape, and our behavior within it, is therefore crucial throughout Pynchon’s works. Specifically, we insist upon marking it up with all manner of borders: rail-lines, power-lines, cable-lines, fences, walls, dams; mining it for whatever of profit lies beneath the surface; turning it into a trash heap; making maps to transform place into property. The one thing we cannot do is leave well enough alone. In Gravity’s Rainbow, the Argentine anarchist Squalidozzi confesses to Tyrone Slothrop that, “‘We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that openness: it is terror to us’ “ (GR 264). Thinking to himself, Squalidozzi has already made the mental connection between Argentina and America: “We tried to exterminate our Indians, like you: we wanted the closed white version of reality we got – but even into the smokiest labyrinths, the furthest stacked density of midday balcony or courtyard and gate, the land has never let us forget” (GR 264). Although the Argentine fails to

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share his insight with the American Slothrop, the narrative voice warns the reader that the “closed white version of reality” is but a construct of colonial desire underlain by a more substantial terrestrial reality. Resistance lies in the land itself, in the messages, perhaps secreted away for another time, that remain to those who can read them. Through forces tectonic and telluric, the land works against the maps that would contain it. The land’s resistance serves as a base and model for human subjects who would challenge the colonial version of reality.

If “the land has never let us forget” the human and environmental consequences of global colonialism, then neither, certainly, has Thomas Pynchon. His novels have taken readers on a multinational journey into imperial madness. V. imagined the devastating effects of British colonization in Egypt and the genocidal debauchery of Foppl’s Seige Party in German Southwest Africa. The Crying of Lot 49 depicted a 1964 California already parcelled out, the landscape digitized like a Silicon Valley chip. Gravity’s Rainbow, set in the European zone of World War II, explored the human impulse to destroy ourselves and our planet through the trajectory of a rocket. Vineland returned us to California in 1984, wondering what happened to the “green free America” we were promised as children.

Early in Mason & Dixon, the LeSpark twins, Pitt and Pliny, ask for “a Tale about America” (MD 7). If Vineland depicts the Reaganomic end of America the Beautiful, then Mason & Dixon imagines its colonial beginnings. The Age of
Reason meets the Age of Information, and they look surprisingly alike. Michael Wood asks of Mason & Dixon, "why should we care about this amiably imagined old world, this motley and circumstantial eighteenth century smuggled into the twentieth—unless of course it is a ragged twentieth century smuggled into a simulacrum of the eighteenth." Of course, it is just that. Both temporally and spatially, from mid-18th century to late 20th and from sea to shining sea, Mason & Dixon and Vineland bookend America. These transgressive texts present within and between themselves a complex "Tale of Geminity" (MD 315), twinned narratives focusing on the interminable effects of colonization, on our obsession with inscribing ourselves upon the land, and on the possibility that good magic (a spiritual function of the natural world, in which love resides) still might save us, though ever undercut by the pervasive dread that it might always already have been too late. Good magic, like Véra's peyote, is "a dream that connects" human beings to each other and to the non-human universe. Most often in Pynchon's literature, this magic is accessible at moments and places of transition, as at the interfaces of night and day or life and death, or tucked away in the redwood forests of Vineland.

VINELAND THE GOOD

Vineland and Mason & Dixon are tales about America. David Cowart calls Vineland a “condition-of-America novel.” Following this assertion, Mason & Dixon would be a “pre-condition-of-America novel.” Both novels posit mythic origins by invoking the Pre-Columbian utopia imagined in the Icelandic rendering of “Vinland the Good.” This designation underpins the sense of possibility implied in what would become the philosophical ideals of “America.” It also, of course, emphasizes the contradiction of those ideals by the sociopolitical realities of the colonial and contemporary United States.

The Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, the storyteller of Mason & Dixon’s framing narrative, has been earning his keep by entertaining the LeSpark children with stories chosen for their “moral usefulness” (7). Like Vineland before it, this American morality tale incorporates themes consistent throughout Pynchon’s fiction: a condemnation of injustice and a search for the sacred within our profane world. It is a story, told over in many guises by Pynchon for the past four decades, in which America itself fares rather poorly in upholding the ideals of liberty and justice for all. Speaking from 1786 Philadelphia, which was the financial, political, and philosophical center of the American Revolution, the good Revd offers a very contemporary postcolonial critique of European imperialism in general and of American colonialism in particular.

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Mason & Dixon is, in part, about the two men and the border line they surveyed between Pennsylvania and Maryland in pre-Revolutionary America. More importantly, however, it is about the legacy of imperialism implied by this border and by others like it. It is a legacy created by our very existence on this planet, as Pynchon postulates that humans have driven spiritual beings, figured as perhaps our pre-human ancestors, ever deeper into exile within the recesses of the earth or the depths of the ocean. These and other ghosts of oppression haunt Pynchon’s natural world. Gravity’s Rainbow ends with a preterite hymn penned by William, the first transatlantic Slothrop, seeking “a face on ev’ry mountainside, / And a Soul in ev’ry stone. . . . (GR 760). Vineland and Mason & Dixon carry forward this vision of a spiritually-inhabited nature, or what David Abram would call the “more-than-human” cosmos to which we are all too often oblivious.9 For Vineland the Good to exist as anything other than a failed mythohistorical ideal, these more-than-human presences must be acknowledged and respected. Pynchon’s Vineland is a physical interface between realms, “where shadows came early and brought easy suspicion of another order of things . . . believed, through some unseen but potent geometry, to warp like radio signals at sundown the two worlds, to draw them closer, nearly together, out of register only by the thinnest of shadows (VL 220). Vineland and Mason & Dixon, in their dual interrogations of the idea and the actuality of America, are

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narrative interfaces that expose the causes and consequences of colonization on this continent.

For the Axman Stig, an agent from the Far North who has been posing as a Swede working along Mason and Dixon’s Visto, America has long been a matter of cartographic narrative. Epics such as the Icelandic *Saga of Erik the Red* and Bjarni Herjulfsson’s *Greenlanders’ Saga* tell of the first sightings of this brave new world a thousand years ago by Scandinavians who immigrated to Iceland, then Greenland, and finally to their “Vinland the Good,” probably Nova Scotia. Pynchon did not even have to indulge his penchant for eye-rolling fictitious names in this case: Thorfinn Karlsefni and his wife Gudrid led the first colonists, and their son Snorri “was the first European born on the North American mainland.” ¹⁰ What seems like a minor diversion (less than two pages) relayed by a minor character in *Mason & Dixon* reveals the origin of European settlement in the Western hemisphere and creates a mythohistorical context for Pynchon’s postcolonial American novels.

When Stig arrives in Philadelphia through the Capes of Delaware, the landscape is already familiar to him through the ancient texts. It is also, however, already a site of loss: “*Philadelphia Irredempta*, ceaselessly a-clamor in the torch-light, headlong, as if in continuous Arrival from the Future,— the Mesopotamian Idyll of the Svâns sens, as vanish’d as Eden” (*MD* 612). He tells

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Mrs. Eggslap about the first Norse visitors to the continent: "Rogues and Projectors and Fugitives, they went without pretext, no Christ, no Grail, no expectation beyond each Day’s Turnings, to be haunted by Ghosts more material, less merciful, than any they’d left at their backs" (MD 634). These ghosts the preterite Norsemen will leave at their backs, as well, for after three years on this North American continent, the earliest colonizers are turned back by the Indians with whom they trade. Instead of utopia, they have found only "the poor fragments of a Magic irreparably broken" (MD 612).

Despite this initial loss, Pynchon is not ready to relinquish the idea of Vineland the Good. Like Mason, who asks, "'Why mayn't there be Oracles, for us, in our time? Gate-ways to Futurity? They can't all have died with the ancient Peoples'" (MD 19), Pynchon wants to save a little of that magic. His oracles and gateways, the interfaces that connect, lie within the natural world, and America might yet be the most miraculous of places. The exiled Cherrycoke describes his own soulful pull to America: "'I was back in America once more, finding, despite all, that I could not stay away from it, this object of hope that Miracles might yet occur, that God might yet return to Human affairs, that all the wistful Fictions necessary to the childhood of a species might yet come true, . . . a third Testament. . . ." (MD 353).

Mason and Dixon, on the other hand, are less optimistic about America. Before they arrive in their new post, Dixon has already made the connection between the American colonies and South Africa: "'Tis said that these people
keep Slaves, as did our late Hosts, — that they are likewise inclin’d to kill the
People already living where they wish to settle’” (MD 248). He and Mason are
appalled by the Paxton Boys’ massacre of an entire village of Indians west of
Philadelphia. Dixon asks, " ‘Is this what America’s going to be like?’ " (MD 310).
Unfortunately, the answer is yes. This initiatory violence signals not only what
America will be like in Dixon’s experience, but what it will be like in the future.
Colonial brutality confuses the travelers: “They saw white Brutality enough, at
the Cape of Good Hope. They can no better understand it now, than then.
Something is eluding them. Whites in both places are become the very Savages
of their own worst Dreams, far out of Measure to any Provocation” (MD 306-7).
When Ben Franklin explains that South Africans’ violence results from the local
weather and its electrical charges, Dixon asks him, " ‘Then what’s America’s
excuse?’ " (MD 307). Threatened by hostile local boys at the Lancaster massacre
site, a disgusted Dixon sanitizes their genocidal act by describing it as " ‘a
neoclassical Instance of the Catastrophic Resolution of Inter-Populational Cross-
Purposes’ " (MD 343). Neither the “Savages” nor the “Wilderness” are to be
feared as much as the Americans themselves.

Two hundred years later, the same forces are in effect in Brock Vond’s
Amerika. Pynchon employs the pastoral to contrast the dreamed and waking
versions of America. In San Francisco, Zoyd Wheeler and Mucho Maas listen to
Sam Cooke’s “Wonderful World,” to “the sermon, one they knew and felt their
hearts comforted by, though outside spread the lampless wastes, the unseen
paybacks, the heartless power of the scabland garrison state the green free
America of their childhoods even then was turning into” (VL 314). Ever
nostalgic for the subjunctive fairy tale, Zoyd still believes “what a wonderful
world it would be” if only we could love each other. Frenesi, though, has
already recognized that love may not bring redemption, at least for her or for
Brock, “its trivializing in those days already well begun, its magic fading, the
subject of all that rock and roll, the simple resource we once thought would save
us” (VL 217). On his wedding day, oblivious to his bride’s emotional distance,
Zoyd indulges in peacenik pastoral fantasy:

   Everything in nature, every living being on the hillside that day,
   strange as it sounded later whenever Zoyd tried to tell about it, was
gentle, at peace—the visible world was a sunlit sheep farm. War in
Vietnam, murder as an instrument of American politics, black
neighborhoods torched to ashes and death, all must have been off
on some other planet (VL 38).

Unfortunately, all of these injustices exist on this planet, right here at home.

Zoyd’s fairy tale fails, he and Frenesi do not live happily ever after, and the soft-
focus pastoral transforms back into the harsh reality of everyday America while
the grandfolks argue “the perennial question of whether the United States still
lingered in a prefascist twilight, or whether that darkness had fallen long
stupefied years ago” (VL 371). The backwoods of Vineland County, though,
offer a different form of illumination, beyond the sentimental fuzziness of Zoyd’s
wedding, the prefascist twilight, and the constant Tube-glow that artificially light
up American space. Vineland’s radiance issues “the call to attend to territories of
the spirit" (VL 317). Even the hapless Zoyd understands that he “must have
choSEN right for a change, that time they’d come through the slides and storms to
put in here, to harbor in Vineland, Vineland the Good” (VL 322). There is still,
after all, a sense of place and a place for magic. Vineland the Good may never
have yielded what the Norsemen sought, but it might yet be what America needs
to save itself.

MAPS / SCAPES

The cartographic spaces in Mason & Dixon and Vineland operate as what
Stephen Tatum terms “topographies of transition.” Such spaces offer “more than
a parody or critique of imperialist or colonialist desires for territorial mastery. . . .
topographies of transition engage with metaphors of mapping and naming the
world in order to re-vision received histories and traditions and to define an
emergent space of transformation that is something other than merely a nostalgic
space of recollection.”11 Pynchon’s interface has always functioned as just such a
site of transition. It merges landscapes and dreamscapes, corporeal maps and
earthly orifices, the quick and the dead, the sacred and the profane, scientific
theories and literary tropes in order to force a critical reassessment of the human
relationship to the rest of the natural world, including the ineffable spiritual

11 Stephen Tatum, “Topographies of Transition in Western American Literature,” Western
realm. Pynchon seeks to retain a place for humans and other spiritual beings in response to an increasingly mechanized order that threatens to exterminate all that is sacred, including life itself.

The narrative voice deep within Mason & Dixon presents a beautifully haunting sermon on American possibility. In this dreamscape, the unmapped territory is sacrosanct. The western margins promise all that the metropolitan center denies. As long as it remains uncharted, the transitional topography of America offers freedom from the coordinates of waking rationalism:

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

Once the lines are drawn, however, the subjunctive hopes diminish. They retreat, like the pre-human creatures, into the cartographic gaps as excluded middles. With each advance of compass and chain, sacred space becomes government space. Freedom yields to control as mystery gives way to certainty.

The astronomer Charles Mason and the surveyor Jeremiah Dixon are employed, by whom they are never quite sure, to draw these lines. They
measure the earth and the stars and their relationship to each other. In these measurements lies a text, they presume, to be read. The reverend and astronomer Nevil Maskelyne believes that there is a message in the stars, a mathematical equation known only to God. At the Cape, Mason blunders by stating to the policeman Bonk that “we serve no Master but Him that regulates the movements of the Heav’ns, which taken together form a cryptick Message . . . we are intended one day to solve, and read” (MD 59). Doing so would, of course, eliminate the need for God if humans could read such divine inscriptions. The Age of Reason would therefore render God an excluded middle, an intermediary no longer necessary between men of science and the universe they would dominate. (The devil, it seems, would still be around, along with his attorney, patrolling the Visto.) Pynchon’s Deity is aligned with the mysteries of good magic, ancient oracles, the living earth, and human decency. This is not the God, appropriated by monarchs and merchants, in whose name was launched the conquests of worlds old and new, but a form of divinity much older and much more inclusive, yet also more particular, emerging from and attached to natural phenomena and specific physical sites. In Gravity’s Rainbow, such spiritual beings are referred to as Titans: “They are all the presences we are not supposed to be seeing—wind gods, hilltop gods, sunset gods” (GR 720). For Pynchon, the divine exists off the known map, in the dimensions beyond and interstices between the cartographic divisions that separate Euclidian space and the creatures that inhabit it.
Mapping in its many forms functions as a handmaiden to colonialism, but it also inspires introspection among those who perform the work of cartography, if not among those who commission it. Throughout their travels, Mason and Dixon become increasingly aware and critical of their roles as pawns in the quest for global dominion. On the island of St. Helena, Maskelyne sings, “Star-Gazing’s ever a Whore’s profession” (MD 136). The dual protagonists recognize themselves as “two Punches in a Droll-booth” (MD 73). Although the Royal Society pays the bills, neither knows just which imperial puppet master pulls the strings: the British East India Company, the Jesuits, or behind both, even more ominous “Forces invisible” (MD 73).

What can be the use, after all, of their charting and graphing of the heavens and earth? Whom will their efforts benefit most? Whom will they dispossess, disenfranchise, disenchant? These questions lurk not only in the consciences of Mason and Dixon but at the heart of the narrative itself, for Pynchon makes it clear that there is vast potential in the unmapped and the unmappable and that this potential diminishes with our presumption of spatial mastery.

Having sailed across the equatorial interface to observe the 1761 Transit of Venus from the Cape of Good Hope, the travelers—Mason, Dixon, and their joint Boswell, Wicks Cherryoke—encounter “the unreadable Map-scape of Africa,” a region of mystery to them, “this haunted and other half of ev’rything known, where spirit-powers run free among the green abysses and sudden
mountain crests" (MD 58). In contrast to the open landscape of the spirit powers, Cape Town, founded by the Dutch in 1652 as an imperial way station between the Netherlands and the East Indies, proposes itself as a model of order and control: “A town with a precarious Hold upon the Continent, planted as upon another World by sepia-shadowed Herren XVII back in Holland (and rul’d by the Eighteenth Lord, whose existence must never be acknowledg’d in any way)” (MD 58). The town is a foreign corporate entity, with the company dictating as much as possible all activities therein. The 17 members of the board of directors of the Dutch East India Company, with the Devil their 18th, are virtually indistinguishable from the state itself. The Cape is depicted as very much a police state. Even the Dutch clocks, bonging without warning every 15 minutes, maintain surveillance over the town’s inhabitants by dividing time into closely guarded segments. In fine Orwellian fashion, the Vroom girls call their clock “Boet” or “Big Brother.”

Upon arrival, Mason and Dixon are greeted by Police Official Bonk, one of several such agents they encounter throughout their travels, who seems more informed than they are regarding their mission and who instructs them in the rules of the Cape. He warns of the danger posed by the vastness of Africa beyond the confines of Cape Town, where “’What seems a solid Continent, stretching away Northward for thousands of miles, is in fact an Element with as little mercy as the Sea to our Backs, in which, to be immers’d is just as surely, and swiftly, to be lost, without hope of Salvation’ ” (MD 59). The distinction between
the urban coast and the elemental interior racializes space into a clearly-defined white city juxtaposed against an all-encompassing black wilderness that threatens to consume the city. Bonk implies that to the colonial mind, Africa is less physical than metaphoric, yet to the native inhabitants this homeland must be physical enough, for the land is the natives’ only hope of salvation against the invading colonists. What the colonists have yet to realize, however, is that their own salvation is dependent upon the land as well. They must develop a transformative relationship between humans and nonhuman nature in which conquest is elided from the equation.

The question this assertion begs is how different is this conceptually from North America stretching Westward into the merciless unknown wilderness?

Colonial enclaves cling to the coastlines while in the interior looms an unfathomable landscape with intangible occupants, all awaiting imperial inscription. In the Conoloways, far along their American journey, Dixon awakens one snowy spring morning from a dream of a “busy, prospering, sacred” (MD 608) city to their West. Echoing Bonk, Mason warns his companion of the increasing dangers of the North American interior, of

“the possibility, that waking Philadelphia is as sacred as anything over here will ever get, Dixon,— observe you not, as we move West, more and more of those Forces, which Cities upon Coasts have learnt’d to push away, and leave to Back Inhabitants [. . .] We trespass, each day ever more deeply, into a world of less restraint in ev’rything,— no law, no convergence upon any idea of how life is to be,— an Interior that grows meanwhile ever more forested, more savage and perilous, until,— perhaps at the very Longitude of your ‘City,’— we must reach at last an Anti-City,— some concentration
of Fate,—some final condition of Abandonment,—wherein all are
unredeemably alone and at Hazard as deep as their souls may
bear,—lost Creatures that make the very Seneca seem Christian
and merciful” (MD 608-9).

This Conradian vision depicts an inevitable loss of self in a space unmapped by
Europeans. Authorized space authorizes colonial savagery against indigenous
and imported occupants. Space beyond the confines of European cartography, in
contrast, threatens the colonial intruders. Mason’s imagined “Anti-City” is
therefore anti-western civilization.

Whereas Mason’s vision is apocalyptic, suggesting the horrors of the loss
of rational control, Dixon’s dream of what might lie at the end of the latitudinal
road is redemptive. Could his oneiric sacred city be Vineland, California? In his
1994 article, David Cowart notes the geographic relationship between the
fictional Vineland, California and its nonfictional counterpart, Vineland, New
Jersey.12 Both lie near the 40th parallel, one somewhat north, the other slightly
south. A quick glance at any map of the Pennsylvania/Maryland/Delaware
setting of Mason & Dixon inevitably brings Pynchon’s fourth novel into the
cartographic dialogue. Just southeast of Philadelphia, across the Delaware and
in the middle of the New Jersey peninsula, there sits Vineland.

In Vineland, the author hints strongly at the sacred sylvan city yet he also
presents a California under siege. Pynchon compounds his Heart of Darkness
imagery through allusions to an American film set in war-torn Vietnam,

*Apocalypse Now* (1979), Francis Ford Coppola's movie based on Joseph Conrad's novel. Southeast Asia replaces sub-Saharan Africa and colonial America as the dark and dangerous other that challenges the very notions of rationality and western civilization. Pynchon then superimposes this imagery on the militarized zone of 1960s southern California (as well as, in a narrative parallel, 1980s northern California). Rock and roll carries the voices of revolution, as "subversive music" from College of the Surf penetrates the nearby military compound, "finding the ears of sentries attenuated but ominous, like hostile-native sounds in a movie about white men fighting savage tribes" (VL 204). Pynchon sides with the savage tribes, recast as counter-cultural college students, against the military-industrial establishment.

In 1786 Philadelphia, young Ethelmer hears "the True inversion of the World" (264) in a new form of music, which Pynchon allows him to describe as "the Rock of the Oceans, the Roll of the Drums in the Night" (MD 204). Twenty-five years before, at the cape, while Mason falls victim to the Vroom women, Dixon is quick to ally himself with not the colonists but the colonized. Much of this alliance is couched in sensory terms. Dixon reacts against the regimented blandness of the Dutch by seeking the vital alterity evidenced by the locals. White Cape Towners deem Dixon dangerous in "his unconceal'd attraction to the Malays and the Black slaves,— their Food, their Appearance, their Music, and so, it must be obvious, their desire to be deliver'd out of oppression" (MD 61). Throughout his stay in the Cape, Dixon sneaks off each evening to the Malay
quarter, "a protruded tongue of little streets askew to the Dutch grid, reaching to the base of Table Mountain" (*MD* 82). Transecting the map of sanctioned space, this section of the city serves as a site of transgressive resistance to order. It is an intrusion of living color into the sterile white Dutch space. By violating the temporal boundary of 9:00 p.m. curfew, at which time whites must be safely absent from this district, Dixon crosses into outlawry, as he will spatially by crossing the Proclamation Line at the Alleghenies. In this quarter, Mason and Dixon witness Rakhman cooking a preterite feast with his *krees* dagger, the "odd number of waves to its Blade, signifying Alliance with the correct Forces" (*MD* 84). A counter-force! If there are correct forces, then we have already met the incorrect forces, which rule this colony and which are pervasive in this text.

When Dixon returns to South Africa following his sojourn to St. Helena, he finds a much-changed Bonk preparing to trek from the colonial controls of the Cape grid for the openness of Hottentot land, still a vast wilderness, where he plans to live as a farmer.

Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* advocates the political utility of preserving the wilderness: "We may need it someday not only as a refuge from excessive industrialism but also as a refuge from authoritarian government, from political oppression."\(^{13}\) Abbey foresees America's inclusion in the "world-wide drift toward the totalitarian organization of men and institutions" (130), styled

by Pynchon as “They-systems,” the incorrect forces against which wilderness
may offer sites of resistance. Bonk seeks in the open space of the 1761 Hottentot
hinterland the same freedom from government control that Zoyd Wheeler and
other hippie refugees seek in Vineland in the early 1970s. Vineland draws some
of its magic from the fact that it has not been mapped out entirely, that it remains
to some extent both wild and mysterious. To convince Zoyd that the hiding is
good in Vineland, Sasha explains to her son-in-law that, “‘Half the interior
hasn’t even been surveyed—plenty of redwoods left to get lost in, ghost towns
old and new blocked up behind slides that are generations old and no Corps of
Engineers’ll ever clear, a whole web of logging roads, fire roads, Indian trails for
you to learn’”(VL 305). Even more effectively than the “Casbah topography”(VL
25) of Gordita Beach, this complex network of passages leading to the interior
protects the various exiles from their pursuers, at least for a while.

Even as depicted on old and incomplete maps, Vineland is gendered as a
maternal site to contrast the patriarchal power system. Although the complex
gender dynamics of the novel defy simplistic binary identifications, Vineland
exemplifies the fertile, nurturing, and healing aspects associated with Mother
Earth in contrast to those more malevolent aspects suggested by the “white
mother city” (VL 274) and its agent of destruction, the “mother ship” (VL 375)
Huey military helicopter used against Americans and other enemies of the state,
an image reborn in Vea’s novel as the grandmother envisions the “Sikorskis,” the
"pinche helicopters" flying over Vietnam. Geographically, Vineland Bay resembles a womb that protects its children from the harsh storms of the outside world:

"A Harbor of Refuge," as the 1851 survey map called it, "to Vessels that may have suffered on their way North from the strong headwinds that prevail along this coast from May to October," Vineland Bay, at the mouth of the Seventh River, was protected from the sea and its many unsolved mysteries by two spits, Thumb and Old Thumb, and an island out in the bay, called False Thumb (VL 316).

Promising sanctuary to battered vessels, including those who, like Zoyd, trekked north to escape authoritarian control, Vineland continues to shelter and mother its inhabitants, whether living or dead, in whatever forms they take. Living humans commingle with Thanatoids, woje, animals, redwoods, and cannabis, usually in peace.

The landscape surrounding Vineland features something sacred that offers humans a spiritual rejuvenation. Millard and Blodwen Hobbs come "back to Earth" from the acid sixties "deep in the Vineland redwoods in a cabin by a stream from whose bed they could hear gold-bearing cobblestones knocking together at night" (VL 48). As a warning, however, against our total destruction of the natural environment, Pynchon forecasts a time when even Vineland will be suburbanized beyond recognition as "part of a Eureka-Crescent City-Vineland megalopolis" (VL 317). In one of his long descriptive passages, Pynchon

explicates the effects of Vineland on those who journey from near and far to this sacred space:

log keepers not known for their psychic gifts had remembered to write down, more than once, the sense they had of some invisible boundary, met when approaching from the sea, past the capes of somber evergreen, the stands of redwood with their perfect trunks and cloudy foliage, too high, too red to be literal trees—carrying therefore another intention, which the Indians might have known about but did not share (VL 317).

Nor do the Indians in *Mason & Dixon* share whatever they might know of the landscape bisected by the Visto. Fifty years after the loggers note Vineland's peculiarity, early photographs substantiate the written claims by revealing a strange light which "could be seen even today in the light of Vineland, the rainy indifference with which it fell on surfaces, the call to attend to territories of the spirit . . . for what else could the antique emulsions have been revealing?" (VL 317). The quality of light in Vineland grants new perspectives, illuminating angles and dimensions too often invisible to human eyes. This place makes spiritual demands upon and offers spiritual rewards to its human inhabitants.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Squalidozzi notes that the openness of the Zone offers limitless hope and limitless danger. Although for Pynchon unmappability most often signifies the possibility for good magic, it can also denote the capacity for unbounded evil. In Cape Town, Dixon visits the Company Lodge with his Dutch South African host, Cornelius Vroom. Unlike the mostly festive carnivalesque "local" pubs the surveyors frequent, this labyrinth is a den of
imperial iniquity, featuring everything from opium rooms to sado-masochistic sex/snuff chambers to—it is rumored—a quarter-size replica of the Black Hole of Calcutta. It bears much in common with Foppl's Seige Party of V., or Lepton Castle, which Mason and Dixon will later visit together in America and where Mason will experience an episode of "Moral Panic."

The crossing of boundaries, typically figured in Pynchon's literature as a positive step toward connection with humanity and the non-human world, here at the Company Lodge involves a retreat farther into the eroticized recesses of destructive imperialist desire. Each threshold promises the fulfillment of some unspeakable taboo between oppressors and oppressed. This Cape edifice stretches back into unmapped and forbidden rooms: "The Penetralia of the Lodge are thus, even to those employed there, a region without a map. Anything may be there. Perhaps miracles are still possible,—both evil miracles, such as occur when excesses of Ill Treatment are transform'd to Joy,—quite common in this Era,—and the reverse, when excesses of well-being at length bring an Anguish no less painful for being metaphysickal,—Good Miracles" (MD 151). In a single sentence, Pynchon presents a complex double interface combined with the shocking revelation that miracles are not inherently good. Whatever good miracles may still exist will not be found, however, in the Company Lodge. Here, as so often in Pynchon's literary world, sadism brings pleasure to both the assailant and the victim, thereby reversing the roles and revealing the mutual complicity of the participants. Good miracles will occur at the latter intersection
of the excesses, when well-being recognizes and rejects the ill-treatment of
others, as when Oedipa Maas identifies with the suffering old sailor in *The Crying
of Lot 49*, or when in Baltimore Dixon frees the slaves and turns the whip on the
slave-master.

Like *Mason & Dixon*, *Vineland* also features sinister spaces off the map.
These are most often government spaces to which ordinary citizens are oblivious.
To contrast the spiritual underground of Vineland County, there is a federal
underground, an entire network of agents and informants keeping tabs on the
American public. Whereas the forest represents a zone of potential redemption,
the federal web is a zone of certain betrayal. Frenesi’s disappearance into the
Witness Protection program signals her cooptation into the Federal Family that
works to break the bonds to family, friends, and homeplace so that Frenesi and
other snitches exist in a world free of consequences. Federal narcotics agent
Hector Zuñiga tells Zoyd that Frenesi, “‘up till they terminated her budget line,
was livin in a underground of the State, [...] a certain kind of world that
civilians up on the surface, out in the sun thinkin ‘em happy thotz, got no idea
it’s even there . . . .’” (*VL* 31). The state has created this unmapped space as a
pernicious site of control, invisible to the surface residents who are being
monitored, where the government can rechannel the rebellious energy of
youthful idealism to its own purposes.

This alternative world even has its own time zone. While living
underground with her second husband Flash, Frenesi feels a sense of temporal
escape into "no longer the time the world observed but game time, underground
time, time that could take her nowhere outside its own tight and falsely deathless
perimeter" (VL 293). This illusory perimeter keeps Frenesi psychologically safe
from all she has attempted to leave behind: her daughter Prairie, her leftist
friends, and her culpability for Weed Atman’s murder. The game time buzzer
sounds in 1984 when Reagan’s budget cuts terminate Frenesi’s federal existence.
Frenesi realizes that for years, “She had been privileged to live outside of Time,
to enter and leave it at will, looting and manipulating, weightless, invisible.
Now Time had claimed her again, put her under house arrest, taken her passport
away. Only an animal with a full set of pain receptors after all” (VL 287). Death
begins again, and so does life. Crossing the interface from the federal
underground back to Vineland, Frenesi reenters “Time,” thereby ending her
sojourn into freedom from personal responsibility for her actions.

In addition to the amorphous yet pervasive space of the federal
underground, there are other more specific unmapped state spaces evident in
Vineland. When Frenesi disappears after federal troops quell the rebellion of the
People’s Republic of Rock and Roll at College of the Surf, her companion DL
searches for her among the officially non-existent spaces of California. FEER, the
Federal Emergency Evacuation Route, is a covert nuclear escape passage to
northern California. Brock Vond uses the invisible artery to transport hostage
students to PREP, the novel’s Nixonian political re-education program.
This secret spot suggests nonfictional sites of containment, such as the California internment camps where Japanese-Americans were held prisoner during World War II or the reservations and forts where American Indians have been, and to a large extent still are, hidden away from the general population. Brock's program is cut when young people come seeking government careers. Hector reveals that the abandoned site has been appropriated by refugees from Vietnam and El Salvador, though it is "hard to say how they even found the place" (VL 347). These displaced persons, victims of American imperialism, have turned the tables by altering the social topography, not to mention the complexion, of the United States, much as indigenous peoples have begun to use their reservations as powerful land bases for resistance against the government that still seeks to eliminate them. The system itself offers opportunities for opposition to those who can locate the gaps in the power structure.

With other members of their film collective, DL seeks the secret highway leading to Frenesi. The site they know exists is not represented on official maps, but "street" maps produced by Berkeley radicals approximate the location of the secret internment camp: "They peered at the maps, each with that enigmatic blank in the middle, like the outline of a state in a geography test, belonging to something called 'the U.S.,' but not the one they knew" (VL 250). The aporia in the map is necessarily as enigmatic as the activities that occur there. DL uses her ninja training as a form of mental and geographic triangulation to determine the location of the road. Subverting the flow of positive energy sought by
practitioners of feng shui, the engineers who built this road used the earth itself to obscure its existence by placing it along, "the crestline of the Coast Range north in a tenebrous cool light, beneath camouflage netting and weatherproof plastic sheet. It was a dim tunnel that went for hundreds of miles, conceived of in the early sixties as a disposable freeway that would only be used, to full capacity, once" (VL 249). DL must drive the "sturdily enhanced" and aptly named '57 Chevy Nomad off-road and then off the map to intersect the mysterious federal freeway.

Although DL finds Frenesi not only at the end of the road, but deep within the earth in a chamber designed to withstand a nuclear holocaust, it is already too late. The "bad miracle" of sado-masochism, which links the narratives of the Company Lodge, Lepton Castle, and the Jesuit Viudas de Cristo to Vineland's PREP, has already taken place, for Frenesi is herself a willing blank space desirous of inscription by the reprogrammers who hold her captive. Pynchon replicates this psychosexual captivity narrative in Mason & Dixon through the story of Eliza Fields, who is transported by Shawnee Indians along a secret route from Conestoga across the border to Quebec, where she becomes a whore for the Jesuits just as Frenesi becomes a whore for the federal government. Their experiences in bondage, however, send them in different directions. Eliza escapes with Captain Zhang and eventually intersects the Visto not far from her former home. Sexually rebuffed by Zhang, Eliza sees her possibilities multiplied beyond the binary of returning to her husband or to Zarpazo. She heads west for
open territory with Zsuzsa so they can be "Adventuresses" (MD 540). This is the road not taken by Frenesi. When DL rescues her, Frenesi looks back with longing upon the PREP compound. Frenesi will soon return to the disciplined map of government space.

THE VISTO

Among many other beginnings in this text, Mason & Dixon suggests the beginnings of the American Road. Almost fifty years before Lewis & Clark made their famous transcontinental journey to the Pacific, and more than a century before John Muir and John Wesley Powell left their own manifest marks on the American West, Mason and Dixon divided what David Cowart terms the "as yet embryonic republic"\(^\text{15}\) in half: north from south, free from slave, Penn from Calvert, Quaker from Catholic. What is the nature of this divisive road, and where will it lead?

The Line drawn by Mason and Dixon is at once an interface between and a site of contestation among competing elements. Physically, it is a Visto hacked out of the Mid-Atlantic woods "eight yards wide and due west" (MD 8), a mobile Zone bearing along the surveying team and their carnivalesque groupies for

approximately 244 miles (even the Encyclopædia Britannica is uncertain of the surveyed border’s length). Among the OED definitions for “visto” (now “vista”) are “a view or prospect, especially one seen through an avenue of trees,” “a long and narrow opening (especially one made on purpose) in a wood, etc. through which a view may be obtained, or which in itself affords a pleasant prospect; an avenue or glade,” and “a mental view or vision of a far-reaching nature.” Pynchon’s Visto incorporates all of these meanings. The Visto is an instrument, like the sectors and telescopes of the surveyors, for looking into the past and the future. In constant transit east and west along the interface, the surveyors are able to look both ways. As Cherrycoke says, east belongs to the past, while the future lies to the west. The Visto affords characters a glimpse into the future and readers a glimpse from the future into the Age of Reason.

_Mason & Dixon_ is very much a late 20th century border narrative set in the 1760s. The Visto creates a new epistemology, a new consciousness among not only those who draw the line, but also those whose lives the line intersects, and certainly those who come after. This new consciousness, shown here at its birth and explored in its more mature aspects in Silko’s _Almanac of the Dead_, is most

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16 Under the entry for “Mason and Dixon Line,” the Encyclopædia Britannica Online cites the line’s length as 233 miles; in the “Jeremiah Dixon” entry, however, it has grown to 244 miles. Is this Kute Korrespondence another instance of what Cherrycoke notes as mysterious occurrences of the number 11? Latrobe cites the length of the Visto as “244 miles, 38 chains, and 36 links from the Delaware, or 230 miles, 15 chains, and 21 links from the place of beginning, at the northeast corner of Maryland” (38). See John H.B. Latrobe. “The History of Mason and Dixon’s Line: contained in an address delivered by John H.B. Latrobe of Maryland, before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, November 8, 1854.” Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1855. The text of the address is available through the Library of Congress Online at http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/murray:@field(FLD001+91898509+):@@@$REFS.
often associated with the border between the United States and Mexico. Pynchon’s implication that the line itself has generative power corresponds to notion conveyed through Silko’s map at the beginning of *Almanac of the Dead*, in which the international border is a bold, straight line that dominates the drawing. The rest of the map is distorted in relation to this falsely straight line of demarcation. Pynchon’s narrative, like Silko’s, bends itself to an examination of the symbology of the border, including its function as a sign of colonial domination, its potential as a site of resistance, its spatial malleability, and its cultural consequences.

Embedded within *Mason & Dixon* lies another border narrative. In 1854, Mr. John H.B. Latrobe of Maryland gave an address entitled “The History of Mason and Dixon’s Line” to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The text of this address is almost certainly a primary source for Pynchon. In addition to providing a surprisingly straightforward account of the convoluted series of land grants, purchases, conquests, and lawsuits that led to the ultimate hiring of Mason and Dixon to settle the border dispute, Latrobe is unable to resist engaging in romantic speculation about the effects of the border itself. He even compares, as does Pynchon, this border to the border of Scotland, claiming that Sir Walter Scott “would have found in the feuds of the Peninsula, and along the northern confines of Maryland, as ample materials for his genius to combine, as much diversity of character and as thrilling incident, as magnificent scenery, and
as wild adventure, as were furnished him by the history of his native land."  
With a sigh, it seems, Latrobe resigns himself to the conclusion that "These are themes for the future novelist, however, rather than the historian," but he cannot stop there. Unable to find sources on Mason and Dixon, Latrobe invents characters for them by analyzing their signatures. He decides that Mason must have been "a cool, deliberate, painstaking man" and Dixon a "more active man, a man of an impatient spirit and a nervous temperament, just such a man as worked best with a sobersided colleague." These are the characters, the morose Mason and the gregarious Dixon, Pynchon gives us in his novel.

Although Latrobe supposes his historical figures to have been unimaginative men for whom he must speak, Pynchon develops Mason and Dixon into characters who are both conscious and conscientious of their work's potential effects. For Mason and Dixon, the process of marking the boundary raises difficult questions regarding the already global political and economic forces behind their work. One of the more pressing issues they confront is the question of who "owns" American space. The line they are drawing is not between two nations nor even two states, but between the "two Proprietorships" of Pennsylvania and Maryland. This task is intended to settle the boundary dispute, already 80 years old, between the two proprietors, ostensibly the Penns and the Calverts. The identity of these proprietors, however, is itself open to

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17 Latrobe, 28.
18 Ibid, 30.
19 Ibid 41.
debate, as is the length of the proposed West Line. Late in the project, Stig complicates matters even more by forwarding the Swedish claim to Delaware, vowing that "for Penn, Swedes were but another tribe of Indian, residing within his American Grant, whose Priority there he found no less irksome, — which is why, at bottom, there ever was a Boundary Dispute, and these Astronomers are come here at all" (611). The farmer John Harland's suggestion that "If by 'the Proprietors' you mean those who truly own" the land beyond the western limit of Maryland through which the line is to continue raises several possibilities: "The Indians" (Dixon), "The Army" (Harland), or "the Penns" (Mason) (MD 468). Later the surveyors are ordered (by whom?) "to continue the West Line 'as far as the Country is inhabited.' Legally this suggests as far as the Proclamation Line, at the Crest of the Alleghenies" (MD 470), yet of course the country is quite inhabited beyond that. Only the Euroamerican inhabitants count.

In his essay, "The Earth is Our Mother," Ward Churchill asserts that the Proclamation Line of 1763, intended by King George III to appease his Haudenosaunee and Muscogee allies by keeping his colonial subjects in place east of the Alleghenies, was a major cause of the American Revolution. The settlers' desire for Indian land west of the line, and the promise of it made by various eastern political and military leaders, drove the colonies' joint quest for independence from England. Pynchon underscores this reading of the historical

moment by casting his George Washington as a pot-smoking surveyor and disgruntled land speculator whose big development plans for the Ohio Territory have gone unrequited by the King’s court. Having been whisked away from Philadelphia by coach on an all-night road trip, Mason and Dixon meet the founding father at Mt. Vernon, where they discuss the effects of drawing lines on the land. " 'Why else refrain from expanding West,' mildly inquires Dixon, ‘but out of a regard for the Humanity of those whose Homes they invade?’ " (MD 277). Already viewing himself in opposition to the British, Washington responds with the warning that Americans "'will be no more contain’d, than tax’d’" (MD 277). The revolutionary spirit is building, and the Proclamation Line is an imperial hindrance to American liberty. Rev’d Cherrycoke reminds his listeners, however, that liberty "'was taken in those Times to encompass the darkest of Men’s rights, — to injure whomever we might wish, — unto extermination, if possible’ " (MD 307). Pynchon’s irony reminds readers that this broad though unilateral definition of liberty remains in use in Cherrycoke’s 1786 as well as at our own late date. Such depredations as those the surveyors witness in their travels have yet to cease. King George’s line taunts the colonists by prohibiting access to the free and "uninhabited" territory to the west of the mountains. Mason and Dixon’s Visto provides an avenue for reaching this forbidden frontier and for furthering the dispossession and decimation of the indigenous population.
Even before they begin the task of surveying, Mason and Dixon have vague misgivings about the nature of their work and about this project in particular. By the time of their first Christmas in America, Dixon experiences a recurring dream of “himself upon a dark Mission whose details he can never quite remember, feeling in the grip of Forces no one will tell him of, serving Interests invisible” (MD 394). The renegade Jesuit Captain Zhang helps define the surveyors’ mutual uneasiness. A late arrival among the westering travelers (though foreshadowed by the Learnèd English Dog hundreds of pages before, on page 18), Zhang is a Chinese geomancer and feng shui expert who condemns Mason and Dixon’s cartographic project. He warns the surveyors that their Visto will have any number of evil, though as yet unforeseen, consequences because the line

“acts as a Conduit for what we call Sha, or, as they say in Spanish California, Bad Energy. — Imagine a Wind, a truly ill wind, bringing failure, poverty, disgrace, betrayal,— every kind of bad luck there is,— all blowing through, night and day, with many times the force of the worst storm you were ever in.”

Ever the straight man, Mason objects that the line is “a Boundary, nothing more,” which in turn elicits a vehement reprisal from Zhang:

“Boundary! . . . Ev’rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature,— coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks,— so honoring the Dragon or Shan within, from which Land-Scape ever takes its form. To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon’s very Flesh, a sword-slash, a long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year ‘round to see as other than hateful Assault. How can it pass unanswer’d?” (MD 542).
How indeed? For we know that the ill wind is even then approaching, that a
hundred years hence the Civil War will split the country along this very axis,
thereby turning the entire state of Maryland into a militarized border zone, and
that the Mason-Dixon Line will in popular parlance come to signify the cultural
distinctions between the northern and southern United States. The Visto takes
on its own energy, its own mythology, and its own problematic place in
American history.

Captain Zhang confirms for Mason and Dixon that they are indeed pawns
and their line but a “Stage-Setting” in an eternal battle which, he claims,
“‘Zarpazo and I must enact upon the very mortal Edge of this great Torrent of
Sha’” (545). In effect, this conflict is a struggle for the soul of America, but it is a
battle that has been raging for eons. Zhang’s enemy is the Spanish arch-Jesuit
Father Zarpazo, also known as the Wolf of Jesus. This villain resembles Ishmael
Reed’s monomaniacal Set and his Jesuit descendent, Heirophant One, from
Mumbo-Jumbo. In Gravity’s Rainbow, Pynchon defers to Reed’s knowledge of
plots. The Jesuits in Reed’s novel are invested in subjugating the natural world
and its indigenous inhabitants in order to create a safe (if illusory and,
ultimately, temporary) space for Anglo-European domination. Set, characterized
as the founder of western civilization, is the white brother of black Osiris.
Associated with nature in all its fecundity and funkiness, “Osiris had developed
such a fondness and attachment for Nature that people couldn't tell them
apart."\(^{21}\) Unable to connect with people or nature, the jealous Set choses instead to rule the world: "Set hated agriculture and nature which he saw as soiled dirty grimy etc. . . . People hated Set. He went down as the 1st man to shut nature out of himself. He called it discipline. He is also the deity of the modern clerk, always tabulating, and perhaps invented taxes."\(^{22}\) He murders his brother, separates the people from the earth, outlaws dancing, and writes new texts giving himself authority. Nature, however, speaks out through the texts and rhythms of Jes Grew and through its human carriers. The conflict continues for centuries, translocating from ancient Egypt to contemporary America. Pynchon mirrors the struggle between the Jesuit knight Heirophant One and the Jes Grew voodoo detective PaPa LaBas depicted in *Mumbo-Jumbo* by pitting Padre Zarpazo against the feng-shui expert Zhang in *Mason & Dixon* and federal prosecutor Brock Vond against karmic adjusters/martial arts experts DL Chastain and Takeshi in *Vineland*.

Like Brock Vond, and like Reed's Set and Heirophant One, Marshall's Harriet Shippen, and Silko's Serlo, Father Zarpazo is a control freak. Lecturing his seminary students, he predicts the Foucauldian paradigm of surveillance and separation, stating that, "'The Model [. . .] is Imprisonment. Walls are to be the Future. Unlike those of the Antichrist Chinese, these are to follow right Lines'" (MD 522). When asked to justify why he opposes the Chinese practice of feng-


\(^{22}\) Ibid, 162.
shui, Zarpazo replies, "'Because it works'" (MD 523). Harmony and control are ever at odds. The Jesuit reveals the arrogance of crusaders and conquistadors for whom religion has ever been a deadly weapon in colonialism: "'The Christless must understand that their lives are to be spent in servitude, — if not to us, then to Christians even less Godly, — the Kings, the Enterprisers, the Adventurers Charter'd and Piratick'" (524). Right lines such as those drawn by Mason and Dixon are meant to keep the Christless in servitude. Whom, though, shall they serve?

Father Zarpazo, who wants lines drawn on the land, wants the Visto to proceed. Zhang explains that there is no circumventing the Wolf of Jesus, for "'tis his Destiny to inflict these Tellurick Injuries, as 'tis mine to resist them'" (MD 544). What use can be these straight lines drawn on the land, if not for a network of domination by those in power, those in league with evil? Zhang answers one of the text's questions by revealing that the Destroyers, included those listed by Zarpazo above, stand to gain from the completion of the Line:

"Who'd benefit most? None, it would seem, but the consciously criminal in Publick Life as in Private, who know how to tap into the unremitting torrent of Sha roaring all night and all day, and convert it to their own uses. Howling like a great Boulevard of souls condemn'd to wander up and down the grim surfaces" (MD 547).

The use of "Howling" here implies both Jonathan Edwards' 16th century colonial "wilderness" against which the Puritans battled and Allen Ginsberg's Beatnik vision of America as a site of lost possibility. The passage also reinforces the
concept, discussed later in this chapter and in those that follow, of the
unredeemed dead seeking justice. Bad Energy creates Bad History:

"To rule forever," continues the Chinaman, later, "it is
necessary only to create, among the people one would rule, what
we call . . . Bad History. Nothing will produce Bad History more
directly nor brutally, than drawing a Line, in particular a Right
Line, the very Shape of Contempt, through the midst of a People,—
to create thus a Distinction betwixt 'em,— 'tis the first stroke.— All
else will follow as if predestin'd, unto War and Devastation" (MD
615).

This imminent Bad History includes the Civil War, but Zhang advises his
listeners that slavery exists everywhere, not merely south of the line.

Zhang's imagery of the assault upon the flesh of the dragon, with the line
as a scar of evidence, reminds us that the earth is a living creature, as Nevil
Maskelyne supposes on St. Helena and as Dixon realizes along the Visto. The
earth is a sentient body, like others, and the surveyors are marking its corpus
with straight lines and right angles, establishing coordinates so that it may be
further monitored, subdivided, and apportioned. Dixon understands that this is
not the first time he has served the forces of enclosure. As a young surveyor in
his native Durham, Dixon "had slic'd into Polygons the Common-Lands of his
Forebears. He had drawn Lines of Ink that became Fences of Stone. He had
broken up herds of Fell sheep, to be driven ragged and dingy off thro' the Rain,
to Gates, and Exile" (MD 587). He sees that the Visto is a means of controlling an
unruly landscape as enclosure throughout England sought to contain human
subjects and their roaming livestock. The Visto allows the Sha to work by suppressing the earth’s own telluric powers in favor of political powers.

If by definition the Visto represents a way of seeing through nature, then that perspective is obtained only at the expense of the natural world. Pynchon is clear that the destruction of the trees along the line, the gaping wound eight yards wide, is but a precursor of the destruction that awaits any who would stand in the way of westward expansion or by extension, the onslaught of Western Civilization. Late in the novel, Dixon surmises that the Indians must understand the ruin the surveyors bring, as well as the message of the line, which he interprets as, “‘As you see what we may do to Trees, and how little we care,— imagine how little we care for Indians, and what we are prepar’ed to do to you’” (MD 679). Here and elsewhere, Pynchon links the degradation of the environment explicitly to the genocide of human beings. When at last the Visto is complete, the Indians disappear into the wilderness, “as if, as long as a Tree remain’d, so might they” (MD 681). Responding to Mason’s discomfort amidst so many trees, Zhang declares that, “‘Trees produce Enlightenment. Trees are not the Problem. The Forest is not an Agent of Darkness. But it may be your Visto is’” (MD 615).

This environmental vision resonates with that presented in Vineland. The novel’s original jacket cover features Darius Kinsey’s photograph, entitled Crescent Camp No. I, of a clear-cut hillside ravaged and smoldering. Populated with redwoods and loggers, Vineland is a testament to the sanctity of trees and a
witness to the devastation wrought by corporate deforestation throughout the
American West. Mexican parrots smuggled into northern California tell children
"full-length stories" including that of "the coming of the humans and the
disappearance of the trees" (VL 223).

Pynchon aligns America, land of the dispossessed and home of the
betrayed, with the third world, particularly in reference to the war on drugs,
declared during the 1980s and expanding ever since. Specifically, the author
links America to Vietnam, which runs as a subtext throughout Vineland, creating
a dialogue between the 1960s and the 1980s. Across the Pacific, the U.S. military
fought communism by using defoliants such as Agent Orange to destroy vast
areas of Vietnamese jungle. The armed strikes against Holytail, a 1984
"Sherwood Forest" (VL 221) in which the residents engage in various forms of
guerrilla warfare to protect their homes and pot crops, recall those missions
against Vietnam.

Exhibiting a particular reverence for cannabis, Pynchon ridicules the anti-
drug movement through such episodes as the "dope-field shoot-out," in which
"a great nation pursued its war on a botanical species" (VL 271). According to
Special Agent Roy Ibble, cocaine is another of "'those substances which God
may have created but the U.S. Code hath decided to control'" (VL 354). In the
autumn, pot country flourishes, producing crops in an atmosphere that is as lush
and inviting as any portrayal of Arcadia: "As crops in the sun grew fatter,
flowered, more densely aromatic, as resinous breezes swept out of the gulches to
scent the town day and night, the sky over Vineland County, which had allowed
the bringing of life, now began to reveal a potential for destroying it” (VL 221).
Neighbors view the troops behaving “as if they had invaded some helpless land
far away” (VL 357), as if the Vietnam War, the formative experience for the
sixties' generation, had come home to Vineland. Nicknamed “Death from
Slightly Above,” Brock flies around in a Huey, wearing a “flak jacket and
Vietnam boots” (VL 375) and brandishing a flamethrower. Frenesi comes home
to occupied territory. As Frenesi's plane approaches VLX, the cabin crew notes
that the “air controllers down there sounded just like they did in Vietnam” (VL
355). For reasons both political and personal, a full-scale war is turning Vineland
the Good into Amerika. The war of aggression conducted in Vietnam and
predicted in Vineland is today being carried out through Plan Colombia, the
United States' $1.3 billion campaign to stop cocaine production by defoliating
southern Colombia with glyphosphate. This ecocidal endeavor, pursued with
no regard for the survival of native peoples, plants, or animals, is likely to result
in social and ecological catastrophe. Once again, the government is clearing a
space for domination, creating a thoroughfare for Sha, and writing yet another
chapter of bad history.

Other lines in Mason & Dixon both subvert and support the force of the
Visto. Dixon's teacher, William Emerson, knows of the Ley lines in Durham, the
ancient and basically benevolent lines along which he teaches his students to fly.
Nonetheless, the ley lines are straight lines of force along the landscape, with
their powers concentrated at the intersections, or meeting places. Emerson warns that any straight lines on the earth may bring dire consequences:

"The Romans . . . were preoccupied with conveying Force, be it hydraulic, or military, or architectural,— along straight Lines. The Leys are at least that old,— perhaps Druidic, tho' others say Mithraic, in origin. Whichever cult shall gain the honor, Right Lines beyond a certain Magnitude become of less use or instruction to those who must dwell among them, than intelligible, by their immense regularity, to more distant Onlookers, as giving a clear sign of Human Presence upon the Planet" (MD 219).

The imperialist Romans brought their straight lines of domination, writing their vias of human influence upon the earth, ruling and ordering the places and peoples they encountered. Straight lines throughout the colonial world, drawn for the convenience of various state proprietors, fail to follow the natural borders of landscape that mark tribal zones. As 20th century decolonization has shown, such straight lines inevitably lead to trouble.

Emerson chastises his pupil Dixon for choosing to be a surveyor and thereby furthering the demarcation of the land. He is wary of such projects as might be of interest to "more distant Onlookers." Who are they? Extraterrestrial beings? Creatures capable of flight, such as Emerson's own students? Or perhaps the Jesuits, with their hot air balloons? The measurements and grids, while obvious from a distance, may form an invisible trap for those caught on earth within them. Zhang warns Mason and Dixon, "Someone wants your Visto" (MD 601), that is, not simply the black line on the map, but the cleared space itself, as an avenue for Shu.
As they note the correspondences linking their colonial travels, Mason and Dixon become increasingly convinced that "the Line is exactly what Capt. Zhang and a number of others have been styling it all along, — a conduit for Evil" (MD 701). They question their roles in preparing this conduit as they have in rendering other services for the Royal Society. Pub-goers at The George, Mason’s local, suggest that a cartel of philosophers stole 11 days by implementing the Gregorian calendar in Britain in 1752. They posit that England’s Royal Society is in fact in league with the Jesuits, who must all be on the same time, because "'Time, ye see' says the Landlord, 'is the money of Science, isn't it. The philosophers need a Time, common to all, as Traders do a common Coinage" " (MD 192) in case they want to coordinate global events. To Mason’s surprise, the local boys interpret the recent observation of the Transit of Venus by astronomers world-wide, their calculations collated to derive the parallax, as such an event, a sign, perhaps, of the apocalypse. Dixon’s Emerson has his own suspicion of " 'a great number of Jesuit Observatories, flung as a Web, all over the World, it seems, — modeled somewhat, I’m told, upon the provisions made for observing the Transits of Venus’ " (MD 223). While the Mohawks never ask Mason and Dixon the "fatal" question, "Why are you doing this?" (MD 641), Emerson does ask Fr. Maire the “obvious Question": "'how often will Emplacements like that ever be needed?’ " (MD 223).

In the American colonies, Mason and Dixon learn of another type of emplacement. Colonel George Washington informs them that the French have
been planting lead plates (with Chinese inscriptions) in the ground throughout the territory they control. Concerned that the plates may have electrical implications, Dixon asks Colonel Washington, "'Why may not these Plates collectively form a Tellurick Leyden-Pile?'" (MD 286). The Reverend Cherrycoke interjects to concur that there "remains a residue of Belief, out to the Westward, that the mere presence of Glyphs and Signs can produce magickal Effects, -- for the essence of Magic is the power of small Magickal Words, to work enormous physical Wonders, --" (MD 286), but getting one word wrong could prove disastrous, "for one letter misplaced can summon Destruction immediate and merciless" (MD 286). The metals and the words combine to convey a force, perhaps magical, perhaps diabolical. The image these emplacements most clearly convey is that of land mines planted throughout the world during the 20th century. Back in Philadelphia, young Dolly (later Madison?) reminds Dixon that the surveyor's magnetic needle, in deference to "'what Shapes lay beneath the Earth'" (MD 301), does not always point north. Dolly predicts that other forces on earth will prove magnetic as well, such as those malevolencies Dixon has found at the Cape's Company Lodge and will encounter again at Lepton Castle, and she advises him to beware.

Inevitably, though quite unintentionally, the surveyors are drawn to Lepton Castle. They are "lost at nightfall" (MD 412) when at this transitional moment they stumble into the deceptively ramshackle cabin containing "the Denizens of Hell, and quite busy at their Pleasures, too" (MD 412), where they
are known and apparently even expected. Here they meet Wade LeSpark, the
arms dealer in whose living room twenty years hence Wicks Cherrycoke retells
the episode. Lord Lepton's story is the American Dream itself. A privileged
ne'er do well, bankrupted in England, Lepton sets out for America as an
indentured servant under an assumed name and ascends the ranks to become a
wealthy iron-master. It is in this mercantile capacity that he knows LeSpark, for
iron is the metaphor for control. LeSpark laments that, "few distinguish between
the Metal itself, and the Forms it happens to end up in, the uses it is widely
known for being put to, against living Bodies, - cutting, chaining, penetrating
sort of Activities, - a considerable Sector of the Iron Market, indeed, directed to
offenses against Human, and of course Animal, flesh," all of which he excuses by
adverting to "the invisible Grasp of the Magnetic" (MD 412). The Reverend
opines to himself and to the reader (though certainly not aloud to his benefactor)
that LeSpark elides from his tale the critical role of "Negro Slavery" in enabling
his "Proprietary Happiness": "the inhuman ill-usage, the careless abundance of
pain inflicted, the unprie'd Coercion necessary to yearly Profits beyond the
projectings even of proud Satan' " (MD 412). Mason rightly experiences his
"Moral Panick" (MD 414) at Lepton Castle. As at the Cape's Company Lodge,
anything may be found in this place: slave musicians from all over the colonized
world, whores trained in Quebec's satanic Jesuit convent, and a full-service
casino linking gambling with global trade.
Mason and Dixon also find here the inverted star, a "Polaris of Evil" (MD 428) that has haunted their travels. This symbol, a metal five-pointed star mounted on the stock of a rifle, links Lepton Castle to South Africa and to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the site of a recent massacre of Indians by whites. Righted, the star is a sign of good luck in the South African Bush country.

Inverting the star, however, changes its meaning into "a sure sign of evil at work, universally recognized as the Horns of the D—-I" (MD 342). The rifles bearing these inverted pentacles are therefore the devil's tools. Mason accuses weapons dealer Wade LeSpark, "'perhaps these occurrences, — ' Mason glowering, 'as others, are invisibly connected" " (MD 429), suggesting that this polaris is but one star within a galactic or perhaps even a universal network of evil. Unable to resist venturing past the authorized end of the Line, Mason and Dixon find at last a Lancaster Rifle in the hands of Catfish, a Delaware Indian, who carries also the fresh scalp of the white man from whom he took it. Having reached, for the moment, the end of the American Road, they turn back.

ANOMALIES

As Graham Huggan reminds us in "Decolonizing the Map," the map can never be an exact representation of the earth, as the signifier can never be the signified. The spaces between words/maps and the things they stand for present an uncharted territory for resistance, so that "cartographic discourse can be seen to play an exemplary role not only in the demonstration of the empowering
strategies of colonialist rhetoric but in the unwitting exposure of the deficiencies of these strategies.” 23 Latrobe notes “it was one thing to execute the deed of 1732 on parchment, and another thing to execute it on the disputed territory.”24 Despite the best efforts of the surveyors to eliminate such phrases, “good enough” and “more or less” still describe the boundary project. Although their map will be accepted by the Royal Society, it remains less than accurate. The boundaries will later be adjusted.25

All of Mason and Dixon’s work reveals some measure of uncertainty. At Table Mountain in South Africa, watching from the same post at the same time, the pair differs by two to four seconds in their mutual observation of the first Transit of Venus on June 5, 1761 owing to either Dixon’s “observational impatience” (MD 98) or Mason’s “Caution inflexible” (MD 99). In determining the parallax, place is the variable while time is the constant. The parallax is calculated based on the differences in points of observation. Each astronomer is to record the exact moments of contact and detachment at both the ingress and egress of the planet Venus across the face of the sun. These four readings must be taken at the same moment worldwide, which requires a global synchronization. Certainly the viewing equipment and timing devices vary.

Some accounting must be made, as well, for such timing discrepancies as

24 Latrobe, 23.
25 ibid, 42-43.
Mason's and Dixon’s, multiplied by others from all over the world. Do they simply cancel each other out or take an average? In any case, Mason and Dixon are lauded for their splendidly successful observation of this first transit. Others have not obtained such results, and on St. Helena, Maskelyne's broken plumb line prevents him from taking accurate readings of anything. The second transit, eight years hence, when the team is split, will not be so successful for either Mason or Dixon.

Whether the result of human error or terrestrial design, gaps in the map function as sites of resistance. The anomalies are mysterious spaces where magic remains a possibility. The most difficult task the surveyors encounter is that of running the tangent line that slices Delaware from Maryland. Latrobe states that Mason and Dixon were brought from England for the surveying job because of "the difficulty of tracing this circle."26 The meridian is supposed to run exactly north and south, but that proves impossible for even Mason and Dixon. With the land already marked by previous surveyors' failed attempts to determine the tangent, "the inscriptions made upon the body of the Earth" are likened to the tattoos on the bodies of the Iroquois and on Oedipa's drunken sailor from *The Crying of Lot 49*. This space is not unbounded but over-defined, so that each surveyor writes a new text upon the surface. It is common knowledge among the survey team that "just at the Tangent Point, strange lights appear at Night, figures not quite human emerge from and disappear into it, and in the Daytime, 

26 Latrobe, 17.
Farm animals who stray too close, vanish and do not re-emerge’ " (MD 323).
This uncertain location is known as “the Delaware Triangle” or “The Wedge” (MD 323). Like the waterspout in V. or the Black Hole of Calcutta in this novel, the Wedge is a classic example of Pynchon’s interface, where two dispensations intrude upon one another: “Yet there remains to the Wedge an Unseen World, beyond Resolution, of transactions never recorded” (MD 470). This space is both unmappable and unreadable.

Geopolitically, the Wedge also exemplifies the excluded middle. It is not Pennsylvania nor Maryland nor the new “Delaware.” Because it defies spatial definition, the Wedge is “not so much claim’d by any one Province, as priz’d for its Ambiguity, — occupied by all whose Wish, hardly uncommon in this Era of fluid Identity, is not to reside anywhere” (MD 469). “To be born and rear’d in the Wedge is to occupy a singular location in an emerging moral Geometry” (MD 323), and especially as the line extends west, this moral geometry will play itself out in the courts among “the most litigious people on Earth” (MD 324). R.C., the American surveyor who swallows Dixon’s perpetual motion watch, personifies the madness that rules the Wedge.

If human behavior in this region is unpredictable, it may indeed be in keeping with the local telluric character of the Wedge. For the most part, the “impossible Geometry” of the Wedge is attributable to royal madness. The monarchs who granted vast tracts of land to Penns (Charles II) and Calverts (the Duke of York, later James II) created these border disputes by failing to clarify
the boundaries from the outset. There are also, however, other explanations for the surveyors' difficulties in establishing the tangent, for the earth itself contains forces that defy their instruments: "Nearby, withal, is Iron Hill, a famous and semi-magical Magnetick Anomaly, known to Elf Communities near and far, into which riskers of other peoples' Capital have been itching for years to dig" (MD 470). The corpus of Iron Hill remains unassailed in part because the diggers might be required to pay taxes to more than one political entity. "A small geographick Anomaly" (MD 470), the Wedge remains unmapped, at least temporarily, even after this second incursion by Mason and Dixon. Its legal status, while unresolved, affords the land a measure of protection against miners and developers and, of course, cartographers and kings.

The existence of such anomalies as might wreak havoc with magnetic instruments brings into question the accuracy of the entire mapping project and of the possibility of representation. Along the Visto, Mason and Dixon learn of various magnetic curiosities. One of their surveying companions, Jonas Everybeet, "will locate, here and there across the Land, Islands in Earth's Magnetick Field, — Anomalies with no explanation for being where they are, — other than conscious intervention by whoever or whatever was here before the Indians" (MD 442). These local deviations from the gravitational norm, which geologists attribute largely to variations in crust density, skew the map by producing negative magnetic readings. Everybeet, however, interprets these departures more transgressively by stating the intentionality of suprahuman
precursors. Were these anomalous magnetic islands placed within the earth as the Jesuits' lead plates were placed beneath the surface? What or whose territories do they mark?

Pynchon writes freely of creatures that lived on earth before the Indians. Mason and Dixon encounter several features within the landscape that bespeak of pre-human origins. Their guide reveals that the cave near South Mountain has "ancient Inscriptions, Glyphs unreadable" though "if it's writing, it'd have to be older'n [the Indians]" (MD 497). Mason cries, "it is Text, and we are its readers, and its Pages are the Days turning. Unscrolling, as a Pilgrim's Itinerary map in ancient Days" (MD 497-8). Mason makes the connection to Stonehenge, which he visited frequently with his wife Rebekah and to which he returns in search of her spirit. This inexplicable arrangement of stones, like the ley lines of Durham, suggest the prior existence of tribal peoples in Britain. Across the Ohio River, earthworks resembling massive serpents indicate that humans were not the first inhabitants of the earth. Captain Shelby offers: "'the Indians tell you that the Serpent, as the other earthworks unnumber'd of that Country, was already ancient, by the time their own people arriv'd. Indians speak of a race of Giants, who built them' " (MD 595). The serpent's shape is apparent not from the ground, but from the sky alone. According to many tribal cultures, the snake is a messenger between worlds. The earthwork serpent and the Worm at Lambton Castle in Mason & Dixon echo the African snakes Damballah and Ogoun in Almanac of the Dead and The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, along with the stone
snake that emerges from the uranium tailings at Laguna. In Vineland, Sister Rochelle tells Takeshi a feminized garden story in which the first man was not Adam but the serpent. The existence of these serpent figures, either within the landscape or within narratives of the landscape, allows for the existence of other worlds and other epistemologies within this one.

Farther west, the surveyors encounter a cone-shaped mound in the path of the Visto. It is possibly a source of telluric power resembling Ben Franklin’s Leyden Battery. This mound of abjection consists not of metal plates, however, but of layer upon layer of refuse. Perhaps it will serve as “an important staging-house, for . . . whatever it may be” (MD 599). Will this future event be a fight against the impulse to draw lines or a manifestation of evil? What Mason and Dixon see when they peek across the mountains is Catfish brandishing a Lancaster Rifle. The evil has been set in motion, like the clockwork universe set in motion by a deistic hand. Captain Zhang links the extraterrestrial invaders to the Jesuits: “’They came from the Sky, they prepar’d to emplace these Webs of right lines upon the Earth, then without explanation they went away again. Their work is being continued by Jesuits, inscribers of Meridians’” (MD 601). Whoever “They” may be, they sound very much like the “They-systems” in Pynchon’s earlier novels as well as the Destroyers in Leslie Silko’s works. Here, as in Silko’s texts, we meet the agents (Jesuits, slave-masters) of the Destroyers while the destructive force itself remains less identifiable.
There is, of course, an alternative to the destructive possibilities Captain Zhang foresees. Other more benevolent creatures, most often invisible to us, inhabit our world. In 1769, Dixon views the second Transit of Venus from Hammerfost Island and is then "taken" farther north, not quite to the pole, into the light of no sunset. He journeys to the interior of the earth, a space whose existence he has discussed earlier with Zhang and Stig along the Visto. The little people in Terra Concava send messages to the outer world through the "Tellurick Forces, including that of Magnetism" (MD 740). The spatial arrangement of the arctic interior requires a different set of rules, as people here are always leaning toward each other, surrounded by earth, rather than away from each other into the void. They warn that when people like Mason and Dixon have done their jobs, the little people will have to move: "Once the solar parallax is known," they told me, "once the necessary Degrees are measur'd, and the size and weight and shape of the Earth are calculated inescapably at last, all this will vanish. We will have to seek another space" (MD 741). Like the woge that have retreated into the landscape in Vineland, these subterranean creatures are ever in exile. Vineland's woge also keep tabs on the humans who displaced them. They are "creatures like humans but smaller, who had been living here when the first humans came" (VL 186). Hippies suggest that the woge have stayed nearby "to wait and see how humans did with the world. And if we started fucking up too bad, added some local informants, they would come back, teach us how to live the right way, save us. . . . " (VL 187).
GHOSTS

Pynchon opens *Gravity’s Rainbow* with an epigram by Wernher von Braun, the father of the atomic bomb:

Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death.

*Mason & Dixon* and *Vineland* perpetuate this notion of life after death along with its implied counterpart, death within life. For Pynchon, death itself is a landscape, an uncharted hinterland contiguous with the land of the living. At the interface of life and death, Pynchon’s physical landscape is haunted by the ghosts of colonialism. Appearing as both individual sprites and national specters, the ghosts represent centuries of betrayal on all levels: “Men of Reason will define a Ghost as nothing more otherworldly than a wrong unrighted, which like an uneasy spirit cannot move on” (*MD* 68). These unrighted wrongs, everywhere in evidence in the 18th century, are just as valid at the end of the 20th.

Pynchon’s fiction exposes the injustices, historical and on-going, that his readers, inevitably complicit, may prefer to overlook. The unattributed narrative voice behind Cherrycoke establishes the context of the story: “This Christmastide of 1786, with the War settl’d and the Nation bickering itself into Fragments, wounds bodily and ghostly, great and small, go aching on, not ev’ry
one commemorated—nor, too often, even recounted" (MD 6). Mason & Dixon is a 20th century commemoration of these aching wounds, made apparent and contemporary in Vineland, yet to heal and compounded daily. Like The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, Almanac of the Dead, and La Maravilla, Pynchon's novels recount crimes against individuals, humanity, and especially against the earth itself. The story of Mason and Dixon is made more poignant by our knowledge of what comes after: that this internecine fragmentation will result in the Civil War, that genocide, slavery, and racial prejudice will continue to haunt the Americas, that the future of the world may indeed be one of corporations and prison walls, that our own environment is further denigrated by our cartographic obsessions and extractive economies.

Within the text of Mason & Dixon are several other texts, among them a Gothic serial entitled The Ghastly Fop, which everyone seems to have been reading for more than 20 years. In this 18th century British soap opera, the fop bears a remarkable resemblance to the Thanatoids, the community of "insomniac unavenged," among them victims of the Vietnam War and other instances of state-sponsored murder, who populate the fringes of Vineland, California. Karmic Adjuster Takeshi describes his Thanatoid clients as victims of karmic imbalances—unanswered blows, unredeemed suffering, escapes by the guilty—anything that frustrated their daily expeditions on into the interior of Death, with Shade Creek a psychic jumping-off town—behind it, unrolling, regions unmapped, dwelt in by these transient souls in constant turnover, not living but persisting, on the skimpiest of hopes (VL 173).
Death is depicted as a landscape, unmapped, still open and teeming with one last possibility. As a region, death is not a final destination, but an interpretable territory in which hope, however minimal, still survives. The Thanatoids, like dead, but not, exist on this interface between life and death. They move about here, exploring the land of the dead while sharing space with the living. The permeable boundary between life and death is rendered at best indistinct.

Like the Thanatoids, the ghastly fop is not quite alive but is unable to leave this world until he achieves resolution. In this case, he must set his financial accounts straight. Each righting, however, reveals additional wrongs, so that the fop’s quest seems to extend in perpetuity. There is, it seems, no single identifiable source of the fop’s ill-fortune, but a web-like “knotting into” rather than an “unraveling” (GR) of plots. To further conflate the narrative strands, characters from the magazine serial appear in Cherryoke’s historical tale at the same time as two of his young listeners, the cousins Tenebrae and Ethelmer, momentarily transported to another room in the LeSpark house, are reading Eliza Fields’ quasi-pornographic version of the same captivity narrative, blurring the boundaries between the textual world and the “real” world within the novel. Pynchon gives us several ghost stories within a ghost story.

Charles Mason’s personal ghost story is that of his haunting by his late wife, Rebekah. The Deist Mason searches for her everywhere, finds her occasionally, and generally does what she asks, even if somewhat reluctantly. Rebekah’s death in 1759, two years before the story begins, is the source of
Mason’s relentless melancholy. Although the narrative never states so explicitly, it seems that she died while giving birth to the couple’s second son, Doctor Isaac. Furthermore, it seems that some type of betrayal has transpired between Mason and Rebekah and the Bradleys in Greenwich. Whatever the case, Mason suffers from a guilty conscience. His globetrotting is in part an excuse to stay away from his children, especially from young Doctor Isaac. His grief and guilt are intensified by the South African slave Austra’s pre-feminist assertion that white women are also enslaved by their men. Mason’s search for a magic potion among the Malays, his questioning of the Learned English Dog and Jenkin’s Ear, and his visits to Stonehenge all stem from his desire for Rebekah’s resurrection. He needs desperately to make amends, but is ever unsure how. The Age of Reason may deny the existence of ghosts, yet Mason surmises, “if Reason be also Permission at last to believe in the evidence of our Earthly Senses, then how can he not concede to her some Resurrection?” (MD 164). In the assertion of his earthly senses over his Deist sensibility, Mason finds ghosts manifest everywhere. The suffering and injustice he witnesses throughout his travels compounds this personal desire for restitution, and again, Mason is confused, and remains in an emotional limbo, most often unable to connect meaningfully with others.

Vineland’s Zoyd Wheeler is hoping for a resurrection, as well. His personal ghost is his ex-wife, Frenesi Gates, who is not dead but merely appropriated by the federal government’s witness protection program. Zoyd
watches for her on late night television, imagining himself the melancholy flower child crooner of an album entitled *Not too Mean to Cry*. Years of living underground have made Frenesi a mystery to her daughter, Prairie, who searches computer files of her "ghost" mother digitized on the screen. The search for her mother introduces counter-cultural Prairie to the "other" America represented by Brock Vond, the control freak federal prosecutor obsessed with Frenesi. It also permits her access to Weed Atman, the Thanatoid mathematician and Frenesi's one-time lover, who was murdered through Brock's agency before Prairie's birth. On the other side, meanwhile, suspended in the game time of the federal underground, Frenesi has remarried and had a son, building a tenuous life as a government informant until Reagan budget cuts return her to the world she left behind.

Both Rebekah and Frenesi are associated very closely with the natural world and both pull their survivors into closer contact with the spiritual qualities of the physical earth. The geographical sites where these women appear function as interfaces between dispensations. Sasha has sent her son-in-law Zoyd to live in Vineland in part because that is where Frenesi is most likely to resurface from the government's underground. Frenesi is connected, more so than to any person, to this place from her childhood. As predicted, this is exactly the site, more than a decade later, of Frenesi's return, just in time for the Becker-Traverse family reunion.
As a child, Frenesi is exceptionally sensitive to her physical and spiritual environs. With no trepidation, she approaches the backwoods of Vineland County alone, where she finds a land of mystery. Years later, cousin Claire tells Zoyd of “young Frenesi the explorer and the reports she’d come back with about rivers that weren't supposed to be where she found them, and of the lights on the far banks, and the many voices, hundreds it seemed, not exactly partying, nor exactly belligerent either” (VL 320). These are the voices of betrayal emanating from “the strange 'lost' town of Shade Creek, supposedly evacuated in a flood of long ago, now unaccountably repopulated with villagers who never seemed to sleep” (VL 320). The Thanatoids have come home to Vineland the Good, creating in this hospitable setting their own ghost town of the fatally dispossessed. Despite her early connections to this magical landscape, however, Frenesi later turns against place, family, and community. She even contributes to the population of Thanatoia by facilitating Weed Atman’s murder. In doing so, Frenesi becomes her own living ghost, exiled from Vineland into a federal purgatory. She cannot go home until she is once again turned into a “ghost” when the government erases her “deeply personal lil ones and zeroes” from its computer database.

In contrast to Frenesi, Rebekah Mason is most closely associated not with her home, but with a place she never saw while alive. Rebekah visits Mason on St. Helena, the South Atlantic island then “owned” by the British East India Company, to which Mason and Dixon sail after observing the Transit of Venus in
Cape Town. Like Shade Creek in *Vineland* and Bournehills in *The Chosen Place*, the *Timeless People*, St. Helena is a site of convergence for betrayed souls. The island is the site of Nevil Maskelyne’s odd though temporary exile in pursuit of the longitude prior to his appointment as Britain’s Astronomer Royal. Of course, the European powers will later sentence Napoleon to exile on St. Helena from 1815 until his death there in 1821. It is not, in this story at least, a tropical paradise. Rather, St. Helena functions as a physical and spiritual intermediary, a volcanic island between the continents of Africa and South America and a realm in which dispensations overlap and compete.

As is Marshall’s Bourne Island, Pynchon’s St. Helena is divided against itself. Leeward James’s Town and windward Sandy Bay are as “two distinct nations, in a state of mutual mistrust, within ten Miles’ Compass, and the Wind never relenting” (*MD* 160). This is the realm of darkness: the night rises at sunset and retreats at sunrise. The island’s domination by the dog star Sirius hearkens to the Death-Eye Dog era, the period of the past 500 years of colonialism, in Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*. It is not, after all, a human province, “this broken island, so long ill us’d” (*MD* 126), where “A very small town clings to the edge of an interior that must be reckoned part of the Other World” (*MD* 107). Because the island appears to be below sea level, it inspires in visitors Dreams of drowning in a flood. In contrast to Frenesi’s Dream of the Gentle Flood, this flood would be apocalyptic rather than redemptive.
St. Helena functions as a microcosm of the human race's careless and short-sighted attitude toward the environment, not only worldwide, but universally, extending to the realm of the stars Maskelyne and Mason would read. As a failed garden, it suggests, like America, the possibilities of what could have been. Maskelyne's commentary on the complex pastoral view afforded on St. Helena suggests that this paradise, too, has a serpent within the volcano. "So will the Reign of Reason cheerfully dispose of any allegations of Paradise" (*MD* 134). The island evinces the human destructiveness that is ultimately self-destructive: "In thoughtless Greed, within a few pitifully brief generations, have these People devastated a Garden in which, once, anything might grow. Their Muck-heaps ev'rywhere, Disease, Madness" (*MD* 135).

Maskelyne senses a conspiracy between the island and the mercantile interest that controls it: "For a while I firmly believ'd this Place a conscious Creature, animated by power drawn from beneath the Earth, assembl'd in secret, by the Company" with all of the inhabitants constantly under surveillance. He confides to Mason, "'tis the awareness of living upon a Slumbering Creature" that makes him tread lightly, "that keeps us uniquely attentive to Life so precarious, and what Civility is truly necessary, to carry it on" (*MD* 128). This requires staying awake and paying attention.

The wind carries the voices of ghosts in this novel, just as the Seventh River, the Yuroks' "river of ghosts" (*VL* 186) in *Vineland* and, of course, the Atlantic Ocean in Marshall's *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* resonate with
the voices of the dead. The wind on St. Helena, in both its physical assault and psychological implications, may indeed inspire madness in visitors to the island. It also, however, reveals the madness inherent in the colonial enterprise. Here Nevil Maskelyne cries out to his newly-arrived companion, “Aahckk! Mason, can y’ not feel it? This place! This great Ruin,—haunted... an Obstinate Spectre,—an ancient Crime,—none here will ever escape it, ‘tis in the Gases they breathe, Generation unto Generation” (MD 132). Gradually awakening to the unseen, somewhat like Zoyd awakens to the neofascism of the 1980s, Mason “already suspected that the Island enjoys a Dispensation not perhaps as relentlessly Newtonian as Southern England’s,—and as to whose Author’s Identity, one may grow confus’d, so ubiquitous here are signs of the Infernal” (MD 133). Especially on the windward side of the island, at Sandy Bay, Newtonian absolutes break down, allowing the interjection of irrational elements, most notably Rebekah’s ghost, into the waking world. The unabated wind interferes with the astronomers’ measurements, so that their work, which demands an exact calculation of Sirius’s position, always includes an element of uncertainty. Pynchon plays with this notion of breaking the supposed barriers between realms, suggesting to the reader that the wind is “As supernatural as a Visitant from the Regime of Death to the sunny Colony of Life,—to be metaphorickal about it...” (MD 173). To preserve his sanity, Mason escapes from Sandy Bay on a passing dhow, whose Arab sailors (akin, perhaps, to V.’s
sailor sage Mehemet?) are the only other characters to acknowledge Rebekah’s presence in this sunny colony.

Within the Western desire for hegemony, Mason’s and Dixon’s various mapping missions signify a wider-ranging imperative of conquest: what Menand calls “the standardization and universalization of time and space” necessary for the regulation of life, human and otherwise.27 The Enlightenment quest for scientific knowledge brings with it a hierarchical cultural component that demands the subjugation of entire groups of people. The oft-visited Mason slowly realizes that colonialism is itself a sign of the infernal. The capitalist impetus of colonialism, to secure global markets, invariably leads to all manner of oppression, “for Commerce without Slavery is unthinkable” (MD 108). The “great Worm of Slavery” (MD 147) is evident throughout the protagonists’ travels, bringing along its attendant ghosts. As he did in V., Pynchon portrays South Africa as the apex of colonial evil, where slavery dominates Cape life as its memory haunts Marshall’s Bournehills. The accumulation of evil will eventually require a day of reckoning, for “here is a Collective Ghost of more than household Scale,—the wrongs committed Daily against the Slaves, petty and grave ones alike, going unrecorded, charm’d invisible to history, invisible yet possessing Mass, and Velocity, able not only to rattle Chains but to break them as well” (MD 68). Pynchon records and makes visible at least the existence of the unnumbered wrongs. Writing from a post-apartheid perspective, Pynchon is

able to envision the breaking of chains that must in 18th century South Africa, as elsewhere, have seemed such a remote possibility. Dixon, much sooner than his associate, understands “what haunts these shores exactly to the Atom, — ghosts ev’rywhere, —Slaves, Hottentots driven into exile, animals remorselessly Savage, — a Reservoir of Sin, whose Weight, like that of the atmosphere, is borne day after day unnoticed, adverted to only when some Vacuum is encountered” (MD 155). Oppression becomes the norm, creating a new culture of slaveholders and slaves. It brings with it as well the desire for opposition, so that the system of global colonialism generates its own opponents along with its own co-conspirators.

The breaking of chains requires a clear vision of individual culpability as much as a gathering of collective strength. The Quaker Dixon advises the Sons of Liberty that "‘Tis not how British treat Americans, . . . ‘tis how both of You treat African Slaves, and the Indians Native here, that engages the Friends more closely’ " (MD 568). Late in his American journey, Dixon laments that throughout their travels, he and Mason have participated in the cycle of oppression, for they have accepted the king’s money and allowed slaves wait on them: “Where does it end? No matter where in it we go, shall we find all the World Tyrants and Slaves? America was the one place we should not have found it” (MD 693). Pynchon forces his protagonists into personal accountability. By turning the whip on the slaveholder and freeing the chained slaves in Baltimore, Dixon acts outside the bounds of colonial, and certainly Quaker, propriety. His
violent eruption, like the Black Hole of Calcutta that so fascinates him, is an anomaly in the social landscape of European colonialism. Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* states that while accountability must begin with individuals, America must force itself into an as yet unrealized national accountability or risk the violence of retribution as the ghosts of oppression, and their living descendents, raise their voices in dissent.
CHAPTER TWO

Exploiting the Excluded Middle:
Paule Marshall's Landscape of the Conscience

whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals,
precisely and inexorably,
what they do not know about themselves
-James Baldwin

Our victims know us by their scars and by their chains, and
it is this that makes their evidence irrefutable. It is enough
that they show us what we have made of them for us to
realize what we have made of ourselves.
—Jean-Paul Sartre

Like Thomas Pynchon and Leslie Marmon Silko, Paule Marshall brings to
contemporary American literature an acute awareness of the United States’
powerful role within the postcolonial world. Born and raised in Brooklyn, the
daughter of recent Barbadian immigrants, Paule Marshall writes of the
relationship between the metropolitan West and the West Indies and of
characters who like herself must negotiate the two cultures. Spanning the second
half of the 20th century, her works are studies in multiplicity featuring primarily
women protagonists on the interface of cultural boundaries. These texts, if not

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2 Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth (New York, Grove Press,
exactly megalonovels, are certainly big books, attested to by their length, complexity, and status within contemporary American letters. In addition to its vital contribution to American literature, Marshall's œuvre has proven a critical asset to the emergence of African-American, Caribbean, and diasporic literatures, Black feminism, and postcolonial theory. For Marshall, the Caribbean is the hybridized zone of contradictions in which these generic categories converge and in which her protagonists struggle to exist on the interface. Here many of the presumed dichotomies of the contemporary world break down. From a Pynchonian perspective, this space and its inhabitants form an excluded middle between Africa and America, the First World and Third World, the past and the future. This in-between zone is a site of confluence, much like Pynchon's St. Helena or the Visto or Silko's Tucson, in which narrative strands come together and from which Marshall launches her very political literary statements.

As a writer, Marshall seeks the excluded middles, or the gaps as Véa calls them, as her sites of literary production. The West Indies have proven to be both the source of and an extraordinary fruitful space for Marshall's project. Left behind in the great Triassic breakup of the southern supercontinent, Gondwanaland, more than 200 million years ago, the coral islands lie within the triangle connecting Africa to North and South America. In only 500 years, the colonial enterprise has overtaken eons of continental drift by reconnecting the continents in an intricate web of global economics, bringing with it cultural interchange and racial amalgamation. On her tiny West Indian stage, Marshall
rehearse for the reader these five centuries of Afro-Caribbean oppression and resistance.

In a statement that links her directly to the notion of the excluded middle, Marshall acknowledges that such an intercultural, migratory existence as her own makes definition difficult. A daughter of both Barbados and Brooklyn, she asserts that: "I'm neither West Indian nor Black American" yet "I've got my feet in both camps so that I am able to understand and respond to Black American culture as well as West Indian culture." 3 Like V.'s Paola Maijstral on her "lonely promontory" or her own timeless people who can see both the past and the future, Marshall is able to look in multiple directions from her ever-shifting vantage point somewhere in between. The Caribbean, and especially the fictionalized Bourne Island, located much like Barbados on the eastern edge of the Lesser Antilles, is for Marshall just such a promontory signifying both exclusion and interface. From here Marshall interrogates the historical forces whose vectors have converged in this almost forgotten zone.

Of Caribbean authors, Roberto Márquez states that, "History, unreconciled and pressing, is their natural element; memory is their métier, the primum mobile of their reevaluative posture, the source of all prophecy." 4 Marshall’s novels force characters and readers alike into confrontations with

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history. The "postindustrial landscape" of which Brian Jarvis writes in reference
to Pynchon's world applies equally well to Marshall's literary cartography,
which contains myriad reminders of our colonial past written into the land.⁵
Physical places in Marshall's texts inspire psychological journeys leading to
personal reckoning and accountability, usually accompanied by an appropriate
epiphatic shock. For Marshall, the geographic excluded middles of the
postcolonial world become the centers for psychological awakening through a
revisioning of the political and economic realities of contemporary existence to
which we may prefer to turn a blind eye.

Set in a remote corner of the fictitious Bourne Island, a newly independent
Caribbean nation, Marshall's second novel, The Chosen Place, the Timeless People,
explores the economic, cultural, physical, and psychological effects of centuries
of imperialism on both the colonized and the colonizer. Interior and exterior
spaces meet and diverge at the excluded middles and interfaces at which
meaning is produced. Working through these Pynchonian tropes, this chapter
examines the crucial role the environment plays in revealing the history and
shaping the present of the people of Bourne Island and in indicating what the
future may hold for the postcolonial world.

Published in 1969, The Chosen Place, the Timeless People draws on the
political movements for Civil Rights in the United States and for independence in
the Caribbean. In an interview given during a 1977 trip to Nigeria, Marshall

referred to *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* as "a strongly political novel" in which she "was trying to sort out what was happening to Black and coloured peoples throughout the world." Visualizing her mission in a larger context, she hoped that the "mythical" setting would identify this work as a Third World, rather than specifically West Indian, novel. In writing of the contemporary effects of such "historical" issues as the slave trade, the African diaspora, and colonialism, Marshall is explicit in her correlation between the domination of people and the domination of place. She makes the reader painfully aware of the local human and environmental consequences of global economics, and in doing so examines the significance of place on human psychology by exploring the complex microcosmic interactions among the triad of individual, community, and environment.

Barbara Christian states that *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, "portrays history as an active, creative, and moral process composed by human beings." All of us are somehow implicated in the processes of history, and therefore all of us bear some moral responsibility for its creation and its consequences. From Bournehills, a place so small and easily overlooked, technically outside the bounds of America proper, Marshall delineates some of the historical forces and institutions on which this country was built and which contemporary America (not merely white America) would prefer to ignore. Our false mythology of race

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6 Ogundipe-Leslie, 26.
7 Ibid 28.
separates America quite cleanly into Black and White, too often eliding from racial considerations peoples of other descents, a topic to be pursued in the following chapters. For now, however, suffice it to say that this country has at its core a hegemonic cultural system that allows certain groups of people to be perceived as less than human. In the introduction to her study of feminist ethics, Sharon D. Welch asserts that the Euro-American middle class’s cultural responses to injustice are inadequate because they “are predicated on an intrinsically immoral balance of power.”

In Marshall’s novel, Saul Amron speaks more bluntly of “the whole goddam inhuman system” (358) that has created and perpetuated the social injustice his research team seeks to redress.

Slavery required the demonization of Africans just as westward expansion required the demonization of Native Americans into “others.” The economics of the New World, propped up by the culture of the Old World, demanded the oppression and exploitation of the peoples and places encountered on the colonial quest. Our national myth of origins, however, privileges the conflict between the noble and bravehearted colonial Americans and the imperial fatherland, England, leaving as excluded middles those “others” on whose labor and/or decimation this country was established. In a reading that explores the literary production of race in America, Aldon L. Nielsen suggests that, “The Middle Passage may be the great repressed signifier of American historical

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consciousness.” (101). The Middle Passage functions as an excluded middle in not just the American but the Western psyche. It a site of repression struggling to fruition within the “Heirs and Descendents,” as Marshall entitles the first book of *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, of both the imperialists and their human cargo. To look back at the emergence of the New World through the descendents of the Middle Passage, represented so clearly in the preterite poor black canecutters—the timeless people—of the fictional Bournehills, is to acknowledge a shameful set of roots of our flourishing global capitalist tree. We may not want to see these roots, but Marshall forces us to look.

Although clearly the isolated island setting of *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, and particularly Bournehills, is intended to function as a microcosm of what the First World has done to the Third World, a representative of “every place that had been wantonly used, its substance stripped away, and then abandoned”(100), the place itself, the “chosen” place, is imbued with otherworldly qualities. Left behind in the wake of the 20th century, Ferguson, one of the “little fella” characters from Bournehills, reveals his understanding of Preterition and exclusion in his telling statement, “Why Bournehills come like a nation God has forgot”(125). Politically, Ferguson envisions Bournehills not as a small region of Bourne Island, but as a nation unto itself, its people bound together by their communal history (as they were in act and spirit during Cuffee

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Ned’s time) and by their difference from the islanders on the other side of the ridge. Has even God abandoned the place, forgotten the people and their past? If so, the land remembers, for the land bears scars that attest to the situation of the residents, and attempts to reshape the landscape of Bournehills are as futile as attempts to change the people. If the Western God has gone with the Western people who brought him, then the spirits of the land and the sea remain to console and confirm the timeless people, carrying messages not only for locals, but for the rest of us as well. Bournehills serves as a repository for an assortment of ills we might prefer to ignore yet must confront if we are to survive with any semblance of humanity. It is also, however, a site of possibility. Merle surmises that the exclusion of Bournehills from the rest of the world has allowed her to know Saul: "‘Maybe . . . it’s only in a place like Bournehills, someplace the world has turned its back on and even God’s forgotten, that we could have met and gotten on so well together, been such good friends’" (469). The excluded middle affords the duality of separation and connection. It offers hope in the midst of despair.

The etymology of “bourne” reveals a conjunction of meanings. The Oxford English Dictionary defines bourne as both a boundary (obs.) or limit (arch.) and a goal or destination: “The limit or terminus of a race, journey, or course; the ultimate point aimed at, or to which anything tends; destination, goal.” Marshall employs all of these variants in her naming of the zone in which this novel is set. Bourne Island therefore represents not merely the boundary, as
for instance the eastern limit of the West Indies, but also the convergence of competing elements at this site. Spatially, this may seem as obvious as the meeting between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. It is also, however, the cultural confluence of Euroamerica and Africa, of technology and tradition, of colonial and neocolonial power structures. To these meanings add the metaphorical yet distinctly political suggestion that should we fail to acknowledge and account for the sins of the past, Bourneholds represents not merely a stopping-off point on the journey from east to west, but the likely terminus of the human race. The goal is a recognition of human connections, breaking the bonds of oppression and seeking a new, more egalitarian means of relating to one another. This bourne is an interface of past and present, physical and spiritual, personal and political, real and unreal, in which timeless grievances find expression through the outrage of the sea, the devastation of the hills, and the relentlessness of the sun.

At the very foundation of the narrative, emerging from the textual gaps, the incessant voice of the Atlantic Ocean provides a tangible reminder of the Middle Passage and the slave trade. The natural world objects vociferously and passionately to the actions of its human inhabitants:

It was the Atlantic this side of the island, a wild-eyed, marauding sea the color of slate, deep, full of dangerous currents, lined with row upon row of barrier reefs, and with a sound like that of the combined voices of the drowned raised in a loud unceasing lament—all those, the nine million and more it is said, who in their enforced exile, their Diaspora, had gone down between this point and the homeland lying out of sight to the east.
This sea mourned them. Aggrieved, outraged, unappeased, it hurled itself upon each of the reefs in turn and then upon the shingle beach, sending up the spume in an angry froth which the wind took and drove in like smoke over the land. Great boulders that had roared down from Westminster centuries ago stood scattered in the surf; these, sculpted into fantastical shapes by the wind and water, might have been gravestones placed there to commemorate those millions of the drowned (106).

Throughout the novel, the ocean provides a voice of conscience, condemning the oppressors and urging the oppressed to rise up against injustice. When the American researchers first experience the Atlantic at Bournehills, they feel its effects immediately. Their thoughts turn to the human potential for self-destruction, as Saul remembers World War II bombings and Harriet revisits her nightmare of nuclear annihilation. On Whitmonday, visitors from the rest of the island come to Spiretown, the sole village in Bournehills, to watch the annual car race. They also visit the beach on the Atlantic side where they must ask for whom the bell tolls: “Their wondering faces raised, they appeared to be asking the reason for its angry unceasing lament. What, whom did it mourn? Why did it continue the wake all this time, shamelessly filling the air with the indecent wailing of a hired mute? Who were its dead?” (363). Each year, the sea purges itself, its sustained outrage reaching a violent crescendo as waves of muck crash into the Bournehills coast. During Carnival, Bournehills reminds their fellows that they are all the subject of the sea’s mourning through the passion play of Cuffee Ned’s slave revolt. Marching in the parade of bands, the timeless people are transformed into historical personages, as though they are still enduring the
Middle Passage, then become the triumphant rebels in the struggle for liberation. The Carnival masque encapsulates the history of Bournehills and offers a model for revolution.¹²

Marshall's West Indies are now enduring another passage, this time in making the transition from British colonialism to American neocolonialism. Most of Bourne Island is a sparkling Caribbean jewel complete with beach resorts, hotel casinos, and a pretend government, all anxious for U.S. investment and tourist dollars, all under the protective paternalism of the local U.S. missile-tracking station. Bournehills, however, is a different story. Despite nominal independence, the poor people of Bournehills remain in economic servitude and are still tied to the land through the sugarcane crop they work for the British company, Kingsley and Sons, which continues to run the island. Their situation exposes those green pastures on the rest of the island as a postcolonial fabrication, for behind Kingsley and Sons is an even larger, more impersonal mega-corporation at work: the United Corporation of America. As ominously as any of Pynchon's They-systems, "Unicor was now part of that giant commercial complex which, like some elaborate rail or root system, endlessly crosses the world, binding it up" (37). Bournehills exists in the gaps of this system, just as, in the nonfictional world, the West Indies and all of the Third World have been passed over yet bound up all the same.

Throughout the narrative, Marshall uses her landscape to convey the political thematics of her text. The oft-quoted aerial views of Bourne Island's topography convey metaphorically a great deal about the interactions of people, place, economy, and history, revealing the terrain as symbolic as well as physical. The reader's first view, though, is from the ground, where Marshall offers an intimate rather than encompassing look at "the chosen place" whose role in this work will be no less than that of "the timeless people." Merle's near-wreck as the novel opens shows Bournehills as an environment proscribing the mechanization of human movement. Merle's surprise at the road's absence, the "unseasonable rain," and the impending arrival of foreign visitors mark this day as somewhat unusual and even portentous. The reader, like Merle and Leesy, is trapped in Bournehills, looking up at the plane they were supposed to have met in town. The effect of this narrative strategy is to ally the reader with Merle and with Bournehills, positioning the incoming plane as an outside force.

Transported from the ground to the air, we next encounter Vereson Walkes, the young man returning from a period of virtual indentured servitude working on the government-sponsored labor scheme in Florida, and the lone passenger for whom Bournehills is home. Our first extended aerial view of Bourne Island, from the perspective of the returning native, establishes the symbolic geography of the place as both an island within the chain and one set slightly apart to fulfill a special but unspecified purpose:
Like the others, it was small, poignantly so, and vulnerable, defenseless. At any moment the sea might rise and swallow it whole or a hurricane uproot it and send it flying. Like all the rest, it seemed expendable: for what could it be worth to the world, being so small? Unlike the others, though, which followed each other in an orderly procession down the watery track of the Caribbean, the island below had broken rank and stood off by itself to the right, almost out in the Atlantic. It might have been put there by giants to mark the eastern boundary of the entire continent, to serve as its bourn. And ever mindful of the responsibility placed upon it in the beginning, it remained alone amid an immensity of sea and sky, becalmed now that its turbulent history was past, facing east, the open sea, and across the sea, hidden beyond the horizon, the colossus of Africa (13).

On numerous occasions, Marshall imparts to her landscape a type of agency usually reserved for human characters. Either the island located itself, having “broken ranks,” or it was “put there by giants.” How might a place determine its placement? How might a place bear responsibility? What might that responsibility entail? And what, ultimately, is its worth to the world? Clearly, the passage above indicates that the meaning of Bournehills will have some connection to Africa, the continental excluded middle “hidden behind the horizon” of the text. As the reader journeys with the First World characters in their interactions with West Indians, Bourne Island is shown to bear the history of the Middle Passage. Bourne Island, and especially Bournehills, is anthropomorphized as both the victim of the colonial giants who created it and as the resistant counteragent standing in both remembrance and defiance of those giants.
If a place can take on human qualities, then is the converse also true? For the timeless people of Bournehills are as topomorphized as the chosen place is anthropomorphized. Together the place and its people bear witness against the colonial enterprise and its lingering legacies. At the same time, though, they offer the possibility of postcolonial regeneration through acknowledging history, taking responsibility, and reclaiming land, community, and self.

Initially, this possibility seems unlikely in such a bleak setting as Bournehills. As if the place itself reflects the socio-economic circumstances of its inhabitants, Bournehills is cordoned off from the rest of the island by Cleaver's High Wall, a ridge unforgiving and atavistic in its appearance. This is where the storms hit first; this is where the Atlantic waves break. Without access to the economics of the rest of the island's green fields and neocolonial investment, Bournehills people are the island's poorest. The residents here have only rocky ground and hard work. They live at the interface of land and water, where the angry hills crash headlong into the equally outraged sea. Merle Kinbona's complaint that, "even nature has turned against us in this place" (7) is undercut by her "resigned half-smile which said that in spite of everything she loved the place" (6). Bournehills folk share Merle's sentiments about their home and especially about the few small sugarcane fields they can call their own. Even if it is only a half acre here and there between the estate plots of absentee British landholders, and no matter how steep or unprofitable, the small parcels of land give Bournehills something to hold onto. After centuries of involuntary exile
from Africa, the survivors of the Middle Passage have created a hybridized
culture borne of that diasporic journey. As Afro-Caribbean West Indians, they
have put down new roots and have made of the place a new home.

Their countrymen, however, feel no such connection to Bournehills, which
is inaccessible even to other natives of Bourne Island, most of whom disdain the
place as backwards and even somewhat frightening, an embarrassment to those
who are doing their best to imitate the West, its inhabitants othered as “those
irredeemable masses on the other side of the island” (59) to whom they are
nonetheless inextricably bound. Physically, this inaccessibility can be attributed
to the fact that there is only one road in and out of Bournehills, the steep and
treacherous passage transecting Cleaver’s High Wall, a road that washes away
after every rain or rather, it decides to “pick itself up and walk away” (9). More
importantly, though, islanders are made uncomfortable by the spiritual quality
of Bournehills, in which the seasonal cleansing of the sea correlates to a painful
purging of the soul. Bournehills insists on personal accountability in its
starkness and forces a remembrance of violations (primarily slavery and its
contemporary parallels) and resistance (through the story of Cuffee Ned) so that
the mythohistorical past is alive in the daily existence of the folk. The foreign
intellectuals who journey here seeking to change the place find instead that the
place changes them. The mysterious “otherness” of Bournehills forces characters
to confront their pasts, prejudices, and desires, whether they can live with them
or not.
Although almost every critic has in some way noted the psychological component of the landscape, I am most interested in the psychological and physical elements of the terrain as they relate to the excluded middle. In a novel in which all of the characters are running away from their pasts, Bournehills serves as a stark reminder of what we have done to each other as individuals and as nations. It works on memory, breaking down resistances so that nothing is forgotten, collapsing time so that all moments exist in this one, forcing an acknowledgment of the existence of the excluded middle. Employing historical narratives of oppression beginning with slavery and the Middle Passage through the Holocaust, the nuclear age, and the postcolonial global economy, all brought together in the chosen place, Marshall details our human capacity for destruction as well as our potential for spiritual recovery. As the novel concludes, Merle Kinbona states this need for resolution through an examination of the past:

"'sometimes a person has to go back, really back—to have a sense, an understanding of all that's gone to make them—before they can go forward' " (468). Saul has suggested this to Merle earlier in the text, where he has made the connection to nations as well as individuals. He doubts the survival of the United States because the country has "'never honestly faced up to its past, never told the story straight, and I don't know as it ever will' " (359). Retelling the twisted story as repressed history, Marshall takes the reader back through her landscape of the conscience.
Despite its unreal qualities, Bournehills does not allow for illusions. Characters must confront their personal memories: Allen remembers Jew-baiting and acknowledges his homosexuality, Vere recalls his ill-fated relationship with the light-skinned girl from up Canterbury, Harriet remembers her privileged but lonely childhood, Saul recalls his first wife's death, and Merle remembers her failed marriage and lost daughter. In this novel so much concerned with coming to terms with the past, Merle is the character who has studied the official version of History in England and taught its unauthorized counterpart in the Bournehills high school. Fired for teaching of Cuffee Ned's slave revolt, Merle is also the bearer of the communal memory rooted in history and place. She knows every feature of the landscape, and her narration to Saul at Sugar's nightclub suggests that Merle knows the life stories of everyone on the island. Merle also contextualizes the timeframe of the novel by mentioning the church bombings in Alabama and the assassinations of American political leaders. She reminds the reader that Bournehills, no matter how fictionalized, is not so far in time or place from the contemporary United States.

Once recovered, memory can either revive or destroy these characters. Those who can take strength from the external environment. The alternative is to succumb to the internal burdens, to blame them on the heat, the drought, the place. For Harriet Shippen Amron, a WASP member of the Elect and the ugly American of the foreigners, the realization of her complicity in the colonial and neocolonial processes will lead to suicide. Having manipulated anthropologist
Saul Amron into marrying her, she then engineers the field work in Bournehills and eventually, upon learning of her husband's affair with Merle, uses her personal financial clout to cancel the project. In this text, the white woman is depicted as the agent of oppression, yet she is merely acting in accordance with the system that created her. Her misplaced sense of philanthropy is but a thin veneer under which lurks an unacknowledged prejudice and general misanthropy toward the preterite Afro-Caribbean underclass whose lot she purports to improve. Harriet is no different than her slave-trading forebear Susan Harbin, who "had launched the family's modest wealth by her small-scale speculation in the West Indies trade" (37) or the wealthy English lesbian who kept Merle as an exotic colonial lover in London. Her family name appears among those early Philadelphia bluebloods indicted in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*. Cherrycoke declares that everyone is implicated in American atrocities, including all of the settlers, "'even little Peggy Shippen'" whose stated childhood goal was "'To marry a General'... 'and die rich'" (*MD 308*). This Caribbean journey reveals to Harriet the limits of her historical and contemporary privilege, proving her no match for either Merle or Bournehills.

Like the corporations that fund development projects for tax breaks, Harriet has her own agenda regarding Bournehills, yet the place itself resists her machinations. Harriet's first view of Bournehills from the airplane is one of warning and an immediate recognition of danger:
It struck her as being another world altogether, one that stood in profound contradistinction to the pleasant reassuring green plain directly below; and she wondered, gazing intently out toward those scarred hills, how an island as small as this could sustain such a dangerous division (21).

This site of contradistinction is an interface of competing elements that must be recognized not separately but jointly, and this is precisely the division that Harriet cannot sustain within herself. She wants to see herself as her new husband Saul sees her: “poised, contained, beautifully self-assured” (91). This desire for containment and control requires an exclusionary sensibility. No site for a honeymoon, Bournehill becomes Harriet’s antipastoral, for the harsh landscape refuses to cover up old scars. Even before the plane lands in New Bristol, Harriet has a sense of foreboding that the life she has planned so carefully for herself with Saul will be challenged by “some perverse plan.” She knows that she has entered a psychological landscape that is taking her someplace she would rather not visit:

Because of the shadows Bournehill scarcely seemed a physical place to her, but some mysterious and obscured region of the mind which ordinary consciousness did not dare admit to light. Suddenly, for a single unnerving moment, she had the sensation of being borne backward in time rather than forward in space. The plane by some perverse plan might have been taking her away from the present, which included Saul and the new life she was about to begin with him, back to the past which she had always sought to avoid (21).

This conflation of time into “a single unnerving moment” is an interface of time and space, so familiar after a reading of Pynchon, a moment of
frightful recognition that sets the stage for at least the possibility of self-awareness.

As such moments permit, Harriet recalls her cruelty as a child and reveals the deep-rooted racism that remains with her. Her revulsion at the touch of Lyle Hutson's black hand on her white arm, along with her terror during carnival, brings back memories of her mother's black maid, Alberta, whose nephew was lynched. In a letter to her closest friend, the family attorney, Harriet states that these memories are "both puzzling and annoying because you know I was never one to dwell on the past. I suspect it's this place. I don't know what there is about it, but it seems to have a way of driving you in on yourself and forcing you to remember things you hoped you had forgotten" (236), and again, "This place is to blame. Bournehills seems to have a bad effect on everyone and everything" (372) (Marshall's italics).

Harriet demands a blank slate on which she can author the future without acknowledging the past. Although she blames the environment for her malaise following carnival and barricades herself in the house to avoid the elements, what really bothers her is that she has not changed the people, that: "They remained, perversely, as they were" (407). In true paranoid fashion, she suspects that the people and the place are plotting against her in a conspiracy. Her statement echoes Lyle Hutson's early suspicion that Bournehills does not change because, "it chooses not to, for some perverse reason" (62). This repetition of the word "pervasive" suggests that Bournehills stands in opposition to Harriet, to Lyle and his neocolonial government, and in fact, to Western rationalism. Saul's
angry warning to his wife that, "'Your values aren't necessarily the world's'"
(181) reminds the reader that Harriet's values are, however, distinctly American:
they privilege materialism, technology, progress, and cultural hegemony.
Harriet continues to assume her own superiority as a member of the white
American upper class, violating cultural boundaries to which she is all too often
oblivious.

In 1963, at about the time Paule Marshall began writing *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, James Baldwin published *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin claimed
that white people need black people for their own salvation, that in fact whites
and blacks need each other, and many Native American writers have made
similar suggestions regarding the relationship between Euroamericans and
indigenous peoples. 13 For Harriet, the journey to Bournehills represents an
opportunity to save herself by acknowledging both the humanity of Bournehills
people and her role in their historical and continuing subjugation. She knows
that Bournehills insists that she change, yet she clings to static notions of her own
identity:

She could not give it, whatever it was, without being herself
deprived, diminished; and worse, without undergoing a profound
transformation in which she would be called upon to relinquish
some high place she had always occupied and to become other than
she had always been (408).

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13 James Baldwin claimed that whites turn to blacks for love. Several of the authors anthologized
in *The State of Native America* suggest that if white people are to live sustainably, they could
benefit from Native spiritual and environmental values. Silko, too, sees a spiritual lack, primarily
"the loss of their connection to the earth," at the foundation of many of white America's most
pressing personal and political problems.
This need for a transformational self-concept echoes Baldwin's socially
critical call for America to change:

in order to deal with the untapped and dormant force of the
subjugated, in order to survive as a human, moving, moral weight
in the world, America and all the Western nations will be forced to
reexamine themselves and release themselves from many things
that are now taken to be sacred, and to discard nearly all the
assumptions that have been used to justify their lives and their
anguish and their crimes so long.\footnote{James Baldwin, \textit{The Fire Next Time} in \textit{The Price of the Ticket}, 351.}

Like her country, however, Harriet cannot embrace the other, whether it is the
psychological other struggling to fruition within herself, the racial other
surrounding her in Bournehill, or the spatial other that constitutes Bournehill.

Her fatal error is her insistence on keeping separate that which must be

For Harriet, Bournehill simply does not fit into her carefully ordered
view of the universe, yet this excluded middle insists on intruding into her
consciousness. At the embrace of darkness and light, Harriet "had the
impression that the night, bedding down in the great folds of the hills, contained
the dawn, and the dawn the darkness. It was as though they were really, after
all, one and the same, two parts of a whole, and that together they stood to
acquaint her with an essential truth" (459). She almost understands that night
and day, darkness and dawn, black and white are inseparable. She almost
recognizes her kinship with Lyle Hutson and Merle Kinbona. She pulls back,
though, taking her white arm from Lyle’s black hand, resisting her impulse to
touch Saul’s lover Merle, fighting her mind’s ruminations on her role in the
grand scheme.

Approaching the edge of revelatory madness, she suffers attacks of
conscience as memories overpower her during the Bournehills night:

The shadows, escaping the moment the light dropped, played little
tormenting games with her. Stealing close to her chair they would
assume the forms and faces of people she had known over the
years, mostly members of her family, all those whom she had
always excluded from her thoughts for fear that she might one day
be the one held to account for them (457).

Of her blue-blooded, old line, corporate America Philadelphia family, Harriet
has long-since asked the crucial question, “‘Must I really be held liable for
them?’” (47). Throughout the novel, Marshall’s answer builds to a clear and
resounding “yes.” Although the author makes clear Harriet’s personal and
corporate links to Kingsley and Sons and to Unicor, both of which contribute to
the continuing oppression of Bournehills people, the character leaves those
connections largely unexamined. She uses her power to destroy the project by
writing home to the metropolitan power brokers, yet she sees her actions as
purely personal attempts to save herself and her marriage without recognizing
the far-reaching political implications of her selfishness. Harriet’s imperative to
ignore the past fails in Bournehills, so that, nonetheless unable to embrace her
past and her responsibility, she is driven mad by her own prejudices and
complicities. She is, in fact, everything she has sought to deny about her family.
Ultimately, her efforts in Bournehill are as entirely self-serving, manipulative, and greedy as those of her corporate brothers and slave-trading ancestors. By drowning herself in the Atlantic, Harriet joins the nine million African souls lost during the Middle Passage. She becomes not simply a scapegoat for the sins of her ancestors, but also another victim of the continuing process of oppression, finally rent apart by that internal division she recognized so early in the text but could never reconcile.\(^{16}\)

Merle Kinbona operates as close to the psychological edge as Harriet, yet the two women move in opposite directions: Harriet toward self-destruction, Merle toward self-assertion. Whereas Harriet struggles fiercely to maintain control over her identity, which is increasingly in danger of crumbling, Merle is from the start a creature of irresolution. Joyce Pettis reads this fragmentation of identity, so much a part of postmodern thought, as a result of the cultural dislocation concomitant with the African diaspora.\(^{17}\) Merle’s incessant talk, an expression perhaps of the multiple and competing modes of discourse from which she emerges, sustains her until she collapses into catalepsy at the closing of Cane Vale. Merle admits the danger of confronting the past, claiming her


study of West Indian history nearly “set out my head” (130). Her recovery, what Pettis would term her quest for spiritual wholeness, leads Merle back across the Atlantic to search for her husband and daughter in East Africa. Having experienced England and rejected the United States as a racist domain, Merle embraces and reverses the Middle Passage back to Africa while Harriet denies and falls victim to it.18

Descended from a British colonial planter and his West Indian slaves, Merle Kinbona is the illegitimate daughter who inherits the estate. Because that distant forefather sired some 40 children, Merle is also in some way related to many of the island’s citizens. More importantly, she is the modern-day heir to the local anti-colonial hero, Cuffee Ned. In a reversal of gender roles, she functions as the female culture bearer of Bournehills. As the unofficial leader of Bournehills, Merle has far greater influence than the useless elected representative, a man who spends most of his time in the island’s capital, New Bristol, hiding from his constituents and terrified of Merle Kinbona. Residents and foreigners alike identify Merle with the place itself. Her face is the corporeal corollary of the ravaged hills: “it had been despoiled, that face, in much the same way as the worn hills to be seen piled around her on all sides had been despoiled” (5). In addition to personifying Bournehills, Merle also links the

18 In his preface to Mary Chamberlain’s Narratives of Exile and Return, Warwick University Caribbean Studies Series Editor Alistair Hennessy suggests that this type of journey to Africa is a fictional fantasy not borne out in West Indian migration patterns: “Of the many countries to which Barbadians have migrated those in Africa are strikingly absent. There is always the dream of the eternal return but bearing the burden of a lost history the dream has to be nourished in the deepest recesses of the mind to be recovered in the imaginative writings of poets and novelists” (iv). See Mary Chamberlain, Narratives of Exile and Return, London: MacMillan, 1997.
people to the Middle Passage and to Africa. Her voice is associated with that of the sea, accusing, shaming, and holding accountable those who would ignore Bournehills’ past and present. More than once, Merle refers to herself as an obeah woman, claiming the heritage of the African conjurer. This connects her to Cuffee Ned, who “had been that also, both seer and shaman to the people, the intermediary between them and the ancient gods” (284). By virtue of her lineage, class, and education, Merle is an intermediary between the people and the new gods of the postcolonial world. Merle, like Cuffee and Bournehills, is an interface at which worlds—and with them their often violently opposed systems of belief—are conjoined.

If Harriet is the representative white Western perpetrator, then Merle is the black victim of the colonial enterprise, at least in broad strokes—for we understand that Marshall’s characters are too complex to fall completely on one side of an interface. Just as Harriet is both agent and victim, Merle is similarly, albeit in roughly inverse proportion, both victim and agent of oppression. Marshall envisioned Merle as a character who “in a sense reflects the struggle of Black people to come into their own.”19 Despite her imperfections, or more likely because of them, Merle functions as the conscience of her community, urging her fellow islanders to “Know your history” and even teaching the history of Cuffee Ned until she is fired from the local high school. This colonial subject talks back, claiming her own mind and agency and finally admitting her own complicity in

19 Ogundipe-Leslie, 27.
the colonial process. Her economic dependence on the English benefactress, with whom she apparently had a lesbian relationship, caused her Kenyan husband to abandon her London, taking their infant daughter with him back to Africa. This loss has left Merle in psychological limbo for years, her manic speech punctuated by bouts of cataleptic silence.\(^2^0\) She recognizes her relationship with the Englishwoman, her psychological oscillations, and her inability to act to regain her family as consequences of internalized oppression. Linking the English imperialists to African conjurers, who throughout the text function as symbols of resistance, Merle states, "‘Those English were the biggest obeah men out when you considered what they did to our minds’" (67). Merle implies that the people continue the colonizer’s work by continuing to think like colonials. The islanders invite the British to run Bourne Island, despite nominal independence, because “‘we don't as yet really trust our own; we don't really believe deep inside us that we can plan and do for ourselves. I tell you, they colonized our minds but good in this place’” (129). Although most of Bourne Island remains “kept” by American economic interests, Merle is no longer the kept woman that she was in London. Like Cuffee Ned before her, Merle finally casts off the role of victim and figuratively casts out the colonizer, Harriet, by refusing to be bought by American dollars or threats.

\(^2^0\) Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr. reads Merle’s psychological state as a middle-age crisis in which “Merle’s unresolved problems of ego identity are clearly symbolically related to the maturational problems of Bourne Island” (70). See his “Paule Marshall and the Crisis of Middle Years: The Chosen Place, the Timeless People.” Callaloo, Issue 18 (Spring-Summer 1983), 68-73.
In contrast to his wife, Saul Amron takes a lesson from both Merle and Bournehills in learning to confront his demons. The Jewish-American anthropologist, whose task it is to study and improve the lives of Bournehills people, knows that the journey will have as much to do with his own self-discovery as with the development project. Upon seeing Bournehills for the first time, Saul too senses its psychological impact, as

the place, these ragged hills crowded out of sight behind the high ridge, with the night hiding in their folds, even seemed, suddenly, to hold some personal meaning for him, his thoughts becoming complex, circular, wheels within a wheel as he stood there. Bournehills could have been a troubled region within himself to which he had unwittingly returned (100).

This landscape sets off an internal dynamic within the character’s psyche. It forces nonlinear thinking; it inspires introspection, imagination, and memory. Saul sees here not Harriet’s dichotomized either/or landscape of “dangerous division” but rather the decidedly postmodern and (before that) non-Western interpretation, in which linearity gives way to circularity and permits meanings within meanings. Initially disavowing both the Jewish community and Americans in general, “with whom he felt no kinship whatsoever” (88), Saul immediately recuperates through his willingness “to confess his part in it all” (89). The first night on Bourne Island, “Merle’s voice and her own anguished laugh were fists striking at Saul’s heart, demanding that he open it again, and his eyes” (92). These are the same demands Marshall makes of the reader.
This notion of opening one's heart and eyes is crucial to Marshall's project. Because Saul has the capacity to give and receive that singular quality, love, he occupies a much different position than Harriet and is aligned instead with Merle, whose love for place and community mark her as the symbol of hope for her people.²¹ As Saul's hostess, native informant, and eventually lover, Merle introduces Saul to Bournehill, which becomes for him the emotional space he needs to allow "his guard to drop" (90), opening him up to the repressed guilt he harbors. Saul's compassion allows him to see across borders to recognize the multivalent connections among oppressed peoples and between them and their victimizers. His willingness to relinquish the role of authority for that of student grants him access to the people he would study. Like McClintic Sphere in V., Roger Mexico in Gravity's Rainbow, or Takeshi and D.L. in Vineland, Saul finds freedom and strength in dropping his guard and giving up on absolutes. He understands that very often he does not understand the situation in Bournehill. At times, "he would be struck by the feeling, too fleeting to grasp, that he had stumbled upon a world that was real, inescapably real, yet at the same time somehow unreal; of the present but even more so of the past" (216). In a nod to modern physics, the spatial and the temporal warp each other as they converge at the interfaces of real and unreal, past and present, here and now. This ability

to engage in the realm of mystery and indeterminacy separates Saul from Harriet and her Stencil-like need for order. After Carnival, Saul confesses to Merle,

"You know I'm beginning to suspect that what Bournehills needs is one of those old-fashioned soothsayers or diviners, somebody whose business is dealing in mysteries, not some poor half-assed anthropologist who's supposed to be concerned only with what's real" (316).

As Saul comes to appreciate the interplay between the mysterious and the real, he opens up those regions of himself so long repressed. Instead of destroying him as it does Harriet, Saul's guilty conscience, revealed through the people and place of Bournehills, restores his humanity, liberates him, and permits him to reclaim his identity as an American, so that he may now return to his own country where there is yet so much work to be done. He realizes that his anthropological programs could be put to better use on the mainland, for Bournehills must remain as is until it has served its purpose.

That purpose involves a radical political revolution modeled on the actions of Cuffee Ned, the culture hero of Bournehills who led a slave revolt there two hundred years before. Although much of the island's toponymy reflects England's colonial influence, such as the hills named, "Agincourt, Buckingham, Sussex, Lords, Drake" (101), specific physical places in Bournehills continue to be associated with Cuffee Ned. Pyre Hill, which burned for up to five years, depending on who tells the story, still appears as a seared monument to Cuffee, who murdered the master, burned down his plantation house, and freed the slaves. Back when "Bournehills, under Cuffee, had been a nation and
its people a People" (405), the former slaves fought off the British and ruled themselves. This is the defining moment of Bournehills' history and the greatest hope for its future. It is the response Merle suggests to the closure of Cane Vale, on which the entire economy of Bournehills is based: take over the British-owned sugarcane processing plant or burn it down. The local rumshop keeper, Delbert, reminds his neighbors of the unity the people displayed during Cuffee's time, when "we knew that if we had lived selfish we couldn't live at all" and warns them "it's the same now" (394). Of course, this type of communal resistance involves a dangerous self-sacrifice: Cuffee paid for his heroism with his life. Always trimming the same patch of grass by Westminster Low Road, old Mr. Douglin marks the spot where Cuffee's head was stuck on a pike as a warning to others who might be inspired to revolt. The old man himself becomes a landmark, his reverence for Cuffee a sign of the multiple ways in which Bournehills people remember their hero. No one can pass by Mr. Douglin on the one road in and out of Bournehills without recalling Cuffee, who died long before anyone living was born, yet who survives through the collective memory of the community. His constant presence reminds the people that once they were free, self-determined, and most importantly, communal-minded. Saul concludes that none of his research could help the people of Bournehills, that "Only an act on the scale of Cuffee's could redeem them" (402).

Cuffee Ned and Merle Kinbona are able to fight back because Bournehills fights back. The place is at once the reflection of its inhabitants' psychological
and physical oppression and the source of their political resistance. Bournehills, much like Vineland, is a landscape in which the real and the unreal blur into one another. The research team learns that Bournehills is beyond the provinces of social sciences and statistics. It resists academic attempts at documentation. It defies automobiles, televisions, and other symbols of technology and development. The terrain works against the government's attempts to manage the land, so that even as Saul and the Australian conservation officer, Bryce-Parker, "stood watching the bulldozers and the heavy earth-moving equipment leveling one of the low hillocks nearby, the dry gray soil appeared to be drifting back, piling up again, forming a new hill where the old one had been" (156). Outside efforts for change here can be only superficial because Bournehills serves a larger purpose.

Bourne Islanders and other postcolonial peoples need Bournehills to warn them against the seductions of western capitalism and cultural imperialism and to remind them of the possibility of self-determination through communal action. The First World needs Bournehills as a reminder of the spiritual and ecological consequences of centuries of domination of people and place. As a microcosm of the injustices of slavery and racism, it is a place both mythical and recognizable. In a scene that might have been repeated in Pynchon's Vineland or even Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian, Bournehills is depicted as a region where, "as usual, because of the thick haze which made the landscape waver and lose shape before the eye, and the sunlight spilling down like molten steel from
the lip of the sun, the entire place looked almost illusory, unreal, a trick played by the eye” (99). Marshall develops this sense of the unreal beneath the real to “suggest there is another dimension”22 to the narrative. The salute that Bournehills people give in greeting, “as if they were witnesses on a stand,” attests to the notion that “They are witness to their history and their suffering—the whole history of slavery and its aftermath.” 23 They insist that readers and other passersby “not only acknowledge them, but love them and above all act in some bold, retributive way that would both rescue their memory and indemnify their suffering” (283). The place and people of Bournehills carry proudly the moral responsibility eschewed by others.

Finally putting together the colonialist collage that is evident in Merle’s bedroom, Merle’s person, and Merle’s homelace, Saul understands that Bournehills, its shabby woebegone hills and spent land, its odd people who at times seemed other than themselves, might have been selected as the repository of the history which reached beyond it to include the hemisphere north and south (402).

Here the excluded middle brings together the very sources of its exclusion, encapsulating for the reader the entirety of Western hegemony where one world spills into and rewrites another. What Saul learns from the failure of every aid and development program in Bournehills is that the problem lies less with the people and environment of Bournehills than with those who either ignore or seek

22 Ogundipe-Leslie, 33.
23 ibid, 32-3.
to change them without understanding their importance as witnesses to history and without recognizing their own roles in that history.

By rejecting Harriet's offer of money to leave Bournehills and Saul, Merle takes up Cuffee's mantle. By setting out for Africa, the source, in search of her husband and daughter, Merle begins to heal her own psychological wounds from the "profound and frightening loss" (5) that has haunted her for years. The implication is that Merle will once again come home to Bournehills to assume her role as a leader, this time stronger and better able to confront the foes, perhaps even cloaked in the strength of family connections that have always been denied her as an illegitimate mulatta. Merle's quest for agency as a postcolonial woman signifies the interdependence of the personal and the political. Merle's attempt to create a space for herself among the cross-purposes, a space held so tenuously yet so tenaciously by the very responsible Bournehills, posits the hope that Bournehills itself may one day heal from its own "profound and frightening loss" but only at an expense much greater than that which Harriet was unprepared to pay. Until then, the Atlantic Ocean will continue to bear the lost voices, among them Harriet's, just as it bears Merle across the postcolonial space to the motherland.

Africa remains on the horizon, as it was early in the text, with Merle poised to set out from Bournehills as the novel concludes. This journeying provides one more connection between Merle and Cuffee Ned, who accepted his death as a means of spiritual return to Africa: "For he had seen his life and deeds
as pointing the way to what must be. And obeah man that he was, a true
believer, he believed that death was not an end but a return, so that in dying he
would be restored to the homeland and there be a young warrior and hunter
again” (288). The people of Bournehills, though, are awaiting yet another return.
Although Cuffee Ned’s “life and deeds” are repeated every year as the
Bournehills presentation in the Bourne Island Carnival parade, that masque is
merely a precursor to a second coming awaited by Bournehills and, presumably,
by the rest of the postcolonial world. The ritual repetition of the masque holds
Cuffee’s place in the consciousness of the people, as the ritual cleansing of the sea
reminds the people why Cuffee fought. Marshall couches Cuffee’s return in
Biblical terms, preparing for revolution by usurping the language of the
conqueror in order to show the inefficacy of that conqueror. Ready for the
victory of tradition over technology, Leesy Walkes reads the early disappearance
of Westminster Low Road apocalyptically: “‘I tell you,’ she cried triumphantly,
‘everything’s going down to grass. We’re seeing the last days now’” (9).
Ferguson, depicted as a physical and spiritual son of Africa, anticipates Cuffee’s
second coming: “He’s goin’ come again I say—or he’s goin’ send somebody just
like him” (135). Merle tells Saul that like the Jews, “I’m also waiting on a
messiah. No Jesus meek and mild though. No thanks. We’ve had enough of
him. We need a tough somebody this time. Another Cuffee’” (317-8). The past
in this text, both real and mythologized, serves as a model for the present and the
future.
This is the prophecy of Caribbean history to which Roberto Márquez alludes. It is a revolutionary political act, most likely violent, in which the dispossessed take back their land. A hero emerges from the excluded middle and lights a fire under the people. The people remember that they are a Nation. James Baldwin smirks in his grave. As Leslie Marmon Silko forwards the postcolonial reclamation of history and land in *Almanac of the Dead*, Cuffee Ned's revolution is played out not in the Caribbean margins but along the borders of the continental United States. To the outraged voices of the nine million souls of the Middle Passage are added those of the sixty million souls of the indigenous Americas. The borders are collapsing.
CHAPTER THREE

Crossing the Line:
Leslie Marmon Silko’s Texts of Repossession

Accursed be the race that has seized on our country and made women of our warriors. Our fathers from their tombs reproach us as slaves and cowards. I hear them now in the wailing winds . . . the spirits of the mighty dead complain. Their tears drop from the wailing skies.

Let the white race perish. They seize your land, they corrupt your women, they trample on the ashes of your dead! Back whence they came, upon a trail of blood, they must be driven.

—Tecumseh, 1811

Leslie Marmon Silko’s body of work demonstrates less a negotiation than a transgression, or perhaps a negation, of borders. Power itself is the most pervasive boundary, and Silko is determined to challenge the boundaries that subordinate native peoples, places, and issues to those of the dominant Anglo society. As mixedblood Laguna Pueblo writer, Silko shows that class, gender, and ethnicity are all determinants in a power struggle, still played out on a daily basis in the world of nonfiction, between Euro-American imperialists and the

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indigenous peoples and places they have dominated for five centuries.
Throughout her career, Silko has sought to give voice to native peoples in a
country whose very existence is based on a silencing of those voices. Her work
posits both a past and, more controversially, a future for natives in the Americas.
This future is one not merely of physical survival but of repossession of land,
culture, and identity. It is a future in which the balance of power returns to
indigenous peoples.

To execute this recovery, Silko must first establish the Americas as a
colonized space with the United States as not the sovereign world leader in
democratic government and international defender of human rights but as the
illegitimate imperial giant whose might crushes any who would stand in its way.
Silko’s homeplace and the setting of much of her fiction, the American Southwest
offers a graphic representation of the environmental imbalance and social
injustice wrought by centuries of imperialism culminating in global capitalism.
For many readers, these concepts may be both unfamiliar and unpleasant. Silko
offers no apology.

To readers familiar with the legal history of Native America and with
contemporary oppositional politics within Native America, Silko’s assertions are
much less radical. They are, instead, in keeping with the increasingly successful
efforts on the part of Native activists who seek everything from federal
recognition to full tribal sovereignty. Ward Churchill argues compellingly that
the genocide of American Indians represents holocaust on a much larger scale
than that suffered by the Jews in Nazi Germany and that in fact American policies and actions against the indigenous peoples provided a model for Hitler’s actions.\(^2\) He suggests solving land claims cases by returning unceded lands—those lands simply taken by the United States without even the deceit of treaties or "just wars" to rationalize the theft, in total about one-third of the area of the United States—to Indian nations, effectively dismantling the United States altogether.\(^3\) As American Indians who seek liberation continue to air their grievances in the international forum of the United Nations, such a plan as Churchill’s is not unimaginable.

Because Silko considers the United States an illegitimate political entity, many of her most cogent concerns revolve around border politics and border crossings as they relate to issues of native sovereignty, environment, economics, immigration, and racial amalgamation. This chapter explores the notion of borders in Silko’s work, from Ceremony to Gardens in the Dunes, with an emphasis on Almanac of the Dead. In her nonfiction, the quasi-autobiographical Storyteller and the collection of essays Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, Silko explicated the themes of state-sponsored oppression and potential repossession so prevalent in the novels. As an exemplar of the critical engagement between contemporary fiction and contemporary life, the meganovel Almanac of the Dead

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articulates, in no uncertain terms, the author's political stance against the existence of the United States in general and against its treatment of indigenous populations in particular. Encyclopedic in scope, *Almanac of the Dead* presents a spectrum of characters on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border, and offers a bold analysis of today's border issues. In reading the text, we must ask ourselves, however, what are the lines? Who is crossing which lines? And what happens when borders break down?

Simultaneously a postmodern American and a postcolonial text, *Almanac of the Dead*, like *Ceremony*, challenges conventional narrative boundaries formally just as it interrogates political boundaries thematically. Bakhtinian dialogics reveal that Silko uses the form of the novel to open up competing narratives, giving voice to those who would be silenced. Writing of the reified language of monoglossia, in which only one voice is authorized to speak, Bakhtin states that, "the objects and themes are born and grow to maturity in this language, and in the national myth and national tradition that permeate this language." The

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polyglossia of hybridized forms of such novels as *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* and *Almanac of the Dead*, in contrast, dismantles those national myths and traditions. The rise of the New Regionalism in Western American criticism has similarly sought the contributions of voices other than those sanctioned by the homogenizing national myths. The story of the West is no longer just the single manifest destiny story of brave white men conquering the savage frontier. We now recognize a much more complex cultural milieu, and any discussion of the West must include the voices of the environment along with those of women and of the various racial, religious, sexual, and economic groups who met and who continue to interact throughout the West. Silko creates a forum for these Western American, and especially indigenous and environmental, voices much as Marshall has created a literary space for West Indian voices.

Silko's use of multiple narrators and multiple storylines in *Almanac of the Dead* reproduces this convergence of cultures in the American West. She merges the oral and written literary traditions, establishing herself as both tribal storyteller and contemporary novelist. The divide between oral and literary, however, is not strictly an indigenous/imperial dichotomy. Silko takes as her model the pre-contact texts of the indigenous peoples, namely the Mayan *Popul Voh* and the Aztec codices stolen or destroyed by the Spanish conquistadors. As the written component to the ancient tribal stories, the fictional almanac in *Almanac of the Dead* is concurrently the prophecy, history, and text through which Silko posits an alternative version of Western imperialism. The novel itself,
therefore, offers a transgressive model for erasing the boundaries established by the hegemonic power structure.

Subversive acts of all sorts take place in this millennial text. Discursively, Silko establishes counter-narratives to attack the very foundations of American mythology. When not outright inverted, outlaws and heroes at least become more difficult to distinguish. The New World as a Garden of Eden with the explorer as the new Adam is countered by the story of the Destroyers and their witchery and by the colonialist genocidal horrors linking the early invaders to their student, Hitler. The tale of the heroic white American West is undercut by the four Geronimos, by Sterling's appropriation of famous criminals, and by the real criminals who established and continue to run Tucson. The white man's Manifest Destiny to conquer the land and its inhabitants is contradicted by the prophecies, the spirit macaws, the twin brothers, and the almanac, all of which reveal a very different destiny for the whites. Following Gloria Anzaldúa's lead, Arnold Krupat asserts that Silko effects a textual "shift in the directionality of history" by insisting upon a north/south rather than east/west axis of movement.6 Patriarchal monotheistic religions, in particular Christianity, are opposed by syncretic tribal beliefs from the Americas to Africa that recognize the sanctity of Mother Earth. The destructive narrative of technological progress is

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6 *The Turn to the Native*, p. 52. See also Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: spinsters/aunt lute, 1987) p. 11.
countered by the story of the earth's endurance and potential for regeneration. Through all of these narratives, Silko forces a re-reading of American history.

The "processes of shift and renewal of the national language" that Silko propagates and that Bakhtin sees reflected in the form of the novel "are inseparable from social and ideological struggle, from processes of evolution and of the renewal of society and the folk" (Dl 67). From Bakhtin's description, the novel is inherently revolutionary, and Almanac of the Dead is explicitly so. The novel itself, therefore, is a border zone, a result of hybridity, revolutionary in character and intent: "In essence this [polyglossic] discourse always developed on the boundary line between cultures and languages" (Dl 50), with the author poised on an interface, such that "The creating consciousness stands, as it were, on the boundary line between languages and styles" (Dl 60). For Silko, the mixedblood Laguna/Mexican/Anglo storyteller who must operate of necessity on and through borders—racial, cultural, linguistic, narrative, spatial, temporal—the sense of inhabiting a border zone is especially pertinent.

While Silko recognizes and benefits from the generative powers of the border zone, she resolutely rejects the authority of the line itself to demarcate people and space. From a postcolonial perspective, Almanac of the Dead functions as a denial of the legitimacy of political borders, specifically those between the United States and Mexico. Silko emphasizes both the reality and the arbitrariness of this international division. Despite the border's very tangible effect on characters' lives, indigenous peoples regard this line as illegitimate
because they regard the two countries it divides as illegitimate. Zeta recalls her grandmother's assertion that, "There was not, and never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas." From their first contact with indigenous peoples in this hemisphere, the Europeans have violated the Laws of Nations. The United States government has crossed the line by drawing the line. As the national border encroached further south and west, each successive acquisition of land was accomplished only through force and/or deception. Even treaties and "purchases" reek of thievery, substantiated by the pennies awarded to indigenous plaintiffs in 20th century land claims cases. The United States has long practiced strategic amnesia in denying the illegality of its own existence.

Memories are long in Almanac of the Dead, though, and for good reason, for as Marshall demonstrated, memory is essential to survival. For the timeless people, who claim that, "yesterday comes like today to us" and to Silko's old ones who "paid no attention to white man's time" (35), there is no statute of limitations on injustice. In the novel, the Brito family still harbors anger and resentment towards the United States for its failure to honor their property rights as guaranteed under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, and that is the recent past. Sterling's magazines advise him to forget unpleasant memories that

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7 Leslie Marmon Silko, Almanac of the Dead (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 133; all subsequent references are cited by page.
might depress him, yet his mantras "Spilled milk" (24), "Water under the bridge" (24), and "let bygones be bygones" (36) will no longer suffice because Sterling "knows he is one of those old-fashioned people who has trouble forgetting the past no matter how bad remembering might be for chronic depression" (24).

*Almanac of the Dead* forces the remembrance and the recognition of the injustices committed against indigenous America. It is a warning to the colonizers and a call to arms to the colonized.

The U.S./Mexico border is an ideal site for this insurrection because it is a zone of contact and therefore of contention. It functions as an in-between space, neither the United States nor Mexico, where multiple cultures—among them Native, Latino, Anglo, Asian, and African—have spilled into one another.

Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha locates culture in just this type of in-between space.⁹ In her groundbreaking 1987 work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa envisions the borderlands as a crossroads that both requires and creates a new consciousness in its inhabitants. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon presented us a glimpse at the creation of this consciousness through the drawing of a proprietary line. The international line offers even more dynamic possibilities. Promising that the U.S./Mexico border presents a new field ripe for cultural studies, José David Saldivar calls this region a "transfrontera contact zone" where "peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate

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with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics" (13-14).^{10}

*Almanac of the Dead* also posits the border as a crucial figment of the Euro-American imagination, as not just a political but a racial division, with whites to the north and non-whites to the south. The line separates the haves from the have-nots, the empowered from the powerless. If, as Edward Said asserts in his Afterword to *Orientalism*, we must demonize others in order to define ourselves by what we are not, then "the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society."^{11} Protecting this line becomes necessary to exclude the "other," a policy Silko abhors just as she loathes the national tendency to demonize "undocumented immigrants" as "illegal aliens." In her essay "Fences Against Freedom,"^{12} she discusses current border policy as an overt manifestation of institutional racism. Calling the southwest a "police state," Silko's angry voice in this piece echoes her tone throughout *Almanac of the Dead*. In both, the author exhibits an unbridled contempt for the United States government. American citizens, especially those with dark skin, face travel restrictions and are subject to illegal searches. In the novel, the Border Patrol refuses to believe that Sterling (Laguna) and Lecha (Yaqui) are citizens of the United States. Because of her appearance, Silko too has been the victim of

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detainment and harassment at the hands of the Border Patrol. By violating human rights, the Border Patrol has crossed the line. In the "Fences Against Freedom" essay, Silko turns the tables by demonizing the Border Patrol as the unwanted intruders. The authority figures are themselves the transgressors. She screams at them, "This is our home. Take all this back where you came from. You are not wanted here."

Silko’s words in this essay echo Wovoka's letter to President Grant,

You are hated
You are not wanted here
Go away,
Go back where you came from.
You white people are cursed! (721)

Wilson Weasel Tail reads this letter aloud near the end of Almanac of the Dead as he begins his tirade against the United States government. By invoking the Paiute prophet Wovoka and his Ghost Dance religion (which becomes much more significant in Gardens in the Dunes), Silko draws upon the ideology of an indigenous resistance movement of the late 19th century. A Northern Paiute from Nevada, Wovoka became a messiah figure who foresaw the reunion of Indian peoples with their dead ancestors, the return of the buffalo to the plains, the disappearance of whites, and the restoration of the land. The people were told that they could bring about these events by dancing. The United States viewed this peaceful movement as a military threat because it brought together Indians from diverse tribes and bands, encouraged them to leave the confines of the reservations, and gave them a reason to hope for a future radically different
from the present. The Ghost Dance culminated in the Seventh Cavalry's December 29, 1890 machine-gun massacre of at least 144 Sioux at Wounded Knee. Pynchon, always encyclopedic, recalls this genocidal moment in *Gravity's Rainbow*: “Interesting weapon, the Hotchkiss. Comes in many nationalities, and manages to fit in ethnically wherever it goes. American Hotchkisses are the guns that raked through the unarmed Indians at Wounded Knee” (GR 697). In the collective consciousness of Native America, Wounded Knee functions as a symbol of the indignities that have been committed against Natives and as a fulcrum for fighting back.

In 1968, urban Indians came together in Minneapolis to form the American Indian Movement. This new warrior society fought back against injustice, giving elders and young people alike pride in their pasts and hope for a future. It also created popular and highly visible heroes, termed by Gerald Vizenor “postindian warriors of survivance,”13 as most notably, Russell Means and Dennis Banks challenged the United States government on the road, in court, and under fire. Today, each continues to challenge dominant cultural perceptions of American Indians. The 71-day standoff between the American Indian Movement and the FBI on the Pine Ridge Reservation at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1973 marked the apex of AIM’s uprising. For the last quarter of the twentieth century, Wounded Knee II has signaled a new era of Red Power, a

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radical, violent, confrontational approach to the reclamation of sovereignty for the "dependent, domestic nations" (Chief Justice John Marshall, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*) within the U.S. borders. It is within this tradition of resistance to oppression, whether peaceful or violent, that Silko locates her interrogation of borders.

For Silko, the political questions of interior and peripheral borders are closely related. Now that the United States government is turning the southern border with Mexico into a militarized zone by building a 12-foot high wall, like that in Cold War Berlin, the border is no longer just a line on a map, but a tangible barrier from either side.\(^{14}\) The wall exacerbates rather than eliminates the conflicts associated with creating and maintaining a political border. The zone in the midst of this maelstrom is Tucson, Arizona, a border town figured as a nexus of race, language, culture, narrative, and political agenda, and the setting for much of *Almanac of the Dead*. Tucson represents a convergence of forces and vectors, a site of exchange between not only the United States and Mexico, but also all points beyond. This location is the base for smuggling all kinds of contraband: people, money, gold, drugs, guns, and stories of empowerment. Smuggling is big business here, and most of the characters—dope dealers large and small, arms dealers, a mafia family from New Jersey, coyotes, Catholics, the CIA—are in some way involved in illegal border crossings. Most importantly,

however, Silko's Tucson is the center of an ongoing war for possession of the land. The agents of the Destroyers have established a foothold here, primarily in the city of Tucson, but so have the armies of the resistance, who have the desert on their side. Even as Leah Blue attempts to urbanize the desert by reconfiguring it into a Venetian resort, the desert gradually reclaims the city.

In *Arizona: A History*, Thomas Sheridan reminds us that "Arizona as a geographical concept did not exist until the nineteenth century. It was not a political reality until 1863."\(^\text{15}\) The United States was indeed a late entry into the battle for the territory that would become Arizona, a land that has been occupied by colonial powers, beginning with the Franciscan and Jesuit priests and other conquistadors, for almost half a millennium. From the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) to the Quota Act (1924) to the Repatriation Sweeps (1930s) to Operation Wetback (1954) to every treaty the U.S. government ever forced on the native peoples, issues of citizenship, immigration, and indigeneity have proven problematic to those power brokers who would determine public policy.\(^\text{16}\) Although the players may change from era to era, border issues, xenophobia, and racist rhetoric seem to have taken up permanent residence in the southwest. Silko confronts these issues primarily from the perspective of the colonized indigenous peoples on both sides of the border. For these dispossessed peoples, the borderland is home, and the border a symbol of their homelessness.

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\(^{16}\) See Sheridan.
Edward Said has said that "Exile is one of the saddest fates." Exile in one's own homeland is particularly cruel. Sterling's literal banishment from Laguna Pueblo is a testament to his psychological distance from his cultural heritage as well as a microcosmic reminder that exile, in one form or another, is a pervasive fact of life among contemporary Native Americans. Sterling is the aging Laguna Pueblo, recently retired from the railroad, with whom the novel opens and closes and through whom Silko introduces elements of her own tribal culture and belief. Sterling's identity is constructed through narratives of colonization. Even his name, "Sterling," signifies the abominations of the imperial past. Mining functions as Silko's most apt metaphor for the imperial desecrations of the earth. Many of the conquistadors who traveled to the Americas in search of gold found silver instead, and in their thirst to extract ore from the earth, proceeded to enslave and exterminate the tribes. From Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's 1541 journey through Arizona and New Mexico in search of the mythical seven cities of gold, to the looting of San Luis Potosí beginning in 1545, to the 19th-century silver strikes in Arizona, and later the demand for copper and then uranium, mining has fueled the imperialists' fires. Adding to the multiculturalism of the transborder zone, German and other European miners, engineers, and capitalists (including Yoeme's and Amalia's husbands) abounded in Mexico. Like the ore that has been ripped from the earth

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or the Laguna people's sacred stone "little grandparents" stolen early in the century by "a ring of anthropologists" (31). Sterling is a displaced element, transfigured out of context.

Banished from the reservation for allowing whites to film the giant stone snake that emerges from the uranium tailings, Sterling is the Laguna scapegoat not because of his offense but because "There were hundreds of years of blame that needed to be taken by somebody" (34). As the tribal scapegoat, Sterling must recover not only his own past, but his people's as well. Far from his home in northwest New Mexico, Sterling works as a gardener for the Yaqui twin sisters in Tucson. The effect of Sterling's reliance on narratives of domination for his identity formation is that he exists not on the boundary between the Indian and white worlds, but outside both. Except with Seese, Sterling attempts to remain silent and perhaps even invisible, reflecting his inability to engage with his community and marking his impotence in both Indian and white worlds. Although Geronimo, one of his heroes, derived power from silence and invisibility, allowing him to move between the seen and the unseen, these qualities do not carry the same effects for Sterling. Instead, he is a passive victim who does nothing of his own volition. He cannot act, not even to defend himself. Sterling needs someone, whether it is a skillful prostitute or a magazine advice columnist, to tell him what to do in all aspects of his life.

Sterling demonstrates the effects of colonialist oppression on individuals as well as, finally, the possibility of recovery. Among a cast of outlandish
criminals, revolutionaries, and other heroes, Sterling is basically a decent, quiet, unobtrusive man who demonstrates that loss of self is indeed one danger of assimilation. Greg Sarris, a UCLA professor and mixedblood Kashaya Pomo/Coast Miwok, would suggest that Sterling suffers from "internalized oppression," what Frantz Fanon would term "cultural estrangement" or the editors of The Empire Writes Back would call "cultural denigration."19 Sterling's emptiness at the beginning of the novel, his failure to understand his situation, or the meaning of the stone snake, or the reason he needs Euro-American narratives of the West, reflects his disconnection from tribe and home. Unable to locate himself within the context of contemporary America, he fantasizes about Wild West dime-novel historical characters. Proud to assign Indian backgrounds to various historical outlaws, Sterling identifies with them as victims of injustice. He buys into the white narratives of "the law" and the American West that he finds in detective magazines, yet even so he manages to twist the tales just a bit to make his criminals more heroic, more misunderstood, more like him.

Sterling's alienation is no accident. It is the direct result of federal assimilationist policies intended to eradicate Indian identity.20 Sterling's problems are indicative of late 20th-century separation from people, place, and

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self fostered by two hundred years of government intervention and propaganda: "Education, English, a job on the railroad, then a pension; Sterling had always worked hard on self-improvement. He had never paid much attention to the old-time ways because he had always thought the old beliefs were dying out" (762). He must "improve" himself because the dominant culture teaches him that there is something inherently lacking in American Indian culture. Like so many other victims of assimilation, Sterling has always had the wrong goals, placing material concerns above spiritual ones and valuing the individual goals of white culture over the communal goals of his own Laguna tribal culture. He is a marginal member of an already marginalized people. It is no surprise that Hollywood, which forms so much of Sterling's self-image, ultimately betrays him.

Betrayal is not a new concept for indigenous peoples. Because they are denied sovereignty, every native tribe in the Americas is in some way exiled, even those who have been able to remain in their ancestral lands. Speaking specifically of the twentieth century, Edward Said reflects that "exile has been transformed from the exquisite, and sometimes exclusive, punishment of special individuals . . . into a cruel punishment of whole communities and peoples" (35). The exile of whole communities of native peoples in the Americas, however, has a much longer history, dating back at least to the first European contact. The tribal decision to banish Sterling is preceded, therefore, by the colonizer's banishment of the Laguna Pueblo as a nation.
For the Yaqui and other natives who lived for centuries in the Sonoran desert in what is now northern Mexico and southern Arizona, the division of land into two countries, neither one theirs, has resulted in their dispossession and exile by political forces beyond their control. From the time of their enslavement and near-genocide by de Guzman, the Yaqui have retreated into the desert hills, relying on the land itself to protect them from the invaders. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko is careful to distinguish between Mexicans, who are descended from the Spanish and other European colonials, and Indians. Her sympathies lie with the Indians. The Yaqui characters in *Almanac*—Yoeme, Lecha, Zeta, Calabazas—can pledge allegiance to neither the United States nor the Mexican government. They are allied, instead, with the desert itself. In this alliance lies a certain measure of freedom and a degree of invisibility, both of which serve them well when crossing the border.

For the natives, border crossings are figured as means of resistance to the colonizers. The abstract map with which *Almanac of the Dead* opens establishes the significance of prophecy, narrative, and place and announces that in the quest for repossession, "Native Americans acknowledge no borders; they seek nothing less than the return of all tribal lands." Here, the border is drawn as a bold straight line. Along with the huge upper-case MEXICO below it, the border is the most striking feature of the map and the most constant presence in the text. Crossing this line constitutes a display of resistance to the still-present imperial forces, and each border violation substantiates Calabazas' assertion of the
artificiality of lines drawn on maps. Smuggling has proven to be a very lucrative
career choice for both Calabazas and Zeta. Eventually, however, economic
considerations give way to political statements. Yaqui sisters Liria and Sarita
help the church rescue and smuggle people across the border, and Zeta
progresses from smuggling cocaine to arms in anticipation of the indigenous
uprising prophesied in the ancient almanac. Like Ceremony's Tayo, who “had
only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions
through all distances and time,”21 Calabazas is able to claim that, “We don't
believe in boundaries. . . . We know where we belong on this earth” (216). In La
Maravilla, the Yaqui grandfather Manuel flies in his rocking chair, “as though
time had turned back to his own father's time, his father's desert, a desert
without fences, without rails. A desert sin fronteras” (M 10) leads him back to
himself. Going a step beyond Gloria Anzaldúa’s admonition to “Admit that
Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are
irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger in your psyche” (86),
Sterling finally understands that we cannot separate the illegitimate political
entities of Mexico and the United States because, “Tucson was Mexico, only no
one in the United States had realized it yet” (759). The border functions as a
constant reminder that the invaders have appropriated sacred tribal lands and
have attempted to circumscribe people's movements across the imaginary line,
yet it remains at best a semi-permeable membrane.

The natives here have never been able to prevent intruders from entering this country or even this hemisphere. Contemporary American politicians, though, are extremely concerned with the influx of so many people who seem to be pouring across the border. In considering what draws the immigrants, primarily those from the south, Americans must realize that many are coming for the same reasons as most of their own ancestors. For some, the reasons are economic; they are seeking better lives. For others, the reasons are political; they seek freedom from corrupt regimes and refuge from civil wars. Or they come to join families already living in the States. But Silko offers another answer, an answer that undercuts the political viability of the United States: prophecy. Guided by the spirit macaws and the twin brothers, the people journey from the south in fulfillment of the ancient almanac's prophecy of repossession. After five hundred years, the era of the Death-Eye Dog, our own time, is coming to a violent close. Silko draws on Mayan and Aztec myths and symbols and asserts that other tribes have similar prophecies regarding both "the arrival of Europeans in the Americas" and "the disappearance of all things European" (map). Referring perhaps to the imperial processes set into motion by the Aztecs, who demanded from their neighbors tributes and victims for human sacrifices, the almanacs describe the pre-contact beginning of exile in the Americas, when the children smuggled the text to the north, through the territory of the Destroyers. Stories of empowerment, therefore, traveled from the south long
ago, just as more recent generations of storytellers—Yoeme, Calabazas, Lecha and Zeta, Wacah and El Feo—have continued the migration.

Anzaldúa writes of this movement as a return to the southwestern homeland, to Aztlán, as part of “a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing la migración de los pueblos mexicanos, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán. This time, the traffic is from south to north.”22 Sheridan's historical study supports the idea of some sort of northward journey, citing the appearance of images of Quetzalcoatl and other Mexican designs in what would become the southwestern United States as evidence that cultural exchange occurred before Europeans arrived:

During the 1300s a number of Mexican motifs suddenly emerge in the rock art, kival murals, and pottery designs of people living from the Mogollon Rim to the Rio Grande Valley. There are plumed serpents, parrots, macaws, and above all, masked figures—precursors of the katsinam who are an integral part of the religious rituals of the western Pueblos today.23

These sacred symbols appear throughout *Almanac of the Dead* as harbingers of repossession, once again engaged in a migration that cuts across cultural and political borders. As part of her mental and spiritual preparation for the war of repossession, Zeta redecorates her ranch kitchen with “Mexican tiles patterned with blue, parrot-beaked birds trailing serpent tails of yellow flowers. Lecha's mysterious notebooks have drawings of parrot-beaked snakes and jaguar-headed men” (21). The twin sisters inherit from their Yaqui grandmother, Yoeme, the

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22 *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 11.
task of translating the encoded almanac and bringing the ancient prophecy back to the people.

By invoking the deeper reason of prophecy for the mass migration to the north, Silko forces a reassessment of the United States' historical narratives and political motives. Perhaps this continent is not the white man's promised land after all. Because the people are older than the border, after five hundred years of occupation, oppression, and genocide, they endure. Like the desert, they pass the border with impunity. In this text, the international border possesses authority neither as a political nor a racial division. Silko employs the building border crisis to demonstrate the potential tenuousness of the United States' power, a power based on theft, corruption, and genocide. Lecha cuts to the heart of the underlying racist agenda. She knows that whites use the border as a psychological barrier against the brown people to the south, stating, "the white man had always been trying to 'control' the border when no such thing existed to control except in the white man's mind. The white man in North America had always dreaded a great Indian army moving up from the South" (592). Is this fear the result of a guilty national conscience, a recognition of wrong-doing, or simply a survival strategy? In the mid-1960s, James Baldwin warned that whites were already outnumbered globally: "it is now absolutely clear that white people are a minority in the world—so severe a minority that they now look rather more like an invention—and that they cannot possibly hope to rule it any longer" (The Fire Next Time 363). Despite the government's efforts, characters—
like their counterparts outside the text—maintain a steady trans-border traffic flow. Census projections reveal that not many years from now, whites in the United States will discover that birthrates and immigration trends have rendered them the minority. The United States must realize that, “What they had done to others was coming back on them; the tables had been turned; now the colonizers were being colonized” (738-9). This turning of the tables exemplifies Fanon's warning that “The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world . . . will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters.”

Neither the Indians nor the desert, however, recognize the “forbidden quarters” demarcated by the international border as at all forbidden. As the twin brothers approach with their followers from the south, they conspire with the encroaching desert to push whites farther north. The prophecy foretells the regeneration of the earth along with the return of the people.

On the level of metanarrative, Silko foregrounds the powers engendered by writing and storytelling as forms of prophecy. The text—including the contemporary novel *Almanac of the Dead*—is essential for cultural survival. The preservation of the ancient almanac assures a future for the people, who take their identity and their existence from stories: “the almanac was what told them who they were and where they had come from in the stories. . . . The people

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knew that if even part of their almanac survived, they as a people would return someday" (246). The almanac saves the children, who in turn save it and their people, on their original journey north early in the epoch of Death-Eye Dog:

"The children had been told the pages held many forces within them, countless physical and spiritual properties to guide the people and make them strong" (252). By eating the horsegut page in the soup, the children take physical sustenance and gain the strength to escape from the crippled old witch-woman, who otherwise would have eaten them all and ended the story. Yoeme warns her twin granddaughters Lecha and Zeta that "In the days that belong to Death-Eye Dog, the possibility of becoming like her trails each one of us" (253).

Although in crossing the imagined line between the physical and material worlds all three women appear to be witches (Zeta stirs a boiling cauldron in the opening scene, Lecha is a talk-show psychic who solves real murders, and Yeome is a shriveled old woman who communicates with snakes), theirs is not the kind of bruja witchcraft practiced by the Destroyers. These women are responsible for preserving the almanac for the benefit of the people.

Remembering the old stories becomes a talisman against evil. It is a talisman from Silko's Laguna ancestors that she has used before in her work: "As the old people say, 'If you can remember the stories, you will be all right. Just remember the stories' " (LL 68).25

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Blurring the lines between past and future, memory and prophecy work together in *Almanac of the Dead* as forms of storytelling. Silko shows that prophecy can create as well as predict events. By foretelling of repossession by indigenous peoples, the almanac creates a climate and the possibility for just such an activity. Although the almanac contains ancient stories, it is also a living chronicle of more recent events. The story of the children's journey from the south is contained in the very book they smuggle. Yoeme has made her own Spanish additions to the polyglossic almanac, and Lecha is the first to make entries in English. The twin brothers' walk north, which is taking place as the novel closes, is foretold in the almanac. Stories are alive and keep people alive, and they imply a certain responsibility on the part of the teller. Recognizing the dialogic vitality inherent in the telling of stories, "Yoeme had believed power resides within certain stories; this power ensures the story to be retold, and with each retelling a slight but permanent shift took place" (581). Stories are not immutable, but are dependent upon subtle changes indicative of life. As our world and our needs change, so must the stories we tell in response to them. Angelita/La Escapía shares Yoeme's understanding that "The stories of the people or their 'history' had always been sacred, the source of their entire existence. If the people had not retold the stories, or if the stories had somehow been lost, then the people were lost; the ancestors' spirits were summoned by the stories" (316). The novel gives voice to the spirits of the dead ancestors. It
exposes old wrongs, indicts the perpetrators, and forces a recognition of personal responsibility.

Throughout her career, Silko has sought the esteemed role of storyteller and the responsibility that comes with it. Indeed, she has been a major force in the explosion of native writing during the last quarter of the twentieth century. *Almanac of the Dead* tells the story of the Americas for the past five hundred years, yet it also predicts events which since its publication have come to pass. Specifically, *Almanac of the Dead* has proven uncanny in foretelling the race riots in Los Angeles and Miami and the 1994 indigenous rebellion in the south Mexican state of Chiapas as well as the end of apartheid in South Africa. Silko also explores the ethics and economics of organ harvesting, a practice that has of late caught the attention of human rights activists. Within the novel, the storyteller has the power to create events, like Thought-Woman or Grandmother Spider who at the beginning of *Ceremony* creates the world by thinking of it.

Lecha Cazador is a primary storyteller in *Almanac*. She understands that her power is also the source of her pain. This power positions Lecha as a conduit whose existence is itself a boundary between realms: "The power Lecha had seemed to be as an intermediary, the way the snakes were messengers from the spirit beings in the other worlds below" (138). After many years' absence, she returns to Tucson to fulfill her obligation to her sister and her grandmother, to transcribe the ancient almanac, and to prepare for the future. During these "intervening years," Lecha has been traveling the country and refining her skills.
She starts by performing acts of vengeance for jilted lovers. Her technique involves gathering information about the offending lover and his family, then imagining horrible endings for them. She tells their personal stories to completion, and these stories become true. From there she becomes a television talk show psychic who finds only dead people. Her success attests to the fact that the daytime audience, America itself, is greedy for death scenes, a sign of the Death-Eye Dog era. In Alaska, Lecha meets an elderly Yupik woman with a strange storytelling power that reminds her of her grandmother Yoeme. This episode combines story and power, technology and vengeance. The old woman uses the natural electricity of animal fur to make planes crash by touching the weather map on the satellite television screen:

"White people could fly circling objects in the sky that sent messages and images of nightmares and dreams, but the old woman knew how to turn the destruction back on its senders. . . . The old woman had gathered great surges of energy out of the atmosphere, by summoning spirit beings through recitations of the stories that were also indictments of the greedy destroyers of the land. With the stories the old woman was able to assemble powerful forces flowing from the spirits of ancestors" (156).

Silko ends this chapter by mentioning the Korean Air Lines crash, making the story more immediate and plausible by linking it to the nonfictional world. The narrative offers no hint of condemnation for either the old Yupik woman or Lecha. These are simply acts of retribution, building up to Lecha's vision of the floating heads of the U.S. ambassador to Mexico and his chief aide, that set the stage for the indigenous reclamation of the Americas.
Lecha's thought process during her final appearance as a TV talkshow psychic reflects the narrative structure of *Almanac of the Dead*. The character's psychic stream of consciousness from technology to guerrillas in this episode incorporates elements of the dialogic process of the novel. As Lecha sits before the taunting host and his audience, she refuses to answer the host's questions, leaving him almost speechless without his scripted lines on the teleprompter. Losing control of his own narrative, the host flounders while Lecha absorbs her surroundings and becomes aware of "the voice that had recently raised itself within her" (163). She redirects the audience's attention to her voice and her vision as she describes the scene of white American heads floating in Mexico's gardens of Xochimilco, which even she does not realize will be the next morning's headlines. Is Lecha seeing the future or creating the future? She knows that changes are coming, even faster than she thought, and that now it is time to get to the real work of revolution. For her, this means transcribing the ancient almanac, a keymap to the past and the future.

The dialogic process of *Almanac of the Dead* is manifested most explicitly in the various tellings of the Geronimo story, for which Indians and whites have very different versions.\(^\text{26}\) Silko defamiliarizes one of the most legendary of American tales. The Apache Wars, upon which Tucson was founded, kept the

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U.S. Army on a wild goose chase for years, during which the Apache crossed back and forth between the United States and Mexico, eluding armed forces in both countries. Sterling's version of Geronimo, though sympathetic, is taken from the pulp magazine accounts of his capture. The Yaqui Indians in the novel, however, say that there were three or four men the Army called "Geronimo," but no "real" Geronimo. The mystery man in question is associated with images of flight, and the Yaqui story surrounding Geronimo is as convoluted as the flight of the imagined warrior: "Old Mahawala started out, and then the others, one by one, had contributed some detail or opinion or alternative version. The story they told did not run in a line for the horizon but circled and spiraled instead like the red-tailed hawk" (224). The story passes from Mahawala to Calabazas, whose listener Root times the all-night storytelling sessions by the movement of the stars.

Although at first he found Calabazas's narrative style frustrating, "over the years Root had learned that there were certain messages in the route Calabazas took when he talked" (215). The reader, too, must become initiated into the storytelling process or run the risk of missing the messages. Early in her career, Silko advised the listener/reader of the marked differences between Pueblo narration and Western linear narrative:

For those of you accustomed to a structure that moves from point A to point B to point C, this presentation may be somewhat difficult to follow because the structure of Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider's web with many little threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other. As with the web, the
structure will emerge as it is made and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made (LL 54).\textsuperscript{27}

That meaning is clearly accretive, so that a single telling of the story is never enough. It must be repeated over and over again by different voices, each of which engages in a dialogue with both the current audience and the previous tellings, with which the listener may be quite familiar. In Bakhtinian terms, the non-linearity of the Pueblo form of telling, as manifested in the Yaqui versions of the Geronimo story, suggests the form of the novel itself, moving centrifugally, counter to the centripetal force of authorized discourse, spinning the tale off in different directions.\textsuperscript{28}

At the same time, however, the Geronimo stories cross lines of gender, tribe, and race to bring together characters and strands of narrative. The Chiricahua Apache Geronimo assumes a larger function as a pan-tribal trickster hero. Beginning with the Yaqui “Wild Ones” Mahawala and Yoeme and ending with the mestizo Root, the Geronimo story links generations of renegades for over a century. Yoeme’s testimony includes a personal sighting of the Apache: “I never moved my eyes from the man at the edge of the water. But in an instant he was gone. All I could see was a gull riding a wave, floating and stretching its wings in the lazy way the gulls have” (130). The notion of flight implies freedom

\textsuperscript{27} This quote is taken from “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,” a lecture transcribed in English Literature: Opening Up the Canon, ed. Leslie A. Fiedler and Houston A. Baker, Jr. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 54-72. A much shorter version was printed in Critical Fictions, ed. P. Mariani (Dia Foundation for the Arts, 1991) and then in Silko’s Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, pp. 48-59.

\textsuperscript{28} See Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, pp. 272-73.
from boundaries. It also implies that whoever he was, Geronimo was a shape-shifter. Drugs bring Lecha and Root similar experiences of flight that connect them to Geronimo. Addicted to Demerol, Lecha approaches her work on the almanacs while her “medication left her feeling as thin as an air current a hawk might ride. She sank back on her pillows with her eyes closed and thought how easily she could imagine the gliding and soaring of the red-tailed hawks that often flew near the ranch house” (245). Cocaine and whiskey leave the physically-impaired Root “riding his high the way he imagines desert hawks ride the updrafts over the arroyos and ravines” (208). Similar moments occur in La Maravilla, in which the Yaqui Manuel and his mestizo grandson use peyote to become red-tailed hawks. This liberation from physical constraints mirrors an opening-up of narrative possibilities. According to Silko, then, whites never got the true story of Geronimo, nor did they “capture” the right man. The slippage inherent in Native storytelling keeps the story growing, in this case as a means of resistance and a source of power, and involves the community in the process of telling.

If the story of Geronimo provides an unexpected voice in American history, then that of the Gunadeeyas, or Destroyers, rewrites that history. Silko describes the Destroyers as sorcerers who called the whites to this continent in a story. ²⁹ Silko tells the Laguna Pueblo story of the creation of white people in

²⁹ Silko relates the story of the Destroyers much more directly and thoroughly in Ceremony. There, the whites are the “winning” entry in a witchery contest.
*Storyteller* and *Ceremony*, and the reader's knowledge of the destroyers depends somewhat upon a knowledge of the previous texts, in which the author emphasizes the generative power of storytelling. In *Almanac of the Dead*, however, Silko seems less inclined to portray the tribes' culpability in the appearance of white people in the Americas. Politically, she does not mince words. Like James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*, Silko posits that whites know their dominion is only temporary and that they are doomed to fall because their power is based on theft and corruption. Whites need tribal peoples to save them from their own destructiveness. Rather than descending completely to essentialism or reverse racism, though, *Almanac of the Dead* shows that the capacity for evil resides in people of all origins, not just the Euro-American colonizers. The fact that the tribes brought the whites here means the native people are not blameless, for Destroyers exist among all peoples. Silko thereby reverses the process of demonization without excusing the evils perpetrated in the name of imperialism.

More importantly, Silko's reclamation of the right to construct an originary story takes narrative authority away from the colonizers. In effect, she states that the story of the Americas never was the white man's story. In writing of the Destroyers, Silko decenters western narratives of colonialism and gives a mythic response to the ideology of Manifest Destiny. She denies ultimate agency to the colonizers, showing that they are merely the creations, agents, and victims of an older and more powerful force, the Destroyers. Europeans, epitomized by
Serlo and his *sangre pura*, are the products of witchery. The Euro-Americans are
definitely allied with the Destroyers, however, and their reign is almost over.
Whatever their origins, the Destroyers are the enemies of the natural world.

Throughout *Almanac of the Dead*, the earth's voice gains strength as the
indigenous army gains momentum. Like her people, the earth is a victim of
colonialism; like her people, her spirit remains unbroken. In this millennial
discourse of repossession, the natural world is connected with notions of home,
belonging, and indigeneity, and preserving it assumes the status of a religious
imperative. Despite his years away, Sterling feels an intimate spiritual
connection to his Laguna home, his eyes tearing when finally he sees Mt. Taylor
again. He believes that “Geronimo,” banished first to Florida and then to
Oklahoma, never again to see the White Mountains, indeed paid a high price for
being a famous criminal. Lecha understands that for the desperate whites who
come to her seeking psychic aid, “the loss was their connection with the earth”
(718).

As if suggesting an environmental justice that begins not with human
sociopolitical efforts but with the earth itself, Silko portrays the earth as neither a
passive victim nor an impartial observer: clearly the earth takes sides with the
indigenous and other oppressed peoples against the colonizers. In the Almanac,
the earth is retaliating for centuries of spilled blood, mining, water diversion,
fence-building, nuclear testing, and other abuses. The drought, which becomes
increasingly pronounced as the novel progresses, is a sign of profound imbalance
in *Almanac of the Dead* as in *Ceremony*. Sheridan notes that in the desert southwest, "the Anasazi and Mogollon appropriated symbols and supernaturals from Mesoamerica and transmuted them into something uniquely Puebloan, a cycle of rituals that wove living and dead into an enduring plea for rain" (19). Pueblo religion, therefore, centers on ancestors and environment, both of which must be satisfied. The earth's outrage began with the Destroyers' atrocities, in particular the murders committed under the guise of satiating the earth's spirits. Montezuma and Cortés were blood brothers who conspired against the people and the land. This time, however, the drought is on the Indians' side. Tourists and settlers are finding the southwest inhospitable. Just as the ancient prophecies promise, farmers are losing their land, the plains are going back to grass, and the buffalo are returning. The earth exacts a personal vengeance on the twins' German father, a miner whose accursedness derives not from witchcraft but from the fact that the "white man had violated the Mother Earth, and he had been stricken with the sensation of a gaping emptiness between his throat and his heart" (121). The white man's insides disappear like the ore he seeks, and he last appears as a dessicated corpse.

Our relationship to the earth indicates our relationship to other people. Crossing the border into the United States, Alegría laments that "poor Mother Mexico had been gang-raped by the world" (671). Of course, Mother Mexico is not the sole victim of colonialism; her children, particularly the females, have suffered along with her. As the earth's spirits regain power, however, so do
individual female characters. Women in this text cross gender lines in their struggles to survive and assume power in traditionally masculine pursuits. Whether or not they merely reproduce the cruelties of patriarchy, though, is another question. Leah Blue becomes a real estate mogul, Zeta smuggles cocaine and weapons, and La Escapúa leads the army of the dispossessed. Only Leah, however, the New Jersey mafia wife who believes that by stealing Indian water she can create a paradise of Venetian canals in Arizona, misinterprets her relationship to the land. The Mayan militant communist La Escapúa holds the more realistic perspective that, "at least Engels and Marx had understood the earth belongs to no one. No human, individuals or corporations, no cartel of nations, could 'own' the earth; it was the earth who possessed the humans and it was the earth who disposed of them" (749).

Clinton, the black Cherokee homeless Vietnam veteran, reveals the dire consequences of so much thoughtless environmental abuse: "The ancient prophecies had foretold a time when the destruction by man had left the earth desolate, and the human race was itself endangered" (747). The twin brothers preach that in order for humans to avoid this fate, "All they had to do was return to Mother Earth. No more blasting, digging, or burning" (710). Eventually, the patriarchal forces that have attempted to dominate the earth will exhaust and destroy themselves.

In addition to delineating the emerging environmental crisis associated with border issues, Almanac of the Dead, a text in which the earth's voice joins the
dialogue firmly on the side of the colonized, reveals the racist rhetoric of certain environmental movements. Predicting the recent split in the Sierra Club over the issue of immigration, Silko reveals that for some "deep ecologists" concerned with the effects of overpopulation, "Too many people' meant 'Too many brown-skinned people.'" The demands to "'Stop immigration!' and 'Close the borders!'" (415) become their solutions to the environmental destruction that has resulted from five hundred years of primarily Euro-American colonialism and industrialism. Later in the text, Eco-Kamikaze suggests that activists "machine-gun station wagons driven by pregnant mothers of five; build a wall across the U.S.'s southern border to keep out all the 'little brown people' " (690). As the border issue becomes more heated, the possible solutions become more violent, yet we have seen at least the second of these come to fruition.

Sterling is the ray of hope in Almanac of the Dead. Though we encounter Sterling only briefly, we must recognize him as the only character in this massive novel who achieves any positive resolution. Like Clinton, who recognizes affinities between African and Native American systems of belief, Sterling is able to envision alliances, to break down the old colonial borders by recognizing Tucson as Mexico and Mexican Indians as Indians. His return home and his reclamation of his Laguna identity represent perhaps the clearest victory in the novel. Now, he wishes he had paid more attention to the old stories and prophecies. In violation of the tribal banishment, Sterling crosses the line back to Laguna, returning to the uranium mine (the Anaconda Corporation's abandoned
Jackpile mine near Paguate in the world outside the text) that figures so prominently in Silko's work and in contemporary Laguna life. There, he finally understands the meaning of the great stone snake: "The snake was looking south, in the direction from which the twin brothers and the people would come" (763). He knows that the abiding earth is sacred and that humans are only transient beings here. Although the eco-terrorists, communists, and armies of the dispossessed are making plans for widespread revolution, Sterling's personal return occurs on the most accessible level. Against the backdrop of impending revolution, Sterling's quiet homecoming is a small, peaceful, yet tangible accomplishment that implies some measure of hope for the rest of our crazy postcolonial world.

If Sterling's story is sweet and palatable, though, how are we to weigh it against Almanac of the Dead's overwhelming narratives of violence? Sterling is horrified by what he sees in Tucson, yet that is exactly what convinces him of the prophecy and enables him to return to Laguna. The outlaws and revolutionaries—Zeta, Lecha, Awa Gee, La Escapía—get things done. The International Holistic Healers Convention, a site of convergence, draws many New Age charlatans and peaceniks, yet it also provides a forum for those tribal peoples, a sort of Pynchonian Counterforce, who would repossess the land by any means necessary. Is violence in this case justified? It comes from everywhere, from the police, from the smugglers, from the mafia, from the blue bloods, from the heroes and heroines of the novel. Are Wacah and El Feo merely
pawns for La Escapía, or do they have any chance to bring their message in peace? Sterling is able, finally, to make translations amidst the competing narratives, to understand his own line of narrative descent, but he ends up waiting for the people to come from the south, and what will happen when they cross that line?

Fanon opens *The Wretched of the Earth* with the claim that “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (*WE* 35). Certainly that statement has proven true in the round of decolonization following the end of the Cold War. By the close of *Almanac of the Dead*, the impending collapse of the border mirrors the United States’ quickly deteriorating economic, environmental, and racial situation. It brings out U.S. troops and sends whites fleeing farther north, fearing an invasion from the south as indigenous peoples reclaim a continent. During the 1990s, President Bill Clinton's border policies revealed the hysteria that Silko predicts in *Almanac of the Dead* of dark hordes, whom she sees not as Mexicans but as indigenous peoples, allied in a sense with the dispossessed Native populations in the southwestern United States, pouring across the border, terrifying the whites who are, after all, squatters in indigenous territory. Fanon states that “For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land” (*WE* 44). Ward Churchill suggests that all of America’s other social ills are secondary to Indian land claims.30 Silko reminds us that the civil wars in Mexico and Central America are about

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30 "The Earth is Our Mother," p. 177.
indigenous claims for land.\textsuperscript{31} Again, these conflicts between colonizer and colonized are nothing new. During the Mexican Revolution, Francisco Madero outraged southern leader Emiliano Zapata by failing to return Indian lands. Francisco Madero (d. 1913) did not survive—as president or otherwise—for very long.

Undoubtedly, this clash of cultures Silko portrays between indigenous and invading peoples will result in violence. Although the twin brothers walk north in peace, inviting peoples of all races to join them, La Escapía plans for war at the border. The potential for violence stems from a long-standing imbalance of power coupled with a lack of cross-cultural communication. As he prepares for the revolution, the black Cherokee Clinton argues the impossibility of believing in absolutes, claiming that "Nothing could be black only or brown only or white only anymore" (747). Because peace is such an unimaginable concept, Clinton values hybridity for what it can offer a cross-cultural alliance of warriors.

In terms of novelistic discourse, Bakhtin sees conflict, inherent to the novel's form, as "a dialogue between points of view," a dialogue in which the speakers speak different languages:

Every type of intentional stylistic hybrid is more or less dialogized. This means that the languages that are crossed in it relate to each other as do rejoinders in a dialogue; there is an argument between languages, an argument between styles of language. But it is not dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense; rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each

\textsuperscript{31} See Silko, "Fences Against Freedom."
with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other (76).

Certainly, Almanac of the Dead is a hybrid, polyglossic text in which the dialogic contentions of differing viewpoints threaten cataclysm. The novel itself is both a fantasy of retribution and a prophecy for our times. Is chaos the inevitable result of such wildly competing narratives? Does the structure of the novel threaten to explode along with the plot? If we are unable to translate, to decode the languages of each other's points of view, then Silko's vision represents a likely, if undesirable, outcome: the border issue is to end violently, a continuation of the brutalities enacted by various groups upon other groups throughout the colonial, and now postcolonial, history of the Americas.

CROSSING BLOODLINES

Who is to make these cultural translations? For the past 500 years in the Americas, the dominant society has used mixedbloods as cultural brokers, very often to the detriment of indigenous communities. As a Laguna from a prominent mixedblood family, Silko seems compelled to explore the crossings of bloodlines. In a 1983 interview with Kenneth Lincoln, Silko stated, "I suppose at the core of my writing is the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed or mixed blooded person; what it is to grow up neither white nor fully traditional
Indian.”32 Louis Owens sees this desire at the heart of all contemporary Native American literature: “For the contemporary Indian novelist—in every case a mixedblood who must come to terms in one form or another with peripherality as well as both European and Indian ethnicity—identity is the central issue and theme” (5).33 Chippewa novelist and critic Gerald Vizenor terms mixedblooms “crossblooms,” suggesting the crossing of racial boundaries that has occurred regularly since the arrival in the Americas of the Europeans and their African slaves.34 Revealing the author’s own Métis fascination, Vizenor’s crossblooms are tricksters who bring worlds together. They work against terminal creeds (mono-anything) and therefore against static notions of identity. Gloria Anzaldúa acknowledges the U.S./Mexico border zone as the site of racial crossings. It is dichotomized as the realm of either los atravesados, “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato [sic], the half-breed, the halfdead” (3) or “the new mestiza” (77).35 The crossblood becomes a new border, a mediator at the confluence of multiple lines of descent. Mixed breeds yield mixed results, exhibiting somewhere between the best and the worst characteristics of their component ethnicities. In the best case, the crossblood emerges as a transcendent being who carries the possibility for not only

34 See Gerald Vizenor, Crossblooms: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
35 Borderlands/La Frontera, op. cit.
individual but, more importantly, communal survival. Silko's most admirable crossblood characters reflect this syncretic notion of bringing diverse elements together to create something new and better than the sum of its parts. These are the characters able to make connections and translations among the dangerous, violently competing narratives.

Louis Owens asserts, "Silko makes it clear for the first time in American Indian literature that the mixedblood is a rich source of power and something to be celebrated rather than mourned."36 In effect, Silko is establishing a place for herself and for the overwhelming percentage of American Indians with mixed bloodlines.37 She shows that the United States government's legal designation Degree of Indian Blood, or blood quantum, is not the sole qualifier for Indian identity. In Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, Silko admits that she became aware of her racial "otherness" at home in Laguna when white tourists singled her out as not being "Indian enough" to stand with her schoolmates for a photograph.38 Like her father Lee Marmon, young Leslie took refuge in the land, retreating to Laguna to find her sense of identity in the place itself.39 Her particular strategy lay in remembering and putting herself in the many stories associated with specific places. She writes that she still identifies with the

36 Other Destinies, op. cited, 26.
38 Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, op. cited, 63.
Laguna heroine Kochinakako, Yellow Woman, because “she dares to cross traditional boundaries of ordinary behavior during times of crisis in order to save the Pueblo; her power lies in her courage and in her uninhibited sexuality.”40 This “uninhibited sexuality” allows her to reinvigorate the tribe by producing crossblood children through liaisons with outsiders.

Silko also identifies with the old-time people who accepted her and who, as Owens might say, “celebrated” differences. What is important to the old-timers is not one’s physical appearance but his or her relationships and behavior, so that “a person’s value lies in how that person interacts with other people, how that person behaves toward the animals and the earth.”41 According to Silko, racism is therefore not a Pueblo attitude, but a sign of the white intrusion into the Pueblo world. Fullbloods who reject mixedbloods on grounds of miscegenation have internalized the white racist values epitomized by Serlo in Almanac of the Dead. “Indianness” becomes a function of behavior as well as blood. Silko’s positive mixedbloods are associated with the land and with regeneration. Those who deny their own Indian blood or who shun mixedbloods because of their difference are somehow “unnatural.”

Tracing the figure of the mixedblood in contemporary American Indian literature, Owens observes that “the mixedblood turns at the point of division back toward an Indian identity and away from the collective dream of white

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40 Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, 70.
41 ibid, 61.
America.” This notion of the turning point suggests more a bifurcation than a unification of racial and cultural identity. The American Indian and the American Dream cannot coexist either within individuals or in the larger political arena. To reclaim an Indian identity, the mixedblood must reject his or her white heritage, which is often seen as no heritage at all. Melody Graulich quotes Silko's autobiographical note from Rosen's anthology, The Man to Send Rain Clouds: “I grew up at Laguna Pueblo. I am of mixed-breed ancestry, but what I know is Laguna. This place I am from is everything I am as a writer and human being.” Descent among the Pueblo is matrilineal, yet Silko's quasi-autobiographical work, Storyteller, reveals nothing of her mother's (non-Laguna) origins. Instead, Silko delineates her paternal family tree, which includes Anglo, Laguna, Mexican, and perhaps Cherokee branches. Despite her claims of inclusivity, Silko turns to her Laguna heritage because whatever her degree of marginalization, she was raised within that community and shaped by that place. For mixedbloods who are raised outside their own tribal community, the act of turning to an Indian identity is more like that described by N. Scott

42 Owens, Other Destinies, 22.
44 Patricia Jones, “The Web of Meaning: Naming the Absent Mother in Storyteller” in Yellow Woman/Leslie Marmon Silko, 213-232. Although Jones focuses on Storyteller, the theme of mother/child separation, whether through abandonment or abduction, runs throughout Silko's work, including her most recent novel, Gardens in the Dunes. It is tempting to seek more specific biographical correspondences. Not only do we learn almost nothing of Silko’s mother in Storyteller or elsewhere, but we rarely hear mention of her own sons, Cazimir and Robert. Silko’s parents were separated during the writing of Storyteller, and at one point Silko lost custody of at least one son.
Momaday as an act of the imagination.\textsuperscript{45} It involves a decision to valorize one line of descent over the others. There is no balancing act here. Whatever the "degree," the "Indian" becomes the strongest element imagined in the blood. Clearly the turn to the native, to appropriate Krupat's phrase, includes mixedblood authors as well as non-native critics and New Age wannabees.

Tayo from \textit{Ceremony} is Silko's most notable example of a mixedblood who brings resolution and healing to his community by claiming his Indian identity. Like Linda Hogan's young protagonist in "Aunt Moon's Young Man," who admits that "Our blood was mixed like Heinz 57, and I always thought of fullbloods as better than us," the halfbreed Tayo suffers from feelings of inferiority.\textsuperscript{46} He idolizes his assimilated fullblood cousin, is scorned by his Christian Laguna aunt, and is taunted by his evil fellow veterans. Ultimately, however, only Tayo can restore balance to all of Laguna. He represents the merger of traditional stories and innovative ceremonies, a new breed to save an ancient people.

Amid competing narratives of racial purity and miscegenation, \textit{Almanac of the Dead} features a vast collection of mixedbloods with a wide range of cultural identifications. Root's mother attempts to Europeanize his great-grandfather Gorgon by claiming that he was "of 'Spanish descent,' not Mexican" (169), but even before his head injury seals his alterity, light-skinned Root gravitates


toward his darker relations. He listens to Calabazas, who knows that “stories
about old Gorgon were full of clues about Root” (169) and who trusts him
because “Despite his blue eyes and light hair, Root was a throwback” (221).
Clinton, the black Cherokee (reminiscent of Ishmael Reed), has learned from the
old women's stories and finds strength in combining his African and Indian
heritages. Clinton sees that from Africa to Haiti to the American mainland,
Damballah, Ogoun, and Quetzalcoatl have earth/spirit affinities, and he seeks to
educate others to join with the tribes. Although Silko does not indicate that
Sterling's background is anything other than Laguna, she does show that his
increasing identification as Indian is crucial to his return. He must divest himself
of the Anglo values he has acquired in order to recover a tribal sense of self. By
the end of the novel, Sterling's role in his Laguna community is uncertain, yet
like Tayo he has knowledge of what is to come.

The Cazador twins, Lecha and Zeta, inherit their Yaqui grandmother
Yoeme's powers, claim her heritage, and accept responsibility for the ancient
almanac. At best, these twins are one-quarter Yaqui, perhaps one-quarter
Spanish (through Grandpa Guzman), and half German. Never, though, does
Silko portray them as anything other than “real” Indians. Other characters as
well as the narrator refer to them as the “Mexican Indian[s]” (46) or “Yaqui
women.” When as children the twins first meet their grandmother, they
recognize old Yoeme as an Indian but are shocked when she informs them,
" 'You are Indians!' " (114). Young Lecha understands that Yoeme left because
"Nobody likes Indians" (116). In a twist on the Yellow Woman stories, Yoeme was married to Guzman for the good of the tribe, to make certain that he kept his political agreement not to kill Indians. The alliance failed, and the children proved a disappointing Mendelian cross-fertilization experiment: "‘You know how it is with horses and dogs—sometimes children take after the father’" (117). Yoeme can walk away from her children because she imagines them as extensions of her husband. Zeta begins to see herself as Yaqui when she begins to think of "Grandpa Guzman not as her grandpa, but as the 'old white man,' which was what others, outside the family, called him" (131). As children, she and Lecha dissociate themselves from Guzman's family by thinking of themselves as indigenous and the rest of the family as foreign. They cross the lines between inside/outside and outside/inside, joining with the "others, outside the family" in order to recognize the family as outsiders.

Within the Guzman family Silko gives a clear portrait of what Anzaldúa must have meant by "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato [sic], the half-breed, the halfdead." All seven of Yoeme's offspring are pale, weak, sickly replicas of their father, among them an albino, Ringo, and a pedophile, Federico, who hides behind the colonial institutions of religion and medicine to practice his abuse on family members. Their own mother regards them as "stupid mestizos—half no-brain white, half worst kind of Indian" (121). After years of waiting "to see if any of you grandchildren might have turned out human" (118), Yoeme returns to claim her twin granddaughters.
By the present time of the novel, the family cemetery in Pótam is full of
Guzman's progeny, who despite "breeding like flies" (583) had dropped just as
quickly. The family mansion, "sinking into the hill with each rainstorm" (583), is
in the same state of decay as its former inhabitants, crumbling like the
foundation of Ortiz's hotel. The signs of Spanish colonial oppression are fading
as the earth retakes the land and the people, absorbing the "unnatural" offspring
of a doomed pairing.

Silko exhibits no sympathy for her mixedblood characters who turn away
from their Indian heritages. They are fools and weaklings certain to be mentally,
physically, and spiritually impaired. Chief among them is Menardo, Almanac of
the Dead's mestizo insurance man. He is a complete fool and the source of much
hilarity in the novel primarily because he has fallen for what Owens calls "the
collective dream of white America." This dream requires an erasure of ethnic
origins and a turning away from an Indian identity. As a child, Menardo loved
to listen to his grandfather's stories about their ancestors' prophecies until he
learned the ancestors were Indians and that, like Lecha and Zeta, he was an
Indian. Unlike the Cazador twins, however, Menardo rejects his grandfather and
his Indian ancestry in an attempt to pass for white. He is obsessed with the
notion of sangre límpia and is convinced that he can pass if only he can explain his
flat nose. Menardo's unclean, tainted blood is his most desperately guarded
secret, yet it is no secret at all. He is mocked and even reviled by Indians and
whites alike not because of his mixed blood, but because of his attempts to deny
it. Despite Menardo's progress in climbing the socio-economic ladder, the ambassador's American wife still thinks of him as "that monkey-face who passes himself off as a white man" (274). His second wife Alegría "decided the Indian chauffeur must be Menardo's way of keeping in touch with his humble origins" (277). Said chauffeur, Tacho, considers his employer "a yellow monkey who imitated real white men" (339). The Indian revolutionary Angelita la Escapía refers to "the pudgy half-breed monkey" under the code name "Red Monkey" when spying on Menardo's arms deals with General J and the CIA.

Like Marshall's Merle Kinbona, and like Silko's Tayo, Betonie, and Sister Salt, Menardo has the tell-tale hazel eyes and light brown hair of the mixedblood. This particular mestizo, however, is clearly the product of the contact between the indigenous peoples and the Destroyers. He has succumbed to the internalized oppression that marks the imprint of colonizer on colonized. Part Two of Almanac of the Dead, Mexico, consists of the books "Reign of the Death-Eye Dog" and "Reign of the Fire-Eye Macaw," two names for the same period of colonial destruction that has gone on for the past 500 years. The first chapter of Death-Eye Dog is entitled "Mestizo" for Menardo. He becomes mega-rich by playing the ultimate capitalist game, insurance. He claims to protect his wealthy clients against everything, including acts of god and the indigenous revolutionaries of Chiapas, some of whom are his relatives. The only thing he cannot insure against is his own stupidity. Menardo equates money with class and class with race. Extremely conscious of his lower social status, he attempts
to buy his way into the upper echelons of Mexican society. If he wears the right
clothes, says the right words, marries the right woman, builds the right house, he
will be no different from the European Mexicans he emulates. No matter how
much money he has, though, Menardo is always a "yellow monkey." Referring
to Root's family in a similar context, "Mosca said there was nothing worse than
half-Mexicans or quarter-Mexicans who were so stunned by having light skin
they never noticed the odor of their own shit again" (200). Despite his best
efforts, Menardo cannot escape the odor of his own shit. He is haunted by
dreams of a giant snake, linking him subconsciously to not only his dead
grandfather and the Chiapas revolutionaries, but also to the Indians north of the
border. Tacho knows that the dreams portend Menardo's death. Thinking he
can cheat death by wearing a bulletproof vest, Menardo puts his faith in
technology. The test bullet Tacho fires at him finds a gap in the armor and
penetrates the vest. Silko sacrifices Menardo just as she does Trigg and Greenlee
by having a trusted inferior do the deed. He becomes as expendable as the self-
made American whites with whom he is both literally and figuratively allied.

Not until Gardens in the Dunes, published eight years after but set a
century before Almanac of the Dead, do we see the mixedblood represent the kind
of cultural inclusivity and racial amalgamation that Silko claims for the Laguna
people in her nonfiction collection, Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit.
Owens writes Other Destinies "For mixedbloods, the next generation," but this
next generation is difficult to discern in a work like Almanac. Sterling is childless,
as are Zeta and even Menardo, and Lecha's only child Ferro is gay. The only infant in the novel is cannibalized for organ harvesting, and Serlo wants to clone himself in the interest of racial purity. *Almanac of the Dead* is a novel of sterility in which narratives of reproduction center on technology rather than human interaction. In contrast, *Gardens in the Dunes* features a fertility plot that culminates in the birth of a black Sand Lizard and the regeneration of the desert gardens that have sustained the tiny tribe.

Because the Sand Lizard tribe has so few members, they are by necessity exogamous. The group can survive only by welcoming children born of sexual relationships with outsiders. Sister Salt, the daughter of a Sand Lizard mother and a white missionary father, plays the role of Yellow Woman in bringing new blood to the tribe through uninhibited sexuality:

The old-time Sand Lizard people believed sex with strangers was advantageous because it created a happy atmosphere to benefit commerce and exchange with strangers. Grandma Fleet said it was simply good manners. Any babies born from these unions were named 'friend,' 'peace,' and 'unity'; they loved these babies just as fiercely as they loved all their Sand Lizard babies (*GD* 220).\(^7\)

That new blood, however, is subsumed into Sand Lizard blood during pregnancy:

Sand Lizard mothers gave birth to Sand Lizard babies no matter which man they lay with; the Sand Lizard mother's body changed everything to Sand Lizard inside her. Little Sand Lizards had different markings, and some were lighter or darker, but they were all Sand Lizards (*GD* 204).

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This gestational conversion process suggests an essentialism independent of physiognomic differences. At least matrilineally, all Sand Lizards are accorded the same tribal status without regard to blood quantum. The Sand Lizard mother may change the baby, but in this case the Sand Lizard baby changes the mother. Sister Salt refers to her infant as the "little black grandfather." He speaks to her from the womb in the almost-forgotten Sand Lizard language and urges her to return home to the gardens. The baby's father, Big Candy, tells Sister Salt that, "Even before the Indians ever saw an African, the old Red Stick dreamers described them and said they had powerful medicine that the people here could use" (219). Their border baby is a crossblood ancestor merging Sand Lizard and white with Baton Rouge Indian and African and fusing the past with the future. Silko's implication is that the little black grandfather will be a messiah figure who will translate rather than manifest the violent narratives of colonialism.

Repossession of land and the quest for political sovereignty cannot be separated from the reclamation of indigenous identity among native peoples. This potential for translation, survival, and return is the subject of the next chapter. Alfredo Véa, Jr.'s young protagonist, Beto, is a mestizo from the heart of Aztlán, and his neighbor, Danny, is a gumbo mixture of black, white, Indian, and Filipino from the Louisiana bayou. Like Tayo, the Cazadors, Root, and the "little black grandfather," Beto and Danny emerge from the crossings of bloodlines in the gaps of America to embody and speak new narratives of repossession.
CHAPTER FOUR

Filling the Gaps:
Alfredo Véa, Jr.'s Oasis in America

What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the winter time. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the Sunset.
—Crowfoot, 1890¹

But at my back I always hear
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity . . .
—Andrew Marvell
To His Coy Mistress

Alfredo Véa, Jr.'s first novel, La Maravilla, takes place off the map of Phoenix, Arizona in the late 1950s, in a town that never was and within a community that no longer exists. It is in every respect a border novel, not far removed from Silko’s Tucson. La Maravilla focuses on an eclectic group of displaced persons who have created their own refugee camp among the junkyards and floodpaths of the desert Southwest. These are the "spilt children" whom America has overlooked, the detritus after the flood. Although many

¹ Touch the Earth, op. cited. Crowfoot, of the Blackfoot Confederacy, 1890. p. 12.
appear to be broken people, these are survivors, living in the desert outside the wasteland of the cities, without zoning or policing or schooling. All are outcasts from the dominant culture, and here on Buckeye Road reside the most unlikely of physicists and philosophers. Thomas Pynchon would call these preterite characters the excluded middles; Véa calls them the people of the gaps. Like Pynchon, Véa uses metaphors from Einsteinian physics to explicate the indigenous systems of belief that posit magic and mystery and dreams as forms of reality. Specifically, Véa offers Yaqui ontology as a means of maintaining individual identity in a culture that urges homogeneity. The Yaqui worldview acknowledges both the transience of human life and the endurance of the living earth, to which all forms of life must return.

Buckeye Road is a magical place, of the type that might be possible for only a short time, perhaps only during one’s childhood, but it is real, nonetheless. This unmapped site of abjection bears no political relationship to the mother city: “Buckeye Road was not Phoenix, nor even a part of Phoenix, not a suburb or an outskirt. . . . There were no street names or street signs, no boulevards or cul-de-sacs; no houses had numbers. . . . It was less than unincorporated, it was unknown.”2 As far as Phoenix is concerned, Buckeye serves only as a site of economic exploitation, harboring cheap labor like the Bournehill section of Bourne Island. With increasing velocity, the city

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2 Alfredo Véa, Jr., La Manavilla (New York: Plume, 1994): 23-24. Future references are parenthetical and are designated by “M” where necessary for clarity.
encroaches upon Buckeye Road just as not so long ago the squatters trespassed into the indigenous realm of the desert. Pynchon's war and his little people have already experienced this form of displacement by another group of beings: "For Indians who once lived alone in this desert, the approach of the squatters was the first sign that it was time to move on" (M 24). It is clear from early in the novel that Buckeye can be only a transitory site, as it is also clear that it has a specific role to play in the lives of those who gather there.

*La Maravilla* is a *bildungsroman* in which young Beto's coming of age incorporates elements of his author's life story that blur the boundaries between fiction and autobiography. Like Véa, Alberto (nicknamed Beto) is about 9 years old in 1958. He is being raised by his grandparents in Buckeye Road, a squatters’ village near Phoenix, until his mother returns to take him to California to work as a migrant laborer. He later serves a tour of duty in Vietnam. As a little boy, Beto wants to become a physicist. Although Beto's future is not revealed beyond his return from the war, his seemingly implausible goal is rendered a possibility by the fact that following his own military service, Véa studied physics and English in college en route to becoming a criminal defense attorney.³

Although the story is told from several characters' perspectives, the novel's main protagonist is Alberto/Beto. This mestizo boy is at the center of a tug of war between his grandparents, a Yaqui refugee from across the international border who remains faithful to his heritage and an Andalusian

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immigrant curandera who struggles desperately to be a good Catholic woman.

The conflict between Manuel and Josephina, however, pales in comparison to
that between the abuelos and their daughter, Lola, whose reclamation of her son
threatens to destroy the boy's sense of self by casting him into the insipid
wilderness of Eisenhower's America. Together, the grandparents give the
fatherless child a measure of continuity and a sense of belonging to both a place
and a family.

Véa portrays his childhood desert home as an oasis of possibility in
America. Buckeye Road is itself a gap in the fabric of America, yet it is a place of
convergence for the displaced persons who populate it. Although the characters
are well aware of their racial and cultural differences, they have found an
equilibrium within their specific ecology. Within this cross-section of the
dispossessed, no one is rushing toward the mainstream. Grandmother Josephina
notes that "For all the desolation of this place, there was a lot of life here . . .
Nothing fancy. Basic life like the cactus and the wildflowers. Twisted life like
the desert plants that had learned to live on nothing but a drop of rain a year"
(98-99). The human residents of Buckeye Road are as twisted and resilient and
various as other forms of desert life: members of half a dozen Indian tribes,
homeless men camped out in junked Cadillacs, a magic busload of transvestite
gourmets, a crazy Irishwoman and her dead husband's ghost, an obese white
prostitute, a pair of black lesbian prostitutes, Chinese merchants, poor whites
from Arkansas and Oklahoma, Mexicans, blacks, mestizos, and a stenographer
under the porch, writing it all down. Whether in cars, trailers, tar-paper shacks or adobe, "In Phoenix's unofficial trash heap, people had set up house" (65). The community they form is one of mutual dependence and support among people who, in the burgeoning consumer culture of the 1950s, seem to have almost nothing of material value.

Véa asserts that those who have fallen through the cracks of America are the ones who can best maintain their identity, in part because they have places of refuge where the masses will not seek them. Historically, tribes such as the Yaqui and the Huichol have kept their cultures and languages alive largely because they have kept to themselves. Even into this century, they have been isolated and independent, fighting the Spanish, then the Mexicans, and even the other Indians who joined government forces against them. Manuel is proud to tell his grandson Beto that even before the Europeans arrived, the Yaquis fought against Aztec imperialism. The price of resistance has been poverty and exile.

In 1958, Manuel lives with his Andalusian wife and mestizo grandson near Phoenix, far north of his Sonoran desert homeland, and before he dies he intends to show young Beto who he is and where he came from. In a desert initiation ceremony shortly before his death, Manuel and other elders introduce Beto to peyote medicine. Peyote is sacred to many indigenous peoples of the desert southwest, and during the twentieth century its ceremonial use spread to geographically distant Indian nations through the Native American Church. Manuel explains that peyote, or hikuli, is like the "genius," which he terms, "an
in-between spirit that could make that communication possible” (222) between the individual’s familiar spirit and the great spirit. Peyote therefore provides an interface, becoming for the Yaqui "a dream that connects" (222). It allows Beto assume a different physical form, to exist in another time and at another place while at the same time maintaining his individual consciousness. Under the influence of peyote, Beto transforms into a redtailed hawk and flies south to the Rio Yaqui at the time of the Mexican Revolution, where he meets his great-grandfather and the child Manuel and witnesses the punishment of the Yori traitors. This first exposure to peyote medicine is Beto’s rite of passage, after which he insists upon being called “Alberto,” refuses further attempts at baptism, and recognizes the local ghost as Wisteria Maybelle’s dead husband. Following Manuel’s death, peyote permits grandfather and grandson to remain connected and ensures at least one more generation of Yaqui cultural survival.

Manuel understands the imperial forces that have long threatened to end not only the Yaqui way of life, but the continued existence of Yaqui people upon the earth. He warns his grandson that, "To lose yourself is the greatest mutilation" (38) and so implores the boy to stay true to his heritage despite the pressures. Like DL Chastain, who “reached the radical conclusion that her body belonged to herself” (VL 128), Beto must look beyond the pre-ordained social constructions that would shackle him body and soul. Manuel reveals to Beto the advantages of their marginalization:
"We are the people of the gaps, mijo. Only we know that the gaps are where life really is. . . . If you follow what is true you will find yourself paying more for every breath, but it's sweeter air. Stay in the gaps, mijo. Love for the land is here. Resistance is here. The company's better in here" (221).

For the Yaqui, then, the most meaningful elements of life—land, resistance, companionship—are in the gaps. Manuel's old Huichol friend supports this assertion by adding that "The human heart is like steam, . . . You can't cover it. If you do, it only becomes stronger. You push people into the cracks and their voice becomes more beautiful, their thoughts more potent" (222). Véa privileges the voice of the oppressed with the moral superiority of a people fighting for their physical and cultural existence within their traditional homeland.

Josephina, Manuel's Catholic wife, hears this beauty and potency in her beloved blues music and in the gospel from Buckeye Road's Mighty Clouds of Joy Church of God in Christ. The strong voice that emerges from the gaps marks the difference between Josephina's Billie Holiday and Lola's Pat Boone. It is a voice of survival that speaks of overt defiance as well as subtle adaptation. As Manuel "walked north with his changeling tribe," they were "forced to change their self-image" in order to stay alive and to persist as a distinct group of people even when displaced from their rio Yaqui. As a nation, the Yaqui have always defined themselves in contradistinction to others: "'We were not the Aztecas,' they howled. 'Now, we are not you' " (9). Eulogizing Manuel, the Reverend Willie Drake credits the Yaqui Indian with converting him from a "Negro minister" into "an African-American man of God" (241). Reverend Drake admits
that he had at first thought of Manuel as an invisible man even more marginalized than himself in white America. One evening, though, Manuel shows the good reverend that he has been seeing with white eyes. He teaches him to embrace rather than elide the differences between the races and awakens him to the politics of the emerging Civil Rights movement. From Buckeye Road, Reverend Drake later returns home to Atlanta to join Dr. King.

Whereas Manuel succeeds in helping Beto and Reverend Drake claim their identities, he fails with his own daughter. In Lola’s case, Josephina proves to be the more influential parent. She makes her daughter feel ashamed of her body and ashamed of her origins. At age 13, the girl gives birth to Beto, and later abandons him to his grandparents. Lola has run away from Buckeye Road for a new life in California, where "Indians are history and Sundays are for football, not for church" (293). She and her latest lover, Jose Pescado (a Filipino who intends to change his name to Joe Fish), are migrant workers who have fallen hard for the American dream.

Lola and Joe epitomize the goal of the Eisenhower administration's drive to erase cultural differences by turning minorities into middle class Americans. Even though Manuel does not live on a reservation, he and his family are victimized by the social consequences of federal Indian policy of the 1950s. In particular, the Termination Act of 1953 (H.C.R. 103) and the Relocation Act of 1956 (P.L. 959) sought to end the so-called “Indian Problem,” including the
United States' trust obligations, by eliminating Indians through legislation.\(^4\)

Dillon Myer, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1950-1953, was the War Relocation Director during World War II.\(^5\) His experience supervising the internment of Japanese-Americans in concentration camps prepared him to deal with American Indians as enemies of the state. The federal government has always recognized the correlation between land and tribal identification. In its desire for land and resources, disguised as benevolent quests to "improve" the "plight" of the American Indian through such programs as Removal in the 1830s, Allotment through the turn of the century, and Relocation in the 1950s, the United States has quite conveniently elected to overlook the devastating psychological as well as economic effects of this physical dislocation of indigenous peoples from home places. The resulting institutionally mandated diasporas and the concomitant fracturing of communal identity become in practice forms of psychological warfare that create rather than solve social problems within and beyond American Indian communities.

Having internalized the cultural denigration made official through centuries of federal Indian policy, Lola is among *La Maravilla*'s most troubled and least admirable characters. Much like Menardo in *Almanac of the Dead*, she is, by all accounts, a lost soul whose disconnection from her ancestry and her

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homeland leaves her devoid of personal resources. Her return from the outside to reclaim her son Alberto from his grandparents signals the intrusion of the mainstream and hastens the demise of Buckeye Road. The Creek historian Donald L. Fixico writes, "Myer unequivocally stated that federal policy deemed Indians to be museum pieces whose life-styles remained no longer viable in the atomic age."6 This official stance demanding full assimilation sent many Indians, especially mixedbloods, into the wild urban spaces of Cold War America while others entrenched themselves in the gaps. Lola sees no place for her parents in the New World she wants so desperately to inhabit. She argues to Alberto that, "This is the twentieth century and this is America. Nobody believes in their stupid superstitions and dumb stories anymore" (293). What Lola never understands is that this self-denying attitude leaves her with no one and no place in the world.

In denying their ethnicity, Lola and Joe have joined the ranks of the tribeless. Manuel believes that most whites "have no tribe, so if a person across town is hurt or hungry, they feel nothing. Pretty soon they will have no communities at all" (230). Despite their paucity of economic resources, no one on Buckeye Road goes hungry. Motivated by both self-interest and self-loathing, Lola parrots the dominant culture's racial prejudices against not only other ethnic groups, but against her own as well. She has internalized the conservative values of Eisenhower's Republic: acquisition, assimilation, and progress. She

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6 *Termination and Relocation*, op. cited, p. 69.
chirps to her son, "In America you can be whatever you want to be. You can drive an Oldsmobile like Joe" (295). Of course, by "whatever you want to be," Lola means, "just like everyone else." Americans do not live in the desert of Buckeye Road.

Lola and Joe have thrown away their identities, their homes, their languages, and their pasts, thinking that this will make them "Americans," thinking that by doing so they will no longer be mestiza and Filipino. Alienated from their own heritages, they are as migrant workers and people of color nonetheless excluded from the dominant culture. Middle class white America has no use for them except as easily exploited economic resources. José Pescado has a map of the Philippines tattooed on his chest; this reminder of home is lost on the new Joe Fish. Because Lola and Joe refuse to listen, they have no stories and no songs to tell them who they are and no mental maps to show them where they belong.

In contrast to his mother, Alberto will always have a place no matter how far he travels from Buckeye Road. Like Root and Mosca who listen to Calabazas tell the old stories in *Almanac of the Dead*, or Jeremiah Dixon who after his father's death draws "a Map entirely within his mind, of a World he could escape to, if he had to" (MD 242), Beto seeks links to his ancestral past through place. Manuel reminds him that "you know where your blood has been for the last ten thousand years, mijo. There are words and songs, palabras y canciones, that tell you and explain to you" (36). He promises his grandson, "you will come back.
Soy una guante para ti. A glove for you when you look for things that fit” (33).

When Beto asks for a clarification of his own border zone identity, he needs to know how one becomes Mexican or American. Manuel’s response is wonderfully complex, inclusive, and passionate. He tells his grandson,

“You are Spanish and Yaqui, you are a mestizo from Aztlán, this land, right here where the Nahua people began.
“That is what a Mexican is. But you were born here in America, también, and that’s what a Chicano is.
“You don’t become American, no, no. Shit no. America becomes you, miyo” (35-36).

The boy already knows what he needs to survive. He has “una brújula en la sangre, a compass in the blood” (37) to give him strength and to remind him of his origins. While others are struggling to become something else, Beto can be himself. Beto has more to offer America than America has to offer him.

Even before Lola returns to take him away, Alberto is making his own preparations to preserve his identity. He goes into the desert alone, consults with his grandfather’s elderly companions, and uses peyote medicine to frequent the land of his people. His abuela, Josephina, knows that the boy is “honing these days already... He’s honing them sharp now to cut into his own wilderness” and prays that “they’re enough to put him in the right place, to keep him in the right place” (276). For Alberto, the desert is home; his own wilderness lies outside, in California, in Vietnam. Véa presents the spatial arrangement of inside and outside from two worldviews, so that “A gringo will go to the edge of his city to look ‘out’ into the desert, while a Yaqui will go to the edge of the
desert and look 'out' into the city'' (31). How is a gringo to love the desert or any part of the earth when his own discourses instill in him a fear of the unknowable Other "out there"?

Josephina need not doubt her grandson's sense of self and place. Beto belongs to the desert and carries it within him as a talisman. By age ten, the boy knows that he does not want to drive an Oldsmobile like Joe. What he wants is to be "A physicist. You know, study the Yquis' second law of thermodynamics, all the rules that run the universe and especially the theory of relativity. You know, Albert Einstein" (295). Although Alberto has never been to school, he speaks three languages, reads the World Book Encyclopedia volume by volume, and learns from everyone around him: physics from Vernetta, the prostitute next door, poetry from the crazy Irishwoman and the Fuller Brush man, history and religion from Manuel, music and medicine from Josephina.

As much as Véa rejects the expressed cultural and political values of the 1950s, he appropriates the metaphors of physics—namely the second law of thermodynamics, singularities, and relativity—with the intention of finding correlates between scientific knowledge and indigenous systems of belief. Pynchon insists upon seeking the sacred in the physical world. In Cape Town, Dixon is profoundly moved by the sight of the Transit of Venus: "'Twas seeing not only our Creator about his work,' he tells Mason later, 'but Newton and Kepler, too, confirm'd in theirs'" (MD 98). Glory resides in this interface of the sacred with the scientific. Manuel worries that the children of the white man,
however, "see a world without mysteries" (231). Alberto wants to be a physicist because he recognizes that the universe is larger than we know, that it is still full of mystery, and that it runs on Yaqui rules. *La Maravilla* posits that those who know about such things as the laws of physics are not just the formally educated, rational scientists we might expect.

The mystery of process, though, is not to be confused with the distrust of scientific “progress” all four of our authors display. Pynchon, Marshall, Silko, and Véa write against the destructive technological narrative of the late 20th century. Concerns regarding the arms race and the deployment of weapons of mass destruction are especially pertinent among residents of the desert southwest, many of whom served as unwitting guinea pigs while the United States of America experimented with how best to exterminate vast numbers of the enemy, any enemy. Late in life, Josephina begins to understand the philosophy of her husband’s people:

“I used to think the Indians out here were all powerless, but they’re not, far from it. They just refuse to join up, that’s all, and that is a very great strength. They have the power to remain themselves.

They’re the only ones who seem to see that so much of the white man’s work is not progress. How can it be progress? How can it be going forward when everything on the land is going cold? V ernet ta says the Yaquis and all the Nahua nations have always known about the second law of thermodynamics or something like that. Maybe it isn’t a law after all. Maybe it’s a Yaqui prayer” (260-61).

What the Yaquis know about the second law of thermodynamics is that the impulse toward order only creates more chaos. The environmental effect is that
the energy humans put into managing the land is outpaced by the destruction that results. The four authors are outraged by the immorality of what humans are doing to the earth and to each other. Perhaps the Yaqui prayer will set things right.

From a socio-economic perspective, the more a society strives for uniformity, the more people and ideas it forces between the cracks. Manuel asks his grandson, "Can you think in all of your World Books A through Z of one big leap of humanity that was ever accomplished by the majority, by all those people out there rushing like mad to be the same?" (221). The increase in disorder under the veneer of sameness makes the people in the gaps those who can threaten the very systems from which they have been excluded. Like a volcano under pressure, the people of the gaps gather steam unto their hearts, while revolution brews in Bournehills and Chiapas.

Manuel advises Alberto to look beyond the obvious, into the gaps, to see through contemporary symbolic constructions to the older forms from which they are derived. Lamenting the gringo notions of time and immortality as "from this day forward" (38), he explains that most people have lost sight of the past, of the facts, for instance, that the Virgin Mary, the death dog la maravilla, and the cat god, the symbol of resistance, all existed in other forms before the Aztecs, Spanish, and Catholics appropriated them. Forms behind forms signify worlds behind worlds. These other dimensions may be available to us if only we can find the interface. On the way to Vineland, Zoyd Wheeler awakens to witness
his baby daughter, Prairie, communicating with the redwoods, “as if she were responding to something she was hearing, and in rather a matter-of-fact tone of voice for a baby, too, as if this were a return for her to a world behind the world she had known all along” (VL 315). For the Yaqui, time stretches both backwards and forwards. Pynchon’s Emerson writes to Dixon, “‘Time is the Space that may not be seen, — ’” (MD 326). While Josephina acknowledges that “Most mortals have a mind-closing function that works so much better than the mind opener” (2), the Yaqui worldview permits humans to exist in other dimensions. It allows for the warping of space and time, so that Manuel exists on the interface of past and present. He lives in both worlds, that of Buckeye Road and that of the rio Yaqui, his tribe's ancestral homeland far south of the border. He is the man who has worked on the railroad and the redtail hawk who takes flight on the desert thermals.

In physics, a singularity is the center of a black hole, a point of zero volume and infinite mass at which space and time are infinitely distorted by gravitational forces. It is that which defies analysis, and as such it is the point at which physics breaks down. As does Pynchon, Véa uses the notion of the singularity to symbolize that which cannot be explained. Harold, the Jewish Fuller Brush salesman scarred from the death camps in World War II, compares Manuel's and Josephina's house to “a wormhole in recognizable space where dimensions met and contorted with each other behind foreheads” (209). He attempts to convince Josephina that God is beyond the names or forms we create
for him. Harold understands that whatever we call these things, “They all come from the same power” (203), whether Yaqui or Catholic or otherwise. Perhaps only the ambiguity of the singularity can describe God:

What is it that the physicists call unmeasurable, ununderstandable things? Things that become less measurable with each attempt to measure? Singularities? Well, I think God is a singularity (204).

Harold has the same idea about la maravilla, Josephina's dog Apache. Looking in the dog's eyes, he thinks that “Perhaps what he saw there was a singularity, a glimpse at the edge of one. It was how he felt about Josephina herself” (208). Singularities permit to Harold a portion of what peyote medicine affords Manuel and Beto: glimpses into other worlds. Apache has been to the other side, to the land of the dead, and returned to lead Manuel to his own death. Josephina, the transplanted Andalusian curandera whose love for her Yaqui husband conflicts with her desire to be a good Catholic, knows that her own power comes from a deeper, older, indigenous source. Suffering from as many split affinities as Marshall’s Merle Kinbona, Josephina wears as evidence “a hammered crucifix hanging next to a small sealed jar of oils, herbs, and lizards' toes” (5). Harold understands that his friend has “a power that was somehow tied into the real powers that gripped this land. Familiar, hearth and field powers; horizon energies not on paper. Josephina kept trying to name the nameless, and somehow Catholic wasn't exactly it” (208). Manuel knows that his wife's power comes from the earth: “The Spaniards took hundreds of herbs and medicines out of the soil of Aztlán and brought them back to Spain. Now she's brought them
back where they belong” (34). Josephina’s frustration that her husband Manuel is a heathen who is influencing their grandson with Yaqui ways is complicated by her growing sense that she too must be a heathen.

After Manuel’s death, Josephina finds herself changing her mind about religion and heaven, giving up on “‘Someone else’s images of lions lying down with lambs, a home in the clouds’” (260). Instead, she sees heaven in Einsteinian terms as “the very edge, the point-edge of time itself” (259). Here Josephina also adopts Andrew Marvell’s “Coy Mistress” view of life and time in which heaven is the infinitesimal interface of the present moment: “‘It’s like a veil made of particles or maybe not, something thinner than measurement. Entiendes? A sheer margin, a tension. Now. It's now, Alberto. The thing we always have and can never own’” (259-60). Too late, she realizes that her intolerance of Manuel's beliefs was wrong. Too late, she wishes that she had used her scorpion water to permit Manuel to speak rather than listen to her apology. Thirty years too late, she speaks the two words of the Yaqui wedding ceremony, “Solamente tu.” Even in death, Josephina is separated from Manuel because a Chinese man is buried between them. Only the return of Alberto from Vietnam and the enactment of proper ceremonies can reunite the family.

The novel begins with Josephina speaking from the grave of the idea of borders between states of being and the possibility of transgressing them. She compares the line between life and death to the surface tension of water, “you could fragment it, touch the surface, make the margin chaos” (1). Death is
simply a matter of changing one's mind. Recalling her own death, Abuela states that, "Subtly, at the core of it, I dreamed in one direction that all at once I was dreaming in another. Just like that! I poked my finger through the surface tension. It is the waves that create and obscure" (3). That surface tension is the interface. Which side is real? Why not both?

Spanish for "the marvel," La Maravilla refers to both the dog who leads humans to the land of the dead and the marigolds placed on Mexican graves. The title, therefore, reflects the novel's concern with life and death and the interface between the two, but it also introduces the 17th-century metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell, whose work functions subtextually throughout La Maravilla. So subtextually, in fact, that a copy of his complete poems is found buried under the dirt and ashes of a burned out house, then promptly discarded by Josephina, before she learns the lesson of the Coy Mistress. Thematically, Marvell's poetry works within the novel by emphasizing the importance of the unknown and the unseen, that which lies beyond the surface. Functionally, it brings characters, living and dead, together. As eulogy material, the poems are rites to signify passing. Wisteria Maybelle, Josephina, Vernetta, Harold, and Beto are linked in various ways, one of which is Marvell's poetry. Véa presents a complex series of doublings in Wisteria and her dogs, her dead Irish husband and his dead dog, and Josephina and her maravilla German shepherd, Apache, who has journeyed to the land of the dead and returned for Manuel. Like a whirling dervish, Wisteria Maybelle dances in a cloud of dust and dogs and
while reciting Andrew Marvell's poems: "Whenever Beto caught sight of her, he imagined that her words spun around her soft center like shells of electrons"

(110). The perfect meter is Wisteria's lunatic prayer, her amulet against time and grief. Her husband, a railroad fireman who shared poetry and tea with her, died near Portland yet roams the desert outside Phoenix.

Josephina and Wisteria Maybelle are mirrors of each other. They are Catholic women who lived in houses built on exactly the same spot, then moved as widows to cardboard houses in the wash. Their husbands died wanting to speak, and both remain in the desert, Manuel as a hawk and the Irishman as a familiar sight. After ten years, Wisteria reenters time when Manuel dies and she mistakes his funeral for her husband's. Of course, it is her crumbling book of poems that Josephina drops in the dust. On the day Josephina dies, Wisteria and all of her dogs are killed in a highway hit-and-run.

In a twist on the theory of relativity, Véa presents community as a key to survival in both life and death. Josephina is comforted by the fact that "Hay gente en esta página conmigo" (3). The others on the page with Josephina constitute the community at Buckeye Road, the disenfranchised, dispossessed, but never disenchanted. Here in the gaps, the possibilities abound for human connections. Even the "almost invisible people" (2) along an invisible road have forged a tribe among themselves. When Vernetta asks how she is to get by in life without her lynched lover, Uncle Flynn replies that, "God sees to it." He says that perspective is relative, for as you go through life,
"You become each chapter in the book, and where you stand always seems to look okay. Even the last chapter. You look around and see, yeah, they is people with me on this page. Maybe even the last page" (137).

Others have shared Vernetta's experiences and with their help, she has gotten by.

The residents of Buckeye Road take care of each other in a way that Manuel believes is impossible among the tribeless whites. At Josephina's housewarming fiesta, everyone is welcome, even those who are abominations according to the abuela's Catholic sensibilities. When Manuel dies, all of Buckeye Road gathers in respect and mourning for their unacknowledged spiritual leader. By tacit consent, the entire community shelters Boydeeen from the Phoenix police after she stabs her abusive man Hiawatha to death in the street. The lesbian prostitutes give her money, Josephina sews her wounds, Mr. Lee feeds her daily, and the Rev. Drake gives her a kitten for company. When Beto suggests that some words be spoken over Hiawatha's lifeless body, the juju man Toop berates the boy:

"You think everything on this here earth an' below an' above is spoken for in words? Shit, there's a universe between all the words we got. . . . The magic words sits in the spaces between the regular words. . . . And there's spaces between them spaces where whole lives come and go with no words attached" (84).

Toop's description of the inadequacy of words supports Josephina's claim that "human language is as limiting as human eyesight or human thought" (2) and Manuel's assertion that what matters most is the unspoken, the unnamed, the spaces in between. This is the realm of dreams and singularities, where time and
space conspire to open us up to hope and faith in the unseen. For Harold, the wandering Jew on his lonely sales route, “It was the sense of connection that drew him” (209) to Manuel and Josephina, the renewal of belief that allowed him to posit mystery over rationalism and begin again.

This sense of connection creates a kind of kinship among the denizens of Buckeye Road. This desert community functions as an antidote to the Ozzie and Harriet years, a fictional oasis of cultural diversity in Eisenhower’s American mirage. It is a refutation of that American dream that seeks to make us all alike yet all alone. Manuel knows that, “an old Yaqui could be by himself, but he was never alone. The paths, even to the sky and to the findings of things, were well worn” (31). Others have walked this land before, and their spirits are everywhere in evidence. In contrast to the illusory American Dream, the dreams in Buckeye Road are, like those produced by peyote, “dreams that connect,” breaking down by revealing as artificial the boundaries that separate past from present, physical from spiritual, people from place, neighbor from neighbor. They are the dreams that sustain us and the dreams that bring us home, wherever that may be.
EPILOGUE

The Last Laugh

While Pynchon, Marshall, Silko, and Véa chip away at the cultural foundations of hegemony, and while beyond the textual world the Zapatistas and other indigenous groups struggle for political recognition and legal rights, including the return of traditional homelands, the earth and its spirits perform their own tasks of reclamation. The earth's refusal to be contained by human construction and technology, however, is only part of the on-going work. The earth in these novels speaks to the people, calling them back after years of dislocation so that, usually without fanfare, someone from each text goes home.

The last word of Vineland is "home." As Sasha had predicted a decade before, Zoyd, Prairie, Frenesi, and even the good dog Desmond meet again in the woods of Vineland at the Becker-Traverse family reunion, where they find themselves "spinning and catching strands of memory, perilously reconnecting" (VL 368). At long last, Saul ventures home to America at the close of The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, while Merle must go to Africa to claim her daughter before she can return home, for good, to help her people in Bournehills. Ignoring the tribal banishment still in effect against him, Sterling returns to Laguna to await the message of the twin brothers approaching from across the border in Almanac of the Dead. La Maravilla's Vernetta takes her multiracial son, Danny,
home from the desert to the bayou, and Alberto returns from Vietnam to perform
the ceremonies that reunite him with his dead grandparents. At the end of
_Mason & Dixon_, the two men dream of each other and of an unknown America.
Both are awakened by the Norfolk Terrier, their version of the good dog, "close
to dawn, dreaming of America, whose Name is something else, and Maps of
which do not exist" (_MD_ 575). In the final scene of the novel Mason's sons,
portrayed as children again, imagine America as just such an unmapped land of
wonder and possibility.

Singing of "the forms behind their forms" (_M_ 226), Véa's Yaqui deer
dancers remind us of the connections we cannot always perceive, many of which
we have attempted to conceal. To live sustainably, or at all, we must recognize
these connections. Promising that he too will come home, Manuel teaches his
grandson of the social and ecological lessons of convergence and return:

"The poets and storytellers have told us such things just as they
always have. But beyond even their vision, beyond the vision of
man, even past the gift of _hikuli_, the forms come together, the rivers
and waves converge. We live in an eddy. Beyond knowing,
beyond language. Things that must always be apart come together.
Things that long to go go backward" (_M_ 226).

At the limits of epistemology and ontology, Manuel locates the rivers and the
waves, the forces of the natural world that exceed our maps and perhaps even
our dreams. Will those ancient spirits beneath Simon Ortiz's _Washyuma Motor
Hotel_ have the last laugh on us all? Trees grow back bright green over the Visto,
and a second growth of redwoods pushes slowly skyward in Vineland the Good.
ABBREVIATIONS


____. "Women, Silence, and History in The Chosen Place, the Timeless People." *Callaloo* 16.1 (Winter 1993).


Skerrett, Joseph T., Jr. “Paule Marshall and The Crisis of Middle Years: The Chosen Place, the Timeless People.” *Callaloo*, Issue 18 (Spring-Summer, 1983), 68-73.


