CHAPTER VI

NIGHTMARES OF THE CLOVEN DREAMLAND

America has been "the promised land" or "the dreamland" for the European powers ever since Columbus's discovery of the "New World." The New World, which was amazingly fertile and terrifically extensive, offered them promises of prosperity and dreams of freedom. Along with the Pilgrim Fathers, people from various European countries who wanted to live meaningfully in an atmosphere of religious and political freedom, established their settlements over the length and breadth of the dreamland. Within a short time, when colonial usurpation and slavery became the law of the land, the dreamland became a cauldron of seething nightmares, broken promises, bondage, cutthroat competition, massacre, bloodshed and moral decadence. In fact, by the second half of the eighteenth century, a period remarkable for economic progress and scientific inventions, the Promised Land became the land of nightmares. While Pynchon's fifth novel, *Mason & Dixon* (1997), is devoted to tracing the very roots of moral and cultural decadence arising from colonialism and slavery in the latter half of the eighteenth century, his fourth novel, *Vineland* (1990), exposes the wreck of the dreams and the disparaging state of affairs of the last decades twentieth century. Of course, he has expounded the manifold aspects of cultural decadence like the evil of war, slavery, colonialism, the perverted use of technology,
exploitation at various levels, and the general disregard for moral values in the western society and families with reference to the twentieth century, in his novels V., The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow.

In the wake of the innovative technological and cultural changes of the late 20th century America, Pynchon compels the readers to look back to the original concept of the dreamland and compare it with the distressing picture of contemporary America with his very evocative fourth novel, Vineland. The novel presents America as a land of lost hopes and broken dreams, a place where massive, impersonal forces have subtly gained the power to dictate the course of individual lives. John Johnston's suggestion that Vineland has a "Janus-faced view, looking back to the period of social revolution, and looking forward to the technological horizon," seems to hint at the real range of the novel (20). Analysing its "genealogical structure" and "archaeological content" Mark Robberds traces "its umbilical vines back to the sixties" (237). Published in 1990 and set generally in Northern California in 1984, Keith M Booker places Vineland among the modern dystopian fictions like George Orwell's 1984, Yevgeny Zamyatin's We, and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (Pynchon Notes 30-31). And for David Thoreen, the novel reflects "the steady encroachment of the executive branch of the legislative and dramatizes some of the attendant threats to America's civil liberties" (45). In his article "Attenuated Postmodernism: Pynchon's Vineland," David Cowart argues that Vineland lacks the
cultural and historical depths of *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, claiming that the novel’s persistent references to the popular culture represent a “depressing litany” (71). Despite the widely different critical stances, it is evident that *Vineland* sets its dreary depiction of contemporary reality against former utopian dreams of what America might one day become. The New World as a whole originally functioned in the European psyche as a locus of hopeful idealism. Pynchon’s suggestion in *Vineland*, probably is that the American dream has become a nightmare. The novel’s title, a name that conveys a sense of abundance and promise, obviously brings to mind the name given to America by the Vikings. The title is apparently sarcastic as Pynchon presents America, as a land of unhappiness, unrealised promises, shrunken prosperity, broken families, and moral depravation.

Resembling Pynchon’s early novels, much of *Vineland*’s narrative is structured on the protagonist’s quest. As Stencil was set in motion by perusing his father’s dossiers, and Oedipa Maas by her lover’s will, Prairie’s quest is initiated by watching computer images and texts of her mother Frenesi, who had divorced her father more than a decade ago (36). The plot of *Vineland* does not concern itself with uncovering the identity of some mysterious sign-figure, emblem, or artefact. It is as a consequence of the altered perceptions of modern culture that *Vineland* assumes a form different from that of the earlier novels. The dedication at the beginning of the novel: “For my mother and father,” seems
consistent, that the novel deals with Prairie's search for her own separated parents, a quest that shapes the context and structure of the novel.

The novel opens with the ex-hippie (56), Zoyd Wheeler's dream of carrier pigeons whose messages he cannot quite understand. Soon the dream is ignored to focus on a message, which he received along with the latest mental-disability cheque, reminding him to do "something publicly crazy" within a week to qualify himself for further benefits (3). On the kitchen table he finds a note from his daughter Prairie, telling him about the urgency of the matter. Zoyd performs his annual act of leaping through the plate glass window of a notorious Vineland County roadhouse, Cucumber Lounge (11). But he escapes unhurt, as it is a well-planned performance. Ralph Wayvone, the manager of the Cuke, without Zoyd's knowledge, has replaced the normal window with a stunt window made of clear candy, which would break but not cut. Zoyd's yearly repetition of the act has been a signal to Federal authorities, in return for which he receives a monthly mental-disability cheque and parental custody of his daughter, Prairie. The authorities are in full support with Zoyd's staged transgression, which becomes a mere media event, complete with live television coverage. One of the parties stage-managing the televised event is Zoyd's old enemy and long time pursuer Hector Zuñiga, "the erratic federal comet who brought, each visit into Zoyd's orbit, new forms of bad luck and baleful influence" (10). The
media people celebrate Zoyd’s act of lunacy. After reaching home Zoyd
and his daughter Prairie watch the performance, which the TV announcer
presented as “an annual Vineland event” (14). Prairie worked at the
Bodhi Dharma Pizza Temple, which a little smugly offered the most
wholesome fast food of the region, and Zoyd was a certified pizzamaniac
(45). Not much later, Prairie goes out in search of her mother with her
boyfriend Isaiah (21). The narrator comments: “Frenesi might be gone,
but there would always be his love for Prairie, burning like a night light,
always nearby, cool and low, but all night long” (42).

Zoyd’s performance of craziness, together with its media coverage
points to the role popular culture plays throughout Vineland. For Zoyd, it
was like being on “Wheel of Fortune” (12). It turns out that Zoyd’s
misbehaviour is even more thoroughly administered and authorized than
he at first realizes. The government uses Zoyd’s annual demonstration of
public craziness to help keep control of his whereabouts. Television
intrudes directly and unexpectedly into Zoyd’s life in the novel’s opening
pages when he discovers that his annual act of maniacal transfenestration
has become, without his prior knowledge or agreement, an organized
media event. Vineland suggests that the period during which television
progressively saturated American consciousness saw significant changes
in the mechanisms of social control.

Through Prairie’s quest, the narrative of Vineland transports itself
genealogically back towards the sixties and the bulk of the novel is
essentially backward looking (144-294). Prairie’s search for her mother becomes systematic and efficient as she gets introduced to the Ninjette Terminal Centre of the Kunoichi Attentives by a Darryl Louise, known as DL (108). The Senior Attentive tells Prairie that they maintain their own library of computer files including a good size one on her mother Frenesi (112). Watching the computer file on her mother, Prairie feels like “a girl in a haunted mansion, led room to room, sheet to sheet, by the peripheral whiteness”, and experiences the whisper of her mother’s ghost (114).

Prairie soon discovers that she can summon to the screen photographs and images of her mom and other dimly recognizable figures of the sixties. Hector Zuñiga shows up early in Frenesi’s life thinking that he can convince her to return to Vineland. He tells Zoyd about Frenesi’s mysterious underground existence connected to drugs, sex and the rock n’ roll. He also discloses his dream of making a film about all those long-ago political wars, the drugs, and the sex, assigning to Frenesi, the “legendary observer-participant from those times” (51) the lead role. The ultimate message of the film will be: “the real threat to America then and now, is from the illegal abuse of narcotics” (51). Thus begins Prairie’s journey back to the sixties, gathering information about her mother. At the end of the first evening of her quest, after she has logged off and gone to bed, the narrative itself continues:

Back down in the computer library, in storage, quiescent ones and zeroes scattered among millions of others, the two
women, yet in some definable space, continued on their way across the low-lit campus, persisting, recoverable. friends by the time of this photo for nearly a year, woven together in an intricacy of backs covered, promises made and renegotiated, annoyances put up with, shortcuts worn in, ESP beyond the doubts of either. (115)

As in Gravity’s Rainbow, in the context of Vineland too, evolution of technology has proved to be, not liberating, but oppressive and dehumanising. Vineland thus suggests that computerization reduces human lives to mere digitised strings of ones and zeros. In a moment of undeniable clairvoyance, her mother Frenesi hums about the “alphanumeric keyboards that stood for weightless, invisible chains of electronic presence or absence” (90).

Later Prairie watches a film footage, which Frenesi shot for the radical 24fps group, some fifteen years before. Frenesi was in fact, influenced by the leftist ideologies of her mother Sasha, who had been in the blacklist of anticommunists of the Hollywood in the fifties. Sasha believed that in America, “history is no more worthy of respect than the average movie script and it comes about in the same way” (81). One subplot in Vineland involves the efforts of Frenesi and her 24fps film group to turn technological surveillance against the government. Frenesi and her fellow radicals in 24fps pursue the wave of revolutionary activity in sixties America, filming demonstrations and official reactions to them
to produce a true film history of these events undistorted by official editing. They had well-defined plans to consolidate public opinion against the evil of war, to expose governmental misuse of power, and to resist all forms of corruption and exploitation in the society. The camera was their main weapon in the political struggle against abuses of power in America. The images they recorded took the form of judgment all could read. Usually, the group simply went out looking for trouble. They found it, filmed it, and quickly got the record of their witness someplace safe. They particularly believed in the effectiveness of close-ups to reveal and devastate:

When power corrupts, it keeps a log of its progress, written into that most sensitive memory devise, the human face.

Who could withstand the light? What viewer could believe in the war, the system, the countless lies about American freedom, looking into these mug shots of the bought and sold. (195)

The authorities, on the other hand, were tactful enough to convert the revolutionary surveillance into yet another version of official surveillance. Official surveillance is a means, which every form of government employs to keep the citizens under control as it does in Orwell’s 1984. Keith M. Booker argues: “the dystopian societies of Huxley, Zamyatin. Orwell and Pynchon include extensive programs for surveillance of private citizens as a means of ensuring obedience and
conformity” (8). It can be noted that in *Vineland*, right from Zoyd Wheeler’s act of transfenestration itself, the government has been extending tentacles of authoritarian control over the populace. Implicit allegations are made against the United States government for their building up of a massive system for political incarceration in response to the revolutionary energies of the sixties. Whereas in the late 18th century political background of *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon presents the American people’s craving for freedom from the British government, as well as the slaves’ hunger for emancipation, in the Vineland of modern democracy, he depicts the misuse of governmental machinery against the people’s passion for liberation. The battered nature of the society in *Vineland* is suggested by the “Political Re-Education Program, or PREP” (268), which involves the establishment of the a system of campus where political undesirables can be taught to think “correctly”, much as in the Stalinesque Ministry in Orwell’s *1984*. DL explains to Prairie the abominable nature of torture and insult people had to undergo in political prison camps, explicitly referring to the American governments under Nixon and Reagan:

> In olden days we called it last roundup. Liked to scare each other with it, though it was always real enough. The day they’d come and break into your house and put everybody in prison camps. Not fun or sitcom prison camps, more like feedlots where we’d all become official, nonhuman
livestock. You have seen camps like this? [...] Nixon had machinery for mass detention all in place and set to go.

Reagan’s got it for when he invades Nicaragua. (264)

Moreover, *Vineland* suggests that the government secretly encourage target groups which they need for proper law enforcement and exercise of power: “Communists then, dopers now, tomorrow, who knew, may be the faggots, so what, it was all the same beef, wasn’t it? [...] that was simple Law Enforcement 101” (339). It even goes far as to imply that the government is not above creating target groups wickedly. A Special Agent Roy ibble, who keeps a Bible on his desk, discloses in *Vineland* that the CIA, especially during the term of George Bush as Director, has encouraged the import of drugs into the U.S., thereby creating a group of drug users who can be defined as official delinquents:

*Harken unto me, read thou my lips, for verily I say that wheresoever the CIA putteth in its meathooks upon the world, there also are to be found those substances which God may have created but the U.S Code hath decided to control. Get me? Now old Bush used to be head of CIA, so you figure it out. (354)*

In fact, Pynchon’s *Vineland* presents an America fully in the grips of official power where the coercive systems extend far beyond the walls of actual prisons, into the society at large. DL tells Prairie about the
imprisonment of Frenesi: “Yep, I’ve seen ‘em, your mom was in one” (264).

Seduced by the Federal Prosecutor Brock Vond, Frenesi becomes a government informer. Frenesi goes to Oklahoma City, where by now “she was meeting Brock Vond for regular trysts in the waterbed suite of a motor inn out on South Meridian, by the airport” (211). Brock’s intention is only to exploit Freensi and tap her services for the Federal surveillance system. The narrator gives a relevant account of Frenesi’s peculiar relationship with Brock and its dehumanising impact on her:

It was in those hours of hallucinating and defeat that Frenesi had felt Brock closer to her, more necessary, than ever. With his own private horrors further unfolded into an ideology of mortal and uncontinued self, Brock came to visit, and strangely to comfort, in the half-lit hallways of the night, leaning darkly in above her like any of the sleek raptors that decorate fascist architecture. Whispering, “This is just how they want you, an animal, a bitch with swollen udders lying in the dirt, blank-faced, surrounded, reduced into this meat these smells....” (287).

Like Frenesi, some of Vineland’s major characters are also made paid government informers, part of a network of domestic spies that stretches across the country. One such informer, Flash Fletcher, who
later becomes her husband, has fathered Justin, Frenesi’s son (90). Many of them have unambiguous criminal history. The federal informer Flash Fletcher had a previous history as a notorious underworld criminal:

One of Flash’s big sorrows was that once, not long ago, he’d been an outlaw as they come, grand theft auto, hard and dangerous drugs, small arms and dynamite and epic long hauls by the dark of the moon. But when he got caught, and his little teen wife left him, and the court took his babies away, and Flash was turned, left with no choice but to work his way up on their side of the law, soon finding that nobody trusted him enough to bring him all the way inside any structure of governance. (73)

Frenesi, by joining the snitch system, has been betraying the revolutionary “People’s Republic of Rock and Roll” of the College of the Surf (209). It became clear that the College of the Surf was no institution of learning at all, but had been an elaborate land developers’ deal from the beginning. Frenesi involves in filming their anti-government activities. Brock Vond who gradually becomes the real director of the footage, uses Frenesi’s recording to impart control on the fledging republic, which he ultimately subverts with her help. Prairie watches the footage and realizes her mother’s involvement in sabotaging the fledging republic. But her pursuit becomes less effective like the helplessness of the child-protagonist of Pynchon’s early story, “The Secret Integration”
against the parental example of racial intolerance. *Vineland* too, addresses the obvious manifestations of cultural control.

Prairie paused at a shot in which DL and Frenesi were walking along together on a college campus. She becomes dramatically aware of her mother’s role in the murder of her former lover Weed Atman, a mathematician and leader of the student revolt at the College of the Surf. Prairie realized that DL herself had “attempted assassination of a federal officer, sometime in the Bureau of Prisons” (131). Prairie observes the filmic image of Freneis’s face “the wide angle distortion”, which proves “unbearable” to her (247). She has noticed Frenesi’s and her associates’ black images moving in the dark “like ghosts trying to return to earthly form” (246). The film portraying Atman’s murder, reveals before Prairie, the grotesquely terrifying aspect of her mother’s personality:

Her mom, in front of her own eyes, had stood with a 1000 watt Mickey-Mole spot on the dead body of a man who had loved her, and the man who had just killed him, and the gun she’d brought him to do it with. Stood there like the statue of Liberty, bringer of light, as if it were part of some contract to illuminate, instead of conceal, the deed. With all the footage of Frenesi she’d seen, all the other shots that had some by way of her eye and body, this hard frightening light, this white outpouring, had shown the girl most accurately, least mercifully, her mother’s real face. (262)
Frenesi finds justification for her crime of murder in the hazy space between simulation and reality. She fails to distinguish between shooting a scene with a camera and shooting a person with a pistol. Johnston finds in the shooting/filming of Atman “an interface, as well as a bifurcation point” (27). Freensi resembles her fictional predecessors: Oedipa Maas, Katje and V. as the transfer from movie to social reality creates an ethical vacuum. She reminds us of Katje, the “Goddess of Darkness” in her appearance and immoral behaviour. Like V., she is involved in conspiracy, spy work, deception, revolutionary movements, and murder. She follows Oedipa Maas in her lack of concern for marital fidelity and responsibility towards her family. The disappearance of all value systems, of all rationales, threatens the commitment of anyone living outside the law, tempting them to blindness of treachery and betrayal represented by double agents.

Unlike in the case of the questers of earlier novels, who travel extensively over Europe, Africa and America, Prairie’s quest is more technological than spatial. The quest for her ‘real mother’ practically culminates in enquiring about Frenesi’s role in Weed Atman’s murder. It can also be seen as an attempt of the younger generation of the 80s to trace the hidden sources of America’s recent cultural decay. In her search, Prairie is assisted by a series of media types, most notably DL and Takeshi, and her father Zoyd, the Pynchonian schlemiel, who like Benny Profane, is forced into action by the pressure of historical change.
Befitting to a child of the 80s, she uses the possibilities of electronic media like the computer, the TV and the film. While Pynchon’s other questers get entangled in spatio-temporal labyrinths, it is within the labyrinth of electronic images that Prairie attempts to find out the truth about her mother and many others of her generation of the politically turbulent 1960s. Evidently, Pynchon uses Prairie’s quest as a backdrop to portray the life of contemporary Americans in the tainted socio-political scenario of corruption, misuse of power and the over-domination of the electronic media. Pynchon seems to parody the depressing cultural impact of the electronic media and the devious application of the same by those in power.

Keith M. Booker establishes the congruence between 1984, and Vineland, in their “emphasis on the role of television as a tool of authoritarian control” (9). Orwell’s influence on the sinister figuration of television is particularly clear in Vineland. But Vineland does not offer directly mimetic passages from text to reality, unless one intends to read all mention of popular culture in the text as essentially parodic. The novel entertains the idea of cinematic determinism, absolute through the medium of television, and goes on to explore the implications of this new hegemony for generations of Americans formed during the recent times. In contemporary America, the social structure is represented most insistently by the media, particularly the television. If surveillance via television is not quite a technological reality in Pynchon’s 1984 America,
television in *Vineland* is in many ways even more effective at enforcing conformity than in *1984*. The omnipresence of telescreens in modern America and the anaesthetizing impact of constant exposure to various programmes render the masses incapable of critical thought, making any authentic resistance to official authority practically ineffective. The allusions to cop shows, family shows, and the game shows, assume their obvious social ordering functions and simultaneously provide opportunities for the characters to divert or subvert their function.

Debora L. Madsen expatiates on the manifold aspects of the influence of the media on the masses:

> Hapless citizens can only submit to the pressure exerted by the long and gun-toting arm of the federal law, by the mass media, through television, magazines and novels, popular music, movies and the like, by the manufactured ‘mindscape’ of the shopping malls and freeway systems that dominate American space. (126)

To a greater or lesser degree, all the characters of *Vineland* are infected by the media, and the media operate as a powerful machinery of social control. Besides, Pynchon presents all the major characters of *Vineland* as tube freaks.

Hector Zuñiga, the Drug Enforcement Agent (DEA) who has supervised Zoyd’s act of transfenestration, is himself a television addict.
Paradoxically, he represents the most extreme case of "Tubal abuse." He receives treatment from N.E.V.E.R. (National Endowment for Video Education and Rehabilitation), a tubal detoxification unit. Among Hector's excesses are constant quoting and humming of television shows and the songs. He is so addicted as to keep a television set in the back seat in his car, powered through the car's cigarette lighter, angled at the rear view mirror, to watch programmes while driving. Moreover, he has divorced his wife who refused to treat the television set as a member of the family. He bears a true resemblance with Fergus Mixolydian of *V.* who keeps the remote control of the T.V attached to his hand. In one scene, Hector's watching of the TV is interrupted by a sudden shutting down of channels and appearances of strange faces with an announcement: "From now on, I'm watching you" (340). Hector is far from a passive viewer; his ultimate plan is to turn his life of drug enforcement into a movie, thereby making it more real. In the last chapter of *Vinelan*, he hunts down Frenesi Gates, intending that she play the lead role in his film "Drugs--Sacrament of the sixties, Evil of the Eighties" (342). She points out how misled Hector is, but in so doing associates the entire American viewing public to his neurosis: "It was disheartening to see how much he depended upon these Tubal fantasies about his profession..." (345).

As Johnston comments, it is extremely difficult to understand the real personality of Frenesi whose "identity has been split into a real and
cinematic self with no possibility of the one being definitively separated from the other (29). She takes televised reality to be authentic in a crucial sense. She believes that the rays coming from the TV screen would act as a broom to sweep the room clear of all spirits. When there was a rerun of the perennial motorcycle-cop favourite “Chips”, she felt a rising of blood and enjoyed masturbating (83). She had an inherited sexual weakness for men in uniform. “Sasha believed her daughter had ‘gotten’ this uniform fetish from her” (83). Frenesi’s entire being has been charged with images of the film, the TV and the computer. In a moment of exhilaration she cries:

If patterns of ones and zeros were like patterns of human lives and deaths, if everything about an individual could be represented in a computer record by a long string of ones and zeros, then what kind of creature would be represented by a long string of lives and deaths? […] We are digits in Gods’ computer […] What we cry, what we contend for, in our world of toil and blood, it all lies beneath the notice of the hacker we call God. (90-91)

When Frenesi thinks about her present life with her current husband, Flash, she takes comfort, in the fact that, as long as their files are on the government computer system, they are guaranteed a privileged sort of life. As an agent of the “Nixonian Repression,” she sacrifices the personal freedom she had from her counterculture activism. She had not
been able to imagine that after the improvident rush of those days, Nixon and his gang also would pass: “Watergate and its many spinoffs ended the gilded age of Flash and Frenesi” (72).

It is difficult to ascertain the mental sanity of Frenesi’s former husband Zoyd, who customarily performs acts of madness to qualify himself for the mental disability cheques. But he too is no exception to the general tendency of “tube addiction” of the major characters of *Vineland*. Isaiah Two Four, a representative of the younger generation who has grown up with the TV culture, offers a valuable critique of the televisual America. He tells Zoyd about the power of television as a weapon in the hands of the authorities to distract the masses from their counterculture movement and to defeat their endeavour:

Whole problem ‘th you folks’s generation […] is you believed in your Revolution, put your lives right out there for it—but you sure didn’t understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, […] sold it all to your real enemies.

(373)

Though Isaiah’s criticism is worthwhile, many of the youngsters of America, have begun treating even their parents as characters in a TV programme. Justin’s friend, a Las Vegas showgirl, advises him to imagine that his parents were “characters in a television sitcom” (351).
Another character, Takeshi Fumimota, thinks that television even weakens the border between life and death as in the case of Thanatoids (218). The Thanatoids are characters who are neither alive nor dead. The narrator refers specifically to Weed Atman who has been murdered by Frenesi and her accomplices. Weed Atman returns as a Thanatoid; but while the Thanatoids are officially alive, Atman is officially dead:

As a resident of the everyday world, Weed Atman may have had his points, but as a Thanatoid he rated consistently low on most scales, including those that measured dedication and community spirit. Even his first of many interviews with Takeshi and DL, continuing off and on over the years, had been enough to establish a detachment of attitude, a set of barriers neither found they could cross. (218)

Near the novel’s end, strangely enough, the Thanatoids come alive, as never before, the narrator speculates, perhaps, as an effect of Television: “Clapping and stomping, these Thanatoids tonight were acting rowdier than DL or Takeshi had ever seen them. Were changes in the wind [...] by the down-country world, by way of television?” (363). Brock Vond’s associate, Roscoe, also expresses the same sentiments when after a close encounter with death in the business of law enforcement, he exclaims: “Feel like we been in a Movie of the Week” (271). In Vineland the ultimately real is essentially tubal. As Joseph Slade points out, “What happened to the Rocket in Gravity’s Rainbow
happens to the television in *Vineland*, an instrument for change becomes an instrument for the status quo” (*Critique* 128).

As Prairie becomes part and parcel of the world of the film, television, and computer images in the course of her quest, her own identity too becomes fragmented. “Prairie liked to imagine herself as just such a figure of luck and grace, no matter what hair, zit, or weight problems might be accumulating in the non-fantasy world” (327). She even confides to her friend Ché that she partially identifies herself with those television characters playing Bionic, Police, Wonder Woman, and even Brent Musberger (327). Structured upon Prairie’s quest, the narrative of *Vineland* is like a montage of film images, characterized by “short, isolated episodes related through flashback and connected by shifts of angle, fading in and out of different scenes of action” (Madsen 114).

Prairie who has got access to her mother’s experiences through technological mediations, finally reaches a stage of distress, vacillation and indifference. Though she knows that she could meet her mother face to face at the Traverse-Becker family reunion, she hesitates to do so. She tells DL: “But I don’t know if I want to anymore” (362). However, at the novel’s end, the narrative stages the reunion of a reconstituted non-nuclear family in which a group of mother and father figures both symbolic and real clusters around Prairie. She takes off for the woods, “Feeling totally familiated out” (374), after having just spent hours with
Frenesi and Zoyd. But Brock Vond and Roscoe who find Prairie lying paralysed in her sleeping bag attempt to seduce her. Prairie draws out a knife and resists them. Vond then claims to be her real father. And Prairie's rejects Vond with a teenage insult: "But you can't be my father, Mr. Vond, my blood is type A. Yours is a Preparation of H" (376). But later, as Prairie falls asleep on the novel’s last page, she is pulled for a while between "Brock fantasies" and "the silent darkened silver images all around her" (385). Early next morning her dog Desmond awakens her and she finds deer and cows grazing together in the meadow.

Vineland presents a seemingly happy ending with the safe return of the lost dog Desmond, the vision of deer and cows eating together, and the evil Vond appropriately rejected and dispatched. But the dream-goal of Prairie’s quest, i.e., the meeting with her mother and the family reunion turns out to be a nightmare. Elaine Safer comments: "The primary tone at the novel’s close is that of a fallen world" (122). In Vineland, Pynchon presents the life of a couple of generations of post war American society, guided, dominated and swept off by film, TV and computer technologies, where human relations have frozen into nothing more than electronic images. Through the character Prairie, the novelist depicts the 80s generation’s technology aided search for their parents, who have already been victims of the same technology. If Mason & Dixon depicts the cleavage of the Promised Land based on slavery, Vineland depicts the technology-based wreck of the family in the
changed cultural scenario of the same Vineland. The novel portrays that with flirters, deserters, lovers under the overpasses and at movies in malls, wimps and pimps who move like bullets and grin like chimps above the heads of TV watchers, America is not the land of dreams envisioned in the long-lived utopian fantasy. It has become instead, “the spilled, the broken world” (267). But what is promising in the wake of the wreck is the untiring pursuit and dream of optimism of the younger generation.

As in the large and sprawling earlier novels *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which embrace as much Euro-American history as possible, Pynchon blends historical facts and fiction to produce his fifth magnificent novel. The main plot of the novel consists in Pynchon’s imaginative reproduction of the story of two British surveyors, Charles Mason (1728-1786) and Jeremiah Dixon (1733-1779), who are best remembered for making the Mason-Dixon Line. The British Crown, between 1763 and 1767, commissioned Mason and Dixon, to survey and determine the exact boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland. The Mason-Dixon Line became the demarcation of America’s free states and the slave states, still the symbol of America’s national failure to live up to the promise of freedom.

Pynchon uses, thus, the story of Mason and Dixon as a vehicle to situate us in a historical period so as to force us to confront the difficult, if not incredulous and untold, version of America’s past—to see the other
side of the “historical line.” Though Pynchon does not sympathize with the slaves, he allows his characters to do so. Frank D. McConnell offers a high praise for *Mason and Dixon*, which he describes as: “one of the most stunning novels I’ve ever read” (*Commonweal* 20).

Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, the principal narrator of *Mason & Dixon*, recalls his accompanying Mason, an astronomer and Dixon, a surveyor on their transcontinental adventurous survey. Cherrycoke has returned to America after a long absence, to attend the funeral of Mason (6). The novel opens in 1786 as an after-dinner entertainment at the Philadelphia house of Cherrycoke’s sister Elizabeth, wife of Wade LeSpark. Cherrycoke reads the story of the two surveyors from a “scarr’d old Note-book” (8). Among the audience the daughters of Elizabeth, Tenebrae with her twin sisters Pitt and Pliny are the active listeners. The tale of their adventures is narrated in proper 18th century fashion, with Cherrycoke’s running commentary. The framing storyline spreads throughout the novel, as various members of the family come and go, sleep and awaken. It is significant to note that Pynchon’s narrator is extremely selective in presenting adventures based on their moral usefulness: “Adventures and Curiosities selected, the Rev. implies, for their moral usefulness, whilst avoiding others not as suitable in the Hearing of Youth” (7).

Cherrycoke starts the tale with his meeting of Mason and Dixon at Portsmouth as they prepare to embark, under the auspices of the British
Royal society, on a voyage to the southern Hemisphere, where they are to observe the Transit of Venus and help to determine the solar Parallax. They begin the journey to Sumatra on the ship the Seahorse in 1761 (29). But the Seahorse is attacked by the French warship l’Grand, killing thirty men (39). Cherrycoke and the surveyors however, manage to escape unhurt. They are ordered to travel again under a new captain to a different destination. Finally, they arrive in Cape Town, a South African Dutch colony where they first encounter slavery. Bonk, the Dutch Police Official, peers at them closely and asks Mason and Dixon why they have travelled to Cape Town, and Dixon responds, “We’ve but come to observe the Sky...?” (59). Bonk suspects the Englishmen’s motives and retorts: “To ‘observe’ anything more Worldly, —Our Fortifications, Our Slaves, --nothing like that, eh?” (59). The expression “Worldly” refers explicitly to realistic experiences like slavery. But this is exactly what Mason and Dixon do. While awaiting the Transit of Venus, the astronomers become acquainted with the slave-culture of the Dutch colonies. More than that, they closely observe slavery in the Dutch colonies. The experiences of Mason and Dixon seem almost insignificant compared to the horror and shock that Cherrycoke’s narrative causes in his audience. Cherrycoke has described the plight of the slaves in South African Dutch colonies as “unforeseen ways of living and dying” (56). Bonk being a “Functionary of the Dutch government” (58), is, thus a spokesman and envoy of the colonialist attitude. He
believes that slavery is a condition of the world, and that it is ubiquitous. Mason, in his turn, argues that they are “Astronomers under the commission of the King” (56). Bonk reasonably suspects that it would be dangerous if Mason acts so unrestrained with a deputy direct from the castle in the presence of others especially the slaves. He therefore records Mason as a “Person of Interest” (59). Bonk also asserts the arrogant colonialist attitude:

As upon a ship at sea, we do things here in our own way, —we, the officers, and you, the passengers. [...] As there is nowhere to escape to, easier to do as the Captain and Officers request, eh? (59)

Though the surveyors are appointed by the British King, they are treated like slaves who must abide by the rule of the Dutch Officials. One can also note that Bonk himself is a slave in the sense that he follows the rules and regulations of the Dutch authorities.

Moving from Bonk, the surveyors penetrate deeper into the Dutch colonial system in South Africa. They reside with an extremely conservative colonialist, Cornelius Vroom, “the Patriarch” of the Vroom family, and his “three blond, nubile daughters” (60). The Vroom family obviously represents the culture of a colonial community. Cornelius does everything possible to perpetuate the division between masters and slaves thinking that masters are human beings and slaves property. In spite of
his arrogance as a colonialist, he is truly aware of the injustice perpetrated by the Dutch in South Africa. However, the colonists by all means strive to maintain the status quo. It appears Cornelius is afraid of a possible invasion and overthrow of Dutch supremacy by the downtrodden blacks of Africa. That is why “he keeps loaded Elephant-Guns in both the front hallway and the Dispens in back” (63). His attitude to the slaves reminds the reader of the German colonist Foppl, of V... Like Foppl, Cornelius also remains sleepless even at night, being anxious about “slave laughter” (63). He imagines that they always watch him, and so tries to pay close attention to the nuances of their speech. In other words Cornelius’s conservatism and religiosity were such that he was never free from the anxiety regarding “the coming Armageddon of races” (63).

Apart from being haunted by the fear of a violent invasion, Cornelius is also afraid of the threat of the invasion of liberal ideas. Cherrycoke reports that Cornelius was particularly anxious about the “Nubility and its unforeseen Woes ” in the case of his daughters (62). He does not permit his children to mingle with Black slaves and Malays for fear that they too might become spoiled like Dixon, by accepting the slaves as fellow human beings. It is evident that Cornelius does not uphold the doctrine of liberal thought as liberalism refers to “the beliefs or virtues like toleration, respect for civil liberties, acknowledgement of property rights, concern for the disadvantaged, faith in reason etc.”
(Varsava 64). So he forbids the Malay Cookery to his daughters, in his belief that the spices encourage adolescents into ‘Sin,’ by which he means “Lust that crosses racial barriers” (63). Here one can realize that Cornelius’s prejudice is being passed on to his children. He also interprets and thus equates lust with sin and race, though in this case, it may not necessarily entail a transgression of Gods’ law or commandments, but rather an offence, which is blameworthy or unacceptable to a community. He might have devised a cultural barrier, as it were, between his family and the blacks in this regard. Thus, if the Vroom children are forbidden from crossing the barrier or division, then they too will become incapable of hearing or listening to the voices of the poor and the deprived. But it is worth noting that the Vroom children also have a prominent role in the commodification and abuse of slaves.

Cherrycoke describes the after-supper entertainment of the Vrooms as “something irresistibly perverse” (80). The Vroom daughters in fact resemble Katje of Gravity’s Rainbow, and the mysterious woman of V., who treat their subordinates as fetishes. Cherrycoke relates a sort of game of “Codes,” “Steps,” and “Eye play” (80), performed by the Vroom daughters and male and female slaves which reflects their control over and psychological abuse of the slaves. It is a game of adolescent flirtation as well as domination as some girls like to “boss” their male slaves while others “gaze the slave-girls” enviously (80). Regarding the expression of desires “they are shameless” and very sinful (80). The
more they commit sins, the more pleased are the Dutch people. Cherryoke comments that the Dutch attend the church only to be reminded of their sins. The church attendance of the Dutch colonists is only a mockery of Christian religious ideals like tolerance, fellowship, and love for all people regardless of their differences or supposed inferiority. Thus, Cherryoke’s “end of the world” is sarcastic in the sense that he sees these people as irredeemable.

Pynchon delineates starkly the attitudinal and behavioural changes occurring in the surveyors at Cape Town, after their direct observation and recognition of the horrors, injustices, and sufferings of the slaves. The surveyors immediately realize the impropriety in practising astronomy in a realm where slavery prevails. Mason thinks of that place as “another planet” where the Dutch speaking white people are more alien to civilization than the Pygmies (69). Shocked by the “impieties” of the Dutch, he shares his “Moral Displeasure” (85). Both Mason and Dixon grow sympathetic toward the slaves:

Mason, as he comes to recognize the sorrowful Nakedness of the Arrangements here [Cape Town], grows morose, whilst Dixon makes a point of treating Salves with the Courtesy he is never able to summon for their Masters. (69)
In the meanwhile, Dixon who has become a deliverer of the slaves, has been recognized by the Dutch colonists as "Simply Not Suitable" (61), and unreliable in any white affairs in the Cape Town:

They have noted his unconceal'd attraction to the Malays and the Black slaves—their Food, their Appearance, their Music, and so it must be obvious, their desires to be deliver'd out of oppression. (61)

Dixon’s interaction with Malays and slaves intimidates the Dutch colonial power structure, for, by communicating with the oppressed, Dixon is implicitly recognizing them as human beings. He thus, disrupts the colonialist attitude of treating the slaves as property.

Cherrycoke’s narration expounds the hypocrisy of the Dutch in matters of sexual morality, despite Cornelius’ apparent control and disciplining of his daughters in their interaction with the slaves. The Dutch women of Cape Town shamelessly approach every white male who comes there (65). Johanna Vroom, the family matriarch, instructs Austra, the Vrooms’ slave-girl to engage in sexual intercourse with Mason who is white, because it will in turn yield a higher price for a slave baby:

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

The slave-girl obeys the instructions and tells Mason, "'tis a common name here for Slaves" (65). In other words, Austra is not a name but rather a label that denies individuality and freedom. In this sense, the slave is commodified, i.e., made into a product rather than recognized as a human being. Johanna’s instructions and Austra’s actions are common practices among the Cape Town Dutch. The Dutch people's laxity and depravation have pervaded the entire Cape Town. Austra tells Mason, “White Wives are much alike, and all their Secrets are common knowledge at the Market. Many have here been, oblig’d to go on bearing children [...]” (65). She also warns Mason about the assault that is likely from the women of the Vroom family. What follows this conversation is the hunt of Mason by the Vroom women and their slaves:

Mason’s Day, long and fatiguing, is spent popping in and out of doors, being caught alone in different rooms with different females of the household, by others, who then contrive to return the favor. Only slowly does it dawn on him that this goes on here all the time, --being likely the common Life of the House. (66)
In this sense Mason himself has been commodified, i.e., made an object of domination. In chapter 9, Pynchon describes an explicit assault upon Mason by Vrou, a female member of the Vroom family. She bluntly tells Mason: “I have chosen to be a very wicked woman” (87). She tries in vain to unbutton her bodice and rips it into two. Being terrified, Mason runs towards the window, climbs up and vanishes through it. Mason becomes more and more conscious of the plight of the slaves and begins to have nightmares about Cape Town, “the Viper-Plantation” (71). He calls the life in colonies hellish:

Heaven help me, [...] my Dreams reveal this Town to be one of the colonies of Hell, with the Dutch Company acting as but a sort of Caretaker for another... Embodying Power, 's ye'd say, altogether—Ev'ryday live it here, being what Hell's colonials have for Routs and Ridottoes.... (71)

The Slaves in the colonies commit suicide at an alarming rate (69), resembling the programme of mass suicide of the slaves under the Germans, as described in Gravity's Rainbow. The whites also commit suicide, for no apparent reason, “or for a reason ubiquitous and unaddress’d” (69). Chapter 7 of the novel closes with Cherrycoke’s reflections on history interrupted by Ethelmer, and Tenebrae. Cherrycoke reminds his audience: “History is the Dance of our Hunt for Christ, and how we have far’d (75). He envisages optimistically that even though “the Wrongs committed Daily against the Slaves, petty and
grave ones alike,“ go unrecorded, and so invisible to history, possess the
strength “not only to rattle Chains” but also “to break them as well” (68).
Cherrycocke recognizes that the historians are not at all interested in
recording the voices of the slaves but their predicament, and the sins
committed against them are flagrant. He refers generally to various
events of history like the crusades, inquisitions, sectarian wars, and sea
battles whereby millions lost their lives. He reminds Tenebrae: “your
cousin proceeds unerringly to the Despair at the core of History—and the
Hope” (75).

Immediately after observing the Transit of Venus, the star gazers
get yet another assignment, according to which they have to visit
Maskelyne on the island of St. Helena to do further astronomical
observations. They have to set sail for St. Helena in October in a ship
named Mercury, captained by Harold (99). On the island, Mason has a
very unhappy time as he is visited by the ghost of his wife, Rebekah, two
years dead. “Mason gapes in despair” (111). Besides, Mason has to
work alone with Maskelyne who is also insane, as Dixon has been
ordered to return to Cape Town (123). But both of them observe the stars
and prepare natal charts for each other (144). Back in Cape Town, Dixon
gathers more information about the Dutch colonists’ immoral practice of
bringing slave women from different parts of the hemisphere and keeping
them as “Opium Girls,” for their carnal pleasures (151).
The surveyors address the Council of Royal Society, and find that they have nothing but good to say of all they have met at St. Helena and the Cape. Both of them reunite and sail back to London. Though Mason wants to meet his sons, “he dreads the Re-Union” (183). But after much procrastination, he meets his sons in the presence of his relations, “with Tears of Sentiment” (202). Mason meets his father, a baker, with whom he has a difficult sort of relationship. He has no idea of and respect for what Mason does. His father smiles at him without warmth and shouts aloud: “You’re a Fool, Stay or go” (204). He is a wistful and spiritual person who believes that bread is alive. But Mason successfully reconciles with his father too. He assures his sons he will soon return, but accepts a commission to travel to America with Dixon to draw the disputed borderline between Pennsylvania and Maryland. The success with the Transit of Venus enables Mason and Dixon to be “entwined with the Projected Boundary-Line Survey in America” (225). The surveyors “sign the contact” (245); but they experience total uncertainty about the nature of their work they undertake and ask: “Good Christ [...] What are we about?” (253).

In the middle of November 1764, the surveyors reach the Philadelphia shore, where “artfully dressed Philadelphia girls” in a mood of reckless flirtation, welcome them (259). Dockside visitors with varying motives scrutinize the disembarking passengers and vendors of all sorts have set up to address the sailors, three weeks at sea. The
surveyors meet with Dr. Franklin who invites them to “The Blue Jamaica” coffee house and tries to investigate their plans (268). Franklin is particularly interested in knowing about Mason’s “East India Company connections” (270). Mason and Dixon then travel to meet with Colonel Washington in Virginia, who advises them not to discuss religious matters at all: “As a rule here, ye may speak your Minds upon any topick Politickal. But on no account, ever discuss Religion If any insist, represent yourselves as Deists” (278). Washington introduces to them his African servant “Gershom” who has an ambiguous expression.

After their arrival in America, even though the surveyors receive information about the first “Conestoga Massacre”, they do not understand its gravity (306). Mason notes that the first mortal acts of savagery in America should have been committed by the Whites against the Indians. As astronomers, they have already seen enough of white brutality at the Cape of Good Hope. They realize that, “Whites in both places are become the very Savages of their own worst Dreams, far out of Measure to any Provocation” (307). Without involving much in the socio-political developments of the land, the surveyors “begin setting up their observatory at John Harland’s farm” (330), the southernmost point of Philadelphia. A Quaker gentleman of Philadelphia reminds Mason and Dixon that the sugar they enjoy is “bought with the lives of African slaves, untallied black lives broken upon the greedy engines of the Barbadoes” (329). As they move thirty-five miles westward and reach
Lancaster, "the place where was perpetrated last Winter the Horrid and inhuman murder of 26 Indians, Men, Women and Children, leading none alive to tell" (341), they find themselves embroiled in the peculiarities, intricacies, and moral ambiguities of American pre-Revolutionary politics and culture. The next day, before Dixon is awake, Mason goes alone to the site of the previous year’s Massacre (346).

Though the British people who came to America ruthlessly massacred the Native American Indians, they revolted against injustice of the British Stamp Act:

Moreover, a spirit of rebellion was then flickering across the countryside, undeniable as the Northern Lights, directed at Britain and all things British, including ineluctably, your miserable Servant. What we now style “The Stamp Act Crisis was in full flower. The African Slaves called it ‘the Tramp.’” (353)

The Surveyors decide to journey separately during the winter in accordance with the toss of the coin by John Harland. They agree to reverse the directions the next time (393). Mason thus goes north and reaches the New York City and Dixon who travels to the South meets Jefferson and gathers important information on Colonel Byrd’s Dividing Line. After the division, the Pennsylvanians began entertaining their own neighbouring state Virginia as “the land of Sensual Beasts” (396).
According to Cherrycoke’s narration, Dixon is not able to recognize the real situation in Virginia at that time: “In all Virginia, tho’ Salves pass’d before his Sight, he saw none” (398).

Mason, who arrives New York by a Staten Island Ferry, has fallen in love with a certain Amelia, a milkmaid of Brooklyn somehow alone in New York without funds. He gets to know more about the American people’s resentment towards British laws: “The Stamp Act is simple Tyranny, and our duty’s to resist it” (405). Amelia then compares the restlessness of the colonists in America to that of the Weavers’ Revolt in Stroud, Mason’s hometown. The Weavers’ Revolt was suppressed by the industrialists with an iron hand, i.e., by engaging infantry, “to kill, disable, or deliver up to Transportation,” all who were found troublesome, and by easily replacing them even more cheaply, by others who worked quite happily in silence (407).

As the surveyors join together again for their common venture after their wanderings, they are reminded of “the infamous Lepton Ridotto” (410). They also know about the iniquitous Iron-Plantation of Lord and Lady Lepton, where according to Cherrycoke’s narration, one can witness Negro Slavery, “the inhuman ill-usage, the careless abundance of pain inflicted, the unpric’d Coercion necessary to yearly Profits beyond the projectings even of proud Satan” (412). The surveyors’ acquaintance with the Leptons throws light on the sinful and antisocial inclinations like lust, flesh trade, murder gluttony etc. prevalent
on the white plantations. There are “pious associations” like “Widows of Christ” whose major duty consisted in seduction. “One of the principal Duties of a Widow of Christ is to charm the Chinese” (525). Lady Lepton’s words betray the general ambience of deception and moral decadence in the America of the 18th century:

Yes lovely isn’t she, purchas’d her my last time thro’ Quebec, of the Widows of Christ, a Convent quite well known in certain Circles, devoted altogether to the World, helping its Novices descend, into ever more exact forms of carnal Mortality, through training as, --how to call them?— not ordinary Whores, though as Whores they must be quite gifted, but as eager practitioners of all Sins. Lust is but one of their Sacraments. So are Murder and Gluttony. Indeed, these two are combin’d most loathsomely in their Ritual of Holy Communion. (419)

When the surveyors arrive at Newark, they receive a letter from John Byrd with the news that Maskelyne has been elevated to the post of the Royal Astronomer. Mason, a hopeful aspirant to the post is now found “in blackest Melancholy” (436). But they begin the work for the West Line in March. During the course of their work they reach the Susquehanna River, and the task of projecting the line across it falls upon Mason (462). However, the surveyors cross the Susquehanna River peacefully enough.
Early in 1766, reversing the directions taken the year before, Mason sets off southward to see the country and Dixon heads north for the lighted streets of New York (562). Dixon meets Captain Volcanoe who has been in the “Crucible of Troubles” for a year in connection with the Stamp Act (564). Dixon also meets an activist Dimdown who asks: “As a Quaker, you’d surely rather see us independent of Britain?” But Dixon discloses his resentment towards the Americans’ and the Britons’ way of treating both the African slaves and the native Indians. Dixon continues:

‘tis how both of You treat the African Slaves, and the Indians Native here. [...] My allegiance as a Quaker born, would lie, above all Tribes, with Christ, [...] for reasons unarguably Tribal, I can have no sympathy for any British King. —not even one who’s paid my Wages, bless ‘im. Call me an ungrateful Cur, go ahead, I’ve been call’d worse.

(568-9)

Mason, travelling south through Maryland, meets again Col. Washington and Gershom (572), who ask him about his companion Dixon. The surveyors return to the North Mountain at the end of March. The surveyors meet Capt. Zhang as they proceed in tracing the line between Pennsylvania and Maryland. Dixon points out the difference between the two states on the question of slavery. But Zhang maintains a compromising attitude towards slavery:
If you think you see no Salves in Pennsylvania, [...] why look again. They are not all African, nor do some of them even yet know, —may never know, —that they are Salves. Slavery is very old upon these shores, —there is no Innocence upon the Practice anywhere, neither among the Indians nor the Spanish nor in the behaviour of the rest of Christendom, if it come to that. (616)

On June 14th while standing atop the Allegheny Divide, some natives enquired of the surveyors about their purpose, and Dixon replied: “Running a Line East and West [...] for some Gentlemen who’ll pay for something that looks good on a Map” (617). Within a fortnight, they are joined by a delegation of Indians, sent by Sir William Johnson. Most of them are Mohawk fighters, who will remain with the party till the end of October, when reaching the Warrior Path, they will inform the surveyors that their own commission from the Six Nations allows them to go no further (646). The Mohawk chiefs, the Onondaga chiefs, the warriors and the women are all examining Mason and Dixon, and the surveyors’ instruments without making any comment. After an interval of silence one of the Indians blurts out the agonies and anxieties of his race:

Long before any of you came here, we dream’d of you. All the people, even Nations far to the South and West, dreamt you before ever we saw you, —we believ’d that you came from some other World, or the Sky. You had Powers and
we respected them. Yet you never dream’d of us, and when at last you saw us, wish’d only to destroy us. Then the killing started, — some of you, some of us, — but not nearly as many as we’d been expecting. You could not be Giants of long ago, who would simply have wip’d us away, and for less. (663)

Detecting danger ahead the axmen who have been assisting the surveyors throughout their venture begin deserting them. Two members of the crew, William Baker and John Carpenter are killed by the fall of a single tree (672). Not much later the surveyors return to Philadelphia and enter the Crook’d Finger Inn. Based on Mason’s entries in the Field book, the surveyors prepare a “Map of the Boundaries” (687). At this juncture the principal narrator Rev. Cherrycoke makes a pertinent comment: “I believe now, that their Third Interdiction came when, at the end of their eight-year Traverse, Mason and Dixon could not cross the perilous Boundaries between themselves” (689). Dixon, who seems to be more humane, asks his companion a question: “Ev’rywhere they’ve sent us, — the Cape, St. Helena, America, — what’s the Element common to all?” (692). For Mason, “Long voyage by Sea,” was the common element. Dixon, now flagrantly reminds Mason of their foremost commitment as human beings to serve humanity by fostering values like equality truth and justice. He refers specifically to their direct experience of, and failure to thwart, slavery, in all the places they have visited:
Salves. Ev’ry day at the Cape, we lived with slavery in our faces, —more of it at St. Helena, ——and now here we are again, in another Colony, this time having drawn them a Line between their Salve-Keepers, and their Wage-Payers, as if doom’d to re-counter thro’ the World this public Street, this shameful Core... Pretending it to be ever somewhere else, with the Turks, the Russians, the Companies, down there, down where it smells like warm Brine and Gunpowder fumes, they’re murdering and dispossessing thousands untallied, the innocent of the World, passing daily into the Hands of Slave-owners and Torturers, but oh, never in Holland, nor in England, that Garden of Fools...? Christ, Mason. [...] No matter where in it we go, shall we find all the World Tyrants and Salves? America was the one place we should not have found them.... I don’t trust this King, Mason. I don’t think anybody else either. (693)

Pynchon’s views on slavery are palpable from the reflections of the chief narrator. Before leaving America, the surveyors move to Baltimore, where they observe once again the grotesque face of slave-torture. They notice a slave driver in the street driving a group of chained slaves, striking them with his whip indiscriminately and using abusive language. They meticulously watch the instrument of torture: “... in its tatter’d braiding, darken’d to its Lash-Tips with the sweat and
blood of Drove after Drove of human targets, [...] its purpose purely to express hate with [...]” (696). The slave driver’s whip is an evil thing, a symbol of ill feeling worse than anything else, between master and slave. The slave driver’s narration of the uses of the slaves: “cook and eat ’em, fuck ’em or throw ’em to the Dogs” (696), is unbearable to Dixon and he feels the need to get up, and strike the scoundrel. He says: “Sooner or later, a Slave must kill his Master” (697). Dixon chooses to act, and Mason admires his companion’s bravery. Dixon rushes to the slave driver, stands between the whip and the slaves holding his hat in his hand and tells “That’s’ enough” (698). He moves directly, seizes the whip and knocks down the slave driver. He threatens to kill the driver, reaches down and removes the ring of keys from his belt. Without heeding to the protests of the driver and the townsfolk, he liberates the slaves. He shakes the whip at the driver and cries: “And dead you’ll be, ere you see again this Instrument of Shame” (699).

Both Mason and Dixon return to England, and are found together at a meeting of the Royal Society Council, on 15th December 1768. Mason, who doesn’t accept any further assignment, sees nothing but penance and renunciation ahead. He broods over the possibility of a reunion with his late wife Rebekah, by means of a suicide (719). But he overcomes his melancholy by meeting with his father and reconciling with his sons. Not much later, he marries Mary and becomes the father of six more children. Mason is grief stricken when he learns that his
intimate companion Dixon has passed away. His body has been buried in the Quaker Meeting house in Staindrop (767). Mason takes his son Isaac to visit Dixon’s grave. The entire family moves to America to live in Philadelphia, fulfilling Mason’s promises to his elder sons. In the twilight of his life, the Board of Longitude offered Mason a prize of £5000. But the “enemies” succeeded in reducing it to an offer of £750, which he refused upon principle (769). After Mason’s death Mary returns to England with the younger children but William and Isaac, Rebekah’s sons, continue to stay in America and become Americans (772).

The surveyors’ official task was to draw the Line separating the boundaries of two states namely, Maryland and Pennsylvania. The Mason-Dixon line is ostensibly unimportant: “Five degrees. Twenty minutes of a day’s turn,” as Dixon notes (629). But as later events testify, it becomes metaphor for the division of a country into North and South. It materializes the “divide within the American soul” into slave owning and free states (Rosenbaum 6).

It can be noted that Pynchon’s surveyors extend a transcontinental “chain” of variegated experiences form England through Africa, St. Helena and America in a zigzag, involuted and convoluted manner. The path of the surveyors partially resembles the labyrinthine structure of the early novels. The links of the chain represent different facets of human life like slavery, exploitation, licentiousness, corruption, jealousy,
infidelity, snobbery and irresponsibility. The surveyors’ competence and involvement in astronomical observation and geological survey are symbolic of their ideological approach and down to earth experience. The trauma of slavery surpasses the amazing experiences they have in different places. On another plain, the novel can be read as the white men’s experience of slavery and reaction against it. Wherever the surveyors go, they confront the agony of the slaves and try to alleviate it. As Michael D. Koontz argues, Mason and Dixon are “laden with discussions about the enslavement of African people, the massacre of Native Americans (or, Indians), and the victimization of people relatively powerless” (An Injustice that will not Cancel Out…”). In Boyle T. Coraghessan’s view, they are Pynchon’s “most sympathetic and complete characters inspired with the breath of life” (“The Great Divide’ New York Times Book Review: May 18, 1997). Pynchon has incorporated the theme of slavery in his novels V and Gravity’s Rainbow also. Whereas in V., Mondaugen, the German engineering researcher, assumes the role of a “saviour,” though not very effective, the victims of slavery in Gravity’s Rainbow decide to “liberate” their race perpetually by mass suicide. On the other hand in Mason & Dixon both the principal characters react very audaciously against slavery. Undaunted by the presence of a hostile crowd of white people, Dixon not only whips the slave driver but also breaks their chains and liberates them. After Dixon’s heroic deed, the surveyors leave for England practically
abandoning their surveying chain, which symbolizes bondage and slavery.

It is contradictory that the Puritan ancestors who had emigrated to America in search of social, political and religious freedoms, exterminated the aboriginal Indians, and enslaved the black Africans, denying their freedom as children of God. More than that in all colonized countries, the slaves were treated like animals or even as chattels. The practice of treating a slave as “an object” or “the property” of the master resembles the psychic perversion of fetishism with the difference that the fetish here is the object of hatred, exploitation and oppression rather than sexual attraction. Dixon’s act of heroism heralds the progressive views of the novelist for the amelioration of the human condition. His spokesman Cherrycoke’s comments are always didactic. Cherrycoke, in fact, sympathizes with the plight of the slaves in America and South Africa. Pynchon is “screaming for pardon” (Koontz), through the words and deeds of Cherrycoke, Mason, and Dixon, for the many sins his people have committed collectively against humanity. The surveyors’ struggle against slavery ends on an optimistic note, as even the then prevailing ponderous power structures fail to react against them. The novel ends happily as the protagonists return to and reconcile with their family members.