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## THOMAS PYNCHON'S *AGAINST THE DAY*: A DELEUZIAN READING OF PYNCHON'S LANGUAGE

### Abstract

This study explores Pynchon's mammoth novel, *Against the Day*, in terms of the minor practice of language as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in their book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, which opens up new possibilities for literary criticism. With his idiosyncratic, intensive, and inventive practice of language, Pynchon shatters the already existing notions of appropriate and homogenizing forms of major language. The novel demystifies the language's institutionalized system of signification and defies identifiable decipherable meaning in many ways,

such as covert and overt deterritorialization of language, escape from “territorial” and “representational” language, defiance of signification, neutralization of sense, asyntactical language, phantasmagorical and absurd tales, quizzical jokes, silly songs, and asubjective free indirect narration. *Against the Day's* practice of language prefers the territory of asubjective insignification to subjective, symbolic, and signifying usage of language so as to dismantle the territory of representation; thus, it pushes the major language towards or even out of its limits.

**Keywords:** Major and minor language, deterritorialization, non-representation, asignification

## Introduction

In their study, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of “minor literature” to open up “new avenues of research” (Bensaïa xiv) in literature. Generally, the term “minor” literature has to do with majoritarian and minoritarian distinction, the majoritarian being general, privileged, and contingent on identity, and the minoritarian, which is not based on a certain standard or ideal and is open to possibilities and becomings. For Deleuze, “Literature, when it fully extends its power of being literature, is always minoritarian. Moreover, the minor literature is great literature, not necessarily the literature of minorities” (Colebrook 104). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “‘major’ and ‘minor’ do not qualify two different languages but rather two usages or functions of language” and adds that “Bilingualism, of course, provides a good example, but once again we use it simply for the sake of convenience” (104). Briefly put, minor literature, like Kafka’s, does not hinge on a certain language and subjectivity, but it is open to the force of difference; hence, mobilization of language becomes feasible. This study aims to show that Pynchon’s *Against the Day* utilizes a minoritarian practice of language with its differential, creative, intensive, and nonrepresentational narration. As Deleuze would expect from a minor literature, *Against the Day* is not to represent the world and recognizable subjects; instead, it is to create effects and intensities through its minor practice of language whose aim is not interpretation and communication

but deterritorialization, that is, deterritorialization of the majoritarian use of language in general and literary language in particular.

### 1. Minor Practice of Language

According to Proust, “Great literature is written in a sort of foreign language. To each sentence we attach a meaning, or at any rate a mental image, which is often a mistranslation. But in great literature all our mistranslations result in beauty” (qtd. in Deleuze and Parnet 5). In the minor literature, language “is written in a sort of foreign language,” and it is not used to represent the world or to serve communicative ends since language is stretched out of its referential limits into the realm of sheer sounds and stuttering, out of the realm of meaning and into the realm of sense, singularities, and effects. This is called deterritorialization of language, and it is “the first characteristic of a minor literature” (*Kafka* 47). In other words, language, in the minor literature, is dislocated to the point that – be it the first or second language of the author – it seems foreign to the reader. As a result, this leads to becoming “a stranger” in one’s own language. This way of practicing the language is actually a process of defamiliarization of language as it is used in the major practice. Language becomes a vehicle of or for becoming and difference, beyond the heresy of representation and identity; it becomes a venue for the author to write “like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. And to do that, finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own patois, his own third world, his own desert” (*Kafka* 18), to be sure, through deterritorialization of the major language. Hence, going beyond the majoritarian humanistic subject and being “a machine-man” becomes possible through dislocated language, “through voice and through sound and through a style”:

A writer isn’t a writer-man; he is a machine-man, and an experimental man (who thereby ceases to be a man in order to become an ape or a beetle, or a dog, or mouse, a becoming-animal, a becoming-inhuman, since it is actually through voice and through sound and through a style that one becomes an animal, and certainly through the force of sobriety). (*Kafka* 7)

Unlike philosophy and science, which have other functions, literature's function is to present "affects" using language as its medium. In fact, minor literature "explore[s] language itself as affect" (Colebrook 107), and in order to do so, it challenges language's territory and deterritorializes it. Simply put, in the major practice of language and literature, language is treated as "territorial" and "representational," as the means of communication and representation. However, the minor literature uses language in an intensive, creative, and effective manner and deterritorializes it. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, minor language "is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation" (*Kafka* 18).

Dr. Samuel Johnson, one of the key figures of the literary Enlightenment, in his attempt to pin down the structure of English, became a "dictator. . . . in times of confusion"<sup>1</sup> and wrote a dictionary intended to cure language. To be exact, his model of language was to make the transgressive language behave. On the contrary, minor literary texts, such as Pynchon's *Against the Day*, try to re-mystify language back to the associative, boisterous, and unruly state, which Johnson's model had once demystified. In so doing, Pynchon's novel divests language of its resolution and uncertainty, freeing signs and sounds from any single origin, and makes the English language take flight on multiple lines of escape. As a rule, the minor literature deterritorializes language by writing from a marginalized or minoritarian position in the major language, hence challenging the major language. Though English is not Pynchon's second language, his language operates as "that which a minority constructs within a major language" (*Kafka* 47) because Pynchon tries to strongly deterritorialize the major language of English and its normalized registers in literary and nonliterary texts. What Pynchon does is subject the English language (which, according to the linguistic theories of Charles A. Ferguson and John J. Gumperz, adopted by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka*, is a vehicular language, functioning within urban, governmental, and commercial realms)<sup>2</sup> to a series of dislocations

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Stanhope, Johnson's patron, argued that the English language is devoid of order and structure, and thus "We must have recourse to the old Roman expedient in times of confusion, and chose a dictator" (Lane 121).

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze and Guattari adopt theories of Ferguson and Gumperz in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Considering the functions of languages, Ferguson and Gumperz

and disruptions. Hence, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, the minor literature and its deterritorialization do not solely arise from a literature written in the colonized language of a minority group. Besides, the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization occur a lot within language par excellence: “Rich or poor, each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth” (*Kafka* 19). However, in the minor practice of language, there is a high coefficient of deterritorialization. In like manner, the gargantuan *Against the Day* outstretches language so much so that its author becomes a deterritorializing writing-machine, an outsider, or foreigner within his own language. Pynchon makes English a minor language within English and the language partakes in its own abolition. Simply put, he makes the major language creep, moan, and stammer in *Against the Day* by distorting and mutating its habitual and majoritarian models and combinations and rising above the actual use of a language, as a foreigner might deviate from the standard syntax and collocation norms of language with his malapropisms. By so doing, the language’s virtual power and its potentiality to create lines of flight are liberated. Moreover, though every language is open to deterritorialization, the language utilized in the novel, the English language, as a vehicular language with many people using it as a foreign language and reterritorializing or deterritorializing it more and more every day, still might be more prone to deterritorialization.

Deterritorialization can transpire when the author teases the major language by disobeying openly and drastically its rules and conventions; however, deterritorialization could also happen living up to stylistic proprieties of the major language, that is, by having “a detached fastidiousness and an ascetic impoverishment of materials that render the language uncannily foreign while remaining technically correct” (Bogue 110). Pynchon does utilize both kinds of deterritorialization in *Against the Day*. He both covertly renders language impoverished while using

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introduce four types of languages – vernacular (language of “territorialization”), vehicular (“a language of the first sort of deterritorialization”), referential (the language of “cultural reterritorialization”), and mythic (a language of reterritorialization) (54).

technically correct material by different means such as prolonged sentences, absurd digressions, and logorrhea that remind us of Deleuze's vision of the text as a machine. He also overtly makes language strange by means of explicitly destabilizing linguistic traditions and standards, orthographic irregularities, and misspellings. That is to say, Pynchon uses a language in *Against the Day* that either overtly or covertly would not behave. For instance, Pynchon occasionally uses nonstandard spellings of the words, such as "sonofabitch," used twice in reference to Vibe – "Sonofabitch Vibe Corp" (*Against* 426) and "that Vibe sonofabitch" (*Against* 455). Another telling example is the usage of the word "Mizziz": "Dear, dear Mizziz Chirpingdon-Groin" (*Against* 367). He also employs less frequent alternative, archaic, and Frenchified spellings, as well as words from other languages, such as Slavic and Arabic, to create lines of flight from the major language by avoiding present-day spelling that has already been regularized and standardized in the language. As a result, *Against the Day* makes the already existing forms of major literary language stammer and stutter by using a language that is purposely inartistic, including vernacular or local speech. The verbal texture of *Against the Day* is woven with inartistic and wacky words and slangs. For instance, Reef Traverse in Venice says that he is from "pennsilvoney" (729), which is an outright phonetic and orthographic distortion of the word Pennsylvania. Throughout the novel, Pynchon revels in slang and colloquial language to achieve a comic and destructive effect regarding major language with its homogenizing forms, to "discombobulate" (645) it, as he would say. For example, he uses words/expressions from popular culture and language that either have not appeared in print or have been rarely used in the bookish or literary register, such as: "Eh, a fangool-a you and-a you mother, too" (*Against* 136). As a result, Pynchon's novel engages in the actualization and the production of new potentialities of language in addition to turning away from the major forms already in place.

Furthermore, with its complex and heterogeneous language, *Against the Day* draws upon a large body of resources and blurs the segregation between literary, colloquial, physical, mathematical, scientific, and historical registers. For example, Pynchon scatters science within the territory of literary language with highly poetic qualities to deterritorialize major

literary language, a language rather sealed from non-literary discourses. The novel is anchored in a wide range of academic resources and registers, including quantum physics, Vectorist and Quarternionist mathematics, Æther, Zeta function, theories of light, and so on. Hence, in *Against the Day*, literary and scientific registers, coexisting and tolerating each other, are positioned on a continuum. This also alienates the literary language from its own territory and principles. That is, the shift of registers contributes to creating the lines of flight from the mainstream literary language.

*Against the Day* pushes language beyond the limits of the standard and into a realm in which language becomes intensive and not confined to the centripetal tendencies of major practice of language (and literary language), opening it up to new possibilities and the unrehearsed, and so far unheeded, opportunities of language revolution. Further exploiting the potentialities of language, Pynchon manipulates English written form's nuances and minute potentialities by writing whole words in capital letters, whole words in lower case, or as a combination of both. For instance, he manipulates capitalization in order to convey the distinctiveness of the ethereal voices hissed by "an augmented choir of voices . . . from the other side of the track" (*Against* 432), or omits both spacing and capitalization: "LINDSAYLindsayLindsay lindsay . . ." (*Against* 433). In order to convey the choral sound and the rough simultaneity, he omits spacing between the words, except for the last one, which is written all in aloof lowercase letters, implying a belated and most uncertain call in the lowest voice: "More loudly, as if replying to the now-accelerating importunacy, 'Simple Rapture of the Sands, absence of light, hearing grows sharper, energy reallocated across the sensorium—' 'LINDSAYLindsayLindsay lindsay . . .'" (*Against* 433). This functions as a line of flight from the simple written linguistic rules to the virtual realm of words and sounds and synesthesia, as does concrete poetry.

More importantly, all over *Against the Day*, Pynchon wallows in the luxury of long sentences and uncontrollably stretched successions of clauses and phrases, which at times get loose and stray from the first word or clause that they were to describe, in a way that language starts to stutter and the articulated sounds grow into deterritorialized noises. This is, indeed, a covert deterritorialization of language done within the frameworks of

technically correct language. To illustrate, the following paragraph from the novel, describing Merle's infatuation with photography, employs numerous phrases embedded in just two sentences to enlist the compounds Merle has made for photography and the objects and critters he photographed:

After going through all the possible silver compounds, Merle moved on to salts of gold, platinum, copper, nickel, uranium, molybdenum, and antimony, abandoning metallic compounds after a while for resins, squashed bugs, coal-tardyes, cigar smoke, wildflower extracts, urine from various critters including himself . . . . He grabbed images of anything that came in range, never mind focus—streets as warm with townfolk, cloud-lit hillsides where nothing seemed to move, grazing cows who ignored him, insane squirrels who made a point of coming right up to the lens and making faces, picnickers out at Rocky River, abandoned wheelbarrows, patent bobwire stretchers left to rust under the sky, clocks on walls, stoves in kitchens, streetlamps lit and unlit, policemen running at him waving day sticks, girls arm in arm window-shopping on their lunch hours or strolling after work in the lakeside breezes, electric runabouts, flush toilets, 1,200-volt trolley dynamos and other wonders of the modern age, the new Viaduct under construction, weekend funseekers up by the reservoir, and next thing he knew. . . . (65)

The paragraph still goes on with more than ten other clauses. In fact, by outstretching the sentences, Pynchon makes language involve itself in the non-linguistic, sonic realm and border on noise. This bordering on noise and animal howl rubs shoulder with Beckett's deterritorialization of language, as pointed out by Deleuze and Guattari, and with what Kafka does in his "The Metamorphosis" widely referenced in Deleuze and Guattari's books. Furthermore, in the story, Kaka registers the warbling of Gregor, the cockroach, to deterritorialize major language; likewise, Pynchon registers some animal sounds with the same purpose. A case in point is Pugnax, a member of Chums, a sentient dog aboard *The Inconvenience* who can read books and whose language is composed of "Rff-rff" sounds:



“I say, Pugnax—what’s that you’re reading now, old fellow?”

“Rr Rff-rff Rr-rr-rff-rrf-rrf,” replied Pugnax without looking up, which Darby, having like the others in the crew got used to Pugnax’s voice—easier, really, than some of the regional American accents the boys heard in their travels—now interpreted as, “The Princess Casamassima”

“Ah. Some sort of . . . Italian romance, I’ll bet?” (*Against* 5–6)

Elsewhere, the boys, having left the Inconvenience for a while, return and find that Randolph has left the security of the balloon to Pugnax. Pugnax, who unlike other dogs, rarely fawns gratitude, gets overexcited and says, “Rr rr-rffrrrrrrf-ffrrrrffrrrrrrffrrf!,” “which the boys understood to mean “I haven’t had two blessed hours’ sleep since you fellows left!” (443). Although they are paraphrased and reterritorialized by Chums, the sounds that Pugnax makes are quite expressive as well as destabilizing to the major forms of language. Here, language is deterritorialized by the sounds acting as an optimal means of expression since, as Deleuze and Guattari propose, “sound doesn’t act like a formal element; rather, it leads to an active disorganization of expression” (*Kafka* 28). This is an experimental use of language, similar to the term “creative stuttering” which Deleuze and Guattari use to describe Beckett’s poetry that “makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in a state of perpetual disequilibrium. . .” (*Essays* 111). Hence, in *Against the Day*, the formalized functions of major language are overcome by an experimental practice of language which is expressive yet asignifying. In other words, language is used as a means of expression rather than communication. As Deleuze posits in *Proust and Signs*, in order to think, we need expressions rather than interpretations, since expressions lie outside our thought, and thinking is created when it is encountered with what is outside of thought (*Proust* 95).

## 2. Escape from Signification and Interpretation

To Deleuze, deterritorialization of language involves an escape from signification and interpretation to the realms of effect, expression, and

asignification. He argues that deterritorialization “frees a possibility or event from its actual origins” (Colebrook 58), and that it avoids being pinned down by interpretation, hence producing an image of “pure affect” (58) instead. Therefore, the message is not important, but “the power to take us away from the coded message of language” (Colebrook 115) is what matters; literature has the potentiality of doing so and this is the very reason why literature is so crucial to Deleuzian philosophy. To put it differently, deterritorialization, by detaching events from their original territory, makes language rise above meaning into effect and intensity. In addition, deterritorialization creates lines of escape from representation, which is a reterritorializing function of language. A minor literature should be non-representative since, as Deleuze and Guattari posit, in minor literature “language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits” (*Kafka* 23). It is worth mentioning that Deleuze and Guattari dub representational thinking as “state philosophy” because it operates as “the policeman of analogy, assuring that” identity and meaning will be obtained (Massumi xi). They believe that Western philosophy from Plato onward has been based on representational philosophy. As an alternative, they stipulate “nomad thought,” which distracts the territories of subject, representation, and signification. From their perspective, signification and representation are like two ailments, two autocrats, two tyrants. Hence, minor practice of language involves experimentation and creativeness, not paraphrase and representation.

In the same vein, Pynchon makes the English language “take flight on a line of escape” (*Kafka* 26). He is a “bachelor writing machine” that avoids extensive or representative use of language. His production is the literary machine of the novel, which is composed of assemblages of intensities and effects that cannot be pinned down by a dominant interpretation or transcendental signifier. In fact, his writing is “less a mirror than a watch that is running fast” (*Kafka* 59). When the readers read *Against the Day*, they are sent by the author on many compellingly feverish journeys and prolonged pursuits. No matter how expert they might be, they will experience a sensation of mystery and vagueness, not being entirely sure of what is going on. There are always too many mind-bending stories and sub-stories concerned with too many characters and a host of places and

settings. The readers encounter stories of Chums of Chance, anarchists, the Webb Traverse family (Web, Mayva, Reef, Frank, Kit, and Lake), Yashmeen Halfcourt and her lovers, Merle Rideout and his daughter Dally, the Zombini family, Professor Vanderjuice, Professor Renfrew/Werfner, Scarsdale Vibe, Foley Walker, Lew Basnight, Nikola Tesla, prophet Doosra, and so forth. These jumbles of stories act like “a sequence of intensive states, a ladder or a circuit for intensities” in Deleuzian terms (*Kafka* 21). On top of that, there are many respective shifts in the narrative types and registers of language. It seems that Pynchon, with his cancerous use of language, has his heart set on making his readers woozy and flighty in order to channel them into creating some lines of flight for themselves so as to escape from interpretation, signification, and the territorial patterns of language.

With the myriad of its accounts and characters, this is “expression” that matters in *Against the Day*, rather than interpretation, expression that breaks the forms and promotes ruptures and incompleteness. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, “a minor, or revolutionary, literature begins by expressing itself and doesn’t conceptualize until afterward. . . . Expression must break forms, encourage ruptures. . .” (*Kafka* 28). Simply put, the minor language of Pynchon’s novel will not behave, will not be disciplined by interpretation, always remaining incomplete, in “disequilibrium.” *Against the Day*’s sense of incompleteness is like that of *Trail*, “in a certain sense the novel could never be terminated—that is to say, it could be prolonged into infinity” (*Kafka* 44). With its seemingly endless narrative and the numerous accounts it engages itself in, *Against the Day* gives the reader a sense of ceaseless deference and postponement. That is to say, a quality of “unlimited postponement” (*Kafka* 44) regulates *Against the Day*, and undoubtedly, this is one of those things Pynchon does with language to avoid representation and interpretation. It is noteworthy that by entering the realm of asignification, a literary text has indeed entered the realm of becoming a “literary machine.” Deleuze uses the concepts machine, machinism, and machinic to escape the notion of the subject and humanist and organic models (like Chomsky’s language tree). Machines are nothing more than their productions and the connections they have. Moreover, machines create absolute and constant becoming and deterritorialization precisely because they do not have a certain home, territory, origin, and

interpretation. Pynchon's narrative reveals the machinic flow of language, since "language becomes a flow, list, voice or series of affects that do not so much 'say' or 'mean' as produce a passage from noise to word, from sound to sense" (Colebrook 114).

Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka's works resist closure because they escape interpretation. In the same way, *Against the Day* resists closure and interpretation; what it actually does is leave the reader with some loose ends, hasty deaths, and floppy, sentimental happinesses which do not provide the reader with a sense of real completion. As William Logan points out,

Order is never restored in Pynchon's universe, though things change: an old enemy dies ignominiously at the hands of his bodyguard, an assassin is taken unawares, third parties do away with a traitorous spy. No one takes much pleasure in these messy ends—death comes too quickly to afford the living any satisfaction.

This sense of incompleteness and deferment hovers all over the novel, as John Carvill confirms in his review of *Against the Day*, "everything you find room to say displaces something else and any bald statement is incomplete without a phalanx of caveats, provisos, and footnotes." In a sense, *Against the Day* can be seen as unfinished, and this lack of linear conclusion, confusing to the reader, can be witness of two significant truths. Firstly, the novel has the quality of being a rhizome that bears no absolute entrance or exits, manifesting the same trait that Deleuze and Guattari detected in Kafka's novels (*Kafka* 3). Secondly, this "effect" of continuity created at the end of the novel might as well refer to the movement of space and time, which is not linear. It connotes the concepts of "eternal return" and circular time movement. In addition, in the final pages of the novel there is a sudden shift to a satiric or slapstick comedy, a farcical cheerfulness as Chums are coupled and they "fly toward grace" (*Against* 1085) upon entering a virtual territory of openness and becoming. Indeed, the apparently ironically jovial ending of the novel is "affirmative, celebratory," and, to use Deleuzian terminology, it "works on an intensive rather than a signifying register" (O'Sullivan 73).

### 3. Escape from Sense

Unsurprisingly, *Against the Day's* defying of signification also leads to an escape from sense. Deleuze and Guattari posit that, in a minor literature, “of sense there remains only enough to direct the lines of escape . . . the thing no longer forms anything but a sequence of intensive states, a ladder or a circuit for intensities” (*Kafka* 21). Likewise, in the course of this inflection and inflation of language, Pynchon renders the language impoverished and opens it up to the non-significatory and non-representational lines of escape into the realm of intensities where the sounds or words traverse deterritorialization and “no longer [belong] to a language of sense, even though [they] derive from it” (*Kafka* 21). Pynchon’s language “torn from sense, conquering sense, bringing about an active neutralization of sense, no longer finds its value in anything but an accenting of the word, an inflection” (*Kafka* 21), and resist the totalizing powers of signification and representation. We, the readers, whether native or non-native speakers of English, in certain parts read *Against the Day* with many lines of flight because, with the familiar and unfamiliar words, complex and muddled sentences, the language is stretched out to the point of being reaped apart, and the readers are pushed to go beyond signification, beyond the signified and the signifier on the sheet of paper, to create their own singular lines of flight in order to be able to proceed with the novel. Pynchon’s creation of the lines of flight in *Against the Day* is in one sense similar to Beckett’s use of sound, which in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, “through its way of ‘taking flight’ . . . brings into play a new figure of the straightened head that now moves ‘head over heels and away’” (*Kafka* 28). Simply put, *Against the Day*, by liberating itself from meaning and by escaping from sense, resists being prescribed by translation and interpretation. According to Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialization of language somewhat entails the neutralization of sense: “This language torn from sense, conquering sense, bringing about an active neutralization of sense” (*Kafka* 21), and through deterritorialization “language of sense is traversed by a line of escape” (*Kafka* 21). This neutralization lifts up minor literature’s intensive and affective features. In other words, when language starts neutralizing the sense, “language stops being representative in order to . . . move toward its extremities or its limits” (*Kafka* 23). This disobeying the limits of

representation, in minor literature, is done to the point of absurdity and senselessness.

In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze discusses the nonsense literature of Carroll, especially his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. He states that "Carroll's uniqueness is to have allowed nothing to pass through sense, but to have played everything out in nonsense, since the diversities of nonsenses [*sic*] is enough to give an account of the entire universe" (22). In other words, in this kind of literature, language is not used for referential and representational purposes; instead, we encounter a kind of language that "transform[s] itself through sense" (Colebrook 112). Pynchon's language in *Against the Day* also at times falls into the sphere of nonsense. Carroll's nonsensical and fantastic animals and events are quite similar to Pynchon's phantasmagoric animals and events. Like Carroll, Pynchon, using language actively and creatively, revels in imaginary events. Indeed, Pynchon unshackles the virtual powers of language from the actual and representational chains in his tall tale. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll presents a vast variety of bizarre events verging on the nonsense, such as Alice's swimming in her tears, or her size transformation, which deterritorializes major language and its already acceptable and sensical happenings. The narrator of *Adventures in Wonderland* says that "so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible" (Carroll 15). Pynchon's tendency toward Carrollian nonsensical literature is quite palpable in his use of numerous sentient animals, plants, and objects. Interestingly, the outlandish events account for a considerable portion of *Against the Day*. That is, Pynchon makes up abundant virtual events to tauntingly play with territorial language. Some telling examples of these events are the mysterious features of Iceland spar, the hollow Earth, the "Counter-Earth," the army of gnomes, people's doubling and bilocation, a dog named Pugnax, who is into reading Henry James, and the sentient ball lightning named Skip. By doing so, Pynchon pushes language to become a generative language, a language of creating virtual worlds by words, a language of becoming and difference, not a language of being and representation. Arguably, these utter contrivances in the novel are made to take out the virtual qualities of language and sneer at the territorial language, which

hinges upon the actual and the existing major forms. Moreover, Pynchon does not make an attempt to make the events sound credible, or even plausible, which renders the events even more nonsensical; however, this reluctance for plausibility is not some pitfall for the novel, but an advertent practice Pynchon imposes on the language of the novel to sidetrack it from the major practice of language. According to Colebrook, “language can operate actively or reactively to the incorporeal transformations of sense,” and when language does operate actively, as in Pynchon’s novel, “it can extend and express its transformative power” (111). Deleuze thus exemplifies this active operation in the nonsense literature of Carroll, and is of the opinion that *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* frees “events and becomings from their actual and material bearers” (Colebrook 111) through the use of nonsense, such as creating imaginary animals and combining language in new ways. Similarly, Pynchon frees events from the actual reality and verges on the virtual reality instead. By inventing virtual events and becomings, he brings to the fore the virtual forces of the language lying beyond the actual and the representation. This propensity towards these kinds of events in both Carroll’s and Pynchon’s works is indeed an inclination toward deterritorialisation of major language. Hence, another way of deterritorializing language and showing the virtual powers of language, lying outside its territorial realm, is by focusing on the virtual, reveries, and whimsies. A good example of this nonrepresentative, virtual entities in *Against the Day* is Snazzbury’s dress called “Silent Frock.” This outfit operates on the principle of a sound cancelling wave, and is “discovered only recently in the scientific laboratory of Dr. Snazzbury”:

“Snazzbury’s Silent Frock,” Yashmeen read aloud. “Operating on the principle of wave interference, sound cancelling sound, the act of walking being basically a *periodic phenomenon*, and the characteristic ‘rustling’ of an ordinary frock an easily computed complication of the underlying *ambulatory frequency*. . . . It was discovered only recently in the scientific laboratory of Dr. Snazzbury of Oxford University, that each individual toilette might be *tuned to itself* through certain structural adjustments in the tailoring—” (*Against* 500)

Indeed, Pynchon's phantasmagoric events are not merely a mindless, buoyant wastage of paper and ink, but their intention is to work to the betrayal of language. That is to say, the virtual event and entities plumped out of language help us realize that language can be betrayed by itself and crumble under its own weight. Hence, this intention to deterritorialize gives a license to the author to use a wealth of doltishly fantastical events without making the novel doltish on the larger scale. Indeed, Pynchon in *Against the Day* mingles the absurdly fantastic, or more precisely, phantasmagoric events with the serious, historical, and real ones. That is, he blends the virtual and the actual, which to Deleuze is the way to depict the true reality of life. Pynchon juxtaposes the mundane and majestic to absurdify the proper literary language. His language, the events, and the tone are alternately farcical and solemn. In fact, he tenaciously uses a dense array of registers, sculpts a deliberate cacophony of registers and tones, which equally excites and exhausts, rivets and frustrates the reader. One of the many inflated and implausible events of the novel striking us as bland to the point of absurdity, through which "language of sense is traversed by a line of escape" (*Kafka* 21), is when Kit Traverse nearly dies by a sudden flow of mayonnaise:

He felt something heavy and wet in his hair. Mayonnaise! he seemed now actually to be sitting in the stuff, which was a good six inches, hell make that closer to a foot deep. And, and swiftly rising! Kit had blundered into flash-flooding arroyos slower than this. Looking around, he saw that the mayonnaise level had already climbed too high up the exit door for him even to pull it open, assuming he could even get that far. He was being engulfed in thick, slick, sour-smelling mayonnaise. (*Against* 546)

Besides, according to Deleuze, one of the ways of exhausting the possible and avoiding sense and signification is "forming exhaustive series of things"<sup>3</sup> (*Essays* 161). In *Against the Day*, Pynchon takes advantage of an exhaustive series of prolonged descriptive clauses; an exhaustive series of

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<sup>3</sup> Others are "drying up the flow of voices, extenuating potentialities of space, and dissipating the power of the image" (*Against* 244).



stretched historical, fictional, and phantasmagoric events; and an exhaustive series of bizarre characters, characters which themselves are reflections of exhausted persons who are “obliged to replace [their] plans with tables and programs that are devoid of all meaning” (*Essays* 154). There are instances in the novel when, overstretching language out of the realm of sense, Pynchon drones on and on about numerous suffocating scientific, historical, or political subjects, like those on zeta functions, the Riemann hypothesis, Vectorism, and Quarternionism. In fact, language games have always been central to Pynchon’s postmodern comic sensibility, and they typically involve giddy descriptions and proliferating details. Sometimes, he provides so many studied and overindulgent details that the reader feels as if he/she were dealing with an encyclopedia of gigantic trivia. This exploitation of monstrous details from time to time verges on black comedy in *Against the Day*. The novel seems to be based on myriads of expansive, Whitmanesque lists and catalogs, featuring prominently nearly on every page. A good case in point is Zombini’s “French flat” in a skyscraper on upper Broadway:

The rooms seemed to run on for blocks, stuffed with automata human and animal assembled and in pieces, disappearing-cabinets, tables that would float in midair and other trick furniture, Davenport figures with dark-rimmed eyes in sinister faces, lengths of perfect black velvet and multicolored silk brocade a-riot with Oriental scenes, mirrors, crystals, pneumatic pumps and valves, electromagnets, speaking-trumpets, bottles that never ran empty and candles that lighted themselves, player pianos, Zoetropic projectors, knives, swords, revolvers and cannons, a coopful of white doves up on the roof. . . . (351)

This long mono-sentence paragraph is compact with about twenty phrases describing a single noun, a flat. Pynchon’s indulging into this kind of trivia may well be the manifestation of an entropic world full of details and information, and an entropic language, a language with “exhaustive, some would say obsessive, detail” (*Against* 418), a “slow, sticky, coagulated” (*Kafka* 26) language, a language taken to extremes. In fact, Pynchon’s overindulgence in details and the implied overstretching of language out of its territory can be extended to the long novel per se. In the novel itself,

some stories and sub-stories seem quite irrelevant with loads of absurd information, and they seem to be prolonged much beyond any functional purpose.

Another example, among many others, of exhausting the language and puzzling the meaning-seeker reader through copious details is the following passage relating to Penhallow and Constance, which is compact with phrases, deferments, and ruptures:

When the Vormance Expedition arrived, Constance's grandson, Hunter Penhallow, was off on the ferry to the mainland every day in delirious truancy, abandoning his easel and brushes, working whatever odd quay side jobs he could for these scientific folk with their strange lower-eighties accents. His parents, one day too early in his life for him to remember, had "withdrawn" southward to that region of sailors' yarns and oddities unconfirmed, and Constance—headlong, unable to withhold, even knowing, in the oracular way expected of her, that as soon as he could he would follow their example if not their exact tracks—had become all his home. (*Against* 128)

Here, by means of the details, Pynchon pushes language to the state of impoverishment, nonsense, and deterritorialization, a sluggish and coagulated language no longer saved by the teleology of major language, a language that creeps "slowly and progressively to the desert" (*Kafka* 26). Another telling example of the impoverished language is this uproarious sentence, describing the time when Merle and Dally are on the road:

Leaves saw tooth, spade-shaped, long and thin, blunt-fingered, downy and veined, oiled and dusty with the day—flowers in bells and clusters, purple and white or yellow as butter, star-shaped ferns in the wet and dark places, millions of green veilings before the bridal secrets in the moss and under the deadfalls, went on by the wheels creaking and struck by rocks in the ruts, sparks visible only in what shadow it might pass over, a busy development of small trailside shapes tumbling in what had to be deliberately arranged precision, herbs the wild-crafters knew the names and market prices

of and which the silent women up in the foothills, counterparts whom they most often never got even to meet, knew the magic uses for. (*Against* 70)

By so doing, Pynchon wants to create a certain effect, a special intensity, by embedding quite a few phrases into one another. That is, by making the phrases jar up against each other, through the “accumulation” of “adverbs and conjunctions” (*Kafka* 23), he tries to communicate a particular sense of absurdity and randomness and reveal the “internal tensions of a language” (*Kafka* 22), hence moving it toward its extremes. Sometimes the verbal diarrhea obfuscates more than it illuminates. As Deleuze and Guattari quote from Kafka’s *Diaries*, “almost every word I write jars up against the next, I hear the consonants rub leadenly against each other and the vowels sing an accompaniment like Negroes in a minstrel show,” and this is the point where “language stops being representative” (*Kafka* 22–23). At this point, Pynchon’s strategy is commensurable to Godard who in his films creates “a strange poverty” within the French language by utilizing accumulation of adverbs and conjunctions, making the French language a minor language within itself (*Kafka* 23).

Other than the trivia and the extensive sentences, Pynchon employs other strategies to deterritorialize the major practice of literary language, one of which is using the obscene in an absurd and vulgar manner. The following paragraph is a good case in point:

“Oboy, oboy.” He stroked the diminutive spaniel for a while until, with no warning, she jumped off the couch and slowly went into the bedroom, looking back now and then over her shoulder. Reef followed, taking out his penis, breathing heavily through his mouth. “Here, Mouffie, nice *big dog bone* for you right here, lookit this, yeah, seen many of these lately? *come on*, smells good don’t it, mmm, yum!” and so forth, Mouffette meantime angling her head, edging closer, sniffing with curiosity. “That’s right, now, o-o-open up . . . *good girl*, good Mouffette now let’s just put this—*yaahhgghh!*” (*Against* 666)

This is only one of many instances where Pynchon challenges literary language by using the obscene in a frivolous manner. Not only is the scene shockingly vulgar but also the language is grammatically incorrect and colloquial (“lookit this, yeah,” “*come* on, smells good don’t it”). Indeed, the language of *Against the Day* teems with the obscene scenes and the banalities of the colloquial language.

Nevertheless, despite all the absurdity and senselessness that Pynchon revels in, *Against the Day* is not trivial because in spite of its episodic looseness, digressions, opaqueness, verbal tics, and loose details, this epic novel conveys messages far beyond the trivia. One such message is the deterritorialization of language by rendering it asignifying, absurd, and even frivolous. It is worth highlighting that Pynchon’s inventiveness, aimed at achieving deterritorialization, is not only lexical but also syntactical. That is, Pynchon does not stop short at absurdifying and stutterings of sounds, words, and phrases, and goes for absurdifying and stuttering of syntax; that is, he overtly overlooks language rules. He occasionally uses agrammatical and asyntactical statements, jarring the language and playfully subverting the rules of grammar, syntax, and normal and sensical linguistic forms in order to “bring language slowly and progressively to the desert. To use syntax in order to cry, to give a syntax to the cry” (*Kafka* 26).

It is noteworthy that Pynchon’s focusing on the absurd or mundane also brings to mind the concept of “Kitsch,” the postmodernist garish artwork or literary text that deliberately devotes itself to vulgarity and cheapness. Like kitsch, Pynchon’s novel intends to deterritorialize language and literature out of its elite ivory tower. The kitsch quality seems more prominent in the novel at the times when Pynchon ridiculously spins the language from high-minded scientific and serious harangues into the trivial and humdrum; for example, he integrates the silly songs and bland or obscene jokes and low humor into the novel. By and large, Pynchon’s style achieves a certain effect by using different poetics and techniques; he renders language “a schizophrenic mélange, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out, blurring what can be said and what can’t be said” (*Kafka* 26).

#### 4. Destabilizing Songs

Employing Deleuzian minor rhetoric, Pynchon makes the major language “stammer, tremble, cry, or even sing,” (*What Is* 176). Interestingly, singing is also a part of Pynchon’s strategy to deterritorialize language. Pynchon, in the synopsis of the novel, states that the novel teems with “stupid songs,” and “characters stop what they’re doing to sing what are for the most part stupid songs” (*Against the Day*, dust jacket). These clunky songs seem to be a parody of or a sneer at the major practice of language with its normalized registers and etiquettes. The following song, included under the title “From the Journals of Mr. Fleetwood Vibe,” written by Fleetwood Vibe as he supervises the scientific expedition that Scarsdale Vibe is bankrolling at the behest of his father. While writing his reports, Fleetwood writes down a doggerel he hears:

The world’s gone crazy, Romancin’ Over Nansen and Johansen,  
Those sturdy young Pals of the Po-o-o-le!

Oh, my, there’s legions Besiegin’ These darin’ Norwegians, Where’er  
in the region they ro-o-o-ll!

Three years ago They sailed off in the *Fram*, Now that they’re back,  
Life’s just muffins and jam!

They’ve all got ants in Their pants, ‘n’ For Nansen and Johansen  
They’re dancin’ right out of contro-o-ol! (*Against* 138)

Another destabilizing doggerel is actually called “Idiotic,” played “uncoordinatedly” by “The little orchestra” that “began to stagger”:

Out on the floor, used  
To be such a bore,  
Till we discov-ered  
What thrills were in store, with  
That step ex-otic, known as  
“The Idiotic” . . .  
Head like a pin? drool down your chin?  
Could qualify-you  
To give it a spin, tho’

It sounds neurotic,  
It's just "The Idiotic"! . . . (823)

These staggering and uncoordinated songs make the language stammer. They are usually farfetched doggerel with halting meters that function as a caricature of the major language with its etiquettes and normalized registers. Pynchon, a scribbler on purpose, introduces the songs into his already awry narrative to make language even more desperate. This penpusher, or better said, language pusher, is having fun, introducing some frivolous songs into a novel he knew would take the canon of literature by storm. The narrative serves up many songs, the use of which is quite conscious on the part of Pynchon as he overtly refers to them in the book's plot-synopsis as "stupid songs" (*Against the Day*, dust jacket).

As the narrator once concedes in *Against the Day*, his amphigory is in "Gilbert and Sullivan style" (*Against* 679); moreover, it is sung with an ukulele quartet playing, which is of great significance and resemblance to Pynchon's style. Gilbert and Sullivan are famous for their comic operas of "topsy-turvy" style. They utilize absurd light verses, challenging the reader's expectation with their bizarre and incongruous use of language and turning the standardized language on its head. Pynchon's style and his doggerels are thus similar to those of Gilbert and Sullivan. As Leigh contends, "[Pynchon's] genius is to fuse opposites with an imperceptible sleight of hand, to blend the surreal with the real, and the caricature with the natural. In other words, to tell a perfectly outrageous story in a completely deadpan way". The Gilbert-Sullivan-esque song made up by Pynchon goes like this:

You know, it's . . .  
Only copper propagaaaan-  
da, that  
Policemen never woo, woo, woo!  
—You  
Know I'd be just as cud-dly as a  
Paaaan-da,  
If only -I-knew,  
You wan-ted-to-cud-dle-me too! E-

-ven in Ken-ya, Tangan-y i-ka and Ugaaaan-  
 da,  
 It's not that unheard of . . .  
 Coz it's a  
 Proper crop o' propagaaaanda,  
 that  
 A flat-tie can't fall in love! (679)

There are other absurd Gilbert-Sullivan-esque songs in the novel – “The Vagabonds of the Void,” presented by Chums, sung accompanied by ukuleles, made and played by Miles who “had become an enthusiastic ukulelist” (15), and the song called “THAT GÖTTINGEN RAG,” which includes “a ukulele of some dark exotic wood” (324).

Further, apart from being Gilbert-Sullivan-esque, Pynchon's silly and heavy jingles are Hudibrastic and have simple rhymes, typically rhyming aa-bb or ab-ab. The following song is one of his Hudibrastic ones,

Her idea of banter  
 Likely isn't Cantor  
 Nor is she apt to murmur low  
 Axioms of Zermelo,  
 She's been kissed by geniuses,  
 Amateur Frobeniuses  
 One by one in swank array,  
 Bright as any Poincaré,  
 And . . . though she  
 May not care for Cauchy,  
 Any more than Riemann,  
 We'll just have to dream on. . . . (598)

This Hudibrastic love song is sung for Yashmeen. Here, Pynchon's farfetched metaphors and his metaphysical wit are revealed by his using the cacophonous names of the influential mathematics figures like Poincaré, Riemann, Zermelo, Frobeniuses, Cauchy, and Watson in order to romantically exalt Yashmeen. This song reminds us of metaphysical poets, such as John Donne, who were censured by Samuel Johnson for using

scientific concepts, cacophonous rhythm, and far-fetched metaphors to create a shock of novelty in the reader. Similarly, Pynchon is using the normalized literary language as well as far-fetched metaphors, cacophonous rhythm, analogies, scientific concepts, and stories to shock the reader. Furthermore, in this song there are numerous senseless limericks with no neat rhyming pattern at all. These songs can also be read as a critique of the major language. Moreover, the absurd songs can accentuate the effect Pynchon makes all through the novel, i.e., the shifts in the novel's register from weightiness to the triviality, and in the case of these songs, from seriousness to the silly jingles. The following incongruous and trivial tango song on vegetarianism could be a telling example:

Vege-tariano . . .  
No ifs ands or buts—  
Eggs and dairy? ah no,  
More like roots, and nuts—  
Pot roast prohibido,  
Tenderloin taboo,  
why should my heart bleed over  
the likes of you? . . . (1082)

Generally, the novel is teemed with songs mostly vulgar or obscene, among which French or German songs could also be found. Pynchon's nonsense poetry demonstrates that the reader should not necessarily try to extract a high-minded interpretation from them as literary texts. The following is some "inappropriately chirpy music" in a bouncy 6/8, "which Kit had now come in earshot of" (534). It is about "Quizzical queer Quaternioneer," and the song is actually quizzical:

O,  
the,  
Quizzical, queer Quater-nioneer,  
That creature of i-j-k,  
. . . Once I saw a Quater-nion chap, he was  
Act-ing oh so queer—  
There was some-thing rather green and long he was



Put-ting in his ear . . .  
Yes it might have been a gherkin,  
If it wasn't, dear oh dear! that  
Quizzical queer Quater-nion-eer! (534)

It is not for fun, or merely for fun, that Pynchon uses these songs in his novel; indeed, he is taking resort in the songs. Deleuze and Guattari make a similar point about Kafka; they opine that “what interests Kafka is a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to its own abolition—a deterritorialized musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words—a sonority that ruptures” (*Kafka* 6). The interspersed and absurd songs of *Against the Day* seem to be the sonorous raptures to abolish language itself, since they make language stutter, break down to senseless sounds for which “intensity alone matters” (*Kafka* 6). It is worth mentioning that to Deleuze and Guattari, “popular songs” operate “as noise and intensity rather than ‘signification’” (*Kafka* 6). To be precise, creating intensity and effect, not meaning and representation, is the purpose of these silly songs. Pynchon’s silly songs verge on asignification and deformation rather than being reterritorialized by already-specified functions of major language and major literature which is in accordance with Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that “as long as there is form, there is still reterritorialization” (*Kafka* 6). Hence, sound gets beyond the forms and “becomes a means of exceeding the dominating functions” (Hughes 63). In fact, while reading the novel, the reader will face a vaudeville of absurd songs and dreadful lyrics shocking to the major practice of language in general and literary language in particular, with their assumptions of appropriate and homogenizing forms. Though Pynchon is clearly having fun writing the songs, they are not merely to function as comic relief. They are to topple down the edifices of normalized and standardized language and create multiple lines of flight out of the established forms and standards. It is hardly bold to claim that the jingles do not intend to make us laugh, but snigger, a snigger at the standard language.

## 5. Menippean Jokes

Pynchon's Menippean tendency is not delimited to the burlesque intermingling of prose and verse. He also delights in Menippean jokes.<sup>4</sup> Alongside the usually colloquial and un-classic lyrics Pynchon integrates into the narrative, there is a repertoire of jokes and jinks in *Against the Day*, which are seldom funny; and more often than not, they are ironically bland and absurd. Clearly, Pynchon is fond of interspersing his narrative with jokes, and this is a matter of significance. That is, the jokes with their mundane and even grotesque language aim to undermine the very basis from which they have arisen – their own language. They draw the language dwelling in the realm of contingency out of its territory into the burlesque, the carnivalesque. Namely, the incorporation of these frivolities brings out the quivering of major language and allows for voicing the minor language. Pynchon does all this consciously, and makes no efforts to temper the jive quality of the jinks, crazy and bad Jokes, and his excursions into the absurd. The following paragraph includes some of them,

“Canadian walks into a bar—goes, ‘Ouch, eh?’ Two Italians prospecting in the Yukon, one comes running into camp. ‘I found gold!’—the other one says, ‘Eh, a fangool-ayou and-a you mother, too.’ What’s the favorite pickup line in Alaska? ‘Woof, woof.’”  
(*Against* 136)

Since Pynchon intends to render language unqualified by using unqualified language, at times the narrative even includes toilet humor and privies. One of Pynchon's blue jokes (there are several other jokes on the size of the penis) is when he jokingly uses Freud's alleged statement about a cigar, “sometimes a cigar is just a cigar,” to describe the bizarre creature, Tatzelwurm: “sometimes a Tatzelwurm is only a Tatzelwurm” says the character while “puffing on a cigar stub” (655). Seemingly, the Tatzelwurm is the manifestation of the male genital organ, and Pynchon is humorously

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<sup>4</sup> For Best and Kellner, Pynchon is representative of what is called the Menippean satire, a Greek literary genre aimed to satirize authorities and offer a social critique (25).

referring to Freud's famous idea that long shapes, including worms, i.e. Tatzelwürms, are symbols for the penis: "it is comforting to imagine this as an outward and visible manifestation of something else," chuckled one of the Austrians, "But sometimes a Tatzelwurm is only a Tatzelwurm" (*Against* 655).

In *Against the Day*, Pynchon makes several insulting mother jokes. For instance, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand makes a coarse joke about a black customer of a negro bar when he thinks that he is going to steal a "Wassermelone,"<sup>5</sup>

"Something about . . . your . . . wait . . . *deine Mutti*, as you would say, your . . . *your mama*, she plays third base for the Chicago White Stockings, *nicht wahr?*" as customers begin tentatively to move toward the egresses, "a quite unappealing woman, indeed she is so fat, that to get from her tits to her ass, one has to take the 'El'! Tried once to get into the Exposition, they say, no, no, lady, this is the World's Fair, not the World's Ugly!" (*Against* 48)

Throughout the novel, Pynchon keeps dropping nasty jokes on ugly mothers. This time, in the quarrel between Lindsay Darby, the unfortunate mother is likened to the hideous Medusa who turns people into stone:

"Hey, Lindsay, you can still catch 'em if you hurry," taunted Darby.

"Or we might send in pursuit your maternal relation, Suckling, one glimpse of whom should prove more than sufficient fatally to compromise their morale, if not indeed transform them all into masonry"

"Well, your mother," riposted the readily nettled youth, "is so ugly" (257)

In Pynchon's "four-door farce" (*Against* 561), he uses this term to describe some stage productions which have settings with several entries and characters that come in and out while missing each other. His

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<sup>5</sup> German word for watermelon.

playfulness in regard with language, his bad jokes that are replete with “salcician metaphor[s]” (*Against* 549), and his mischievousness tease and rot away any stabilized and commonsensical foundation of language and negate the standard language as well as the standard literary language.

In fact, one of Pynchon’s ways to disestablish the language is by taking resort in the absurd and goofy humor that sucks the language dry of representation. Pynchon’s multiplicity of sprawling storylines, his incongruous jumble of themes, his taking pains over trivia, and his manipulations of plot to avoid being trapped by it are transpired to an unusual and clunky degree, so much so that his approach goes beyond being comic and seems farcical. Using the banal in tandem with grandness and magniloquence seems to be adamantly offensive to the territorial language of representation. In fact, the deterritorialization of language and its reterritorialization are always in process because the deterritorialization becomes possible by creating new material out of the manipulation of material already in place, and humor could contribute to this process of reterritorialization and deterritorialization. To Deleuze, “humor can operate as a strategy of dissent—but also of affirmation. In fact we might see humor as a form of affirmative violence: violence against typical signifying formations” (O’Sullivan 73). In his book on von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, Deleuze deems humor, being in league with repetition, as a line of flight from the laws and norms even while re-enacting and reterritorializing them (Deleuze, *Masochism* 85–86). Hence, by utilizing humor, Pynchon contributes to language deterritorialization and destabilizes signifying formations and laws. From Deleuze’s perspective, modern humor, unlike the classical humor of Plato, turns norms and laws upside down: “in modern thought irony and humor take on a new form: they are now directed at the subversion of the law. This leads us back to Sade and von Sacher-Masoch, who represent the two main attempts at subversion, at turning the law upside down” (Deleuze, *Masochism* 86). Some critics see Pynchon’s low humor and anticlimactic jokes as pointless and incongruous, but they miss the point that this being seemingly pointless is not actually pointless and has something to offer – the absurdifying and the deterritorializing the language.

## 6. A Subjective Free Indirect Style

Another significant feature contributing to the signifying and nonrepresentational state of the minor literature and cinema is free indirect style. In *Cinema I* and *II*, Deleuze tries to classify images and signs, drawing upon Henri Bergson's theories. In particular, he focuses on the point of view and free indirect discourse. To Deleuze, literary language and film language defy interpretation; instead, they are the practice of de-representation, and one way to practice this non-representation is the "free indirect discourse." Interestingly, Bakhtin also points out that free indirect discourse greatly contributes to the polyphonic state of the novel, and sees it as the distinctive characteristic of the novel genre that distinguishes it from the dramatic genres. From Deleuze's perspective, the relationship between the narrator, who is narrating, and the character, who is being narrated, gets indefinite in free indirect discourse. That is, the line of demarcation between them becomes undecided:

In the cinema of poetry the distinction between what the character saw subjectively and what the camera saw objectively vanished, not in favor of one or the other, but because the camera assumed a subjective presence, acquired an internal vision, which entered into a relation of simulation with the character's way of seeing . . . The author takes a step towards his characters, but the characters take a step towards the author: double becoming. (*Cinema 2* 222)

Deleuze praises free indirect discourse because of its "diversity, the deformity, the otherness" (*Cinema 2* 184). To him, "the very special form of a 'free indirect discourse,' of a 'free, indirect subjective'" is an important trait of the language of minor literature and cinema (*Cinema 2* 148). The free indirect discourse contaminates the demarcation between the objective, direct style of the narrator and the subjective, indirect style of the character. In other words, it tends to "go beyond the two elements of the traditional story, the objective, indirect story from the camera's point of view and the subjective, direct story from the character's point of view, to achieve the very special form of a 'free indirect discourse'" (*Cinema 2* 148):

The story no longer refers to an ideal of the true which constitutes its veracity, but becomes a “pseudo-story.” . . . Objective and subjective images lose their distinction, but also their identification, in favour of a new circuit where they are wholly replaced, or contaminate each other, or are decomposed and recomposed. . . . Or rather the characters express themselves freely in the author’s discourse-vision, and the author, indirectly, in that of the characters. (*Cinema 2* 187)

In Deleuze’s viewpoint, free indirect discourse allows interferences from the narrator’s voice into the hero’s voice. In a dialogic manner, the character’s voice and point of view infiltrate into the narrator’s, so the reader cannot say where one begins and the other ends. This dialogic manner not only resists interpretation but also problematizes the concepts of subject and identity by blurring the line between the subjectivity of the character and that of the author. Instead, it practices polyphony, subjectivity, and difference. As Colebrook states, “free-indirect style deterritorializes language by showing its emergence as noise or effect above and beyond any speaker’s intention,” and “reterritorialization occurs when we imagine a subject who was there all along at the origin of language. We think that ‘man’ invented language, rather than being one of language’s effects” (116).

In *Against the Day*, there are sections in which the narration is in the third person but is focalized through a narrow or clichéd perspective of the characters. This is because, although free-indirect discourse is written in third person narration, it speaks “in the received, common or clichéd style of the characters described, so it is neither the author or [*sic*] the character who is speaking” (Colebrook 109). For instance, the narrative voice is contaminated with a chummy and juvenile tone while narrating the stories of Chums. In fact, those parts on Chums of Chance, though narrated in omniscient style, are written in the very style and mood of the juvenile character of Chums. When the novel ends with Chums’ presence, the reader surprisingly encounters a happy ending, which rarely occurs in Pynchon’s novels, and probably would not have occurred if it had not been for Chums’ innocent and juvenile outlook. That is, in these parts of the novel, the language of the narrative is contaminated by the buoyant and optimistic

language of Chums of Chance, though there seems to be an ironic absurdity in this chummy narration and the happy ending. Another good case in point is the prurient tone of the free indirect style in recounting the threesome relationship between Reef, Yashmeen, and Cyprian. Indeed, the novel practices a minor language, an active rather than a reactive language, which does not represent the world objectively and in a representational manner through an unadulterated narrative voice, but creates a contaminated voice of intensity, effect, sense, and event and reveals the virtual, revolutionary, and transformative powers of language.

Moreover, in indirect discourse, as Deleuze views it, no definite subject is assumed because it operates collectively (which is another trait of the minor practice of literature), and language becomes a collective assemblage. Instead of an individual speaking subject, we are left with an anonymous or pre-personal voice dispossessed by any fixed subject, a deterritorialized, mutated, confused, and contaminated language. The indirect discourse, “this mobilization of language,” moves “away from propositions . . . [as] the event of sense” (Colebrook 110) and goes beyond an individual subject. Simply put, Pynchon in *Against the Day* uses free indirect discourse to go beyond being and individual identity. The narrator contaminates the voices of characters with his own and undermines self-contained subjectivity to reach inter-subjectivity, becoming, and difference. For instance, the third person narrative voice in the following paragraph is dexterously contaminated by Merle’s interior monologue and is shattered under the influence of his vacillations and indecisions. In a cigar store, Merle notices a “Dishforth’s Illustrated *Weekly*” in a rack of magazines which has an article about his wife and the man she has fled with, the famous magician, Luca Zombini, their children, and “their warm and wonderful home in New York” (75). Merle cannot decide whether he should tell this to her little daughter or not. As a result, the third person narrative gets fragmented and contaminated by Merle’s own inner voice:

His next thought was, Dally better not see this, and then immediately, sure Merle, good luck. And when he caught sight of her just about then coming up the street to find him, her hair in the wind a banner flown by the only force he had ever sworn allegiance

to, he added, reluctantly, and it'll have to be me that tells her.  
(*Against* 76)

The narrator's and the character's voice are confusingly mixed without being set off by any quotation marks or other means. That is, in a dialogic manner, the character's voice and point of view infiltrate into the narrator's, so that the readers cannot say where one begins and the other one ends. Generally, the narrator of *Against the Day* takes on the language of many of his characters. At times, he mingles the character's language, insight, inner thoughts, and register with his own detached and reportorial voice, a voice that has superior knowledge and privileged register; hence, he tempers the character's language, tones it down, bends it, and makes it malleable. This contamination or temperance, which is deterritorializing and self-cancelling to the subjectivity of the narrator and the narrated, happens frequently with a variety of animate and inanimate characters; that is why the register of the novel changes from sober to comic to farcical and sexual all through the text.

## Conclusion

The major language predisposes the normalization of language, while minor literature shatters it. Pynchon's *Against the Day* is one telling example of such writing strategy. In the novel, attacking the normalization, he puts forward a critique of the major language by shattering its already existing notions of appropriate use of language and homogenizing forms of major language. The novel as a minor practice does not "assume a major function in language" (*Kafka* 27). As Deleuze and Guattari argue in *What Is Philosophy?*, "it is characteristic of modern literature for words and syntax to rise up into the plane of composition and hollow it" (*What Is* 195). With his minor practice of language, Pynchon distorts the representational image of language; problematizing syntax, the articulation of the words, and sentence structures. Thus, he makes the language shudder and stutter. And occasionally it is the characters of the novel who do so to deterritorialize language, to smash it to smithereens and noises. That is, by reading the novel and involving the reader in the process of minor practice, Pynchon teaches us "how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language" (*Kafka* 19). Moreover, the novel



demystifies language's institutionalized system of signification, defies identifiable decipherable meaning instead, and prefers the territory of insignification, "a purely intensive usage of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying usages of it" (*Kafka* 19). In *Against the Day*, "language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits" (*Kafka* 23). That is, *Against the Day*, does not intend to be representational and interpretive, and it escapes interpretation through its multiple lines of flight from major language, its deterritorialization of literary language, its unattainability, the fabulous and virtual events and detours, the asubjective free indirect discourse, the quizzical songs, and the Menippean Jokes. Woven throughout the pages of *Against the Day* is a "a mixture, a schizophrenic mélange" (*Kafka* 26); it mingles comic diction and epic sentences a page long, tragedy and melodrama, pornography and slapstick. In other words, it is constantly in a state of "becoming," and thus the singular status of the artwork is embodied in the novel, producing a revolutionary text located in the sphere of minor forces.

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# DELEUZIJANSKO ČITANJE JEZIKA U ROMANU *AGAINST THE DAY* THOMASA PYNCHONA

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Rad proučava Pynchonov opsežan roman *Against the Day* na temelju manjinske uporabe jezika kakvu donose Deleuze i Guattari u knjizi *Kafka: u prilog manjinskoj književnosti*, a koja otvara nove mogućnosti književne kritike. Svojom idiosinkratičnom, intenzivnom i inventivnom uporabom jezika, Pynchon ruši već postojeće pojmove prikladnih i homogenizirajućih oblika većinskoga jezika. Roman demistificira institucionalizirani jezični sustav označavanja i opire se prepoznatljivom, jasnom značenju na različite načine kao što su: prikriivena i otvorena deteritorijalizacija jezika, bijeg od „teritorijalnog“ i „reprezentativnog“ jezika, protivljenje značenju, neutralizacija smisla, jezik lišen sintakse, fantazmagorične i apsurdne priče, zagonetne šale, besmislene pjesme i asubjektivan, slobodni neupravni govor. Uporaba jezika u romanu *Against the Day* daje prednost asubjektivnoj neoznačavajućoj uporabi jezika nad subjektivnim, simboličkim i označavajućim jezičnim izrazom kako bi dokinula područje reprezentacije te na taj način gura većinski jezik prema njegovim granicama, pa čak i onkraj njih.

**Ključne riječi:** većinski i manjinski jezik, deteritorijalizacija, nereprezentativnost, obeznačavanje