Minor Literature and Deterritorialization in Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing*: A Deleuzian Reading

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this thesis is an original work, written by myself alone. Any information and ideas from other sources are acknowledged fully in the text and notes.

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Abstract

Throughout history, the Western Literary canon, an acme of cultural accomplishment in the Western world constituting of conservative contributors, have marginalized minor social groups for being unable to satisfy the leading culture through supporting the conventional discourse. With the rise of postmodern philosophy, however, this body has been challenged by growing movements such as feminism, multiculturalism and relativistic literary notions. Thus, making it evident that the present-day dead end of Western literary canon means the need for change in society to give way to new canons.

In this thesis, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s philosophy on minor literature is used to analyze Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* to establish whether the author succeeds in developing a minor literature, and thus, succeeds in undermining the tenants of the Western literary canon.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The question of what literature is continues to be a point of contention in critical discussions in literary studies. The answer is crucial in attempts to uphold and maintain the literary canon and how it divides “literary” from “non-literary” works. Who is the canon, and who determines what “non-literary” works are? For a long time, the canon consisted of white males and has now expanded its horizons to other groups of people. One of largely discussed topics in this thesis is the group of ‘minorities’ and how they have come to fit in the Western literary canon. Following political emancipations and a series of decolonization since the 1950s, several minor groups have been able to elevate their voice. Oppressed by centuries of marginalization, artists from these minor groups began to express the excruciating experience of their fellows and opened eyes to formerly unseen experiences. The emergence of these minorities naturally led to the promotion of critical theories to define them. One of these theories is especially used in this study: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s philosophy of minor literature, which entails both the minorization of language and literature. According to Deleuze and Guattari, there are three characteristics of minor literature which have the potential to be seen in any work of literature: “the deterritorialization of language, the
connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective arrangement of utterance” (Kafka 18).

Deleuze, a French philosopher, and Guattari, a French psychoanalyst and political activist, initiated one of the most prominent critical collaborations in post-structuralism, which led to a number of joint researches, including *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), and *What is Philosophy* (1996). Their collaboration is undoubtedly indebted to the consequences of the May 1968 events in France, when an atmosphere for the rise of postmodern ideas arose. The core of Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas is the presentation of their distinctive definition of the binary of what they term “minor literature” and “major literature”. To demonstrate the developing of “minor literature”, as Deleuze and Guattari explain it, I analyze two novels by Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and *Reckless Eyeballing* (1986).

During his literary career, Reed penned nine novels, all of which are predominantly concerned with racial-protest themes. In reading his work, it becomes clear that a chief principal for him is to prepare the ground for justice for African American and multicultural writers, who, according to him, neither accede to nor write in the Western classical tradition. In order to produce a minor, counterculture, Reed devoted a part of his fictional works to Vodun (Hoodoo or Voodoo) rituals, folklores, and principals. By reading Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* using Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy on minor literature, it becomes clear that the appearance of these racial subjects in Reed’s novels amid the dominant white institution demonstrates his attempt to escape the major and promote *becoming* minor.
Both *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* have been the target of critical studies, but none of these studies have approached the novels in the light of the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Examples of such critical studies can be seen through scholars such as Roxanne Harde, who is primarily concerned with symbols and the allegorical iconoclasm of Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* which she discusses in terms of their cultural significance. Another scholar, Beth McCoy, explores the workings of paratextuality in Reed’s novel, including abundant citations that the novel is ripe with. Richard Swope’s article on *Mumbo Jumbo* is primarily aimed at discussing the role and function of the protagonist, PaPa LaBas, as the detective of the novel in which he claims to reveal the facts of American society in the “detective space” that Reed provides. In her article, Sharon A. Jessee explores the roles of humor and satire in providing a distinctive African American identity in Reed’s novel. Finally, Daniel Punday’s article uses Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s theory of the “signifying monkey” to study Ian Ball’s rise to stardom as an African American writer. While such works are significant in that they address symbols, signifiers, and roles of characters within the novel, in using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature, this thesis advances the study not only of Reed, but contributes to discourse on how we define literature.

In this thesis, I aim to discover whether Reed succeeds in developing a minor literature in two of his novels, and thereby succeeds in undermining the tenants of the Western literary canon.

### 1.1 Significance of the Study
Postmodernism, in general, is primarily concerned with providing new perspectives in order to prepare the ground for new generations to unsettle the over-arching presence and power of meta-narratives and to allow new voices to be heard. When this philosophy comes to literature, Deleuze and Guattari argue that literary works shelter themselves in “major language” while simultaneously attempting to “deterritorialize” it and, thereby challenge the concept of “major literature”. This postmodern struggle, they argue, occurs in works of art that are self-consciously against oppression in all its manifestations including politics and culture. Ishmael Reed’s works are prime examples of such literature in that they are written in the “major language,” that is American English; are aimed at deterritorializing it; and express the “minor” concerns of African Americans. The present research, thus, aims at discussing how Reed’s two prominent novels, Mumbo Jumbo and Reckless Eyeballing, use Deleuze and Gauttari’s term to become a postmodern voice of marginalized discourses. Investigating both novels, this study is concerned with how the novelist undermines the dominant culture, language, and literature and establishes a space for marginalized voices.

1.2 Methodology and Approach

The Western literary canon, which came to be known as the acme of cultural accomplishment in the Western world, was once believed to be characterized as timeless and universal. With the rise of postmodern philosophy, this body has been challenged by the growing powers of such resisting movements as feminism, multiculturism, and cultural studies and relativistic literary notions. In other ways, writers from minor social groups have been relegated to the margins throughout history because they have not been able to satisfy
the interests of the leading (major) culture through contributing to the dominant conservative discourse. In both aforementioned ways, it is evident that the present-day dead end of Western literary canon means the need for “a change in society at large because the monuments of the old order are thought to be giving way to new canons, greater cultural diversity, and changing political values” (Kolbas 1). Indeed, the core of the concerns for the canon is rooted in the binary of the major and minor. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s discourse on minor literature as well as various academic sources on the discourse on the canon and specifically its process of inclusion and exclusion, I examine the role of the major through the exploration of Ishamel Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* and debate his attempt to escape the major in order to shed new light on the minor.

In the first place, this study considers the selected novels as entities that struggle to undermine the American English language and literature as the major entities out of which they appear. In the second place, it investigates the binary characters and events in the novels that challenge one another as representatives of minor and major voices. Specifically, in the case of *Mumbo Jumbo*, I investigate how a minor narrative and history are created alongside the major, and in the case of *Reckless Eyeballing*, how a minor, African American artist struggles against the major American literature to canonize himself. Finally, I analyze the clash of binaries presented in Reed’s work in terms of deterritorialization of major language and literature, and birth of a new resisting voice.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This chapter takes as its starting point discourse on the canon and specifically its processes of inclusion and exclusion. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s discourse on minor literature, I investigate the binary of the major and minor to see how minor, marginalized voices are produced within this binary. Finally, I examine the role of the major through an exploration of Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* and debate his attempt at escaping the major to become minor.

2.1 The Canon and the Ideology of Major and Minor

According to literary scholar, Mike Fleming, in “The Literary Canon: implications for the teaching of language as subject”, “the word ‘canon’ in English is derived from the Greek ‘kanon’ meaning a measuring rod and then a rule in law. The term came to have a religious meaning in the notion of canon law and subsequently became a term which referred to an authoritative list of approved books. In an educational context the concept usually refers to the specification of the literature texts that should be included in a syllabus in school or university” (1). To simplify, the term canon can be defined primarily in two contexts: the religious and the literary. In the religious context, it signifies a rule, principle, or law. In the literary context, the term refers to the writings or other works of art that are generally agreed upon to be good, important, and worthy of including in schoolbooks. Thus, taken together, the canon designates a set of texts that are regarded as authoritative.
When discussing the definition of the canon, it is vital to elucidate the traditional criteria for establishing the canon. According to Fleming, the decision-makers include a group of “educators, policy makers and curriculum developers” (1) who are “primarily associated with notions of quality” (3), and a “selection of those texts or authors which are considered ‘the best’” (3). Furthermore, other principals for determining ‘the best’ text or author were to do with “selecting texts thought to be representative of a particular period, style or genre or those which have had an impact on culture historically and those which are thought to have a particular national significance” (3).

Appearing in anthologies and further bolstered through academic discourse, eminent authors including Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton constitute the canon of Western literature. While such figures form the canon, the canon in turn reproduces them, reemphasizing their eminence throughout the ages. What has come to be known as the Western literary canon is a set of high culture literature that are taken to be enormously esteemed in the West. It is noteworthy that while the majority of these works were written in the West, they have travelled, due in large part to colonialization, to other parts of the world where they also have the status of the classics. As philosopher, John Searle points out, the canon can be taken as a certain Western intellectual tradition that goes from, Socrates to Wittgenstein in philosophy, and from Homer to James Joyce in literature (qtd. in Steiner 146).

In some ways, the Western literary canon, which came to be known as the acme of cultural accomplishment in the Western world, was once believed to be characterized as timeless and universal. Nowadays, with the rise of postmodern philosophy, this body is being challenged by the growing powers of such resisting movements as feminism,
multiculturalism, cultural studies, and relativistic literary notions, the movements and schools that have progressively been established in academia since the tumultuous 1960s. In other ways, writers from minor social groups have been relegated to the margins throughout history because they have not been able to satisfy the interests of the leading (major) culture through contributing to the dominant conservative discourse. In both aforementioned ways, it is evident that the present-day dead end of the Western literary canon means the need for “a change in society at large because the monuments of the old order are thought to be giving way to new canons, greater cultural diversity, and changing political values” (Kolbas 1).

On the surface, the presence of great writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Austen and Woolf in anthologies and syllabi appears to be decided by an aesthetic mechanism, i.e. the literary qualities in form, style and content. However, it is now a truth generally believed that there is a hegemonic power behind such a formation which works through the mechanism of selectivity. The canon, and the process of its formation, continues to be mired in controversy. In Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation, John Guillory sees “the canon as representing or failing to represent particular social groups“ (vii). The marginalized social groups to which Guillory refers to are given a voice in the canon significantly as a result of theories of postcolonialism.

In the past decades, following postmodern debates, discussions regarding the literary canon have caused an abundance of critical writings- ranging from editorials and arguments in journals and newspapers to philosophies and case studies in seminars and symposia- leading to the canon’s expanding contributors. As a result of efforts made by postcolonial critics, the canon now welcomes non-Western texts. As literary scholar, Salah D. Hassan points out,
postcolonial studies evolved its established prominence in English literature as well as English departments through broadening the canon and incorporating typical “Third World” works. From the 1980s, literature produced by African, Asian, and Caribbean authors began to be included in the English literature curriculum, won awards and received a great amount of attention. Such changes made in the area of literary studies have been to some extent compensatory for the exclusions exerted in the Eurocentric tradition (Hassan 301).

The need for this change was soon welcomed by many theoreticians as well. Philosopher, Cornel West’s “Minority Discourse and the Pitfalls of Canon Formation”, discusses the dispute over the decolonization of the Third World and how it grew associated with the resistance against the white, patriarchal culture, leading to the rise of academic interest in cultural studies. Moreover, in his book, Guillory considers the declining hegemony of the “old bourgeoisie” and the ever-increasing growth of a formerly marginalized class that has been unfamiliar with the Western canon. Literary critic, Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, sees the question of the undermining of the Western canon as an institutional matter rooted in the question of hegemony. From all of these writings, it is obvious that the core of the concerns for the canon is rooted in the binary of major and minor. The canon designates some as major while excluding others as minor. Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy on minorization is one of the attempts to reconcile the issue through the topic of minorization and becoming.

2.2 The Binary of Majoritarian versus Minoritarian
Appearing in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain the binary of minoritarian and majoritarian as manners by which one can draw distinctions. A majoritarian approach to phenomena appears in the oppositional distinctions that have long been established in human societies and have long determined a privileged hierarchy and originality. For instance, the concept of “man” has become a majoritarian term throughout history in social constructs. Social structures have determined that there is some collectively adopted being called the human that are locally differentiated and classified in terms of race, sex, and culture. When it comes to the question of “man” and “woman,” the differentiation is majoritarian: woman turns into the other of man. In fact, it is this difference that results in the identity of man.

While the majoritarian distinction is the source of hierarchy, a minoritarian approach does not see the distinction as an advantaged or hierarchical approach which is the source of an ideological order. Because of such hierarchy, Deleuze and Guattari describe “woman” or “becoming-woman” as minoritarian. They seek out the “minoritarian becomings” that resists any “politics of recognition” (Porter 3). This resistance is because of the fact that what is hailed as minority is not inherently minor but has been identified so with no objective standard or norm. In the case of “woman,” whenever one, indeed, recognizes the potential of the process of “becoming-woman,” they concede to the thinking that there is something actually distinct from man, meaning that humanity is not solely in the confine of the so-called masculine principles of reason, power, authority and action. Thus, “woman” in its “becoming” form provides humanity with some new opportunities and prospects through the minoritarian attempt to politicize and “dismantle” (Porter 41). “Woman” remains in the boundary of a minoritarian practice as long as functioning in the realm of becoming, as
exemplified in the liberation struggles by women. As soon as the term “woman” is associated with some standards, for instance of caring, nurturing, passivity or compassion it comes to be majoritarian. At this time, the expressive term becomes able to disregard those entities who do not satisfy the expectations (Colebrook 104). As Deleuze and Guattari point out:

A determination different from that of the constant will therefore be considered minoritarian, by nature and regardless of number … This is evident in all the operations, electoral or otherwise, where you are given a choice, but on condition that your choice conform to the limits of the constant (‘you mustn’t choose to change society …’). But at this point, everything is reversed. For the majority, insofar as it is analytically included in the abstract standard, is never anybody, … whereas the minority is the becoming of everybody, one’s potential becoming to the extent that one deviates from the model. There is a majoritarian ‘fact’, but it is the analytic fact of Nobody, as opposed to the becoming-minoritarian of everybody. This is why we must distinguish between: the majoritarian as a constant and homogeneous system; minorities as subsystems; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming (Thousand Plateaus 117).

The features of the binary of majoritarian versus minoritarian enumerated by Deleuze and Guattari are expressed in literature. Being a locus where identity is expressed and created, literature is always minoritarian in Deleuzian sense. Minoritarian literature does not only refer to the literature produced by minorities of race, gender, and religion. In the minoritarian literature, the literary practitioner does not write in a typical notion that “the people” are accustomed to. This minoritarian attempts results in the creation of becoming, autonomy and new identity:
There is a universal figure of minoritarian consciousness as the becoming of everybody, and that becoming is creation … The figure to which we are referring is continuous variation, as an amplitude that continually oversteps the representative threshold of the majoritarian standard … In erecting the figure of a universal minoritarian consciousness, one addresses powers of becoming that belong to a different realm from that of Power and Domination. Continuous variation constitutes the becoming-minoritarian of everybody, as opposed to the majoritarian Fact of Nobody. Becoming minoritarian … is called autonomy (Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus 117)

Based on such a definition, literature steps in the minoritarian sphere when it produces new identity and turns into a voice representing what is not discussed, or a “people to come.” This is the process that all literature may go through, hence why it is argued that all literature has the potential to be minoritarian. At the time of producing his works, Shakespeare came to be a minoritarian playwright in that he provided a new experience of man and history in the context of the Renaissance that was outside the traditional aesthetic mechanism established by the canon. However, he later turned into a majoritarian figure through the attempts made through colonial discourse to promote the British hierarchy. Whenever a resisting reading of the playwright is carried out, a writer seems to turn from a majoritarian figure into a minoritarian one in that when a minoritarian reading of a certain work is undertaken, the potentials for the change it may entail is once again reviewed.

2.3 Minor Literature

Positioning Kafka as the representative of the practitioners of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari conclude that minor literature does not need to originate from a minor language:
“it is rather that which a minority constructs within the context of a major language” (Kafka 16). A practitioner of minor literature uses his artistic talent and pen within the background of a major language and literature; however, they distance themselves from majoritarian ideals and their propagation of conservative criticism desired by the ruling class. Such distance prevents the attempts for producing minor literature from falling into the trap of the logocentric tendencies of major literature. This means that minor literature is immediately political by nature; it creates resisting discourses out of the ruling structures of power.

The ruling class in capitalist societies is responsible for the propagation of majoritarian language and literature, aiming to institute conservative criticism and silencing discourses of change. It also enforces certain literary criticism that marginalizes the political nature of literature. In fact, the relationship between the ruling class and its majoritarian literature with minoritarian literature is an Oedipal one in Freudian terms. This means that the relationship in question acts like the one between the father as the source of law and power and the son who is overshadowed or castrated by this law and power. Only a logocentric presence such as an Oedipal father can prepare the ground for such struggles. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, “The judges, commissioners, bureaucrats, and so on, are not substitutions for the father; rather it is the father who is a condensation of all these forces that he submits to and that he tries to get his sons to submit to” (Anti-Oedipus 12). According to such argument, since the father figure is seen as the manifestation of all majoritarian entities and as the symbol of law and power is intolerant of resisting forces, and a minor literature has no way but to politicize the minor concerns in the realm of a major language (Barnett 552-553). This politicization leads to the deterritorialization of the major language and literature.
Deterritorialization comes about when a thrust for becoming evades or separates itself from its original ground. This might happen in the binary of majoritarian and minoritarian of language. When humans unify or *territorialize* themselves through language, they play in the ground of majoritarian. In its minoritarian manifestation, language can turn into inhuman or *deterritorialize* in artistic practices. Deleuze and Guattari believe that pop literature is a good example of minor literature and the way it deterritorialization. The question of why Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy approaches “pop-literature” as minor literature is to be answered by understanding that “while minor literature is concerned with institutionalized power structures, it does not seek to offer ideology but rather to ‘break forms, encourage new ruptures and new sproutings’” (La Cour, 81). Thus, making it a discussion of becoming.

An example of such becoming can be seen in Deleuze’s distinction between art, philosophy and science. Art is empowered, not to represent the things it is aimed at, but to conceive and generate some situations that have not been experienced. For instance, literature contains such affects through the powers of language. Such language is not reduced to such functions as communication and representation; rather, it is a language that *becomes* and *creates* sense, similar to the absurd mood of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) or Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1954) in which while the authors seemingly create an absurd literature, they produce a distinctive philosophy and a new view of man. In short, *Alice and Wonderland* is a story about becoming and growth. The story is portrayed through a child’s life attempting to discover her identity and purpose in life. Similarly, in *Waiting for Godot*, man is portrayed as an alienated human being lost and living solely to wait for another man. The absurd notion that Beckett portrays is that man’s existence is without purpose. In Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, this approach to language constitutes a *minor* literature.
Both stories are different in that they do not conform to traditional structures. It results in what is not previously familiar. In such literature, the great tradition does not expand through the addition of new works because this literature unsettles and displaces the system. Deleuze and Guattari argue that all literature has the potential to be minor. This literature assumes language to be foreign, is exposed to transformation, and is the apparatus for the fashioning of identity, not the expression of identity (Colebrook 103-104). This means that their desired minorization is achieved through the creation of new identities, not merely the reflection of identities.

In order to better elucidate their argument, Deleuze and Guattari assume a certain methodology in that their policy in discussing minor literature in general and Kafka in particular is to experiment and not to interpret. To interpret and not to experiment means that they would expose literature to the codes of a major literature and language. The act of interpretation undertakes literary works and literary figures to the domination of the logocentric ethics, in which all the different texts are reduced to one distinct arrangement or structure. By assuming the experimentation approach, Deleuze and Guattari delve into the text of Kafka to activate numerous assemblages within his works. As they point out, “We aren’t even trying to interpret, to say this means that” (Kafka 14). In fact, Deleuze and Guattari see Kafka as a succession of “Kafka machines” (Kafka 7), not as a text of interpretation. This machine is not endowed with any subjectivity or intrinsic centrality, it is merely an apparatus to making connections and productions. In other words, its existence is dependent on its performance. Thus, having no essence, it is merely continuously involved with a practice of deterritorialization, or becoming of something else.
This idea of machine, with its associated practices of assemblages, connections and productions, finds centrality in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. In these works, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the whole life functions literally as a machine. Their *machine* is compared and contrasted with *organism* and *mechanism*. While an *organism* is a unity with a given identity or objective, a *mechanism* is a closed machine which has an assumed, certain function. In contrast, a *machine* is merely made up of some connections with no inherently determined identity. For instance, a car is not inherently endowed with any identity and objective. It finds its mission when it is associated with another machine, i.e. human body. This example can be generalized to other connections in which the human body plays a role. Therefore, all life is machinic and works only when it is connected with other machines (*Kafka* 30).

Such machines do not involve attempts for interpretation, but stimulation with current “machinic” assemblages. This potential for stimulating Kafka’s machines with current machinic associations within power structure is what gives Kafka his political aspect (*Kafka* 29). Considering Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to Kafka and minor literature, Jean-Jacques Lecercle concludes four theses out of their approach to literature:

The first thesis is that for Deleuze the task of literature is not the creation of forms: rather, literature is the unceasing genesis of a flow of life, an expression of desire. The second thesis is that literature has an impersonal quality: it is a site for welcoming pre-individual haecceities rather than the expression of a self, the self of the author or of the character. The third thesis is that literature is the expression of ‘great health’, a phrase Deleuze has borrowed from Nietzsche: that literature has to do with the clinical as well as the critical is inscribed in the very title of Deleuze’s last book – what literature is about is, again, the
power of life [...] The last thesis is that literature implies a minorisation of the major use of language. (60)

Out of these four thesis, Lecercle encapsulates the function of minor literature in this way: “a minor literature is not written in a minor language, it deterritorialises a major language; in a minor literature everything is immediately political: it is the very embodiment of the 1968 slogan ‘the personal is also political’; a minor literature is not an individual affair, it is always produced by a collective assemblage of enunciation” (60). This definition asserts that the root of the becoming of minor literature is produced by deterritorializing the major.

**Conclusion**

Since a significant deal of newly canonized works respond to the formally canonized works, such as Jean Rhy’s Wide Sargasso Sea, which reconsiders Charlotte Bronte’s novel, Jane Eyre, it is possible to argue that the cannon now contains both majoritarian and minoritarian voices. However, as a result of the fact that power is able to majoritize everything including resisting voices, minoritarian voices may become gradually majoritarian. For example, when works like that of Rhys become a posture of bragging democracy for power and the sign that the system is so flexible to include minoritarian voices, the very minoritarian voices becomes majoritarian. Thus, in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, it is the point of flight and the identity that is formed which becomes important. Therefore, when each work in canon is discussed in terms of flight, they have the potential to become minoritarian.
In this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy is discussed in terms of the binary of major versus the minor in which minor works appear to be a becoming force to escape the monopolistic tendency of major. In such a context, their argument for “minor literature” discusses how literature is likely to be minoritarian in that they delve into major language and literature in order to fashion minor identities and voices. This, they argue, results in the deterritorialization of the dominant narrative and the birth of resisting discourses. Having this theoretical framework as the pillar of my study, in the following chapters I explore Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* to establish whether Reed is successful in deterritorializing the major through history, language and literature, and thus, providing a new perspective on the system of the major and undermining the contributors of the Western literary canon.
Chapter 3

*Mumbo Jumbo*: Minoritarian versus Majoritarian

In 1973, Ishmael Reed published *Mumbo Jumbo*, a novel that condemns the Westernized, Judeo-Christian historical perspective and encourages the reader to see history through an Afrocentric lens. The novel incorporates nontraditional storytelling techniques such as linear distortion, footnotes, photographs, and charts. One of the more prominent techniques he uses throughout the novel is the faction technique, that is, the act of combining true historical facts and events with fictional ones without telling the reader the difference. Reed weaves in conspiracy theories and rumors, making them look like actual history, an example of this is seen in the rumor about President Harding’s black ancestry, which will be discussed thoroughly later in this chapter. It is because of such techniques that Reed is often affiliated with being a postmodernist and Afrofuturist, in that he “address issues of blackness and race through … speculative fiction” (“Afrofuturism”), making his work all the more interesting to look at today.

In this chapter, I analyze Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* using Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy on minor literature to establish whether Reed achieves minorization within this novel. To do so, I divide the chapter in three sections; the first devoted to analyzing minor and major history presented in the novel. Here, I describe allegory’s and real historical events used in the novel to investigate the major dominance on the minor. Reed’s twist on historical events combining it with fiction will be dealt with in the second section. Such rumors and
conspiracy theories in the novel are discussed in terms of flight to demonstrate its effect on major and minor art and literature expounded in the third section of this chapter.

3.1 Major vs. Minor History in *Mumbo Jumbo*

The story is set in Harlem during the 1920s where an outbreak of Jes Grew spreads towards their city. In this story, Jes Grew symbolizes the spreading of African American culture across America. As the protagonist of the story sees it, Jes Few is a movement to advance black culture. The Jes Grew movement, however, is under the attack of a group of Atonists which consist of members in the major, dominant system. The Atonist’s and their organization, The Wallflower Order, aim to stop Jew Grew from spreading so that they can promote Western Civilization. The protagonist, Papa LaBas, is a voodoo priest and a detective who is assigned to discover a secret sacred text that revisits and reexamines the entirety of Western civilization through the lens of the African American experience. According to literary scholar, Andrew Stormbeck:

> Reed threads a critique of western cultures and a validation of minority sub-cultures, most prominently Vodoun. Conspiracy theory appears in the book's opening pages, which recount an attempt by the Wallflower Order to quash Jes Grew by fumigating the Place Congo in New Orleans (6) Colluding power moves against a perceived threat; immediately, Reed as narrator-author informs the reader that *Mumbo Jumbo* will function as a conspiracy novel" (115) (Stormbeck 301).
As one of the many conspiracy theories spiraling in the story, the ‘secret society’ is built upon the idea that a select group of people that “controls the course of history” (301). Stormbeck maintains,

Society members hold powerful positions, becoming presidents, popes, kings, and prime ministers, but their desires are secondary to the will of the society itself, which remains constant over the course of centuries. These societies secretly orchestrate historical events, including elections, wars, and economic crises. … Like the Freemasons or Illuminati, Mumbo Jumbo’s Wallflower Order possesses wide-reaching powers as a result of its elite membership. Since its members occupy positions of financial and political power, they can exert influence in a variety of spheres. (Stormbeck 301).

Therefore, when the speaker of Mumbo Jumbo remembers that “[s]omeone once said that beneath or behind all political and cultural warfare lies a struggle between secret societies” (19), he establishes the responsibility of the protagonist to uncover historical machinations and purposes. Reed’s novel thereby distances itself from fantastical escapist literature by becoming the mouthpiece of one of such secret societies. Nevertheless, he adopts a popular approach to the novel, playing with the humble status of the typical detective novel, which makes Mumbo Jumbo appealing to all potential readers. As Robert H. Cataliotti claims, “Like the jazz saxophonist’s revision and restructuring of a musical composition drawn from the realm of Broadway show tunes, Mumbo Jumbo improvises upon and transforms the detective novel genre; the underlying mystery is an attempt to find (write) the spiritual essence of black oral expression” (6).
Reed’s novel also, seemingly self-consciously, aims at sheltering itself in the tradition of what Deleuze and Guattari call major language. As literary scholar Pierre-Damien Mvuyekure explains, Reed’s decolonization process hinges not only on appropriating the language of the master but also on liberating his writing by both forging his writing styles out of ancient African-based traditions and enmeshing them with those found in the “New World” … Just as language is central to any colonial, postcolonial, or neo-colonial experience … so is it pivotal to Reed’s fiction (as it has always been in African American literature). (qtd. in Bendixen 285)

Indeed, in order to deterritorialize the major language and its systems of writing, *Mumbo Jumbo* amalgamates historical, political, cultural, and religious concerns within a fictional production. By using faction as a writing technique, Reed combines actual facts with fictional ones without clarifying the difference, which is helpful to deterritorializing the major, white history by deconstructing its perception and producing a counter history presented through an Afrocentric lens. For example, Reed’s historical allusion to the United States’ conquest of Haiti, which is the white American attempt at suppressing Haitian culture such as jazz music, oral storytelling, Voodoo, as well as the role of Haiti in the origins of African American literature. Another example of such technique is demonstrated when asserting president Warren Harding’s black ancestry in the novel. Both examples can be construed as evidence for Reed’s attempt to deterritorialize (major) history. Namely, to make the familiar unfamiliar. Reed does this by illustrating American history in an African American lens.
Along these lines, although Reed uses historical events and places, he reimagines them in the light of Atonism. As scholar, Christopher Douglas points out, Reed “imagine[s] a plot by the forces of ‘Atonism’ – named after Aton, the first Egyptian deity declared to be the only god – to crush the burgeoning African American artistic movement, which traces its aesthetic inspiration through the Caribbean back to pagan Africa” (34). The Atonists are archetypal figures for totalitarianism who have had a lineage from antiquity to the present time.

Throughout the novel, Reed seems to be skeptical about all Western traditional phenomena, including history, art, and religion; as Douglas contends, “In *Mumbo Jumbo* […] Reed locates Christianity at the heart of a millennia-old historical conspiracy suppressing polytheistic rivals and pagan practices, a conspiracy linked to specific practices of bodily repression and aesthetic values” (36).

Reed’s discourse on Atonism is underscored by his setting the novel in the Harlem Renaissance, a pivotal point in the development of African American identity. A significant cultural movement of the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance saw African Americans migrating to Harlem, New York from southern areas in North America and flourishing in terms of politics, art, and culture. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed presents Jes Grew as a symbol to describe this movement and importantly, the fact that African Americans were finally being heard among other ethnicities, especially amongst white Americans.

In “Messenger Bug: Ishmael Reed’s Media Virus,” Madeleine Monson-Rosen illuminates that “*Mumbo Jumbo* incorporates and resignifies literature, including canonical literature of the Harlem Renaissance, the detective novel, and science fiction” (29). Since, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “the notion of minor literature and the claim that minor literature, regardless of its authorship, is the people’s concern and it is expressed in the
collective assemblages of enunciation” (Ardoing 83) in that it structures our conceptions of reality and social structure, Reed can thus be seen as entering the discourse of the minor by rewriting major history through an Afrocentric lens. In “We Will Make Our Own Future Text,” Harde elucidates that “Mumbo Jumbo is a tightly controlled allegory that draws from modernism its weapons, from postmodernism its tools, and negotiates, within the form, a hermeneutic of reverence for language’s spiritual impulse” (Harde 362). In *Mumbo Jumbo*, the main character Papa LaBas, a black detective staunchly concerned with indigenous cultures, works as the ambassador for Reed by demonstrating his struggles to deterritorialize the major; it becomes clear that Reed has a particular political mission in mind, that is, to defend and promote the achievements of black society, literature, and art (the minor), which he attempts to do by altering the white, dominant society and deconstructing its politics.

One of the dominant arguments of postmodernists, including Deleuze and Guattari, is that history is merely a narrative of the dominant power structure and thus ignores the concerns and hardships of minorities. These postmodernists argue that instead of ascribing to history, one must look for multiple histories. Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* follows this incentive by resisting the Western claim of presenting a neutral account of the past. As Theodore O. Mason points out, “Reed’s sense of history devolves from an understanding that the historical ‘facts’ as we understand them are wholly fictions propagated by the masters of high Western culture” (98). This understanding results in both his undermining dominant history and presenting a minor history. As a racial minor figure, Reed is cognizant that he and his fellow African Americans are surrounded by major accounts of the past and present wherein they, as people of color, were and continue to be predominantly marginalized. Reed, therefore, delves into the majoritarian state-run history with the aim of deterritorializing it to finally open up an
opportunity for minor identities such as black writers. Consequently, it is Reed’s novelistic strategy to provide his readers with a uniquely black version of American history. Literary scholar, Reginald Martin, explains:

Reed’s point is that ‘facts’ from history are often fabricated or too biased or incredible to be believed. Fact overlaps with fiction, and only when the two are juxtaposed can one see the similarities. Further, as in the case with religion, one believes what one wants to believe, regardless of the facts. One man’s fiction is another man’s fact, and who is to say which is which and whose fact or fiction is more valid? (90).

Martin suggests the binary of fact and fiction to indicate Reed’s deconstruction of the white posture of presenting “facts” through history. This deconstruction is initiated in the opening pages of the novel, where Reed sets the events in the 1920s: “1920. CHARLIE PARKER, THE houngan (a word derived from n’gana gana) for whom there was no master adept enough to award him the Asson, is born. 1920-1930. That 1 decade which doesn’t seem so much a part of American history as the hidden After-Hours of America struggling to jam. To get through” (17). Discussing the excerpt, Cataliotti emphasizes the cultural determinant, designating the 1920s, what Reed terms the “1 decade,” as “an outburst of African-American creative output that transforms the character of American popular culture and eventually has global impact” (5).

However, Reed’s discourse is not clear-cut praise of this era or its writers. In discussing Reed’s political standpoint, writer, Lee Hubbard, argues,

Reed believes that these ‘talented tenthers,’ led by Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates, have set up a black Vichy regime. (The French Vichy government collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.) ‘These blacks-Vichy-regime
intellectuals don’t and won’t support black writers with viewpoints that differ from their own, such as black nationalist, multiculturalist and anyone who makes white people feel uneasy. It’s time for African-American writers to end the slave-master relationship. (27)

Indeed, Reed is suspicious of all political inclinations, including the one initiated at the endeavors of such black thinkers as Henry Louis Gates. Since the most visible political struggles were all initiated in the major context, Reed emphasizes that philosophical or political writings do not prepare the ground for the expression of the real situation and hardships of African Americans and therefore cannot lead to their freedom. As opposed to the “talented tenthers,” Reed argues for the emancipatory nature of literature as a popular practice that not only serves no major ground, but rather is the mouthpiece of minor concerns.

3.2 Rumors and Conspiracy Theories in Mumbo Jumbo

Literature as an autonomous practice empowers Reed to rewrite American history of the 1920s from a minor perspective around the time when Warren Harding held the United States presidency. Where the image of the U.S. president is typically associated with major ideals, the case of President Harding was different. He is included in Mumbo Jumbo in all probability owing to his “total lack of racial prejudice in a highly intolerant era,” being “devoid of racial or religious prejudices,” and proposing “an anti-lynching bill and an interracial commission to recommend ways to improve race relations” (qtd. in Bishop 20).

As mentioned earlier, Reed uses a great deal of rumors and conspiracy theories as truth in Mumbo Jumbo to help him deterritorialize the major. This can be seen as he mentions that President Harding has a minor background as a result of which “the White House urgently suppresses stories of President Harding’s black ancestry” (Young 83). In reaction to
the ruling class’s alleged censorship of this supposed information, Reed expresses that is intended to be represented as fiction by major politics. Thus, in order to communicate Harding’s minor history, Reed refers to the atmosphere around which Harding rose to power: “Race Riots Between Whites and Negroes. The Whole Reflecting an Unhappy Country when Harding Became Its President” (*Mumbo Jumbo* 24). While it is apparently a boon for the minors to have a minor figure as their president, Reed informs his readers that Harding did not, in fact, use his power to further black deliverance:

I…I…How do you think that this Harding election will affect the Negroes, W.W.? Hinckle says in an attempt to change the subject.

Why…it’s funny that you should mention it, sir, they all call him the Race President. (96)

The fact of being a minor does not mean Harding can advance minor ideals. Ironically, while Harding came to be known as “the Race President,” he merely continued major values. As Reed struggles to point out, Harding’s alleged fact of belonging to a minor racial background comes out to be merely a way to get more votes from black society. Therefore, in the novel Reed asks: “when he was quoted as saying, ‘The Negro should be the Negro and not an imitation White man,’ what did he mean by that? Was that some kind of code he was giving to Blacks?” (181). The ‘imitation’ is soon revealed when the narrator acknowledges that the minor Harding is nothing but “merely a puppet president, his only acts of agency defined as black” (Harde 363). Once more, utilizing rumors and conspiracy theories, Harding’s final destiny in the novel is decided due to such racial discussions: a group called the Atonists who hold pervasive power assassinate him during “what has become known to historians as ‘Harding’s mysterious journey West’” (182). The event presented in the novel is a great blow to the American Presidency that undermines the constructed grandeur of
American political system: the seemingly major power does not hold the final hand in administration; rather, it is apparently manipulated by some clandestine power called the Atonists. Reed’s act of rewriting history is in contrast to the history presented by the major American account. Reed seemingly reminds his readers that the American motto of democracy is nothing but propaganda. It is the Agonists, a group that symbolizes totalitarianism, that administer power, not the luminaries who represent the people:

We weren’t only a political cause but a cause that went to the very heart of Western Civilization. You see, there are many types of Atonists. Politically they can be “Left,” “Right,” “Middle,” but they are all together on the sacredness of Western Civilization and its mission. They merely disagree on the ways of sustaining it. If a radio show began touting the achievements of Western Civilization over civilizations of others there would barely be a letter to the station from anyone, anarchist or Calvin Coolidge Republican. (Mumbo Jumbo 167)

While the major history instills a delusional sense of autonomy in the so-called American democracy, Reed’s minor history proves to be illuminating as it reveals the totalitarian nature of the democratic façade, thus disentangling people from the false sense of having any real participation in the system. In the end, Mumbo Jumbo is critical of all institutions that, in practice, uphold the ideals of major power.

3.3 Major vs. Minor Art and Literature in Mumbo Jumbo

The exposure of the majoritarian and minoritarian is not limited to the question of history in Mumbo Jumbo. The binary in question is similarly examined in the realms of art and culture. Reed’s Mumbo Jumbo adopts a metafictional stance: it is fiction in order to
discuss fiction with the ultimate aim of deconstructing the essentialist tradition of producing literature. Similar to art historians such as Walter Benjamin, Reed sees history at work in bestowing value upon art. In the words of Benjamin “the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual – first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function” (qtd. in McKeon 677). Since the fact of serving the ritual refers to the collective and political aspects of such a practice, it can be argued that art, from the very beginning, is often created in service to the majoritarian interests. In other words, as rituals are instituted and upheld by states, the process by which art turns into a ritual refers to the majoritarian tendency of the system. Once again resisting major historical accounts, Reed presents his distinctive minor history of art in the novel: “in Egypt at the time of Osiris every man was an artist and every artist a priest; it wasn’t until later that Art became attached to the State to do with it what it pleased” (Mumbo Jumbo 200). Reed emphasizes that in the beginning, art served major religion, then it proceeded to serve the majoritarian tendencies of the State. He also associates mythology with ancient art, and finally sees the process leading to Christianity: “Dionysus taught the Greeks the Osirian Art which lasted until the Atonists in the late 4th century B.C. convinced the Emperor Constantine to co-sign for the Cross” (Mumbo Jumbo 204). In sum, Reed sees art as having always served the major.

Such a view of art is also later applied to African American literature when Reed refers to the “secret societies” that run the publishing institutions that make African American writers undergo “literary colonialism” (Hubbard 27), a concern that has often been articulated by other African American writers. For instance, in “What White Publishers Won’t Print”, Zora Neale Hurston decries the prejudices among white publishers for not letting African
American writers break through racial and ethnic stereotypes. In her emphasizing that minorities are “just like everybody else” and that “the majority cannot conceive of a Negro or a Jew feeling and reacting inside just as they do” (qtd. in Burrows 168), Hurston shows her inclination for deterritorializing the major culture. Whereas Reed criticizes the white manipulation of art, he likewise attacks the lack of taste for art among the masses:

Have you ever seen people line up outside a Van Gogh exhibit? When they get inside there are so many they can’t even see the paintings, they just pass by like sheep or like mourners passing the tomb of a fallen hero, a bier, with the same solemnity. And the extent of their knowledge concerning Van Gogh is that he “cut off his ear.” Man, it’s religion they make it into. (*Mumbo Jumbo* 104-105)

The question of an uncultured audience is a great source of solicitude for African American writers. In “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Langston Hughes explicitly refers to his anxiety of the heterogeneous audience who appear in such forms as “high-toned” blacks and “low-down folks” preclude the artist from deterritorializing major culture for the sake of minor discourses. Hughes points out that in the midst of the heterogeneous black audience, there exists the major white voice: “‘Be stereotyped, don’t go too far, don’t shatter our illusions about you, don’t amuse us too seriously. We will pay you,’ say the whites” (qtd. in Napier 29). It is such concerns that reappear in Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*.

Reed’s novel contains the collective solicitudes of minor artists about the forces, coming from both major and minor figures, that try to direct and limit their pen. He sees art and culture not as salvaging entities serving minor concerns, but as major practices serving such totalitarian groups as the Atonists. By including *Benign Monster*, a major journal in the novel, Reed emphasizes the manipulating nature of art in the major culture. The novel points
out that the board of the journal includes “an art director who likes Aubrey Beardsley, a flagpole sitter whose record is 10 days, 10 hours, 10 minutes, and 10 seconds, people whose feet fall asleep, 3 or 4 inside dopes, and muckrakers of Tammany Hall. The staff of the _Benign Monster_” ( _Mumbo Jumbo_ 87). As Reed sees it, the art director’s interest in Aubrey Beardsley and Tammany Hall, majoritarian figures in art and politics, prepares no ground for such minor figures as Reed, Hurston, and Hughes. However, in actual history, neither Beardsley nor Hall are considered major figures as such as they are associated with other minorities: gay and Irish American, respectively, which each contend (and to an extent still contend) with exclusion from the major. Nevertheless, Reed does not address their minority and seems to only see them as major figures because nevertheless, they are white and male.

Reed proceeds to reveal that the seemingly artistic institutions are not administered by artistic figures; rather, as the case of Art Detention reveals, they are directly under the surveillance of the State’s agents:

Biff Musclewhite has reduced his status from Police Commissioner to Consultant to the Metropolitan Police in the precinct in Yorktown in order to take a job as Curator of the Center of Art Detention. (More pay.) He is sitting with 1 of his old colleagues, Schlitz “the Sarge of Yorktown,” nicknamed affectionately by the police station he so often visited over the years. (48)

By emphasizing that an art center is administered by a former police commissioner because of the “more pay” he can get, Reed illuminates the capitalistic nature of art practice in modern times. The policy that the Center of Art Detention adopts merely serves the major politics and culture, and its agents such as Biff Musclewhite. In such a context, the name “Musclewhite” has its own connotations, as it underscores how everything including politics
and culture are at the service of empowering white muscle. In the words of Harde, “With the detention centers, *Mumbo Jumbo* allegorizes the Western preoccupation with cataloguing fine art and hiding it safely away from the masses” (366). The novel as an artistic entity does not keep in line with the ideals of people like Biff Musclewhite. Rather, it is suffused with such minor folk cultures as hoodooism, a traditional African American folk spirituality that acts as African American religion in the New World (Mellis 164). Appearing now as Neo-HooDooism, this African American religion conceives no hierarchy of gods and no superiority of one culture to another (Ludwig 170), acting as a resistance against the prejudiced stance of white culture.

Reed’s presentation of minor history reveals that art, culture, literature, and literary institutions are all administered by the major Western system. In order to finally destabilize the hierarchical, majoritarian system, Reed aims at deterritorializing the whole cultural institution of the West. As Reed attempts to become a mouthpiece for black writers by stating that “We will make our own future Text. A future generation of young artists will accomplish this” (243), he in fact envisages an alternative literary canon consisting of literature and culture that includes the solicitudes of the marginalized. The argument for “our own future Text” makes Reed a proponent of what Deleuze and Guattari call the polyvocal: an art that serves the ideals of the long-silenced people of America.

**Conclusion**
Mumbo Jumbo aims to position art as potentially contributing to human freedom. This takes place through revealing how art has historically served states by being manifested in art, while it appears to be an individualistic practice. This postmodern act of deconstructing the majoritarian function of art is clearly pointed out in the novel when character, Yellow Jack, makes character, Berbelang, “remember the vow, Berbelang, we are just going to return the things, not pick up their habits of razing peoples’ art. It isn’t Goya nor is it the painting’s fault that it’s used by Atonists as a worship” (Mumbo Jumbo 131). The “remember” in question turns into a becoming to alter the very idea art: to move it from a committed practice to a reclaiming one. The struggle for becoming is well-observed by literary scholar, Linda Hutcheon, who argues that, “On the one hand, [Reed] offers another totalizing system to counter that of white western culture: that of voodoo. And, on the other hand, he appears to believe strongly in certain humanist concepts, such as the ultimately free individual artist in opposition to the political forces of oppression” (197-98). Hutcheon describes Reed in two ways; one trying to be the major and one trying to escape the major. That said, Reed attempts to deterritorialize art, language, and history in this novel, not only to serve the ideals of the minor, but to be heard himself, and to change the discourse of the literary canon. In Mumbo Jumbo, it is clear that Reed’s desire is to be a polyvocal, to be a voice among many to demonstrate that the white male writers have taken over the literary canon for far too long and that it is a time of change, a time for other marginalized, minor groups to be valued as writers and artists.
Chapter 4

Deterritorialization of Minoritarian Culture in Ishmael Reed’s *Reckless Eyeballing*

As pointed out in the previous chapter, African American writers such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston were concerned with being branded as a “singular black voice” while their culture is heterogeneous, which is also reflected in Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, where his characters discuss how minor artists are surrounded by both major and minor voices that direct and limit their pens. Similarly, characters in Reed’s more recent novel, *Reckless Eyeballing*, do the same. *Reckless Eyeballing* attempts to expose the major system and the extent of their control on publishing houses and theatres, which ultimately leads to limiting African American writers.

The title of Reed’s novel is rooted in a historical event. “Reckless eyeballing” first came into the vernacular when charges were filed against Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American, for his “inappropriately” looking at a white woman in her family’s grocery store. The result of this minor offense was Till’s execution in Mississippi in 1955. His brutal murder inspired many movements against the long history of ferocious harassment of African Americans in the United States, making Till an iconic figure of the Civil Rights Movement. This event was an inspirational model for Reed in *Reckless Eyeballing* (Miller 76-77). In his novel, named after this charge, Reed uses his characters to demonstrate that the term “reckless eyeballer” was created by the white, dominant culture to further the undeserved reputation of African Americans as dangerous and in need of control. Therefore, the aim of this Chapter is
to investigate how majoritarianism has full control over American language, literature, and culture, and how this mechanism resists the minoritarian ideals.

Literary critic, Henry Louis Gates, uses Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* as a classic example of signifying the African American literary tradition. This is conceivable as the novel relies heavily on references to and parody of previous black text (Punday 458). In *Reckless Eyeballing*, however, an increased presence of the literary establishment makes clear that “there is no hermetically sealed African American tradition and no chance at a purely "black" vision” (Punday 459). Such interpretation is seen slightly in Reed’s earlier work but becomes explicitly visible in *Reckless Eyeballing*. In this novel, Reed is not only challenged with an African American tradition, but with the mediation and interpretation of such a tradition by an establishment (the major). Thus, the protagonist of the story, Ian Ball, is by no means a straightforward hero attempting to establish a clear voice; he is, instead, constantly caught within traps as he attempts to find a medium by which to use such a voice” (Punday 459).

### 4.1 The Importance of Women in *Reckless Eyeballing*

Though produced fourteen years after *Mumbo Jumbo*, *Reckless Eyeballing* (1986) has many affinities with it in its discussion of the majoritarian and minoritarian. In both novels, Reed reacts against the dominant historical, social, cultural, and political issues of his time, parodying present-day major movements and discourses. Reed’s investigation in *Reckless Eyeballing* is partly directed at the rise of feminism, an attempt that made the novelist a target of strong criticism: his detractors call him a misogynist, a point that will be discussed in detail further in this chapter.
Similar to *Mumbo Jumbo*, *Reckless Eyeballing*, is concerned with heterogeneity, but in the latter novel, the focus is on the publishing houses and their majoritarian control. This is best exemplified in the novel when Ian Ball, an African American playwright, seeks to publish a book:

“One day I was having lunch with Becky at the Four Seasons, and during the course of our conversation I asked her to see if she could get a friend of mine’s book published. The book was about natural childbirth and the black community, and do you know what she said?” His mother and Ian stopped eating. They definitely were interested in what Johnnie Kranshaw was going to say.

“Boy, did that bitch get hot. She turned red as a beet, and started talking so loud some of the other people in the restaurant started looking our way. She said that neither she nor her friends in publishing would have anything to do with a book whose subject matter was even remotely connected to the penis.

“She said that the penis had been used as a weapon against all women for thousands of years and that there would be no peace in the world as long as men were not disarmed of their penises.” The fellas were right about Becky, Ian thought. (*Reckless Eyeballing* 122-123)

The majoritarian control is demonstrated through the character, Becky French, a white feminist, and her decision in not publishing Ian Ball friend’s book. The novel exposes the extent of the power she has on not only her own publishing house, but other venues such as journals and theatres. Thus, exposing the reader to one of the majoritarian groups in the novel: Feminists. In the passage above, we see French refusing to publish Ball’s friend’s book, and that is only an example of the many challenges Ball faces in order to get himself and his
fellow African American writers published. Throughout the novel, French’s prejudice towards Ball is specifically emphasized when he writes and wins critical acclaim for his play, *Suzanna*, an anti-feminist play with its main plot of objectifying women. The play landed him on the notorious sex list maintained by French and her female colleagues. Being on the sex list has also branded him as a sexist. Therefore, much of the novel seeks to narrate Ball’s struggle to reinstate his literary career by appeasing feminists (Krishnaveni 9).

Ball’s struggles begin as he seeks to produce his new play, *Reckless Eyeballing*. When his male director, Jim Minsk is murdered, the production of the play falls under French’s control. French, however, delegates the directing and production tasks to her colleague, Tremonisha Smarts. Reed draws the character from Scott Joplin’s play, *Treemonisha* (Graham 216). Similarities between Joplin’s character, Treemonisha, and Reed’s Tremonisha Smarts can be seen as the former is a young woman educated by a white woman who decides to lead and educate her own community, and the latter is a feminist playwright working with French (a white woman) to expand feminist values in publishing houses, journals and theatres. In *Reckless Eyeballing*, Tremonisha is famous for producing the *Wrong-headed Man*, a sentimental play recounting the story of a black man having adventures of rape and incest. The story has an intertextual relationship with Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, because similar to Walker, Smarts ensures that a film version of her play seeks out mainstream white approval. In the excerpt below, Tremonisha explicitly explains how the *Wrong-headed Man* is taken into the realm of majoritarian system:

"I was writing about some brutal black guys who I knew in my life who beat women, abandoned their children, cynical, ignorant, and arrogant, you know these types, but my critics and the people who praised me took some of these characters and made them out to
be all black men. . . . I thought they were my fans, those feminists, but some of them would have drinks and ask me about the 'raw sex' and how black men were, you know. Others used my black male characters as an excuse to hate all black men, especially some of these white women." (*Reckless Eyeballing* 129-130)

The passage above suggests that “racism and sexism are both based on a human, and particularly “American” tendency to seek stereotypes” (Punday 453). While the passage above may be about sexist stereotypes, Reed makes it a point to emphasize issues of ethnicity rather than gender (Punday 453). Despite Reed’s clear desire to protect and uphold the black male, “the solution to the problems of both kinds of generalizations lies for Reed in the reassertion of the ethnic in general and ethnic literature in particular because… it is this movement away from ethnic individuality that encourages a general acceptance of stereotypes” (Punday 453). As Temonisha and Ball work together and Ball understands that the only way he can produce and publish his play is by conforming to the majoritarian ideals, that is, to be feminist friendly. Therefore, he is involved in conflicting ideas about whether or not to write a play that will please the white, dominant culture, or to resist them. Whilst being observant of such majoritarian ideals, he is in despair to be published, thus, he finally decides to conform to the majoritarian ideals for his new play, *Reckless Eyeballing*, as such that “the women get all of the good parts and the best speeches” (12).

Reed cannot be read in terms of a fixed interpretation. This is due to the fact that he “has many things going on at the same time, while his readers and critics tend to follow a straight line or one thing at a time in their reading” (Nelson 398). Ball’s “double-headedness” is highlighted in the novel making is possible for the reader to like one group of people (like women or Jews), but believe in anti-Semitic and anti-feminist slanders at the same time
Since Ball is a spokesperson for Reed in the novel, Reed is also associated with "double-headedness" making it difficult to truly understand and analyze him and his novel, Reckless Eyeballing. According to Punday,

Critics and reviewers unanimously agree that Ishmael Reed is assaulting feminism in Reckless Eyeballing. His protagonist, Ian Ball, is called a "notorious sexist," and yet we are invited to suffer with Ball during his persecution at the hands of powerful women in the theatre world. When Reed climactically summarizes Ball's victimization by revealing him as "two-headed," he seems to be using that common African-American trope of black "double-consciousness." This trope defines black consciousness as split into two identities, one acceptable to and partially created by the white hegemony, the other more authentic but disturbing to that same mainstream society." (446)

The “double-consciousness” mentioned in the passage above makes it possible for the reader to read the text much more effectively and to understand why it has been often misinterpreted (Punday 447). The very man who is accused of misogyny is able to absolve himself by conforming to majoritarian ideas to give a feminist everything she desires, as, in Ball’s Reckless Eyeballing, “the women get all of the good parts and the best speeches” (12).

It is noteworthy that Ball not only wants to absolve himself, but he is forced to do so in order to get published, to get his worked produced, and to win critical acclaim. Furthermore, it is important to note that while Reed has been accused of such misogynist tendencies, it’s root cause can be interpreted through African American insecurities regarding women and Jews that are highly evident in this novel. An example of this is when Ball finds independent accomplishment through his play, Suzanna, stifled by the mechanism of dominant judgment (Goffman 204) of the women in power. Literary scholar, Katrin Schwenk, explains: “Reed
sees black men jeopardized by the feminist outrage against rape and black machism, which fits all too well the myth of the black rapist” (qtd. in Goffman 317). That said, fear of emasculation can be considered “a root cause of Black anti-Semitism [and anti-feminism] in *Reckless Eyeballing*” (Goffman 204).

In this novel, Reed is attentive to the workings of seeming minorizing movements and practices. Hence why feminism becomes an object of discussion in the novel. As it was the case with *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed’s *Reckless Eyeballing* is highly vigilant about the majoritarian tendencies in culture, especially the ones that claim to side with minorities. This vigilance is predominantly focused on feminism, as, in the words of Lynn Orilla Scott, Reed’s criticism is directed at “the hypocrisies and contradictions of the feminist movement” (460). Arguing that his fellow artists add to such hypocrisies, Reed initiates a cultural conflict with a contemporary novelist Alice Walker for, as Susan Gubar points out, “promoting a knee-jerk, racist suspicion about the criminality of African-American men” (151). Thus, one of Reed’s central arguments in *Reckless Eyeballing* is that feminists’ initially innocent minorization of feminine ideals has now turned into a major discourse which excludes and sidelines men.

As previously mentioned, French works as a stand-in for the exclusionary practices of feminists in Reed’s work. Not only does she refuse to publish books “whose subject matter was even remotely connected to a penis” (*Reckless Eyeballing* 123), when Ball visits her office, he finds “THE SEX LIST,” on which the names of detractors of majoritarian ideals are blacklisted:

“On top of Ickey’s desk was a newsletter called *Lilith’s Gang*, ‘a publication for feminists in the culture industry.’ On the first page was THE SEX LIST! Next to each male writer’s
name was a column that included the offense he’d committed. There were names of black as well as white male writers” (92).

Finding himself blacklisted, Ball assiduously tries to prove to be a majoritarian in order to finally disentangle himself from the label of a detractor. The list serves as the evidence that Reed presents for the abusive dominance of the seemingly minoritarian practices of feminism that in actual act strengthen their majoritarian values. The exemplification of such dominance is highlighted in Becky’s supporting of a black drama in which black male characters are shown to be malevolent, lustful killers. The representation that Becky has in mind is, thus, shown to be the manifestation of a majoritarian mechanism that adores those works that represent “black fellows as animalistic sexual brutes” (54). The hypocritical feminism is thus shown to be an Otherizing practice through Reed’s pen. Feminism, in Reckless Eyeballing, is concerned with the major, therefore, unlike real life, feminism is not minor. Feminism, in Reed’s work, wants to be the dominant discourse, that is women being above men which plays into other dominant discourses of white being above black.

Prior to his play, Suzanna, Ball aimed at supporting the deterritorialization of feminist ideals, which “have made the afro man into an international scapegoat” (32). Seeing the consequence of such hazardous adventures, Ball decides to majorize instead of minorize. This attitude change undertaken by Ball is directed at feminism: Suzanna challenges feminism, whereas Reckless Eyeballing, his following play, endorses it. The turn in attitude for being associated with the majoritarian is acknowledged by Ball when talking to his mother:

“Are you all right, Ian? I had a bad dream about you. You aren’t getting those women mad at you again, are you?” How did she know that? Ian wondered. “I’m one step ahead of you, Ma,” he said. “I’ve written a play that’s guaranteed to please them. The women get all of the
good parts and the best speeches. I’ve taken all the criticism they made of Suzanna to heart. You’d be proud of me. I’m—I’m going for it.” (12)

In this short dialogue, Ian shows he has learned the principles of feminist majoritarianism, which is to please women such as Becky and the other feminists’ who have control over the literary and art scenes; he has internalized that success can only be achieved through pleasing those in charge.

4.2 Conforming to Major Ideals vs. Minor Ideals

One of the greatest achievements of Reckless Eyeballing is its elucidation of how the politics of political correctness often confirm white supremacy through opposing the legitimate criticism of certain groups, which can lead to a shift to the right among leftist groups. The discussion of this politicization is carried out in the novel not only in terms of white feminism, but also in a critique of Jewish power in American society. The novel does this by claiming Jews wield an omnipotent power in American society, exerting supremacy in both wealth and culture, as wealth allows for control over art, literature, and criticism. In the novel, Reed makes clear that such control contributes to making African Americans as the ultimate minority group through preventing them from publishing their work.

Using Ball as his spokesperson, Reed refers to the precariousness of majoritarian power in culture. Ball refers to Neale, and Hughes to emphasize what happens when an African American initiates a deterritorialization from the major, that is, when they write about topics that are not approved by in the dominant, major culture. This is the art of Reed to insightfully represent the predicaments of a typical African American artist. In having Ball choose the traditional way of producing literature by being faithful to the majoritarian
tendency in the arts Reed underscores that this is the only way for the work of African Americans to be published. Of course, Reed also depicts the complicity of black writers, who oftentimes betray their own customs and ideals and strengthen the majoritarian power of culture in order to succeed.

Two characters in the novel, Brashford and Shank, are colleagues in dramatic literature who endorse Black nationalist movements and show to be against artists who conform to major culture and literature. Pointing to their fellow black artists who have adapted to the major, white culture, Shank comments on the major culture’s dominance over black art. Moreover, Shank perceives the major culture seeming to be praise other minority groups by “letting them be white” (63) that conform to the majoritarian guidelines for writing literature. Shank sees “being white” as a sign of betrayal which can be seen in the following quote, “They let them be white now because they serve the white man by keeping an eye on us, monitoring us, providing him with statistics about us, and interpreting us” (63). Such majoritarianism has so isolated the Black culture that writers such as Brashford claim that “there’s nothing for me to write about” (33). Like other writers, Brashford feels the overwhelming control of the majoritarian system in that he feels like he is not freely able to write about his own culture unless it is within the guidelines set by the majoritarian system. Brashford feels unable to deterritorialize a major culture because he cannot find any minoritarian resources to write about. This disappearance of black material, according to Brashford, is to be found in the excessive dominance of major system in American society:

“Every time you turn on the TV or go to the movies or read a new play or novel, there’s some Jewish writer, director, or producer who thinks that he knows more about niggers than they know about themselves […] Ralph Ellison was right. We’re just a natural
resource to them. Something that they can rip off. Their views of us haven’t changed since the days of slavery.” (33).

Through Brashford and Shank, Reed offers a critique on American culture through underlining that the seemingly innocent practice of culture and literature is shaped, distributed, and awarded by industries concerned with wealth and specific political agendas. While Reed is unsuccessful at deterritorializing the major culture, he is victorious at discussing its faults and exposing the system of the major.

In addition to culture, Reed also critiques religion, which he characterizes as yet another political institution. In another discussion about the majoritarian domination of culture, Shank surveys the interconnection of race and Judaism:

Black people invented Judaism and then these Europeans take it over and water it down into some kind of stale crossover religion. Next the white Jews say they the only Jews and the original Jews, the black Jews who invented the religion in the first place, have to take a test when they go to Israel. Imagine that. Like these Falashas, whose traditions are pre-Talmudistic, have to take a test from these fake Jews when they go to Israel, and Israel is becoming such a theocratic state that they’re even going to stop admitting these jive American Jews. (55)

Becoming artistically isolated by the institutionalized system of the Jewish major, Brashford and Shank do their best to undermine it through expanding and deliberating on how culture and religion are politically informed. Because both African Americans and Jews have long been treated as minority, wandering groups, there has been some assumed affiliation between them. Seemingly, this desired association does not consider the Jews who hold majoritarian power. In reaction to this negligence, Reed, in *Reckless Eyeballing*, makes the distinction
between the two conflicting sets of Jews, each of which contribute to both minoritarian and majoritarian processes.

This distinction is repressively opposed in the novel by the majoritarian discourses. Shoboater, a pro-Jewish critic in the novel, disagrees by arguing “The Jews were the only ones keeping you guys going. But instead of expressing gratitude, the fellas keep coming down hard on the Jews” (Reckless Eyeballing 76). In contrast to Shoboater, Jim Minsk, a Jewish director in the novel, represents the ideals of Jews as a minority group in American society. He is interested in making an alliance between the oppressed Jews and African Americans through deterritorializing the majoritarian history: “The Europeans were massacring Jews before they went into Africa after the blacks” (Reckless Eyeballing 21). The conflicting arguments of Shoboater and Minsk are the manifestation of an ever-present conflict between minoritarian and majoritarian Jewish discourses in the American cultural arena. Thus, Reed illuminates, the fact of what constitutes Jewishness is decided by the majoritarian versus minoritarian standpoints of Jews. The ones who further the majoritarian ideals are the true enemies of minor struggles including those belonging to minor Jews, while the minoritarian Jews may be isolated by the majoritarian people of their fellow race. Thus, Reckless Eyeballing determines that race is not the only decisive factor in the system of the major; rather, it is the grip on wealth and superstructure that decides who upholds majoritarian power.

Brashford’s quote describes the mood and state in which Reed is situated: “throughout history when the brothers feel that they’re being pushed against the wall, they strike back and when they do strike back it’s like a tornado, uprooting, flinging about, and dashing to pieces everything in its path. A tornado has no conscience” (Reckless Eyeballing 51). Indeed, we can
read Reed’s novel as his “strik[ing] back” by initiating a literary tornado in *Reckless Eyeballing*. Reed is well-aware that those who push minor voices against the wall are not merely white and/or Jewish Americans. In *Reckless Eyeballing*, he argues that the main culprits are African Americans themselves who, instead of deterritorializing the system of the major, endeavor to become contributors to it. This, for him, is particularly true of black feminists and artists who, he argues, have associated themselves with the white machination to achieve critical acclaim.

In his novel, Reed resists rote discussions of what it means to be African American, and in particular profiting “from interpreting what they call ‘the black experience’” (*The Reed Reader* 235). The core of his argument is that black experience cannot and should not be “contained” in traditional white symbols and forms. He suggests that the forces that presently oppress black men have become more and more complex to the point that even African Americans themselves contribute to it. To combat this, Reed adopts a “reckless eyeballing” to shed light on this cultural hypocrisy.

Being a “reckless eyeballer,” Reed presents himself as a self-conscious entity in the course of the novel to prevent the identification of the audience with the events. This conscious fact of being an eyeballer is supported by the novelist who argues that an African American “attempts to write about other major cultures is considered a case of ‘Reckless Eyeballing.’ What you lookin’ at” (*The Reed Reader* 236). Daniel Punday calls this approach metafiction in Reed’s fiction, arguing that “Through this subtle metafiction, Reed indirectly comments or ‘signifies’ on the readings and misreadings produced because of the reader’s expectations” (447).
In order to further emphasize how literature and culture are subject to the system of the major, the third-person narrator of *Reckless Eyeballing* delves into the protagonist’s mind:

[Ian had] been telling people for years that he was at work on a second play, but even his strongest supporters realized that he would never finish the play, because he was afraid that the patrons who had lavished him with gifts, prizes, chairs, would abandon him if it weren’t as big a hit as his first play, *The Man Who Was an Enigma*. (29)

While Ian was formerly lauded by the literary establishment, he understands that unless he reaffirms their ideals, he will no longer be supported. Ian’s fear is further justified by Brashford, who tells him, “You remember after the then incipient feminist movement got their contacts among the patrons to stop you, it was my contacts that kept you going. That Suzanna was a disaster, but I got them to give you that award” (34). Here, Brashford, who has strong affiliations with the established literary patronage, makes it clear that the endowment of literary value is more a politically procedural attempt than a merely and purely artistic one.

### 4.3 The Unjust Image of African Americans in *Reckless Eyeballing*

In order to deterritorialize the unjust, majoritarian image of black men, Reed turns a reckless eyeball on how white feminism, as an oppressing institution for black men, operates in American society. He explains that the dominance of this discourse has worked to produce disindividualized black men who are taught to be compliant to women, including Jewish patronesses, female reviewers, and white feminists.

Reed aims to deterritorialize this discourse that aims to disseminate an ingenuous typicality of minor people for its own egotistical interests. He also underscores that the most tragic part of this egoism is that it furthers its ideals through its propaganda of siding with
minor, oppressed sets of people. In the novel, this unfaithful institution is shown to be actively present in culture and literature, and leading an imperialistic, cultural hegemony. Discussing how Tremonisha’s play, *Wrong-Headed Man*, is taken into the realm of majoritarian system, it is clear that the majoritarian system is primarily driven by typicality to resist deterritorialization. Reed’s assumed mission of deterritorializing such typicality in *Reckless Eyeballing* is rooted in the trials he has undergone. His critique of white feminism is a reaction against such feminist authors as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, who were patronized by white feminism and turned into cruel figures who undermine all black men, including their black male artist counterparts. Indeed, as Reed underscores, where black female writers flourished, their fellow male writers, including Reed himself, Ralph Waldo Ellison, and Richard Wright were sent to the margins (Goffman 205).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined *Reckless Eyeballing* to reveal whether Reed successfully reinforces a minor literature, and thus, is successful at undermining the contributors of the Western literary canon. The study shows that Reed is successful with the latter by depicting how the major precludes minor literature born in an American society but finds it difficult to achieve the former. Reed argues that the responsible elements preventing the formation of a distinctive black minor literature consist of a powerful majoritarian culture and treacherous black artists who uphold the majoritarian power, indicating how both elements look for their own collective and personal interests.

Reed’s *Reckless Eyeballing* is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted novels due to the way multiculturalism is dealt with anti-Semitism, feminism and race. By
including many topics all at once, the novel, and its author, have been charged of misogyny because “his readers and critics tend to follow a straight line or one thing at a time in their reading” (Nelson 397). While it is fair to interpret Reed as an anti-feminist and an anti-Semite, it is crucial to understand his bigger goal with writing *Reckless Eyeballing*, which is to escape the strict rules set by the major which limit and direct his pen. To do this, Reed aimed to demonstrate the American culture and history through an Afrocentric lens, as it is explicit that his desire is to be free from the major and to defend and his black culture and literature.

In this chapter, *Reckless Eyeballing* was analyzed using Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy on minor literature in order to determine whether the novel was successful at deterritorializing the major. To do that, the importance of women, the major and minor ideals, and the unjust image of African Americans were discussed. It is obvious that Reed’s greatest mission is to defend black artists and to escape majoritarian rules and regulations to produce a work of art, however, he seems to criticize and expose the major’s faults much clearer than actually deterritorializing the major as Deleuze and Guattari define it. In this novel, it is clear that the major has full control over the Western literary canon, therefore, as Reed critiques the major, he ultimately succeeds in undermining the tenants of the canon.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this research, I investigated Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* in the light of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s philosophy on minor literature. Using their approach, I investigated to establish whether the selected novels were able to achieve deterritorialization and provide a new perspective on minor literature. To do this, I explored the binary of minor versus major, as well as how “minoritarian becomings” resist any “politics of recognition” (Porter 3). That is, how “becoming-minoritarian always works against power structures and in this sense it is always a political action” (qtd. In Ardoin 84).

As Deleuze and Guattari explain it, minor literature does not only refer to the literature produced by minorities of race, gender, and religion. Instead, literature steps in the minoritarian sphere when it produces a new politics of identity, or what Deleuze and Guattari term: a “people to come.” Indeed, because the major has the capability to majoritize everything including resisting voices, minoritarian voices may gradually become majoritarian. Thus, in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, it is the line of flight – an escape from the system of the major, and a deterritorialization that is important.

In both *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing*, Reed endeavors to find a line of flight to promote a becoming of African American identity. His attempt at deterritorialization in *Mumbo Jumbo* is seen through his frequent referrals to the major culture, bringing into light contemporary American issues like controversies and conspiracy theories about the American presidency. Genuine historical concerns are amalgamated with Reed’s distinctive mythmaking tradition to provide a fictional aspect to his topical overview with the subsumption of Atonism serving as one of such mythmaking attempts. Yet, it is noteworthy
that fiction is added to the historical concerns to exemplify and strengthen his very concerns: Atonism, in fact, as a satiric addition to the novel, is used to highlight the archetypal totalitarianism existing in American society.

Similarly, Reed’s *Reckless Eyeballing* lays claim to contemporary issues regarding the way the majoritarian institutions controls and limits the production of literature. The novelist delves into the issues and limitations of publishing houses that decide which work is worthy enough to go through the course, and thereby have the potential for fame and grandeur. Reed’s representation of this is the most direct possible investigation of the mechanisms of the major culture and literature. Remarkably, in *Reckless Eyeballing*, Reed is interested in analyzing the way culture in general and literature in particular is produced. As Punday puts it, “Reed's concern with what happens when a writer tries to take his or her personal, ethnic message to a general audience is relevant to the configuration of that ethnic group. Because the definition of such a group plays such a key role in writing, such external definitions cannot be disregarded for the sake of a hermetic writing within the group” (460).

One of Reed’s political missions in both novels is his attempt to defend and promote the achievements of black society, literature, and art (the minor), which he attempts to do so by altering the white, dominant society and deconstructing its politics (the major). In the selected novels, Reed attempts to demonstrate that the major has taken over the literary canon for far too long and that it is a time of change, a time for other marginalized, minor groups to be included and respected as writers and artists. In both *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing*, Reed refers to familiar phenomena in American society, ones that form the majoritarian backgrounds everyone might come across. For instance, rumors around Warren Harding or the spread of feminist ideas are familiar to nearly all Americans living in America.
Though the novelist refers to these majoritarian discussions, he does not keep a neutral stance against them. Rather, he struggles to initiate a resisting reconsideration of them. In both novels, Reed makes it a point to present other marginalized groups as major such as Beardsley and Hall in *Mumbo Jumbo* and women and Jews in *Reckless Eyeballing*. It is interesting that Reed illustrates all other groups other than his own as major entities.

Reed achieves a distinctive voice in both the novels. The distinctiveness in question is achieved through the spread of a new and different experience of the familiar phenomena. This accomplishment is truly minoritarian in the sense of minor literature as it expresses the staid in a new, resisting manner. It is minoritarian because a new philosophy and a new perspective is fashioned in the background of majoritarian perspectives. Reed provides a new experience of the American political system, revealing how its posture of democracy is merely a pretense as the system is traditionally dominated by a selected, majoritarian, totalitarian few. The novelist provides a new experience of the publishing houses showing how they do not function by a truly aesthetic system but by majoritarian, conservative agents. He also informs that minoritarian movements like feminism are always at the risk of being majoritized by major cultural tendencies. In fact, what is clear in both novels is the politicization of all phenomena including culture, a feature which is the most dominant aspect of minor literature as defined by Deleuze and Guattari.

I began this study with hopes of analyzing two novels that demonstrate deterritorialization and minorization. However, as I continued to research and examine each closely using Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, I realized that neither novel completely illustrate the act of deterritorialization. Because, deterritorialization, as explained by Deleuze and Guattari, does not consist of offending the major, but to escape it. What Reed has actually
accomplished in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing* is a critique of systems of the major, as well as minor groups which have become major, including, problematically, women and Jews. Because Reed is unable to accomplish deterritorialization in both novels, he is not completely successful in developing a minor literature as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. He, does, however, expose the major system which shapes the Western literary canon, and thereby, succeeds in undermining its tenants. The concept of minor literature, while admirable, seems difficult to establish as a “revolutionary machine to come” in Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Reckless Eyeballing*. 
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