

TEXTUAL ENACTMENT OF METANARRATIVES COLLAPSE: A LYOTARDIAN COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POSTMODERN FICTION

Syed Arif Ullah,

PhD in English Scholar, Muslim Youth University, Japan Road, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email:
arifkhanscholar@gmail.com

Dr. Iesar Ahmad,

Professor of English Literature, Muslim Youth University, Japan Road, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: iesar.ahmad@myu.edu.pk

Abstract

*This study investigates the textual production of postmodern discourse through a comparative analysis of Albert Camus's *The Stranger*, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Grounded in Jean-François Lyotard's concept of incredulity toward metanarratives, the research examines how these novels do not merely represent postmodern conditions but actively generate them through their narrative, linguistic, and discursive configurations. Methodologically, the study operationalizes Lyotard's philosophical framework through Catherine Belsey's model of textual analysis, employing a post-structuralist approach to demonstrate how meaning is constructed through language, ideology, and discourse rather than reflected from reality. Addressing a significant gap in existing scholarship, this research brings Belsey's analytical method into a sustained comparative dialogue across three formally and historically distinct texts. Through close textual analysis, the study reveals that grammatical indifference, discursive fragmentation, and systems-based paranoia function as key mechanisms through which grand narratives are destabilized. Furthermore, it demonstrates that juridical discourse, consumer culture, pharmaceutical language, and scientific rationality operate as competing language games that displace universal truth claims with localized and performative modes of legitimation. By integrating Lyotard's theoretical insights with Belsey's methodological precision, this study offers a systematic framework for analyzing the relationship between language, power, and meaning in postmodern literature.*

Keywords: Postmodernism, Metanarratives, Lyotard, Belsey, Camus, DeLillo, Pynchon

1. Introduction

This research addresses a problem lying at the intersection of postmodern theory and literary analysis: how does Lyotard's concept of incredulity toward metanarratives translate from philosophical proposition into the specific texture of narrative art? Rather than restricting the inquiry to a single text, the study applies this question comparatively across three foundational works. Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942/1989), Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) are widely cited as postmodern benchmarks, yet the precise linguistic mechanisms through which each enacts the collapse of grand narratives have rarely been traced through a systematic, shared methodological apparatus. The research's key argument moves beyond impressionistic characterization: these novels do not merely depict the postmodern condition; they generate postmodern discourse through their narrative, linguistic, and ideological structures.

To substantiate this claim, the study draws on the textual analysis developed by Catherine Belsey (2005) in her essay 'Textual Analysis as a Research Method,' a methodology that reveals how language, ideology, and discourse actively produce—rather than passively reflect—meaning.

Postmodernism has shaped debates in literature, philosophy, and cultural studies for over half a century. Lyotard (1984) defines the postmodern as incredulity toward the grand legitimating stories—Enlightenment rationalism, Marxist emancipation, Christian salvation, and scientific progress—that had organised knowledge and authority in modernity. In their place, Lyotard (1984) proposed the concept of language games: localised discursive systems, each governed by its own internal rules, in which no single discourse can claim supremacy over all others. Belsey's (1980) model of textual analysis and significantly advanced in her 2005 essay, offers

a rigorous post-structuralist methodology for examining how texts construct meaning through language, ideology, and discourse. The 2005 essay is the more theoretically mature formulation: it incorporates a Lacanian account of the Real, a deeper engagement with the undecidability of the signifier following Derrida (1976), and a sharper focus on the encounter between the symbolic order and what exceeds it. Their combined application to a comparative study of three major postmodern novels has not been attempted in existing scholarship.

Postmodernism

As a cultural and intellectual movement, postmodernism can be most precisely defined by its systematic distrust of totalising narratives that legitimised knowledge, history, and social progress—its 'incredulity toward metanarratives,' as Lyotard (1984, p. xxiv) famously formulates it. Jameson (1991) describes postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, marked by pastiche, the waning of affect, and the dissolution of stable historical consciousness. Hassan (1987) identifies stylistic departures—from form to anti-form, hierarchy to anarchy, presence to absence—that collectively distinguish postmodern from modernist aesthetics. Hutcheon (1988) refines this with the concept of historiographic metafiction: postmodern art both inhabits and ironises the conventions it critiques, producing a critical duality that refuses both naive realism and nihilistic relativism. A persistent challenge in postmodern literary scholarship, however, is translating this philosophical orientation into a concrete series of textual operations. The present study meets this challenge by bringing Lyotard's (1984) theory into productive dialogue with Belsey's (2005) post-structuralist methodology, operationalising philosophical abstraction into analytically grounded close reading.

Research Objective

1. To investigate how *The Stranger*, *White Noise*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* collectively enact postmodern incredulity toward metanarratives through their narrative and discursive configurations, employing Belsey's (2005) model of textual analysis as the primary analytical instrument.

Research Question

1. How do Camus's *The Stranger*, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* textually enact Lyotard's concept of incredulity toward metanarratives when examined through the post-structuralist methodology of Belsey's (2005) model of textual analysis?

2. Literature Review

Postmodernism emerged as a philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic critique of modernity's foundational certainties. Lyotard (1984) defines the postmodern as the collapse of faith in grand legitimating systems that once provided coherence and authority to knowledge, arguing that these metanarratives are no longer credible because they claim to represent all of human experience while suppressing difference, ambiguity, and plurality. In their place, postmodernism privileges local, contingent, and heterogeneous knowledges (Best & Kellner, 1991). Philosophical foundations for this critique were established by Derrida (1976), whose concept of *différance* demonstrated that language never achieves finality. Foucault (1975, 1980) exposed how knowledge is inseparable from power, showing that what a society deems true is produced through discursive formations sustained by institutions. Barthes (1977) advanced the claim that meaning arises through active readerly engagement rather than authorial intention. Together, these thinkers provided the epistemological groundwork for postmodernism's dismantling of universalist claims.

Camus's *The Stranger* has generated sustained commentary on existentialism and colonial representation. McCarthy (1988) reads Meursault's indifference as an enactment of absurdist freedom, while Said (1993) situates the novel within the politics of colonial representation and the grammatical erasure of the Algerian subject. Sartre (1947) offered an early analysis of Camus's style as a philosophical act—each sentence severed from the next, refusing the

continuity of grand narrative purpose. Despite this rich body of work, no study has applied Belsey's (2005) four-stage model to the novel's specific linguistic mechanisms of grand narrative refusal. *White Noise* has attracted extensive critical commentary: Baudrillard's (1994) theory of hyperreality has been widely applied to DeLillo's representation of simulation and media saturation, Frow (1990) examines it as a meditation on death and information, and Wilcox (1991) connects it to the exhaustion of heroic narrative. LeClair (1987) reads it within the tradition of the American systems novel. *Gravity's Rainbow* has been analysed as the paradigmatic encyclopedic postmodern text by McHale (1987), who identifies its ontological instability as its defining formal characteristic, while Mendelson (1976) describes it as the first truly encyclopedic American novel and Seed (1988) traces its fictional labyrinths of paranoia and power. Despite this body of scholarship across all three texts, a comparative study combining Lyotard's philosophy and Belsey's (2005) post-structuralist textual methodology has not been attempted. This gap constitutes the original scholarly contribution of the present study.

3. Research Methodology

This research is grounded in qualitative, text-based analysis framed by post-structuralist literary theory. The primary methodology is Catherine Belsey's (2005) model of textual analysis, operating on three interrelated assumptions: first, that language is not a neutral medium but a system of differences that produces meanings; second, that texts are active sites of ideological formation rather than passive reflections of reality; and third, that the encounter between the symbolic order and the Real—following Lacan—is the site of a literary text's deepest critical operation. The study is theoretically aligned with Lyotard's (1984) concept of incredulity toward metanarratives, rendering his philosophical construct into analytically operable textual procedures. Primary data is drawn exclusively from the three selected novels, while theoretical texts by Lyotard (1984) and Belsey (2005), together with relevant secondary scholarship, function as interpretive frameworks rather than data sources. No empirical or quantitative methods are employed.

This study operates within the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, which assumes that meaning is socially and linguistically constructed rather than objectively discovered (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research design is analytical-descriptive and qualitative, employing close textual analysis as the primary method. This design enables in-depth interpretation of literary language, discursive patterns, and ideological formations across three formally diverse works. The interpretivist paradigm aligns naturally with postmodern theory, which rejects universal truth claims and emphasises the contingency and plurality of knowledge.

The analysis proceeds through Belsey's (2005) four-stage model applied systematically to selected passages from all three novels. Passages are selected on the basis of their relevance to Lyotard's three key concepts—incredulity toward metanarratives, language games, and performativity—and their distribution across the three texts ensures genuine comparative scope. The analytical process involves: (a) textual familiarisation through repeated close reading; (b) identification of discursive formations and ideological structures; (c) close linguistic reading of vocabulary, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical patterns; and (d) synthesis of interpretive insights aligned with Lyotard's framework.

Belsey's Model of Textual Analysis

Belsey's (2005) model operates through four analytical stages applied systematically in the analysis section. The first stage—identifying discursive formations—examines how language in a text reproduces ideological positions and power relations. The second stage—close linguistic reading—analyses word choice, syntax, imagery, and rhetorical patterns to reveal how meaning is produced through specific choices. The third stage—uncovering ideological assumptions—situates linguistic patterns within broader cultural and political formations. The

fourth stage—synthesising critical knowledge—constructs interpretive insights that connect textual detail to philosophical and theoretical questions. Together, these stages translate Lyotard's philosophical framework into a set of analytically verifiable textual procedures.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity in qualitative literary research is understood as credibility, coherence, and interpretive transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is established through sustained textual engagement and detailed evidence for all interpretive claims across all three primary texts. Dependability is ensured through systematic documentation of analytical procedures. Confirmability reflects the researcher's reflexive awareness of interpretive positioning. Theoretical triangulation—cross-referencing findings through Lyotard (1984), Belsey (2005), and relevant secondary scholarship—enriches analytical depth and reduces the risk of monolithic readings.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three of Lyotard's concepts from *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). First, incredulity toward metanarratives describes the collapse of grand legitimating systems whose philosophical authority has been withdrawn even as their institutional power persists. Second, language games—adapted from Wittgenstein (1953)—refers to the plurality of localised discursive systems, each governed by its own rules of legitimation, none capable of claiming universal authority over the others. Third, performativity identifies efficiency and operational effectiveness as the postmodern criterion for validating knowledge, replacing correspondence to truth. These three concepts provide the philosophical lenses through which each textual passage from the three novels is analysed. Belsey's (2005) four-stage model provides the methodological instrument for tracing their operation at the specific level of vocabulary, grammar, and narrative organisation.

4. Textual Analysis

The following analysis applies Belsey's (2005) four-stage model to selected passages from all three novels, examining each through the lens of Lyotard's postmodern philosophy. Each subsection identifies the operative language game, the mode of incredulity toward metanarratives, and the performative dimension of meaning production.

The Stranger: Grammar as Incredulity and the Colonial Differend Meursault's Syntax and the Refusal of the Grand Narrative of Grief

"Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday; I can't be sure." (Camus, 1942/1989, p. 3).

Belsey's (2005) first stage identifies here the discursive formation of familial mourning: a language game governed by the social expectation that the bereaved subject will encode loss within a structure of temporally precise, retrospectively meaningful significance. The close linguistic reading (stage two) reveals that Camus's opening sentence systematically refuses every requirement of this language game. The declarative 'Mother died today' achieves its ideological effect through grammatical isolation: the death is not embedded in a subordinate clause structure that would position it as the origin of subsequent consequences, as the grand narrative of grief demands. The qualification 'Or maybe yesterday' introduces temporal uncertainty into the dominant narrative's claim to significance, and 'I can't be sure' converts that uncertainty from an informational deficiency into a formal statement about Meursault's relationship to time itself. Stage three uncovers the ideological assumption underlying every conventional mourning narrative: that a parent's death constitutes a temporally precise, emotionally organising event whose significance is available for retrospective articulation. Lyotard's (1984) framework clarifies that Meursault's grammatical indifference enacts exactly the incredulity he theorises: the language game of filial grief is simply declined rather than contested. Belsey's (2005) synthesis confirms that meaning is produced not by the death but by

the refusal to inscribe it within the dominant discursive formation—a refusal performed at the level of sentence grammar rather than through any explicit philosophical statement.

The Trial as Grand Narrative Theatre: The Juridical Differend

"They seemed to be arguing as if the case were perfectly simple—entirely unrelated to me." (Camus, 1942/1989, p. 85).

Belsey's (2005) discursive analysis identifies the collision of two incommensurable language games: the language game of criminal jurisprudence, which requires intentional subjects whose actions express deliberate moral dispositions, and the language game of Meursault's immediate, fragmented sensory experience, which operates without retrospective moral coherence. Lyotard's (1984) concept of the differend is directly operative: the wrong Meursault suffers—being judged for the emotional quality of his inner states rather than the act itself—cannot be expressed within the court's language game without being converted into further evidence of his depravity. The phrase 'entirely unrelated to me' is syntactically charged: the trial has constituted a version of Meursault—coherent, morally legible, intentionally violent—that does not correspond to his own experience, and the court provides him no mechanism for contesting that constitution. Stage three reveals that the colonial dimension of this differend—the namelessness of the Arab throughout the novel, his grammatical erasure within Meursault's first-person narration—extends the analysis to its most politically charged dimension: the colonial grand narrative constitutes the erasure of the colonised subject's individuality as a natural absence rather than an ideological construction, producing the differend as a formal rather than merely thematic phenomenon. Belsey's (2005) synthesis demonstrates that the court does not discover Meursault's guilt; it produces it discursively by constituting the unified, intentional, punishable subject the legal grand narrative requires.

Religious Grand Narrative and the Refusal of Transcendence

"I seemed to understand that he was deeply upset by all my apparent indifference to such serious matters." (Camus, 1942/1989, p. 111).

Belsey's (2005) stage one identifies the prison chaplain's discourse as the language game of religious transcendence: a system that constitutes death as a threshold rather than a terminus and the condemned as a subject whose spiritual account remains open. The close linguistic reading (stage two) focuses on the modal construction 'seemed to understand': Meursault does not know, does not share, and does not argue against the chaplain's language game; he observes it from outside as one would observe a ritual whose rules one does not inhabit. Lyotard (1984) identifies religious metanarrative as one of modernity's most powerful legitimating systems: the story of sin, redemption, and eternal salvation provides a framework within which present suffering acquires meaning through the promise of transcendent resolution. Stage three reveals that the chaplain's language game can make no legitimate move within Meursault's symbolic order because Meursault does not inhabit the metanarrative of spiritual accounting; the chaplain's language cannot reach him without Meursault's willingness to enter the language game within which it operates. Belsey's (2005) synthesis confirms that the exchange dramatises Lyotard's (1984) differend in its religious dimension: between the metaphysical language game of the chaplain and the sensory, present-tense language game of Meursault, there is no common phrase universe and no possible adjudication.

White Noise: Consumer Culture and the Performativity of Meaning Identity, Performance, and the Decentred Subject

"I am the false character that follows the name around." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 17).

Belsey's (2005) stage one identifies the discursive formation of academic identity: the language game through which institutional authority—conferred by title, office, and prescribed

appearance—constitutes the professional self. The close linguistic reading (stage two) focuses on Jack's construction of his own inauthenticity: the noun phrase 'false character' occupies the subject position conventionally reserved for the authentic self, and the verb 'follows' positions identity as a trailing effect of the institutional name rather than an inner essence the name expresses. This is not confessional irony but a precise formal statement of the decentered subject as Belsey (2005) theorises it: a self produced through discourse rather than expressed by it. Lyotard's (1984) framework situates this as an enactment of incredulity toward the grand narrative of liberal individualism—the story through which modernity promises its subjects a unified, coherent, authentic inner self whose expression in public life constitutes the good life. Stage three reveals that the ideological function of the academic grand narrative, like that of the supermarket and the pharmaceutical industry, is to interpellate subjects into positions whose constructed quality must remain invisible for the performance of identity to succeed. Belsey's (2005) synthesis confirms that the gap between the name and the 'false character that follows it' is not a personal failure but the structural condition of every subject produced by a language game that promises authentic selfhood while delivering only its performance.

The Barn, the Sign, and the Death of Referentiality

"No one sees the barn. Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 25).

Belsey's (2005) discursive analysis identifies here the language game of tourist aesthetics: a discourse that produces cultural significance through the circulation and accumulation of signs rather than through direct encounter with the objects those signs nominally represent. The close linguistic reading (stage two) attends to the logical structure of Murray's observation: the claim that it is 'impossible' to see the barn after seeing the signs describes not a contingent psychological difficulty but a structural epistemological condition—the sign-system has displaced rather than enhanced access to the referent. Lyotard's (1984) incredulity is enacted in the collapse of the metanarrative of authentic experience: the grand narrative that promises access to the real through direct perception has been foreclosed by the prior circulation of representations. Stage three uncovers the ideological assumption that the tourist language game sustains: that cultural value is produced by consensus and citation rather than by any intrinsic quality of the object. The 'most photographed barn in America' is most photographed not because of what it is but because it is most photographed—a performative logic, in Lyotard's (1984) sense, in which legitimation is self-referential rather than grounded in any external standard. Belsey's (2005) synthesis confirms that discourse has created the barn's aura; the object itself is secondary to its discursive construction.

Pharmaceutical Discourse and the Colonisation of Mortality

"Babette confessed that Dylar had not eradicated her fear but had taught her new ways of naming it." (DeLillo, 1985, p. 257).

Belsey's (2005) stage one identifies pharmaceutical discourse as a postmodern substitute for the grand narratives of metaphysical and religious consolation in the face of death. The close linguistic reading (stage two) attends to the verb 'taught': Dylar has not delivered on its operational promise—the elimination of the fear of death—but has installed a new language game for articulating what it claimed to remove. The phrase 'new ways of naming' is analytically decisive: the drug has produced not a change in Babette's relationship to mortality but a change in her discursive resources for representing it. Lyotard (1984) identifies the performativity criterion as the postmodern standard of knowledge legitimation: a discourse is validated not by its correspondence to truth but by its operational effectiveness. Stage three reveals the ideological operation through which pharmaceutical discourse constitutes its subjects: by interpellating patients into a language game in which fear-of-death is redescribed as a neurochemical dysfunction amenable to pharmacological management, it displaces the

metaphysical question with a technical one. Belsey's (2005) synthesis confirms that the novel's most devastating postmodern insight resides in this passage: even the failure of the grand narrative generates not liberation but a new language game for managing the same unresolved terror, a textual demonstration that the postmodern condition is not the absence of grand narratives but their perpetual, self-undermining reconstitution.

**Gravity's Rainbow: Paranoia, Dissolution, and the Preterite
The Opening Line and the Collapse of Causal Metanarrative**

"A SCREAMING COMES ACROSS THE SKY." (Pynchon, 1973, p. 3).

Belsey's (2005) first stage identifies in Pynchon's opening sentence the radical dismantling of the language game of causal narrative: the discursive system that requires, in Lyotard's (1984) terms, 'a great hero, great dangers, great voyages, and great goals' organised within a structure of sequential, purposive intelligibility. The V-2 rocket travels faster than sound; its sonic signature arrives only after the explosion it accompanies, reversing the conventional order of cause and effect. The close linguistic reading (stage two) attends to the capitalisation—not a conventional typographic emphasis but a formal declaration that this text will operate outside the language game of subordinated, causally organised narrative. There is no subject of the screaming, no origin, no context: the Real erupts into the symbolic order before that order has time to constitute itself. Stage three uncovers the ideological assumption that the causal-sequential grand narrative sustains: that history is intelligible, events are produced by identifiable causes, and the narrating subject stands at sufficient temporal distance to comprehend their significance. Lyotard's (1984) incredulity toward the metanarrative of historical progress is enacted formally—at the level of sentence structure and typographic choice—before a single character has been introduced. Belsey's (2005) synthesis confirms that the novel begins by staging the encounter with the Real in its most compressed form: the eruption of what resists symbolisation into the symbolic order before that order has had time to prepare its defences.

Pointsman and Mexico: Incommensurable Language Games

*"But to Mexico belongs the domain between zero and one—the middle
Pointsman has excluded from his persuasion—the probabilities."* (Pynchon, 1973, p. 55).

Belsey's (2005) stage one identifies two competing discursive formations: Pointsman's behaviourist psychology, a language game that permits only binary states—excitation or inhibition, one or zero—and Roger Mexico's statistical mathematics, a language game inhabiting the space of continuous probability between those poles. The close linguistic reading (stage two) attends to the phrase 'excluded from his persuasion': Pointsman has not disproved the probabilistic domain; he has excluded it from the rules of his language game, rendering it inadmissible as a valid move. The word 'persuasion' subtly marks the behaviourist framework as an ideological commitment rather than a neutral scientific method. Lyotard (1984) argues that the postmodern condition is characterised by the multiplication of incommensurable language games, none of which can claim universal priority. The confrontation between Pointsman and Mexico dramatises this proliferation with exactitude: behaviourism and probability theory are not competing answers to the same question but players in different games whose rules are mutually exclusive. Stage three reveals that Pointsman's grand narrative of behaviourist science produces the human subject as a predictable, controllable, conditioned entity—a subject constituted by the System whose resistance is by definition inadmissible within the game's rules. Belsey's (2005) synthesis identifies Mexico's probabilistic domain as the space of Lyotard's (1984) *petit récit*: the localised, non-totalising knowledge that flourishes in the gap the grand narrative cannot close.

Slothrop's Dissolution and the Dispersal of Grand Narrative Selfhood

"There is no way to tell which of the faces is Slothrop's: the only printed credit that might apply to him is 'Harmonica, kazoo—a friend.'" (Pynchon, 1973, p. 742).

Belsey's (2005) stage one identifies the language game of biographical record: the documentary apparatus through which the grand narrative of individual selfhood—continuous, identifiable, purposively directed through time—is institutionally established and maintained. The close linguistic reading (stage two) attends to the specific form of Slothrop's disappearance from the novel's evidentiary record: he is not declared dead or transformed but rendered unidentifiable within a photographic image. The credit 'Harmonica, kazoo—a friend' is the trace of Slothrop's presence reduced to a pair of instruments and a grammatically anonymous social relation—not a name, not an identity, but a function and a placeholder. Lyotard's (1984) framework clarifies that Slothrop's dissolution is the novel's most sustained formal enactment of incredulity toward the grand narrative of individual heroism: the story of the purposive self-moving toward knowledge and freedom through the trials of experience. The quest does not resolve; the mystery is not solved; the liberation does not arrive. Stage three exposes the ideological function of the quest grand narrative: it constitutes persons as unified, coherent moral agents whose identity is deepened by experience and who therefore bear responsibility for their choices within the System. Slothrop's dispersal is the formal refusal of this constitution. Belsey's (2005) synthesis identifies this as the most radical deployment of the decentred subject in postmodern fiction: not a subject whose unity is ironised but a subject whose narrative coherence is literally withdrawn, leaving only the musical trace of an anonymous friend.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how Lyotard's (1984) concept of incredulity toward metanarratives is textually enacted in Camus's *The Stranger*, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, employing Belsey's (2005) model of textual analysis as the primary methodology. The central argument—that each novel actively produces postmodern discourse rather than merely reflecting postmodern conditions—has been substantiated through close analysis of nine textual passages distributed across the three works.

Summary of Findings

This study has demonstrated that all three novels constitute sustained literary enactments of Lyotard's (1984) incredulity toward metanarratives, each operating through formally distinct but philosophically convergent mechanisms. Through close textual analysis conducted via Belsey's (2005) four-stage model, the study has shown that each novel's narrative strategies enact the collapse of grand legitimating systems and validate meaning through local, provisional language games rather than universal truths. In *The Stranger*, incredulity is inscribed in sentence grammar: Camus's syntactic choices refuse the language games of filial grief, juridical intentionality, and religious transcendence, enacting Lyotard's (1984) differend at the level of narrative voice and producing, through the Arab's grammatical namelessness, the colonial differend as a formal phenomenon. In *White Noise*, incredulity operates through tonal irony and discursive juxtaposition: DeLillo exposes the grand narratives of academic authority, referential language, and pharmaceutical salvation as language games whose legitimacy derives from Lyotardian performativity rather than correspondence to existential truth. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, incredulity achieves its most formally radical expression: Pynchon dismantles the grand narrative of causal historical intelligibility in his opening sentence, stages the incommensurability of competing scientific language games through Pointsman and Mexico, and dissolves the protagonist across the Zone until only a harmonica credit remains. Belsey's (2005) model proved indispensable as a methodological bridge between Lyotard's philosophical abstraction and the specific textual mechanics of each novel. Her four-stage procedure enabled a systematic movement from surface to ideological depth, producing

theoretically grounded readings that neither impressionistic commentary nor purely philosophical analysis could generate. The combined Lyotardian-Belseyian framework produced analytical precision that neither framework could achieve independently: Lyotard provides the philosophical architecture of grand narrative critique; Belsey (2005) provides the micro-analytical instruments for tracing that critique in the specific grammar, syntax, and rhetoric of literary language. The comparative structure of this study has further revealed that all three novels converge, through different formal means, on what Lyotard (1984) calls the *petit récit* as the ethical residue that survives grand narrative collapse: Meursault's opening to the 'benign indifference of the universe' (Camus, 1942/1989, p. 122), the community of Blacksmith residents gathering in shared attention before their toxic sunsets, and Pynchon's unfinished hymn for the preterite—'Now everybody—' (Pynchon, 1973, p. 760)—all enact the same foundational conviction: that after the withdrawal of totalising legitimation, what persists is not nihilism but the humble, attentive practice of meaning-making in the local, the contingent, and the shared.

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