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強制決定和事件忠誠：品瓊《抵抗白晝》中無政府主義式的勞工政治

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# 強制決定和事件忠誠：品瓊《抵抗白晝》中無政府主義式的勞工政治

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## 摘要

本論文以湯姆斯·品瓊在其首部後 911 歷史小說《抵抗白晝》(2006)為探討主題，論述此小說在十九世紀末期無政府主義和勞資衝突的基進觀點。有鑑於美國政府在 911 之後對歷史的扭曲，品瓊憤而轉向/回歸無政府主義和勞資衝突這兩大脈絡。透過其人物的政治決定，品瓊支持勞方立場，本文運用阿藍·巴底烏的理論，來闡述小說中主體改造、政治倫理強制決定與事件忠誠，以說明品瓊小說裡一系列的後 911 反/無政府主義政治。

關鍵字：勞工、強制決定、事件忠誠、巴底烏、《抵抗白晝》

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## **Forcing and Fidelity: Anarchist-Labor Politics in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day***

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines Thomas Pynchon's extensive and radical treatment of anarchism and the labor wars fought at the turn of the last century in his first post-9/11 novel, *Against the Day* (2006). The paper contextualizes Pynchon's (re)turn to anarchism and labor war in terms of his post-9/11 political anger with the Bush administration for its abuse of history. The paper employs Alain Badiou's theories on subjective evental transformation and politico-ethical forcing and fidelity to theorize Pynchon's post-9/11 oppositional anarchist politics and enactment of a series of forcing and fidelity events—turning characters to the labor cause—in the novel to signal a strong pro-labor stance.

Key words: labor, forcing, fidelity, Badiou, *Against the Day*

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## Forcing and Fidelity: Anarchist-Labor Politics in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*

Wang, Huei-Ju

The sole task of philosophy is to show that we must choose.

—Alain Badiou, “Thinking the Event”

.... We will buy it all up, all this country. [...] we fishers of Americans will cast our nets [...] ready to build on. [...] When the scars of these battles have long faded [...] who will be left anymore to remember the jabbering Union scum, the frozen corpses whose names, false in any case, have gone forever unrecorded? who will care that once men fought as if an eight-hour day, a few coins more at the end of the week, were everything [...]. Anarchism will pass, its race will degenerate into silence, but money will beget money, [...]. It is inevitable. It has begun.

—Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day*

Of all the hundreds of characters in Thomas Pynchon's 2006 novel, *Against the Day*, none is so anti-labor and anti-anarchist as the arch-antagonist, Scarsdale Vibe. Indeed, shortly before his assassination and facing labor unrest, Vibe makes a triumphant speech in Colorado demonstrating such sentiment, partially quoted in the second epigraph above. In the speech, Vibe eloquently sums up labor's lost battle against capital in the early twentieth century in industrialized and corporate America, believing that much of it is destined to fade into history (1000-1). In his complex and labyrinthine reconstruction of turn-of-the-century American modernity and through multiple interconnected narrative threads, Pynchon the anarchist historian excavates

this part of much forgotten history, where organized labor (“union scum”) and organized capital (“fishers of Americans”) fought it out with deadly firearms and bombs over the eight-hour day and other labor rights issues. The excavation of this history, in its foregrounding of anarchism arising from the historical and material conditions of the Gilded Age—where the incorporation of capital trampled on the rights of workers to organize and enjoy the fruits of their labor—showcases Pynchon’s confrontational and unapologetic radicalism in the aftermath of September 11. That day created a conservative political climate in the United States and elsewhere, where any act of violence is quickly condemned as “terrorism” and any individual endorser of violence as a “terrorist.”

Pynchon’s profound meditation in *Against the Day* on turn-of-the-century anarchism, the terrorism of its time, quickly drew the attention of critics who saw new developments in the novel and connected them to developments related to 9/11. In his early review of the novel, Bernard Duyfhuizen notes that Pynchon “is laying bare the historical context of the ‘terrorism’ that confronts the world today” (par. 14). Likewise, in “Daydreams and Dynamite,” Graham Benton situates the proliferation of anarchist characters and anarchist history in *Against the Day* in the context of our time, characterized by globalization and terrorism (193, 195, 206). Benton remarks that the anarchists who inhabit the novel invite comparisons to 9/11 terrorists on the grounds that both groups, though with obviously different aims and objectives, use “strategies of asymmetric warfare [to lash] out at a perceivedly oppressive system” (“Daydreams” 208). Sharing a similar view, Samuel Thomas states that Pynchon’s “extraordinary treatment of fin de siècle anarchist terror—a reckoning with the moral vortex of the blast radius” marks one of the “new developments” in the novelist’s trajectory (“Metković” 354).

To continue this list, for Kathryn Hume, *Against the Day* “represents a new

departure” for Pynchon, who moves away from “postmodern relativism” and articulates an anarchist-Catholic version of a “politics of violence” and “religion of penance” (163-64). However, Hume notes that Pynchon’s political support for violence is confined to the novel (164, 180). Hume concludes that one of the effects of *Against the Day* is to ask critics to reassess Pynchon’s earlier fiction in terms of religious and anarchist-Luddite messages, which are, for the most part, ignored (183). Hume’s last comment signals the importance of Benton’s pioneering work in analyzing the anarchist dimension of Pynchon’s work beginning in his debut novel *V.* (1963). Indeed, in his 1999 essay on the anarchist dimension in Pynchon’s work up to *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Benton notes that anarchism represents for Pynchon “a mode of thinking and acting” (“This Network” 541).

This strong emergence of a political theme has also emerged in other critical work. In *Pynchon and the Political*, for instance, Samuel Thomas seeks to foreground “the political Pynchon” in his critical-theory inflected reading of Pynchon’s major novels published before 9/11, arguing that Pynchon’s political dimension was not adequately investigated by earlier critics, who tended to focus on the textual dimension of postmodern Pynchon (12-14). Exceptions to Thomas’ critique include works by Jeffrey S. Baker and David Cowart. Baker views Pynchon as “a writer from and of the American 1960s, championing the anti-war, anti-fascist position of the radicals” (333), and he foregrounds Pynchon’s “war critiques” in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (334). In historicizing Pynchon’s ethico-politics grounded in the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s, Cowart notes that Pynchon’s radicalism lies not only in “endless, self-indulging, textual play” but also in paradoxically subverting the “postmodern gospel” in his critique of racism, economic inequality, genocidal violence, and police-state repression (4). I agree with these three critics’ views of a politically and ethically committed Pynchon, and I advance the view of an evental

Pynchon—a Pynchon further radicalized by 9/11—practicing the politics of forcing and fidelity in *Against the Day* as his active intervention in contemporary American politics and culture. In doing so, I do not diminish the postmodern aspects of Pynchon (textual breakdown, fragmentation, and “knotting into”) but rather foreground his politico-ethical dimension, or his “vibrant and unusual socio-political conscience,” as Thomas puts it (*Pynchon* 14).

Pynchon’s extensive and provocative treatment of labor troubles fueled by anarchist terrorism in *Against the Day* marks a new development in his long literary career since *V*. In *Pynchon and History*, Shawn Smith notes that Pynchon’s strategy for representing history in his fiction is to find “a collective subject” and represent “its negative experience of history figurally” (15). In *V*, Pynchon uncovers the history of the colonized African Hereros and their brutal termination by the Germans in their 1904 rebellion (264-65). In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon’s political sympathy lies with what he calls the preterite, that is, the passed-over, including the German Hereros and animals. In *Against the Day*, Pynchon finds that “collective subject” in the turn-of-the-century exploited and oppressed working classes and represents what happened to them during labor strikes. Those who died in the American labor wars thus become a significant source for Pynchon in his first post-9/11 novel reconstructing the people’s history, as historian Howard Zinn might term it, from the class perspective. Pynchon’s deep sympathy for the dispossessed is evidenced in his repeated allusions in the novel to the labor wars in Pittsburgh (the Homestead strike of 1892), Chicago (the Pullman strike of 1894), Colorado (Cripple Creek, the San Juans), and other Western mining towns (Coeur d’Alene, Idaho).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pynchon’s presentation of and allusions to the turn-of-the-century labor-capital conflicts, accompanied by the use of dynamite, cover much of the labor history and labor movement documented by Louis Adamic in *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America*, first published in 1931.

In this article, building on these past works, I want to suggest that Pynchon's most thorough presentation of anarchism and most profound contemplation of terrorism co-exist with an extensive presentation of labor wars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This convergence of a contemplation of anarchism and terrorism and that of labor troubles renders *Against the Day* Pynchon's most political and politicized novel, clearly articulating his post-9/11 politico-ethical vision: an intensified opposition to an oppressive state and capitalism and a pronounced pro-labor stance. More importantly, I argue that Pynchon develops a new aesthetics of "forcing" and "fidelity" in his sympathetic treatment of the conflicts between labor and capital in the novel. Thus, this paper is concerned with a series of enactments of forcing and fidelity as a new form of aesthetics and political activism in Pynchon. My reading of Pynchon's new aesthetics takes as a starting point French philosopher Alain Badiou's writings on forcing and fidelity, articulated in his theories of the event and the subject, to which I will now turn.

### **1. Badiou, Forcing, Fidelity, and the Event**

The philosophy of Alain Badiou contains many concepts that can prove helpful to a reading of Pynchon's labor politics. Before returning to Pynchon, it is necessary and worthwhile to lay out some of these concepts. The key terms that will be used here are "forcing," "fidelity," and the "event."

To begin, the notion of "forcing" plays an important role in Badiou's philosophical conception of the event and the subject. In *Being and Event*, Badiou states that forcing, a concept he appropriates from mathematician Paul Cohen's set theory, is the "fundamental law of the subject" (403). The subject in this text is the effect of a series of inquiries with regard to the production of knowledge and truth. Forcing in the Badiouian inquiry is situated between knowledge and truth. Forcing, for Badiou, is the indispensable "supplemental event" that allows the "indiscernible"

in knowledge to become discernable and to be thought of as true in a new situation or the event that allows the subject to decide “the undecidable” (*Being* 428-29). Forcing thus “produces an anticipatory knowledge of the new situation,” a knowledge whose “truth is suspended from the chance of inquiries” (Feltham 111). Through the procedure of forcing, a subject of truth emerges. As Badiou writes, “A subject is that which, finite instance of a truth, discerned realization of an indiscernible, forces decision” (*Being* 409), and “Truth requires ... the ultra-one of the event. The result is that it *forces decision*” (*Being* 430; emphasis original). These two Badiouian formulations highlight the composition of the subject as truth, which constitutes a Badiouian event, through forcing that punctures a hole in existing knowledge and thus creates a new truth.

Although the subject in *Being and Event* is “a series of successful enquiries, a set of multiples connected to the name of the event,” not the human subject endowed with agency (Feltham 111-2), the notion or operation of forcing has “an ethical punch to it” (Pluth 101). In his later work, *Ethics*, Badiou rethinks the subject in relation to the question of ethics, allowing the human subject (“the human animal”) to emerge to become a new being through an event (40-1). The effect of the event on the subject is such that it “compels” the subject to “decide a *new* way of being” and to act in the situation (*Ethics* 41-42; emphasis original). As we shall see, Badiou’s notion of evental subjectivity is useful in reading instances of evental transformation in *Against the Day* and, equally importantly, in theorizing Pynchon’s own post-9/11 political anger and anarchism-inflected labor politics.<sup>2</sup> Forcing, as I

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<sup>2</sup> Significant political and historical events have had uncanny ways of influencing writers’ literary productions, reshaping their political ideology and, in turn, informing their post-event works. Indeed, just such a notable evental transformation or radicalization of writers and their ideologies can be seen in the works of William Dean Howells after the 1886 Haymarket riots; John Dos Passos after the 1927 executions of Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in Boston; John Steinbeck writing on the migrant farm labor and participating in the rescue of flood-trapped migrants during the later years of the Great Depression; and George Orwell after the Spanish Civil

use it in this essay, means that a human subject is placed in a situation and is forced to make an informed decision after acquiring new knowledge about the situation. The result of forcing may or may not lead to an eventual subjective transformation. This practice of forcing, a form of agency by which a new politico-ethical stance is taken with regard to labor and class conflict, together with Pynchon's foregrounding of labor wars, constitutes one of the new developments in the novel.

Fidelity, on the other hand, according to Badiou's philosophical conception, is fidelity to an event, to the consequences of a truth procedure, by "participat[ing] in the new subject made possible by the event" (*Philosophy* 48). As with forcing, fidelity gestures toward a theory of change, a break with the situation. As Badiou writes in *Ethics*, fidelity "amounts to a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself; it is an immanent and continuing break" (67). Badiou concludes that the course of fidelity to an event is uncertain (*Ethics* 71). Nevertheless, Badiou emphasizes that the "political subjects are always between two events," that is to say, "between the past event and the coming event" (*Philosophy* 13). Badiou's articulation of fidelity is another way of affirming and maintaining forcing and enables my reading of forcing as fidelity. Like forcing, my use of Badiou's fidelity posits a subject in the historical material world that acts faithfully to an event, as Badiou to the May 1968 and Pynchon to the radical movements of the 1960s, events that had enormous consequences in both countries and beyond.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to *Against the Day*, Pynchon's most visible pro-labor stance is displayed in *Vineland* (1990) and is manifested in his sympathy toward the

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War and the Second World War. Pynchon's leftist politics, formed prior to and during the Vietnam War, seems to follow the aforementioned pattern. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon obliquely speaks to his ideological formation through a spokesman for the Counterforce, noting that "[b]etween two station-marks, yellow crayon through the years of grease and passage, 1966 and 1971, I tasted my first blood" (739).

<sup>3</sup> In *Cinema*, Badiou acknowledges the effect of the event of May 1968 on him and his philosophical work (105-28).

Wobblies, the loggers in Vineland and neighboring areas, and the general strike of 1934 in California (75-77), which serves as a backstory to the 1960s youth rebellion. Pynchon's portrayal of labor wars in turn-of-the-century Colorado in his 2006 novel, his first *full-scale* engagement with labor and capital conflict in his work, reinforces his solidarity with the exploited and oppressed in our contemporary time of globalization and terrorism and demonstrates his fidelity to the revolutionary ideals of the radical 1960s. Furthermore, in *Against the Day*, Pynchon's pro-labor stance is foregrounded and expands to interrogate the use of violence by anarchists to justify their utopian ends—the overthrowing of the oppressive state and the more equitable distribution of wealth to the laboring classes. Pynchon retools his political strategy of “turning” in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), evident in the formation of the Counterforce in the last part of that novel to turn against and oppose the elect/elite, described as “They/Them,” and as *forcing*. In this way, Pynchon performs acts of *forcing*, to use Badiou's term, in his historical novel on labor war, in which he forces a politico-ethical decision from his characters (notably detective Lew Basnight, anarchist Webb Traverse's sons and grandson, and Professor Heino Vanderjuice) to cut ties with oppressive corporate power structures. Webb and the anarchist preacher Moss Gatlin advocate for such forcing. This political forcing, above all, is intended to render the characters as pro-labor in terms of class and labor conflicts. In its extreme form, this Pynchonian forcing is a form of fidelity, aggressively pushing for fidelity to the labor struggle. This double operation of forcing and fidelity in *Against the Day* is the new aesthetics informing Pynchon's post-9/11 ethico-politics.

In his foreword to the 2003 centennial edition of George Orwell's *1984*, the first appearance of his writing since 9/11, Pynchon also appears to have succumbed to an evental transformation. In the essay, which contextualizes Orwell's leftist politics for *1984*'s post-9/11 readers, Pynchon unreservedly launches a damning

critique of the Bush administration, charging that government officials were being paid excessively, circa 2003, to “debase history, trivialize truth, and annihilate the past on a daily basis” (xxi). Moreover, Pynchon seems to identify himself with Orwell, who was afraid of losing his political anger, which was “precious” (Pynchon’s own word) to the British writer because he developed an attachment to it “as any capitalist to his capital” (xix). It is from this essay, the earliest clue of an eventual transformation in Pynchon’s subjectivity, that the seeds of *Against the Day* can be seen; the essay is a “genealogical argument” for *Against the Day* (Veggiean 200).

## **2. Anarchism and Class War in Colorado**

Badiouian forcing and fidelity form the aesthetic and ideological underpinnings in Pynchon’s presentation of the anarchist class wars in Chicago and Colorado’s mining towns, events that have the potential to create radicalized political subjectivity. Supplementing this aesthetics of forcing or forcing as fidelity is sympathy, the most frequently exploited affect in the novel.

Forcing, as “the fundamental law of the subject” in Badiou, is most obviously on display in Pynchon’s scathing critique of industrial capitalism, the major concern of which is making profits at all costs. Acts of forcing as a form of ideological persuasion and fidelity to the event of labor struggle are aggressively performed by the traveling anarchist preacher Moss Gatlin, who promotes violence against capitalist owners and peddles an “anarchist heaven” where workers are compensated with living wages and have the right to organize (91-92, 465), and by the miner and anarchist Webb Traverse, who uses dynamite as his working man’s weapon to sabotage the capitalist infrastructure. At the opposite end of the political forcing are the forced, who are placed in the center of the labor-capitalist conflict or capitalist intrigue and are compelled to wrestle with issues of ethics and class loyalty through

the power of Badiouian forcing. Through this politics of forcing and fidelity, Pynchon exposes us to anarchist acts and discourse while inviting us to examine the dark side of capitalism and to contemplate the ethics and politics of anarchist bombings in the war against capital.

In the chapter introducing Webb Traverse (81-96), the Telluride anarchist, Pynchon presents an argument about whether terrorist acts against capital are justifiable through a sermon delivered by the Reverend Moss Gatlin. Encoded in this inflammatory sermon is an act of forcing as ideological persuasion promoting the anarchist-labor cause. Holding his court at a faro establishment in Telluride, Gatlin makes the following speech that seeks to justify the use of dynamite in the case of the working man fighting for his share of “human freedom.” Gatlin preaches to his congregation:

For dynamite is both the miner’s curse, the outward and audible sign of his enslavement to mineral extraction, and the American working man’s equalizer, his agent of deliverance, if he would only dare to use it. ... Every time a stick goes off in the service of the owners, a blast convertible at the end of some chain of accountancy to dollar sums no miner ever saw, there will have to be a corresponding entry on the other side of God’s ledger, convertible to human freedom no owner is willing to grant. (87)

In this inflaming speech, Gatlin points to the dialectic or the paradox in dynamite to both enslave and liberate the miners. What is left unsaid between the ellipses is tantalizing and subversive. Also conveyed in the speech through the metaphor of “God’s ledger” is the idea that there must be some sort of justice for the miners, who cannot enjoy the fruits of their labor and “human freedom” because of capital’s law of profit.

Gatlin goes on to inflame his congregation, arguing that “there are no innocent bourgeoisie” (87). More importantly, he performs an act of political forcing, asking

his listeners to choose sides and telling them that “when you reach a point in your life where you understand who is fucking who [...] who’s taking it and who’s not, that’s when you are obliged to *choose* how much you’ll go along with” (87; emphasis added). Forcing a decision on the class conflict thus constitutes Pynchon’s post-9/11 radical anarchist politics in the novel, agreeing with Badiou that radical subjectivation is the effect of forcing. However, Gatlin’s radicalism calls for the destruction of those who “slaughter the innocent as easy as signing a check” and for the anarchist devotion that “must be negotiated with the day, from those absolute terms” (87). Gatlin’s view on class antagonism is one of the radical views the novel offers, echoing the view of the late nineteenth-century French anarchist Emile Henry, who held that “there are no innocent bourgeoisie” (*Anarchists* 118-19).

Other anarchists embracing this ideology in *Against the Day* include Yashmeen Halfcourt and Ewball Oust, who also advocates “more slaughterin[g] of the guilty” (922). This anarchist ideology, which is repeatedly alluded to and discussed in relation to the issue of the innocent who were killed in anarchist violence in other parts of the novel (181, 850-51, 942), resonates with post-9/11 readers by hinting at the complicity of the bourgeoisie in the capitalist system.<sup>4</sup> Its reiteration throughout the novel constitutes another form of aesthetic and ideological force, potentially forcing an honest reckoning with the system’s downsides.

Webb Traverse, who is among Gatlin’s Telluride audience, is no stranger to the politics of forcing as fidelity to the labor struggle. Webb is one of the able practitioners of forcing in the novel, introducing the pro-labor ideology to his children. One of Webb’s subversive acts, ideologically speaking, is his attempt to impart to his young children, “all silver-boom babies, up and running just in time for

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<sup>4</sup> See Benton’s discussion of Pynchon’s wrestling with the issue of the innocents who were killed by anarchist violence (“Daydreams” 202-5).

Repeal” (89), the essential truth about American capitalism. He does this by showing them “one by one” his union card, the “most precious thing” he owns (93). Furthermore, he asks them to read the slogan printed on the back of the card: “Labor produces all wealth. Wealth belongs to the producer thereof” (93). He then tells them what they just read is all “straight talk” and “no double talking you like the plutes do, ’cause with them what you always have to be listening for is the opposite of what they say” (93). Webb goes on to offer his children three examples—Freedom, Reform, and Compassion—used by the ruling elite to interpellate and control the masses. As Webb elaborates, when the plutocrats say

‘Freedom,’ then’s the time to watch your back in particular—start telling you how free you are, somethin’s up, next thing you know the gates have slammed shut and there’s Captain givin you them looks. ‘Reform’? More new snouts at the trough. ‘Compassion’ means the population of starving, homeless, and dead is about to take another jump. So forth. Why, you could write a whole foreign phrase book just on what Republicans have to say. (93)

This is the essential knowledge that Webb wants his children to “learn by heart” because they will not learn it at school, where the Gettysburg Address and the Declaration of Independence are taught in its place. However, Webb’s ideological forcing, practiced on his small children, does not achieve the desired result initially and evenly.

Encoded in Webb’s dismantling of Orwellian-style bourgeois doublespeak is a political allegory of the contemporary moment of the novel’s composition. That is, in the ideology of freedom, reform, and compassion used by the Republicans at the turn of the last century, we can read a similar ideological discourse that was best exploited by George W. Bush, who frequently adorned his political speeches with talk of freedom, reform, and compassion. Consider, for instance, the following speeches Bush made before and after his first presidency. During his 2000 election

campaign, Bush pushed for various Republican reform agendas, including social security and health care reforms, tax code reforms, and school reforms, themes reiterated in his Republican nomination acceptance speech (“GOP”). In his 2001 inaugural speech, Bush pledged to “speak for greater justice and compassion” (Bruni and Sanger). Shortly after the 9/11 terror attacks, he vowed to “defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world” (“9/11”). In light of Pynchon’s political anger at the Bush administration after 9/11, as shown in his 2003 essay, it is easy to draw an allegorical parallel between the Republicans then and now.

### 3. Private Eye and “Anarchy Never Sleeps”

As his fidelity to 1960s radicalism grew, intensified by his anger over the Bush administration, Pynchon’s political activism after 9/11 exhibited a peculiar interest in taking sides through Badiouian forcing in the class war between labor and capital. The forcing of Lew Basnight to side with labor and anarchist causes exemplifies this new political tactic. Moreover, in Basnight’s case, Pynchon emphasizes the importance of *time* in ideological transformation and political conversion. The forcing of Basnight takes time to unfold, a protracted unfolding that allows Pynchon to force the reader to embark on the journey of forcing with Basnight and to wrestle with the political use of violence and terrorism, both past and present.

Amateur private eyes have figured heavily in Pynchon’s oeuvre, investigating mystery or conspiracy that exposes them to social and historical crises.<sup>5</sup> Basnight’s appearance in *Against the Day* marks another new development in post-9/11 Pynchon because he is the first *professional* private investigator, prefiguring the later arrivals of Larry “Doc” Sportello in *Inherent Vice* (2009) and

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<sup>5</sup> These amateur private eyes include Herbert Stencil (*V.*), Oedipa Maas (*The Crying of Lot 49*), and Tyrone Slothrop (*Gravity’s Rainbow*).

Maxine Tarnow in *Bleeding Edge* (2013). Commenting on Pynchon's use of the detective genre in *Against the Day*, Brian McHale observes that Basnight, in his Chicago and Colorado phase, is modeled on the Pinkerton detective, a law enforcement figure that helps to bring order to bourgeois society and features prominently in late nineteenth-century dime novels (19).<sup>6</sup> The forcing of Basnight, who is investigating anarchism for the owners, to side with labor underscores not only Pynchon's pro-labor stance but also his subversion of the conventional Pinkerton detective genre.

Before the World's Colombian Exposition, Chicago was negatively associated with the Haymarket bombing of 1886. The anonymous bombing led to the arrest of eight anarchists, most of whom were German immigrants, and derailed labor's campaign for an eight-hour workday (Trachtenberg 90). In the early parts of *Against the Day*, Pynchon repeatedly alludes to the "Haymarket bomb" to highlight the city's history of anarchism (25, 51, 111, 176). For example, the head of one Chicago private detective agency complains, "Since the Haymarket bomb, we've had more work than we can handle" (25).

Basnight's journey of forcing places him at the center of the labor strife and anarchist revolts of the late nineteenth century. His protracted process of forcing exposes him to the sufferings of the working class and the oppression of the anarchists. Two major episodes, which I call the Badiouian events for their potential to politicize subjects, present Basnight's initial and eventual forcing. The Badiouian forcing begins during the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, when Basnight is investigating and deterring anarchist activities for White City Investigations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Allan Pinkerton, the founder of the formidable Pinkerton agency, wrote a series of detective stories, including *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives* (1877) and *Strikers, Communists, Tramps, and Detectives* (1878), drawing on his own experiences (Denning 119, 161).

<sup>7</sup> Basnight's detective agency is possibly named to allude to the White City, a nickname by which the Chicago fair is also known, because a plaster-like material called "staff" was used to paint the

Basnight, the narrator tells us, “wandered into” the detective business not because of his “political belief” but because of an unexplained “sin he was supposed once to have committed” (37). Basnight was recruited by his boss, Nate Privett, for his amazing powers of observation and memory. In assigning the greenhorn Basnight a new job to help him “get educated” on anarchism, Privett tells him, “Anarchy never sleeps, son. They’re meeting right down the El line” (49). Competing with Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency for the business of detecting American anarchism (51), Privett is obliquely alluding to Pinkerton’s slogan, “We Never Sleep,” the slogan that appears below the agency’s iconic corporate logo, the Unsleeping Eye. The private detective agency founded by Allan Pinkerton in Chicago in 1850 was the “largest provider of investigative and protective services” in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century and, more importantly, the “only instrument of police power to function” throughout the land (Slotkin 139). In his history of Pinkerton’s agency, Christopher Raczkowski remarks that its unsleeping eye aspires to be Michel Foucault’s panoptic eye, heralding the “emergence of the modern techniques of social surveillance” (632).

Basnight’s becoming “educated” on anarchism causes him to begin to turn against his union-busting private detective agency and the union-busting industry as a whole. Through Basnight’s education on anarchism, Pynchon compels the reader to also “get educated” on the topic but only to elicit sympathy for the downtrodden. On his way to investigate the anarchist meeting, Basnight stumbles into a spilling theater crowd presided over by the traveling anarchist preacher, Moss Gatlin. Instead of “a handful of malcontents,” the crowd is “numerous” and consists of

Unemployed men from out of town, exhausted, unbathed, flatulent,  
sullen [...]. Women in surprising numbers, bearing the marks of their

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façade of the structures at the Court of Honor white to conceal their steel frames, giving the “illusion of marble and classic monumentality” (Trachtenberg 215).

trades, scars from the blades of the meatpacking floors, squints from needlework carried past the borderlands of sleep in clockless bad light [...] women just looking to put their feet up after too many hours of lifting, fetching, walking the jobless avenues, bearing the insults of the day.... (49)

Furthermore, the crowd is singing Blake's "Jerusalem," which the narrator says is "a great anticapitalist anthem disguised as a choir piece" (49). Pynchon's detailed description of the crowd gives special attention to the working-class women, including immigrant women, who were flocking to the city to search for jobs during the late nineteenth century in pursuit of their American Dream.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the passage shows that Pynchon's sympathy lies squarely with the working men and women, a profound sympathy expressed in the phrase "bearing the insults of the day."

What is Basnight's reaction to the gathering at the theater described above? The narrator says that the unexpected encounter left in Basnight "a fine crack that in time was to prove unmendable...." (50). This encounter constitutes what Badiou calls "a supplemental event" (*Ethics* 41) that was unplanned *and* that potentially caused a turn and forcing in his political consciousness and subjectivity. The encounter leads Basnight to question the prevailing ideology represented by White City Investigations and its clients, which regarded labor unions and anarchists, both of which were often lumped together, as "evil," "misguided," "not quite American," and "not quite human" (50). Basnight also becomes sympathetic to the immigrant workers at the gathering, noting that they did not fit the stereotypical description of the "bearded, wild-eyed, bomb-rolling Red" and that they could become just as

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<sup>8</sup> George Levine notes that "the extreme of the realist vision" in Pynchon's prose shows his compassion for the dispossessed and the preterite, allowing "the ordinary, the base, the obscene to threaten us with significances" (67). Levine's observation applies to Pynchon's descriptions of the exploitation and suffering of the working class in *Against the Day*. Pynchon's descriptions also recall other naturalist and realist novels that feature the struggles of the working people, such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900).

“American” if they were well-fed and well-clothed (50).

Despite the potentially transformative effect of the theater encounter, Basnight remains with White City Investigations, hunting down anarchists in Chicago before his final politico-ethical turn and forcing. This delay in Basnight’s forcing signals the importance of temporality in Pynchon’s aesthetics of forcing. It takes time for Basnight to absorb the material conditions of the working class, the same conditions that gave rise to anarchism and other socialist uprisings. Working for White City Investigations, the narrator tells us in a flashback, prepares Basnight to turn toward the anarchists’ cause for social change. While working on cases involving anarchists and bombings, Basnight, with his “ultra-keen detective’s reasoning,” begins to see that the powers that be could benefit from any bombing set off by anybody, anarchist or otherwise. Basnight also begins to sympathize with the anarchists he had been chasing in the Stockyards and beyond, fantasizing about hitting “the next silk hat” and “the next mounted policeman beating on an unprotected striker” with a “surrogate bomb” or “a frozen pile of horse-droppings” (175-76). Most importantly, Basnight sees that the oppression of the workers exists not only in the Stockyards, where it was most obvious, but also in the Pullman plant, the steel mills, the McCormick Reaper, and in many other places. In fact, as he sees it, there exists “this same structure of industrial Hells wrapped in public silence everywhere” (176). This critical knowledge, which highlights the essential truth of industrial capitalism, paves the way for Basnight’s politico-ethical turn toward the labor cause in Colorado.

#### **4. Taking Sides**

The second event that eventually forces Basnight to the side of labor is the escalating war between the miners and the owners in the San Juan Mountains. When investigating the Kieselguhr Kid case in Denver, Basnight begins to wrestle with the

issue of “how to take sides” (175). The contest over Basnight’s soul takes place when Colorado national guards and strikebreaking vigilantes acting like “Ku Klux Klan night-riders” are called out to suppress the miners’ struggle (178). This political event exerts additional external force on Basnight to choose sides. The terrain’s altitude enables Basnight to gain clarity on the exploitation of the miners: the owners always have an unlimited supply of labor eagerly waiting to be hired, and they ruthlessly exploit the workers until they drop dead in the mines, a scene that reproduces the exploitation in the Stockyards. Pynchon’s description of the owners as “Plutonic powers” and the miners as “gnomes” and “dwarves” shows once again that Basnight’s and his own sympathies lie with the exploited workers.

However, Basnight’s clarity and sympathy are undermined by the intrigues of the labor war with union men and scabs “changing sides [and] changing back again,” thus plunging “his soul” into aggravated agony (176). Yet, Basnight’s irresolution compels him to remain in the mining country to determine “which side he was on” (179) even though the class war was threatening to explode into “another little Haymarket” (176), with both the union and the Mine Owners Association fully armed. Pynchon uses Basnight’s irresolution to prolong Basnight’s journey of forcing and postpones performing *his* own act of forcing, one of the most significant ones in that it helps establish the novel’s prevailing sympathy for anarchistic labor struggles.

Basnight’s turn to the labor cause comes to pass when he learns that he had been used by corporate power while investigating the Kid case. When Basnight complains to Privett that the case is “a bitch, and growing more difficult every day” and that “The Unsleppin Eye with all its corporate resources” can take back the case, Privett indiscreetly discloses that this is “not how it works” and that “the clients are still payin *in* [...] they’re happy” (180). Privett’s indiscretion thus allows Basnight to

gain new critical knowledge about his situation: the owners had used anarchism to advance their own class interests, the same method used by Chicago's powers. Furthermore, Basnight's new insight has a strong allegorical significance for the post-9/11 world, in which governments have legitimated or justified their actions in the name of fighting "terrorism." Basnight's later epiphany that "he could have been working for the right side years before this" (181) and his subsequent resignation from the union-busting and anarchist-hunting White City Investigations clearly showcase both Basnight's ethico-political turn and Pynchon's unequivocal support for labor.

As the first licensed private eye in Pynchon's oeuvre, Basnight lives "in an era where 'detective' was universally understood code for anti-Union thug" (689). Basnight's taking labor's side thus significantly marks Pynchon's critique of Pinkerton's agency and other private detective agencies that had helped mine owners police organized labor as well as his subversion of the Pinkerton detective stories popularized by Allan Pinkerton himself. Additionally, Basnight's turn toward the labor cause renders him an eventual subject. That is, the labor wars in Colorado are *the* political event that pushes him, already sympathetic to the workers, to the right side of the class conflict from the working-class standpoint.

With Basnight's forcing, Pynchon delivers his most developed aesthetics of forcing in *Against the Day*. In the journey of forcing, which takes time to come to completion, the subject designated for political transformation is exposed to the working conditions of the working class and develops critical knowledge about capitalism and sympathy for the exploited and oppressed in that system. In the forcing of such critical knowledge, sympathy is shown to be the most important affect that helps to open the subject's mind to the other world, where the "other half" (to use Jacob Riis's famous phrase) of society lives. In playing up his aesthetics of

forcing as a new form of his post-9/11 politics, Pynchon can be said to be acting faithfully to his 1960s radicalism, a fidelity that is much needed in times of crisis produced by globalized capitalism.

### **5. The (Im)possibility of Forcing vs. Fidelity**

Pynchon also explores the (im)possibility of ethico-political forcing in Webb's children through Webb's brutal murder, which is ordered by Scarsdale Vibe. Webb's anarchist "theory of education" (94) has little impact on how his children view the capitalist system before his murder, except for the sympathetic Reef, who secretly wants to be Webb's apprentice. However, Webb's murder, a political familial event, creates a situation in which his children may or may not be forced to support his anarchist-labor cause.

As with Basnight's forcing, the forcing of Kit Traverse takes time to develop. When Kit accepts a Vibe scholarship to study at Yale, the angry Webb intervenes, forcing his youngest son to choose between him and the scholarship. Webb, with his class antagonism, sees "Vibe's Lieutenants of Industry Scholarship Program" as the tycoon's cunning way of buying off his son. He puts the conflict bluntly: "You're either my boy or theirs [the owners], can't be both" (105). Webb's forcing fails to produce the intended result of persuading Kit to reject the class enemy's offer. Nevertheless, Webb's death at the hands of Vibe's hired guns eventually forces Kit to clearly see the owner's cunning plan for him.

Through Kit's forcing, Pynchon demonstrates capital's cunning in controlling and managing the working class. Kit's turning against Vibe begins at Yale, when he begins questioning his place there and seeing that "there was no role for his destiny as a Vectorist within any set of Vibe goals" (319). The vectorist's turn intensifies when he learns that Vibe has been spying on him, violating Lake's letter informing him of their father's death (321), and when his Yale Professor Heino Vanderjuice

reveals to him Vibe's evil plan sabotaging Nikola Tesla's free electricity project (322-23). Vanderjuice, who turns against Vibe, plays a crucial role in Kit's turning, advising him that he owes Vibe nothing and that the owners' policy is to corrupt and to harm when the former fails (323).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a disembodied voice, possibly Pynchon's, describes Vibe's plan to buy off Webb's sons as "*corrupting youth*" (335; emphasis original). The voice, which also participates in Kit's forcing, continues, "It wasn't enough to pay to have an enemy murdered, but he must corrupt the victim's children as well" (335). Later, when Vibe suspects that Kit knew his involvement in Webb's murder, the benefactor terminates his sponsorship of Kit's study at Göttingen, Germany, to pursue an advanced vectorist education—an education advised by Vanderjuice as Kit's way out of Vibe's evil influence and control. Vibe's financial termination ironically forces Kit to see clearly that Webb had been right all along in seeing through the owners' tricks, recalling his father's warning that, with them, "if it doesn't work with gold, the next step will be lead" (618; cf. 105). The forcing of Kit to Webb's side thus exposes capital's method of buying off labor activists and the working class and eliminating stubborn opposition when that method fails.

Although Badiouian forcing constitutes Pynchon's major political activism in *Against the Day*, such forcing fails on Lake Traverse. Lake, whom Webb calls "Child of the storm" (190, 267, 487), has a stormy relationship with her father. She grows up hating him for his union activities and his "Anarchist shithouse" (478). Even after his bloody murder, ordered by the Vibe Corporation, Lake continues to hold a grudge against her father, saying that Webb "had his almighty damn union,

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<sup>9</sup> Vibe strikes a secret deal with Vanderjuice during the Chicago fair to sabotage Tesla's experimental free electricity project on a global scale, which poses a threat to the capitalist system of profit. Vanderjuice regrets his involvement in Vibe's scheme ten years later, acknowledging the criminality of the deal and signaling his turn against the tycoon (322).

that's what he loved. If he loved anything" (192). In her rebellious spirit, Lake knowingly marries one of Webb's killers, Deuce Kindred, antagonizing her mother Mayva. In marrying Deuce, Lake would act as if she killed her father (265), Mayva furiously tells her daughter, forcing Lake to choose between honoring Webb's memory and marrying Deuce. Unlike Kit's forcing, Lake's forcing fails to take effect. Lake's marriage to Deuce alienates her from her family, incensing both her mother Mayva and her brother Frank. Furthermore, although Lake denies Deuce's wish to have a child with her to secretly atone for killing Webb (486), she fails to take any action against Deuce to avenge Webb's killing, as Frank hoped (641), deflating and frustrating the reader's expectation of her being a "Child of the storm." Lake remains married to Deuce when he later becomes a Los Angeles serial killer, dubbed the "Syncopated Strangler," psychologically repeating Webb's murder (1052, 476). Lake's case is an enigma through which Pynchon explores the political and psychological failure of a person's eventual radicalization.

However, forcing, through which a new radical subjectivity may emerge, is not enough to sustain radicalization. For Pynchon, the positive consequence of political or ideological forcing can be further sustained by fidelity to the event of pro-labor struggle. Frank Traverse's forcing, supplemented by his fidelity to the anarchist-labor cause, exemplifies this combined use of forcing and fidelity in maintaining a long-term ethico-political commitment to the cause of the dispossessed and the oppressed. Jesse Traverse's radicalization also exemplifies this combined use of forcing and fidelity.

Webb's second-oldest son, Frank, aspires to be a mining engineer before Webb's brutal killing, seeking to climb the economic ladder within the system. After Webb's murder, Frank rejects Vibe's "charity" to buy him off with good job offers at the mines (274). Frank's forcing begins when his investigation of Webb's case takes

him to mining towns in the Colorado mountains, making him witness firsthand the antagonism between the owners and the miners' union and the rounding up of unemployed miners as vagrants (282). As in Basnight's case, Frank's forcing comes about after his further exposure to the labor-capital conflicts, conditions that provoke sympathy for the working class. The battlegrounds between labor and capital in Telluride and Cripple Creek (282, 466) constantly haunt Frank, as does Webb's unavenged ghost (316). Pynchon's turning of Frank to Webb's side reaches a climax when Frank, returning from the Mexican Revolution, joins the labor struggle in Ludlow, displaying his fidelity to the labor cause. This labor struggle ends in the massacre of the strikers when state violence and state terrorism are used against them in the form of "Death Specials" (1009), armored motorcars with two Colt machine guns on them.<sup>10</sup>

This labor strike turned terror event helps to produce a new political subjectivity in Jesse Traverse, the young son of Reef and Stray Briggs, turning him into a budding anarchist and thus continuing the anarchist line in the Traverse family. The young anarchist subsequently writes a school assignment on "What It Means To Be An American." Applying the lesson he learned from the killings of the striking coal miners and their families, Jesse writes, "*It means do what they tell you and take what they give you and don't go on strike or their soldiers will shoot you down*" (1076; emphasis original). This "topic sentence," in Pynchon's hands, gets "a big A+" from a sympathetic teacher (1076). Jesse's Ludlow experience provides an

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<sup>10</sup> In his astute reading of *Against the Day*, J. Paul Narkunas examines the intersection of the "Eastern Question" in Europe and the labor troubles in the American West and draws our attention to Pynchon's juxtaposition of the 1914 Ludlow Massacre in Colorado and the 1913-14 Balkan Wars (258). This juxtaposition points to the significance of the labor wars in the American West in Pynchon's world systems novel. Additionally, it allows us to see that as a result of European immigration to the United States, the Ludlow strikers include "Greeks and Bulgarians, Serbs and Croats, Montenegrins and Italians" who fought each other over "snarled-up politics" in Europe and who, at their mining jobs in Colorado, have learned to drop their "ancient hatreds" and become "brothers-in-arms," fighting their oppressors, the mining companies (1002).

instance of Badiouian evental transformation or radicalization. Moreover, Jesse provides a genealogical connection between *Against the Day* and *Vineland*, in which he becomes the patriarch of the Traverse-Becker family (Duyfhuizen par. 6; *Vineland* 369). That is, as an adult, Jesse demonstrates his fidelity to the labor movement by becoming an active labor organizer with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), organizing loggers in Northern California (*Vineland* 75-6).

## 6. A Consensus?

In representing Webb's anger over social injustice and class oppression and his seeking relief in dynamite explosions, Pynchon empathizes with Webb's anger. Later, when Webb's spirit is being called at a séance held at a Swiss sanatorium, Webb confesses to his sons, Kit and Reef, "I sold my anger too cheap, didn't understand how *precious* it was" (672; emphasis added). He also admits that he was "yelling at the wrong people" (his wife and children) rather than directing his anger at the "damned owners." Pynchon's description of Webb's precious anger recalls his description of Orwell's political anger as precious in his 2003 essay on *1984*. As I have argued, Pynchon was incensed at the Bush administration for its manipulation and manufacture of history to pursue its political and economic interests in the Middle East in the name of the victims of 9/11. Pynchon thus harnessed his own precious political anger to produce an anarchist version of the people's history in *Against the Day* and to pay tribute to those who died in the turn-of-the-century labor wars.

Pynchon's presentation of radical anarchist politics and violence in *Against the Day* has provoked debates among critics. Hume argues that, abandoning postmodern ambiguity, Pynchon aggressively sought to articulate, and thus foreground, opposition politics against capitalism "out of despair over lack of effective peaceful alternatives" (163-4). His fictive support of the politics of

violence, writes Hume, signals that Pynchon's "changed sense" was possibly caused by "intensified personal convictions or increased desperation over the direction America is taking" (164). Benton responds to Hume's reading with a dose of caution, highlighting Pynchon's acute awareness of the human cost of political violence, particularly for the innocent, while acknowledging the degree to which Pynchon entertained a "romanticization of [anarchist] terrorism" to attack capitalist infrastructure, as presented in the novel ("Daydreams" 203). In my view, Pynchon's inclusion of diverse anarchist voices in the novel allows us to see the contradictory aspects of anarchism: "a potentially utopic aspiration and a horrific plunge into chaos, annihilation, and destruction" (Benton, "This Network" 541). Pynchon's presentation of anarchism enables us to see its utopian desire, expressed in the projects of free electricity and free water for all (33, 393) and in its historical promise to build a "commonwealth of the oppressed" (942). However, the anarchist politics of political assassinations of political and capitalist figures, historical or fictive, such as President William McKinley, industrialist Henry Clay Frick, and Scarsdale Vibe, exposes the limits of such an approach (372, 737, 742). In the case of the Italian anarchist painter Andrea Tancredi, we see that his violent hatred of the American industrialist and financier "with designs against Venetian art" ends violently, and nothing changes (738-43). Even Foley Walker's success in gunning down Vibe, the most surprising turn in the novel, fails to change the capitalist system, the source of oppression encouraging the spread of anarchism, other than to render a poetic justice to a ruthless industrialist and financier.

I believe that Pynchon, like some of his readers, was caught in a bind. Being deeply aware of the "inherent vice" of capitalism and sympathetic to the preterite in this system, then and now, Pynchon appreciated some theoretical versions of the anarchist critique of capitalism and the state. However, he had no solution to the

human sufferings that occurred when violent anarchist “propaganda by the deed” hurt the ones it was meant to help. Thus, Pynchon unrelentingly pursued anarchist politics *in* the novel and the turning of some of his characters against the system. This politics of turning, which previously emerged in *Gravity’s Rainbow* in the formation of the Counterforce, is reconfigured, in some cases, as Badiouian forcing and fidelity in *Against the Day*, underscoring Pynchon’s continued politico-ethical commitment to social justice.

### **Conclusion**

In placing Lew Basnight in such a protracted struggle with anarchism and injecting him into the labor-capital conflict and by supplying many other anarchist labor voices, Pynchon invites us to contemplate the historical and material conditions that gave rise to these movements. Anarchism may decline, as Vibe predicts, but it will not completely fade into history when oppressive socio-economic conditions exist to feed it, as seen in the contemporary anarchist anti-globalization movement. This has been the case with anarchism and contemporary terrorism. To root out terrorism, we must look at the sources of oppression and address its grievances rather than addressing only its effects with violence.

By considering the idea of taking sides in his extensive and sympathetic representation of the Colorado labor wars, Pynchon moves toward a new critical political stance in his first post-9/11 fiction. This new turn, or what Badiou calls the “obligation to choose” (“Thinking the Event” 21), may be even more subversive than the radical anarchist portrayals and anti-capitalist critiques Pynchon presents in the novel. Reading *Against the Day* in the context of Pynchon’s post-9/11 political anger at the Bush administration’s willful manufacture of history, the writing of the novel may arguably embody Pynchon’s own political and aesthetic struggle against and with the day. By turning to the turn-of-the-century labor wars in the American

West, Pynchon revives a forgotten period of history when, as Vibe remarks before his surprise assassination, working men and women, including immigrants, fought over “an eight-hour day” and “a few coins more” (1001). This history, which culminated in the Ludlow Massacre of 1914 in incorporated America shortly after the outbreak of the Great War in Europe, is an essential component of Pynchon’s world systems fiction because both events foreground the class nature of war in the United States and Europe, where working-class soldiers were fighting not for themselves but for the imperial powers. In writing *Against the Day*, Pynchon may have productively channeled his political anger at the Bush administration. The sublimation of his political anger into an explicitly politico-ethical text renders Pynchon a radically politicized subject marked by the effects of the most significant historical event at the dawn of the twenty-first century. *Against the Day* is thus Pynchon’s timely intervention into the realms of literature, culture, politics, and ethics on “absolute terms.” The eventual Pynchon that we glimpsed in his 2003 essay fully emerges in *Against the Day*, practicing the politics of forcing and fidelity to support the labor cause.

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