Slavic, Underrepresented, and "Minor:" Queer Interventions into Czech Literary Marginality

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Abstract: This article interrogates the intersecting marginalities of Czech literature and queer writing, reframing their position within the contested category of "minor literatures." Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of *littérature mineure* from *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), it argues that "minor" should not be understood as merely peripheral or subordinate but as a site of aesthetic, political, and affective subversion. Revisiting the genealogy of the term—its translation history, its geopolitical implications, and its critical reception—the article highlights how "minor" is charged with questions of power, dependency, and epistemic difference. This framework is reinterpreted through a queer theoretical lens, emphasizing sexuality, embodiment, and affect, dimensions largely absent from Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Kafka. The analysis positions Kafka not only as a linguistic or ethnocultural outsider but as a figure whose erotic ambivalence, bodily anxiety, and aesthetics of shame destabilize heteronormative, bureaucratic, and nationalist orders.

By situating Czech queer and queer-adjacent writers, such as Richard Weiner, Jiří Mordechai Langer, Otokar Březina, and Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, within this theoretical constellation, the article demonstrates that Czech "minor literature" serves as a space of deterritorialization that is linguistic, sexual, and spiritual. These authors enact queer opacity, coded homoeroticism, mystical reconfigurations of identity, and decadent hypervisibility, thereby refusing assimilation into dominant aesthetic, sexual, and national paradigms. The article concludes that "minor" should be read not as a deficit but as a generative modality that resists universalization, dramatizes estrangement, and enables the formation of alternative collectivities. In doing so, it reclaims the queer potential of minor literature as a textual commons for the displaced, the migrant, and the queer, linking early twentieth-century Czech modernism to contemporary theories of nomadic subjectivity, queer temporality, and non-sovereign literary space.

Czech literature is frequently situated under the problematic label of "minor literature," a term subsumed within the spatial and ideological coordinates of "East Central Europe."[1] When we introduce the already marginal category of "queer literature" into this framework, we amplify the outsider status of both the subject and the scholarship devoted to it. Yet this double marginality—Slavic and queer—should

[1] Hereafter I jettison the quotation marks around minor literature.

be understood not as a deficit, but as a generative site of resistance and resignification. This becomes evident when we revisit the concept of *littérature mineure* as developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their seminal 1975 text *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*. While their theory of minor literature has long been invoked in studies of peripheral literatures, it rarely receives a sustained queer critique. This oversight is particularly acute in the case of Franz Kafka (1883–1924) himself, whose life and work embody complex negotiations of sexuality, language, and power. In what follows, I use minor literature in the Deleuzian sense, and "minoritarian literature" for its queer-theoretical expansion.

Deleuze and Guattari's theorization is based on the French translation of Kafka's diaries by Marthe Robert (1954), which itself was based on the Max Brod edition of 1951. Crucially, Robert renders Kafka's term "small literatures" as *littérature mineure*, a translation that shifts the semantic field from "small" (*petite*) to "minor" (*mineure*)—a word charged with implications of inferiority and subordination (from the Latin *minor*). This slippage reveals how translation mediates both geopolitical and sexual anxieties: minor indicates not merely a measure of size or visibility, but of structural dependence and epistemic otherness.

This queer potential of minor literature—as a site of destabilization, not simply marginalization—is overlooked in Deleuze and Guattari's canonical reading. While they emphasize the revolutionary linguistic potential of the minor writer—an immigrant producing deterritorialized language from within the dominant tongue—they largely bracket off sexuality as an explicit analytical category. Their Kafka is an ethnolinguistic subject, not a queer one. Yet Kafka's own writings brim with erotic ambiguity, bodily anxiety, and the uncanny performativity of desire. His letters, diaries, and fiction (especially *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and *In the Penal Colony*) stage forms of gendered and sexual displacement that are anything but incidental. They can be read as articulating what we might call a proto-queer critique of bureaucratic, heteronormative, and nationalistic orders.

Queerness and the Politics of "Minor Literatures"

To situate Czech literature within this framework is not to diminish its cultural specificity, but to recognize how its formal and thematic idiosyncrasies resist hegemonic aesthetic models. When reread through a queer lens, Deleuze and Guattari's framework offers a way to understand minor not as lesser, but as a position of radical subversion. Their language—invoking collectives that queer gender, class, and ethnicity—gestures towards queerness, yet stops short of engaging with sexuality as a structural force in literature. Kafka's work, however, can be read as a corpus that stages precisely this entanglement of minoritarian identity and queer embodiment.

Kafka's "liveliness"—a term he uses in his 25 December 1911 diary entry to describe the "literature of a small nation"—is not simply an aesthetic judgment. It signals affective surplus, a queer excess that overflows national or linguistic borders (Lowell 2010, 352 and 368). Yet critics, such as Pascale Casanova, misread this vitality. In *The World Republic of*

Letters (1999), she appropriates Kafka to argue that peripheral literatures acquire value only concerning the "world literary space"—a gesture that reinscribes the center-margin binary characteristic of world-literary hierarchies. Galin Tihanov rightly challenges this stance, suggesting that so-called small literatures gained significance not through cosmopolitan validation but through the emergence of parallel public spheres and synchronous literary modernisms (Tihanov 2014, 173).

Here, queer theory can sharpen our reading. The notion of multiple publics—overlapping, transient, and often underground—resonates strongly with queer modes of cultural production and circulation. Czech queer literature, even when not thematically queer, often enacts a formal queerness: it interrupts, reconfigures, or refuses the dominant codes of national identity, linguistic purity, and sexual normativity. In this sense, the queerness of Czech minor literature may reside not only in its characters or plots but in its refusal to "scale up" to the dominant metrics of literary value.

For Kafka, the Yiddish writers—whom he sympathetically engaged with but never counted himself among—did not constitute an independent German-language literature capable of rivalling the canonical authority of what was considered "great German literature" (Lowell 2010, 367). As Stanley Corngold has argued, Kafka does not write in a distinct "Prague German dialect," countering the claim made by Deleuze and Guattari that Kafka's language was a form of linguistic deterritorialization (Corngold 1994, 89–101). Rather than being a provincial or minor expression within a dominant linguistic system, Kafka's German is deeply literary, precise, and self-consciously constructed—thus complicating his status within the Deleuzian model of minor literature.

However, Deleuze and Guattari's framework remains productive when applied beyond its linguistic dimension, particularly in contexts of migrant and queer literatures, where deterritorialization extends to the body, desire, and psychic life. In this theoretical landscape, the act of writing in a dominant language becomes a violent and incomplete process of cultural assimilation. For many exilic and migrant authors, language acquisition is experienced as a form of trauma—a condition of exile that creates an unending tension between articulation and alienation. The major language is no longer simply a tool of communication, but a domain of struggle, shame, and persistent outsiderhood. In this light, Kafka's writing may be understood not as rooted in national identity or linguistic community, but as a constant negotiation with linguistic estrangement—language as both a mask and a site of psychic injury (Tuckerová 2017, 433–53).

This notion resonates powerfully with queer readings of Kafka, particularly through Britta Kallin's assertion that "the pain and injury of the flesh represent the deeper psychological wound" in Kafka's work—a wound that may be read as a figure for shame, disidentification, and psychic displacement (Kallin 2020, 56–74). Kafka's ambiguous sexual identity, his conflicted masculinity, and his well-documented neuroses around embodiment and authority give his texts a queer valence. The famous metamorphosis into an insect, for instance, can be read as an allegory of bodily dysphoria, of queer abjection, or of the radical otherness of the queer subject in a normative familial and social

world. Saul Friedländer's characterization of Kafka as "the poet of shame and guilt" is thus not merely psychoanalytic but profoundly political: shame is queerness rendered affective and dislocated, neither hidden nor disclosed, but suspended in the grotesque visibility of Kafka's literary imagination (Friedländer 2013, *passim*).

This queer optic reframes Deleuze and Guattari's theory of minor literature. Rather than serving a revolutionary political function in a Marxist or anticolonial sense, Kafka's reterritorialized writing emerges as a queer practice of negation and opacity. It resists codification, refuses normative forms of desire, and exposes the foundational instability of identity itself. The minor becomes not merely a sociopolitical category, but a modality of existence, a structural queerness that inhabits Kafka's syntax, characters, and narrative structures.

Contemporary minoritarian literature—especially that produced by queer migrants, stateless individuals, disabled authors, and racialized subjects—extends this deterritorialized aesthetic into the 21st century. These narratives do not aim to develop alternative national canons or enclosed traditions, but instead perform hybridity, fragmentation, and the refusal to belong. The figure of the nomad in these texts is no longer metaphorical, but existential: a subject who lives within the borderlands of multiple cultural, sexual, and linguistic regimes.

Thus, minor literature today operates as a utopian project in which exilic, queer, and bastardized texts imagine collectives outside the capitalist-nationalist paradigm. This literature forms a radically inclusive archive of the marginal, a textual commons inhabited by cosmopolitan migrants, immigrants, trans and nonbinary persons, precarious gig workers, and others who exist at the periphery of late capitalism's globalized circuits. These figures are not simply victims or outsiders, but agents of literary and conceptual reimagination. Their authors, like Kafka before them, use literary form to expose the violence of normativity and to propose new, bastardized grammars of subjectivity.

In this context, the value of Kafka's work lies not in its potential to be nationalized, canonized, or universalized, but precisely in its unresolved estrangement—its queerness in language, form, and identity. It anticipates and legitimizes contemporary literary experiments that articulate a subjectivity irreducible to citizenship, family, gender, or language. Rather than offering redemption, Kafka and the literatures that follow him dramatize the impossibility of ever arriving 'home,' and in so doing, turn exile, shame, and disidentification into sites of aesthetic and political potential.

The four case studies that follow—Weiner, Langer, Březina, and Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic—are essential for illustrating how Kafka's queerness, deterritorialization, and alienation are not isolated phenomena, but part of a broader spectrum of early-twentieth-century Central European literary strategies that resist assimilation into majoritarian language, sexual normativity, and national identity. Each case study highlights a different configuration of deterritorialized identity, showing how these authors—not unlike Kafka—work at the threshold of languages, sexualities, religions, and political

imaginaries. These case studies help trace how such postmodern concepts as hybridity, borderlessness, and nomadic subjectivity were prefigured in modernist Czech literature.

Richard Weiner: Migrant Homelessness and a Transnational Queer Space

Richard Weiner (1884–1937) represents the homeless migrant, a queer outsider whose exile is both literal and poetic. His Cubist aesthetics, coded metaphors, and estrangement from the Czech petty-bourgeois literary establishment make him a paradigmatic figure of what Deleuze and Guattari would call a minor literature: one in which the tension between private trauma and collective expression becomes visible through fragmented form. Weiner's work is thus a literary enactment of deterritorialization through linguistic and sexual opacity. His oeuvre articulates migrant homelessness, linguistic exile, and disidentification with national literary norms in a distinctly queer register, positioning Weiner within Czech modernism as a paradigmatic figure of minoritarian estrangement. As Jindřich Chalupecký notes, Weiner was largely ignored or disowned by Czech literary culture, which in the early 20th century gravitated towards "petty bourgeois" values. In this context, Weiner becomes a literary renegade—not simply because of his physical migration to Paris, but because of his deep aesthetic and affective alienation from the ideological heart of Czech literary nationalism (Chalupecký 1947, 85).

Weiner's displacement from Czech space is not only geographic but also existential. His rejection of normative family structures, his flirtation with silence and erasure, and his embedding of homoerotic and Jewish identity within densely metaphorical prose all signal a queer refusal of cultural legibility. Like Kafka, Weiner employs strategies of concealment, crafting a poetics that obscures while simultaneously signaling its occlusion. Indeed, the female pseudonym "Filína" under which he published journalism further underscores his investment in gender fluidity and identity dissimulation—a subversive act in a culture that demanded clear demarcations between public and private, male and female identities (Langerová 2000, 20).

His long-term relationships with the French early 20th-century group known as the Simplistes—the poets René Daumal, Roger Vailland, and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte—offer a further glimpse into a transnational queer network in which homoerotic friendship, poetic experimentation, and anti-bourgeois rebellion were deeply intertwined. The poetic collection *Mnoho nocí* (*Many Nights*, 1927) captures this resonance, offering a Cubist textual surface that resists stable interpretation (Sacher 1986, 156–61). Just as Cubism fractures visual perspective, Weiner's prose disrupts temporal and narrative continuity, offering a queered temporal architecture that refracts and multiplies experience. He thereby not only avoids closure but destabilizes the very idea of a coherent subject—especially one aligned with nationalism, Catholic morality, or heteronormative family structures.

Rather than addressing Jewishness or homosexuality overtly, Weiner's texts render these themes spectral, haunting the surface of the prose without appearing directly. This rhetorical strategy aligns with what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the "epistemology of the closet": an articulation of queerness through codes, silences, and structural

instabilities rather than declarative identity. Reinhard Ibler's view of Weiner as a "predecessor of postmodernism" is thus wholly apt, for Weiner anticipates the postmodern valorization of fragmentation, irony, and textual self-reflexivity, not merely as aesthetic choices but as survival strategies for a queer migrant subject in cultural exile (Ibler 1995, 266). Martin C. Putna reads Weiner as one who uses symbolism, obscure or allusive imagery, spiritual or mystical language, and possibly aristocratic stylization to encode homo- or homo-affective themes (2011, 98–103).

Weiner's central queer text, "Uhranuté město" (The Haunted Town), from the collection *Šklep* (*The Grimace*; 1919) exemplifies this orientation. Here, two outsiders—a tourist from the French town of Rodez and a student returning from abroad—penetrate the self-enclosed identity of a provincial Czech town. Their very presence introduces a disruptive queer temporality, fracturing the town's circular, repetitive time. Weiner's concept of "rectifying the circle" (narovnání kruhu) becomes a metaphor for queer liberation from heteronormative stasis: not a revolution, but a subtle realignment that allows for departure, difference, and movement beyond the 'own,' i.e., the familiar, the familial, the national.

In the end, these strangers do not assimilate; rather, they form a silent, affective alliance, built not on speech but on gesture and gaze. Their union, neither romantic nor familial, prefigures a queer collectivity that refuses assimilation yet offers solidarity in exile. The conclusion of the story gestures towards a new home, not grounded in territory but in shared estrangement, a fundamentally queer mode of world-building that transcends the state and its borders.

Thus, Weiner does not simply represent a marginal voice in Czech literature. He stands as a queer transnational subject, articulating a poetics of resistance to rootedness, family, nation, and normative desire. His estrangement from Czech space and language becomes a condition of possibility for entering a broader field of world literature, one in which silence, artifice, and ambiguity become tools for navigating the exclusions of modernity. In this way, Weiner is not only a figure of minor literature but also a prophet of queer world-making, speaking from the haunted interstices of nationalism, modernism, and sexuality.

Jiří Mordechai Langer: Queer Mysticism and Homoerotic Subversion in Czech Modernism

Jiří Mordechai Langer (1894–1943) brings into focus the intersection of queerness and Jewish mysticism. His work rewrites homoerotic experience in the language of Hasidic spirituality, thereby queering both religious tradition and national identity. Unlike Weiner's, Langer's deterritorialization is spiritual and cultural rather than aesthetic. He radically reconfigures Judaism as a space of queer affection, making his writing a precursor to modern queer theology. His work illustrates how minor literatures generate alternative epistemologies and resist hegemonic national or religious norms, not by opposing them, but by infiltrating them with hybrid subjectivities. As a queer Jewish author and mystic writing in interwar Prague, he offers a profoundly subversive voice within Czech modernism. His life and work resist assimilation into normative national,

religious, and sexual categories, marking him as a pioneering figure of queer Jewish subjectivity in European literature. A close associate of Kafka, Langer was born into an assimilated Prague Jewish family and educated in a secular bourgeois milieu. At age nineteen, he radically broke with this environment, undertaking a spiritual migration eastward into the Hasidic community of Belz (Yiddish: בעלזא) in Eastern Galicia north of Lviv. This movement was not only a return to religious roots but also a form of queer escape from Prague's heteronormative constraints—a rejection of modernity in favor of mysticism, masculinity, and homosocial intimacy.

Langer's embodied mysticism reframed Hasidism as a homoerotic utopia. In *Die Erotik der Kabbala* (*The Eroticism of the Kabbalah,* 1923),[2] he explicitly interprets the tactile, affective relationships between young male Talmudic scholars not merely as a spiritual brotherhood but as a sacred homoerotic communion. Love between men is not simply tolerated within Langer's vision of Judaism, but is sanctified (Halper 2011, 189–231). He constructs a model of Jewish masculinity rooted in desire, intimacy, and erotic gesture, which contrasts starkly with both liberal bourgeois rationalism and traditional Jewish legalism. Langer thus queers both religion and modernity, forging an identity grounded in sexual mysticism, sacred aesthetics, and homosocial affect. Putna highlights Langer's position at the crossroads of Jewish cultural revival and the modern European homosexual imaginary: he is both inside Jewish religious tradition and outside normative national/sexual narratives. Putna reads this double marginality as enabling Langer to generate hybrid identities, diasporic, queer, and religious (2011, 137–9). Mark Cornwall (2013) relies on the work of Hans Blüher[3] to show intellectual transfers across borders: German-language theories about male erotic bonds were read and debated in the multilingual space of the Bohemian lands (Czech, German, Jewish publics). That is why Blüher matters for a Czech history of homosexuality, even though he was a German-language author, for his ideas contributed to debates and practices in the region. On the one hand, his writings were cited by some early-20th-century sexual reformers and youth-movement protagonists; on the other hand, his rhetoric was taken up selectively (and sometimes in a distorting manner) by different political currents ranging from homosexual emancipation campaigns to reactionary nationalist thinkers (2013, 178–88).

As Shaun Jacob Halper has shown, Langer is unique in that he was the first modern Jewish author to articulate a homosexual identity using the internal categories of Judaism. He was not simply a Jewish homosexual, but a homosexual Jew: his queer subjectivity was inseparable from his spiritual Jewishness. His innovation lies in

[2] Jiří Mordechai Langer employed different languages according to genre: he wrote scholarly studies primarily in German, composed poetry in Hebrew, and published most of his prose and essayistic writings in Czech. For this reason, *Die Erotik der Kabbala* was written and published in German.

[3] In his intellectual positioning, Jiří Mordechai Langer distanced himself from Magnus Hirschfeld's sexological model, which conceptualized homosexuality within a framework of gender inversion and intermediate sexual types. Langer instead showed greater affinity with the ideas of Hans Blüher (1888–1955), whose writings—particularly *Wandervogel. Geschichte einer Jugendbewegung* (2 vols., 1912–1913)—celebrated male homosocial bonding and framed homoeroticism within a discourse of masculine heroism and spiritualized male community. The latter should not be confused with Karl August Blüher (1865–1914), the mayor of Dresden associated with the so-called "Blüher trials."

translating the emerging language of modern sexual identity—psychoanalysis, sexology, homoerotic desire—into the symbolic grammar of Kabbalah and Hasidic mysticism, creating an unprecedented synthesis of theology and sexuality. In so doing, he anticipated later queer theorists' emphasis on the erotic as epistemological, a site where language, desire, and sacred power intersect.

In *Devět bran. Chasidů tajemství* (translated as *Nine Gates to the Hasidic Mysteries*, 1937), Langer's most celebrated Czech-language work, the poetics of queer exile is again central. Framed as a mystical travelogue, the text traces the journey of "a young man from Prague" into the inner sanctums of Hasidic life, passing through nine narrative "gates," each devoted to a different *tzaddik* (righteous man). These gates function symbolically as stages of queer initiation: from alienation and foreignness to intimacy and erotic knowledge. Each encounter with a *tzaddik* is simultaneously theological and affective, marked by a desire that is both sacred and sensual, mediated through storytelling, gaze, touch, and shared meals.

Unlike Martin Buber's literary stylization of Hasidic tales, Langer's oral narrative mode emphasizes embodied speech and gestural communication. The narrator whispers, turns his head, and modulates his tone as storytelling becomes a performance of intimacy. This queer aesthetic of orality constructs the tale as a ritual of seduction and shared revelation, a performance in which language itself is eroticized. Langer's poetics is thus anti-modern in its religious conservatism, but radically modern in its performative destabilization of identity, normativity, and narration.

One of the most striking stories in *Nine Gates*, "Převrácená miska" ("The Overturned Bowl," 1937) exemplifies Langer's use of Hasidic myth to dramatize queer spiritual resistance. A cosmic connection is drawn between Rabbi Elimelech Weisblum in Lizhensk (Polish: Leżajsk) and Emperor Joseph II in Vienna: when the rabbi knocks over his soup bowl, the emperor's inkwell spills and prevents the signing of a conscription order for young Jewish men. The chain of events is magical, affective, and embodied, resisting state power through bodily gesture. In this scene, queer desire and religious power are aligned against the violence of the state, suggesting an erotics of resistance that transcends reason, legality, and empire.

Moreover, Langer's legends subtly critique heteronormative Jewish theology. In Hasidism, women are often either invisible or demonized; Langer queers this absence by replacing the woman with the young male disciple as the object of love and spiritual exchange. The act of a *tzaddik* sharing his food with a devoted male follower—food sanctified by the rabbi's mouth—becomes a quasi-sacramental act of queer intimacy. This convergence of eros, mysticism, and pedagogy echoes ancient Greek models of erotic mentorship, refracted through the mystical lens of Kabbalah (Koschmal 2010, 273–85).

Thus, Langer's work should be read not as nostalgic or folkloric, but as radically experimental, both aesthetically and ethically. He resituates Jewish storytelling as a queer practice of identity formation, combining mysticism, eroticism, and linguistic performance into a vision of Jewish queerness that is neither secular nor heteronormative. In Langer's world, the homosexual Jew is not a tragic outsider but a mystic initiate, one

whose journey through sacred gates leads not to assimilation but to a queer sanctuary at the heart of tradition.

Langer's contribution to Czech queer modernism is therefore foundational. Alongside Kafka and Weiner, he maps the intersection of minor literature, sexual marginality, and religious estrangement, forging a transnational queer poetics that speaks both from and beyond the Czech-Jewish experience. His work expands the horizon of what queer literature can be: not merely confessional or activist, but sacred, performative, and mythic—a literature of the wandering mystic, the embodied soul, the erotic scholar in exile (Halper 2023, *passim*).

Otokar Březina's Queer Self-Suppression and Minor Literatures: A Mystical Aesthetic of Belonging and Withdrawal

Otokar Březina (Václav Jebavý, 1868–1929) illustrates how queer energies can be embedded in abstraction, metaphysics, and visionary poetics. While his writing avoids explicit thematization of homosexuality, his homoerotic philosophical friendship model and ideal of male spiritual brotherhood echo Nietzschean queer ethics and aesthetic elitism. His symbolic, metaphysical poetry constructs an atopic empire of light, language, and Logos, showing how minoritarian subjectivities can shape grand, cosmological visions. Březina embodies the spiritual dimension of deterritorialized identity: a queer metaphysics that defies both nationalist realism and normative eroticism. In the context of Czech literature, Jewish writing is often characterized by forms of migrant homelessness and the poetics of exile. However, another salient but less explored tradition is that of rhetorical silence, ecstatic sublimation, and spiritualized withdrawal, as embodied by Březina's Symbolist poetics. Widely regarded as the foremost representative of Czech Symbolism, Březina offers a unique case of queer literary self-fashioning, the intensity of which lies not in erotic disclosure but in the radical abstraction and displacement of queer desire into visionary mysticism, spiritual metaphysics, and homosocial sublimity. Martin C. Putna (2011, 93–98) places Březina in the context of other late-19th/early-20th-century authors who practiced forms of sublimation, stylization, or camouflage; he emphasizes (a) the use of symbolic/metaphysical language to displace erotic content, (b) the formation of homo-affective 'spiritual friendships' rather than overt erotic narratives, and (c) a preference for aesthetic and aristocratic distancing that converts desire into visionary, metaphysical, or anti-biological forms. Putna employs the notions of mask and signal, whereby Březina conceals the depiction of homosexuality but simultaneously signals its presence (2011, 28–9). He situates Březina's masking not as mere personal evasiveness but as a cultural practice—a response to moral/legal constraints and to a Symbolist aesthetics that valorized spiritualized forms of desire.

Although Březina never explicitly thematized sexuality in his work, his poetic and personal biography reveals an estrangement from normative heteroerotic structures. The

poet never married, no romantic relationship with a woman is known.[4] Such intimacies as that between Březina and Pammrová, while veiled, are not invisible. Rather, they are transmuted into the ecstatic language of Symbolism, where queer subjectivity finds indirect but powerful expression.

Březina's five volumes of poetry, composed between 1895 and 1907, mark a spiritual and aesthetic evolution from pessimistic decadence to metaphysical idealism. The third cycle, *Větry od pólů* (*Polar Winds*, 1897), resides at the center of this transformation, offering an elaborate metaphysical system wherein the lexeme "light" (světlo) appears sixty times in just nineteen poems. Light functions here not merely as a symbol of divine illumination, but as a queer signifier: radiant, incorporeal, ungraspable, and intensely affective. Logos becomes the medium through which spiritual and aesthetic longing is both articulated and deferred. Březina thus creates a poetics of radiant absence, in which the ineffable beauty of the male soul eclipses the possibility of physical consummation.

Březina's aesthetic program must be situated within a Nietzschean matrix of sublimated desire, heroic individualism, and spiritualized masculinity. Following Nietzsche's dictum in *The Gay Science* (1882, followed by a second edition in 1887) to "become who we are," Březina's poetry enacts a kind of queer becoming that rejects both heterosexual normativity and effeminate decadence. Instead, he cultivates a virile, mystic brotherhood, a homosocial order of "temple builders" devoted to the sacred tasks of art, ethics, and transcendence. Willow Verkerk's reading of Nietzschean friendship as an eroticized pedagogy grounded in rivalry, virtue, and sublimated aggression maps well onto Březina's male homosocial aesthetic: "a manly fellowship [...] which rejoices in sharp vigorous exchanges just as love rejoices in bites and scratches which draw blood" (Verkerk 2014, 281). There are clear similarities here to the German poet Stefan George and his male circle of initiates.

Rather than expressing queer desire in carnal or overtly affective terms, Březina adopts a strategy of theological abstraction. The father-God of *Větry od pólů* is not a nurturing presence, but a terrifying power whose polar breath erases individuality and evokes the dread sublimity of Old Testament justice. Yet this figure also becomes the object of spiritual eroticism, a divine masculine ideal whose violent beauty necessitates both worship and withdrawal. The poet's soul is made "radiant and white," not through romantic union, but through submission, self-purification, and ecstatic silence (Keilson-Lauritz 2005, 207–30).

The poetics of silence in Březina's work is not merely thematic but also performative. His metaphysical lexicon—dense with oxymorons, paradoxes, and synesthetic overload—resists the clarity of confession. Instead, desire is deferred, redirected, and encrypted in a mystical language that obscures as much as it reveals. This rhetorical

[4] In this context, one might mention Anna Pammrová, who was what vulgar colloquialisms call a fruit fly or fag hag. Unhappily married, she spent over 45 years of her life in seclusion, corresponding intensively with Březina and cultivated deeply emotional, spiritually-tinged friendships with younger men, most notably Jakub Deml (Wöll 2006, 223–52). Jindřich Chalupecký provocatively described their relationship as a "love affair," implicitly recognizing the queer erotic energies circulating within Březina's life and poetics.

strategy aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature as a mode of writing from the margins that deterritorializes language, disorients meaning, and articulates political and erotic desires obliquely. Březina's work, while couched in Czech, draws from German philosophy, French Symbolism, and religious universalism, making it a paradigmatic case of a minor literature emerging from within a "major" tongue.

If late decadence in Czech letters often ends in sterility or withdrawal, Březina offers a paradoxical alternative: the sublimation of queer desire into theosophical futurity. Even as his work retreats from corporeal reality, it imagines the collective body as a cathedral, the brotherhood as sacrament, and language itself as the erotic site of transcendence (Kraß 2016, *passim*). His final poetic silence after *Ruce* (*Hands*, 1901) is not a failure of voice but a withdrawal into the sacred, a queer renunciation of the discursive that paradoxically affirms the unspeakable depth of longing.

In this sense, Březina prefigures later queer-modernist figures such as Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen, whose surrealist projects also refract identity through spiritual alienation, abstraction, and erotic mysticism. Březina's queerness, while not biologically inscribed or biographically confessed, becomes aesthetically foundational. He does not merely write poetry; he constructs a queer metaphysics in which the erotic, the divine, and the aesthetic coalesce into a radiant order of sacred withdrawal. His work invites us to read queerness not as lack, but as luminous surplus—a condition of exile that becomes the very medium of visionary art.

Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic: Open Queerness and Imperial Positionality in Czech Decadence

Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic (1871–1951) represents the openly queer militant whose aesthetic of excess, perversity, and symbolic estrangement establishes an oppositional stance towards normative imperial culture. Putna treats Karásek as one of the central fin-de-siècle figures whose life and work are inseparable from homoerotic cultural practices, a kind of Bohemian Oscar Wilde who staged an aristocratic, decadent persona and cultivated a visible homo-aesthetic milieu (2011, 140–4). His decadent poetics refuses heteronormative legibility, not through concealment, but through hyperbolic visibility: camp, paganism, satanism, and necrophilic motifs rupture the bourgeois sexual imaginary. Unlike Weiner's coded trauma or Březina's sublimated mysticism, Karásek's enactment of a theatrical defiance aligns with Lee Edelman's notion of queerness as the death drive—non-reproductive, future-negating, and anti-social. Yet he simultaneously embodies Muñoz's "queer utopianism" through mythopoetic invocations of lost civilizations, erotic sublimity, and self-invented aristocratic identity. Karásek's work deterritorializes Czech literary tradition by fusing erotic negativity with decadent classicism, situating his authorship at the volatile crossroads of minor literature and radical queer visibility. He remains one of the most militant and openly homosexual figures in Czech literature, whose literary and editorial activity offered a bold provocation to fin-de-siècle heteronormative respectability.

Co-editor of the *Moderní revue* (*Modern Review* , 1895-1925)—the primary publication of Czech Decadence—Karásek forged an unapologetic aesthetic of sexual dissidence and

metaphysical revolt. Especially in Vienna, he lived his openly gay life without restrictions from his Czech home country. Today, while he is remembered for his novels, essays, and art criticism, his poetic oeuvre, spanning eight anthologies from 1884 to 1946, stands as the most sustained queer intervention in Czech Decadent writing. Karásek's editorship of periodicals, his collecting practice, and his role as a salon figure were culturally decisive. They helped institutionalize a particular aesthetic and created audiences who consumed and produced decadent and, at times, erotically charged art and literature. Therefore, Alena Petruželková situates Karásek not only as an author but also as an organizer of cultural circulation (2011, 135–80). Jan Seidl likewise presents Karásek as both an author and the *spiritus agens* of a queer-inflected cultural milieu in Prague: a collector, salon host, and founder of a private library/gallery whose holdings and exhibitions created a material infrastructure for homoerotic and decadent tastes (2012, 74–86).

His first volume, *Zazděná okna* (*Walled Windows*, 1884), already signals the thematic architecture that would define his work: a Symbolist cult of color and sensation, cast in the decadent mode of Baudelaire's *forêt de symboles*, but shot through with a sense of existential confinement and erotic frustration. Karásek's innovation lay in contaminating high formalism, especially Lumírist prosody and strict stanzaic structures, with images of moral decay, queerness, and bodily pathology. Against a social order anchored in bourgeois discipline, Karásek performs a stylized marginality, donning the mask of the dandy and *poète maudit*, resurrecting Romantic spleen as a vehicle of sexual and spiritual heresy.

The radical break in his poetic project comes with *Sodoma* (*Sodom*, 1895; republished 1905), subtitled *A Pagan Book*, a daring gesture that collapsed the line between personal identity and aesthetic militancy. Explicitly homoerotic and pansexual in its ambition, *Sodoma* was censored upon publication and later defended in the Viennese Reichsrat by socialist MP Josef Hybeš—a symbolic moment uniting political dissent and sexual nonconformity under the imperial gaze. In these poems, dreams are elevated as a privileged site of transgression and revelation, echoing Henri Bergson's valorization of intuition over materialist rationality. Yet the dream, for Karásek, is always tinged with erotic dread—Deleuze and Guattari's deterritorialized desire of a minor literature: intimate, visionary, and dangerously opaque to the hegemonic, norm-setting imperial codes of Empire.

Influenced by Stanisław Przybyszewski's cult of Satanic sexuality, Karásek's poetics merges fin-de-siècle antinomianism with Nietzschean transvaluation. His *Kniha aristokratická* (*The Aristocratic Book*, 1896) invokes not merely sexual taboo but a whole metaphysics of the perverse: homosexuality, orgiastic rites, sadomasochistic imagery, and pagan spectacle converge in a delirious counter-history of the body. These classical allusions are not nostalgic but deeply queer appropriations: Rome and Greece are reimagined not as harmonious idealities, as in Jaroslav Vrchlický or Josef Svatopluk Machar, but as zones of Dionysian collapse and sexual delirium filtered through a decadent Nietzschean lens.

This anti-idealism finds its most violent articulation in *Sexus necans. Kniha pohanská* (*Sexus necans. A Pagan Book*, 1897), where Eros and Thanatos are locked in ecstatic conflict. Here, death is not merely metaphorical but eroticized—often through necrophilic images or sacred violence—revealing the deeper metaphysical program of Karásek's aesthetics: the overcoming of the self through sublime disintegration. If Symbolism generally sought transcendence through aesthetic form, Karásek radicalizes this drive by fusing spiritual ascent with bodily desecration.

Despite the frequent use of historical and mythical masks (Icarus, Narcissus, Endymion, Hyacinth), Karásek's figures never stabilize into allegory. Instead, they become queer avatars—transhistorical emblems of exile, ecstatic suffering, and sublime isolation. *Endymion* (1909) and *Ostrov vyhnanců* (*Island of the Exiles*, 1912) extend this logic, collecting figures who resist or are exiled by normative moral orders: martyrs, madmen, cross-dressing monarchs, and suicidal artists. Their inclusion affirms not only the poet's identification with the queer outsider but stages a minoritarian archive of failure, excess, and resistance (Lishaugen 2006, 372–80).

Significantly, Karásek offers no traditional love poetry. As a self-declared disciple of Arthur Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, he viewed sexuality not as a site of romantic fulfilment, but as an illusion of the species—a biological trap that diverts the will from its spiritual task. Thus, while eroticism saturates his poetry, it never crystallizes into romantic union. Instead, we find a high Symbolist dualism: Platonic Eros as transcendent longing, pitched against the animalism of the flesh, which brings with it not pleasure but decay. In this schema, sex functions as both *pharmakon* and apocalypse: simultaneously a lure towards sublimity and a symptom of metaphysical rot.

This radical sexual negativity also helps to contextualize Karásek's recurrent misogynistic tropes. Women in his poetry rarely appear as autonomous subjects. Rather, they are reduced to two archetypes: the prostitute or the mystic. These are not merely gendered clichés but tropes in a broader queer cosmology that seeks to eliminate heterosexual reproduction, sentimental coupling, and domesticity. In his poetic universe, the erotic is only meaningful when wrested from reproductive utility and reconstituted as a spiritual ordeal—available most clearly, perhaps exclusively, to male bodies sublimated into art.

Karásek's homoeroticism is structural. His literary project constructs a queer counter-world in defiance of Austro-Hungarian norms and Catholic morality. It should be read alongside the contemporaneous efforts of other fin-de-siècle homosexual authors—Stefan George, Joséphin Péladan, Oscar Wilde—not for superficial comparisons, but because all articulated a metaphysical politics of queerness, one that made visible not just marginal desire, but alternative structures of time, beauty, morality, and being. Karásek's work does not seek toleration or visibility within the imperial order; rather, it enacts what Muñoz might call a "queer utopia"—a refusal of the present in favor of erotic futurity, mythic time, and aesthetic sovereignty. The main character in his novel *Manfred Macmillan. Kniha první trilogie Tří kouzelníků* (*Manfred Macmillan. Book One of the Three Magicians Trilogy*, 1907; English translation by Carleton Bulkin in 2024) embodies the

trope of the "outsider intellectual" who wields forbidden knowledge. He is both alluring and alien, a queer subject who cannot be assimilated into bourgeois society. The magician's knowledge and charisma mirror those of the decadent queer dandy, who reconfigures marginality as a position of power and aesthetic superiority. This sameness aligns Karásek's character with contemporary European fin-de-siècle queer figures, such as Joris-Karl Huysmans's Des Esseintes or Wilde's Dorian Gray.

Karásek's poetic silence after *Poslední vinobraní* (*The Last Grape Harvest*, 1946), as with Březina before him, may be interpreted not simply as exhaustion, but as a withdrawal from a world unable or unwilling to accommodate the ontological burden of queer art. Where Březina sublimated desire into metaphysical radiance, Karásek exposed it in the form of decadent collapse. Both, however, belong to a Symbolist genealogy that queered the very conditions of literary subjectivity, making possible a Czech minor literature of which the ghosts still haunt the margins of Europe's cultural history.

Queer Minor Literature from the Czech Periphery: Karásek, Weiner, Langer, and Březina in World Context

The Czech writers Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, Richard Weiner, Jiří Mordechai Langer, and Otokar Březina form a singular constellation within the broader field of modernist and queer literary traditions. While deeply embedded in the cultural and political matrix of Central Europe at the turn of the 20th century, these authors also speak to a wider aesthetic and epistemological formation that can be meaningfully situated within both the framework of minor literature and the evolving corpus of gay world literature. In diverse ways, those literary works foreground non-normative forms of embodiment, eroticism, spirituality, and subjectivity, thereby positioning queerness not only as an identity but as an ontological dissonance, a mode of writing, and a form of resistance.

Deleuze and Guattari define minor literature not by the nationality of its authors but by its structural position, as a literature written in a major language by a minoritized subject, characterized by deterritorialization, the politicization of private life, and collective enunciation. In this sense, Karásek, Weiner, Langer, and Březina represent a queered Czech literary modernism that subverts dominant national, linguistic, and epistemic orders. Writing from a position that is at once inside and outside the imperial culture of Austro-Hungary and the newly-forming Czechoslovak identity, they deterritorialize the Czech language and unsettle its presumed heteronormative and Christian underpinnings.

Karásek's oeuvre exemplifies the aesthetic transgression associated with French decadent literature (e.g., Jean Lorrain, Huysmans) and the wider European decadent tradition (including Wilde), yet it radically localizes this gesture within the Czech cultural milieu. His flamboyant homoeroticism, obsession with bodily decay, and violent rejection of bourgeois Christian values align his work with a "queer negativity" (in the sense theorized by Leo Bersani and Edelman) reminiscent of Bersani's claim that sexuality "shatters the self" (Bersani 2010, 28). Karásek's stylistic excess—his formal experimentation, exoticized pagan references, and inversion of classical genres—enacts

queerness as both a thematic and structural disruption. His disdain for reproductive futurism and romantic normativity resonates strongly with Edelman's *No Future* (2004), which theorizes queerness as an opposition to the heteronormative temporality of social continuity. Karásek's queerness operates as a strategic refusal of coherence, productivity, and moral legibility, foregrounding excess and negativity as aesthetic principles.

Langer's writing occupies a radically different, though equally subversive, space. As both a devout Hasid and an openly homosexual intellectual, Langer queers Jewish tradition from within, blending Kabbalistic longing with homoerotic sublimity rather than rejecting spirituality altogether. His use of Jewish mysticism as a framework for articulating non-normative desire offers a prefiguration of Muñoz's theory of queer utopia, in which queerness is imagined as a spiritual and affective horizon beyond the present. Langer's sacred eroticism aligns with a diasporic queer temporality that resists assimilation and embraces multiplicity, marginality, and ecstatic disruption.

Weiner's prose and poetry, deeply influenced by his experiences in World War I and his encounter with French modernism, manifest a fragmented and often traumatized subjectivity that resonates with both Kafka and Jean Genet (Wöll 2020, 189-99). His queerness is encoded in linguistic deformation, broken syntax, and narrative incoherence. For Weiner, queerness is not only a matter of sexual identity, but also a form of existential estrangement. His work enacts what Edelman describes as a "refusal of narrative closure," resisting all attempts to stabilize meaning through heteronormative or nationalist frames (Edelman 2004, 4). The aesthetic of opacity and brokenness in Weiner's texts opens a space for what Bersani might call the anti-social thesis of queerness, where the subject dissolves into affect, silence, or non-meaning.

Březina, often read as the most spiritual of Czech modernists, sublimates erotic and bodily experience into a metaphysical and symbolic register. His visionary poetics draws upon German idealism, mysticism, and universalist philosophy, yet it is haunted by a queer desire for union that defies normative gendered binaries. Though not explicitly erotic, Březina's poetics of cosmic love, death, and transcendence exhibits a queer ontology in line with Sedgwick's notion of queer performativity (Sedgwick 2003, *passim*), where desire is located not in objects but in affective intensities and uncontainable yearnings. Březina's queerness is thus cosmic, spiritual, and diffused, operating in the interstices between metaphysics and embodied experience.

From Margins to World: Czech Queerness and Global Comparisons

When considered within the broader context of gay world literature, these Czech writers reveal both affinities and disjunctions. Karásek shares decadent and aestheticist motifs with Wilde, Lorrain, and Péladan. Langer anticipates James Baldwin's intersection of race, religion, and homosexuality, while also echoing Marcel Proust's sublimated eroticism. Weiner aligns with the alienated and fragmented prose of Genet, Kafka, and Samuel Beckett. Březina's metaphysical sublimity finds echoes in Hart Crane and Rainer Maria Rilke. Yet, what distinguishes these Czech authors is their intricate interweaving

of queerness with imperial positionality, linguistic marginality, and metaphysical speculation.

Unlike much of Western gay literature, which often centers confessional or romantic paradigms of queer identity, Czech minor literature at the turn of the 20th century frequently negates or defers sexual identity, staging queerness as a force of dissolution, aesthetic disruption, or mystical transfiguration. This is not a simple repression but a structurally embedded resistance to normalization. The relevant writers' queerness is neither identical to nor easily integrated into Western gay canons. Instead, it troubles the very categories by which queerness is understood—sexual, linguistic, spiritual, and political.

To read Karásek, Weiner, Langer, and Březina as a queer minor canon is to expand the parameters of both Czech literature and gay world literature. Their writings articulate queerness as an aesthetic revolt grounded in metaphysical yearning and textual excess. Rather than assimilating into teleologies of progress or liberation, these authors queer time, language, and desire independently of familiar paradigms. As such, they contribute to a global queer archive that is profoundly Central European—fragmented, mystical, exilic, and singularly resistant to capture.

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