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Osaka University

Why Can’t We Be Friends?:

Three White Male Writers in Contemporary American Literature

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
Studies in Language and Culture,
Graduate School of Language and Culture,
Osaka University

by

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION **1**

1.1. WHY CAN'T *WE* BE *FRIENDS*? 1

1.2. THE PUBLIC VOCABULARY AND THE PRIVATE VOCABULARY 5

1.3. THREE WHITE MALE WRITERS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE 9

2. INTENTIONAL FALLACY OF CRITICS **15**

2.1. AFTER THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY 15

2.2. WHO ARE "WE"? 17

2.3. CAN CRITICS REPRESENT OTHERS? 23

2.4. THE ENTITLEMENT FOR YUPPIES TO REPRESENT RAPPERS 28

2.5. INTENTIONAL FALLACY OF CRITICS 32

3. A CRITIQUE OF INTELLECTUALISM: RICHARD POWERS'S *THE GOLD BUG VARIATIONS* OR PRAGMATIC SENTIMENTALITY **34**

3.1. ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM? 34

3.2. DISCIPLINE, CULTURE, AND INTELLECTUALISM 36

3.3. "MY CUB TRANSLATION" OR VOLUNTARISM 40

3.4. PRAGMATIC SENTIMENTALITY 46

4. A CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: JONATHAN FRANZEN'S *THE CORRECTIONS* OR HUMAN DIGNITY **55**

4.1. POLITICAL *IN*CORRECTNESS OR HUMAN DIGNITY 55

4.2. ABANDONING CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT 57

4.3. NEVER BEING CORRECTED 63

4.4. A SELF-REFERENTIAL MOMENT IN REALISM 69

5. A CRITIQUE OF METANARRATIVE: DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S *INFINITE JEST* OR ANTI-POST-POSTMODERNISM **76**

5.1. NEW METANARRATIVE FROM THE 1990S 76

5.2. Daily Excessiveness of Irony 79

5.3. The Depth on the Surface 85

5.4. Infinite Reflexivity or New Metanarrative Never Exist 92

6. I WAS SEEN: FOREVER OVERHEAD OR FOREVER NOTHING BELOW 100

6.1. To Be Seen, or Not to Be Seen 100

6.2. "Forever Overhead" 101

6.3. Forever Nothing Below 105

6.4. The Bottom of the Sea or *Forever Overhead* 110

7. CONCLUSION 115

WORKS CITED 123

1. Introduction

1.1. Why Can't *We* Be *Friends*?

"Why can't we be friends when we are lovers?"—this is the question of a song called "Sincerity Is Scary" by the British rock band, The 1975. This line, taken from a conversation between a couple, shows that when two people become lovers, they can no longer be friends "'Cause it always ends with us hating each other" (The 1975, "Sincerity Is Scary"). The relationship as lovers gives them excellent opportunities to be happy, but it sometimes leads them to be self-righteous, suspicious, and skeptical to each other. Why can't we be friends when we are lovers? This song indicates the (im)possibility to be friends even when we have some kind of relationship with others, such as being neighbors, classmates, colleagues, lovers, or even family. This subject word *we* matters; while we easily use the subject word to show our relationship in our daily lives, we politically use the word in the public sphere to promote solidarity. We all know the famous slogan, "Yes We Can," but we also know that the country has been completely divided. We often represent ourselves as "we" in a political sense; however, the signified people of the word are always nameless and transparent. *We* in our daily lives often cannot be *friends*, not to mention "we" in politics.

"Why can't *we* be *friends*?"—this is the central question of this paper because it has been and will be unimaginably difficult for *us* to be *friends* in both the private and public spheres. To confront with the question, I will argue that three white male writers in contemporary American literature—Richard Powers (1957–), Jonathan Franzen (1958–), David Foster Wallace (1962–2008)—wrote mega-novels about the difficulty or (im)possibility of *us* being *friends* in this contemporary postmodern era.

The title "Why Can't We Be Friends?" shows that my research question

is not about society or culture but about our human relationships; I want to emphasize the private aspects of human relationships rather than public ideas or statements. The former, the private aspects of human relationships, is an ordinary thing. My recognition owes to Raymond Williams's idea of "Culture Is Ordinary" (1958). The usual idea of culture is about the public; however, this viewpoint is insufficient when considering Williams. He denies having one perspective of culture and society: "The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind" (2). Thus, according to Williams, thinking about something happening "in every individual mind" is necessary to consider culture and society:

> We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning—the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about our general and common purposes, yet also questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. (2–3)

To consider culture, it is not enough to only discuss "society" or the public sphere. One must pay attention to the "mind" of people or the private sphere about "a whole way of life." This could be rephrased as the minor details of our private lives. Williams argues that "Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses," while Marxism tends to regard an individual as a representation of a particular class, sexuality, race, or nationality. I argue that this kind of discussion sometimes dismisses the individuality of people in discussing the public sphere.

Richard Rorty clearly criticizes critics from the Left who academically discuss the public sphere. In *Achieving Our Country* (1998), he critiques "a

cultural Left" by stating, "we now have, among many American students and teachers, a spectatorial, disgusted, mocking Left rather than a Left which dreams of achieving our country" (35). The critics Rorty referred to as the Cultural Lefts criticize—as an act of "critique"—their country and adopt arrogant attitudes toward *other* Americans. While Rorty's conservatism seems to be nationalism, which is not acceptable for the Left, one cannot ignore his argument. Rorty detects the fallacy of the Cultural Left: "This [finding America unforgivable] leads them to step back from their country and, as they say, 'theorize' it" (36). Rorty states that the critics' theorization of America, despite their consideration of the public sphere, is no longer *public* because they simply dismiss *other* Americans in the name of public discussion and theorization. Their "public" discourses lead them "to give cultural politics preference over real politics" (36). This oxymoron of the Left is what I will discuss in Chapter 2, "Intentional Fallacy of Critics." Who are the *other* Americans, anyway? Of course, one may already know them because of the Bush and Trump presidencies: "Nobody is setting up a program in unemployed studies, homeless studies, or trailer-park studies, because the unemployed, the homeless, and residents of trailer parks are not 'other' in the relevant sense" (80). They are not your *friends*, because they are not *your* others.

If one truly wants to confront others and consider the public sphere for good, one must stop talking about public discourses and see the reality of the current situation. The question is, "Why can't *we* be *friends*?" The following four points are my positions as a critic: to withdraw myself from easily discussing the public sphere; to criticize literary criticism which regards characters in literature as the representation of specific groups based on race, nationality, or sexuality; to pragmatically *use* literary texts to answer my research question; and to consider a realistic alternative or solution. My discussion of American literature will be in this context. I will argue that the novels of Richard Powers, Jonathan Franzen, and David Foster Wallace question the (im)possibility of being *friends*; therefore, I want to consider a

realistic answer to my research question by pragmatically *using* their texts. However, their novels have mainly been discussed in the contexts of culture, politics, or society: the public sphere. In this paper, I insist that their novels should be discussed in the context of the private sphere. To be more precise, I will criticize the public discourse—intellectualism, political correctness, and metanarrative—in the previous research of the novels and alternately consider the private relationships, such as family, lovers, and friends, in the texts. My argument does not entirely dismiss the public sphere; rather, I believe that if one truly wishes to consider the public sphere, one cannot simply dismiss the private sphere just because it is the smallest unit of *solidarity*.

Through the discussions of three white male writers, I will argue that their mega-novels articulate individual, private, and ordinary human relationships, which are worth considering in literary criticism, where discussion in the public vocabulary is dominant. Their texts are about the lived and ordinary experiences of lovers, family, and friends. This can be rephrased as our enjoyment of sharing the same world and being *friends*, or our suffering of not being in the same world and not being *friends*. In *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), Richard Powers lets his readers experience "a sense of wonder" to be *friends* once again; intellectualism is criticized, and voluntarism is praised. In *The Corrections* (2001), Jonathan Franzen lets his readers experience the impossibility of family members being *friends*; political correctness is criticized, and individuality and human dignity are praised. In *Infinite Jest* (1996), David Foster Wallace lets his readers experience the light enjoyment of being *friends* privately, individually, and superficially; depth and metanarrative are criticized, and surface and private lives are praised. My discussion will begin with a theoretical background, including the works of Richard Rorty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Wallace, and will end with Wallace, Ocean Vuong, and Kyohei Sakaguchi. Through these discussions, I aim to approach the literary texts pragmatically

and then consider the realistic way for us to live a "life BEFORE death" (Wallace, "This Is Water").

1.2. The Public Vocabulary and the Private Vocabulary

Culture is ordinary; then, how can we talk about the ordinaries of our lives? I believe that some critics' public discourses cannot capture the lived details of our private lives. This is also a question about representation. Williams articulates this when he talks about "masses":

> But a few weeks ago I was in a house with a commercial traveller, a lorry driver, a bricklayer, a shopgirl, a fitter, a signalman, a nylon operative, a domestic help (perhaps, dear, she is your very own treasure). I hate describing people like this, for in fact they were my family and family friends. ("Culture Is Ordinary" 7)

He expresses an instant dislike when his "family and family friends" are treated as a figure of a specific worker. It is true that they are actually "a commercial traveller" or "a shopgirl;" however, Williams's irritation shows that this kind of representation dismisses people's individuality. This makes us reconsider our choice of vocabulary when we represent someone as something. This paper will question the vocabulary that critics use when they talk about politics, society, and literature. By doing so, we can answer the ordinary question: "Why can't *we* be *friends*?"

We and *friends* articulate a minimum of solidarity. Solidarity is usually regarded as a union or association in the public sphere. It also shows that the members of the group share the same ideas, truths, disciplines, and interests. However, Rorty impressively concludes his discussion on solidarity as follows: "The self-doubt seems to me the characteristic mark of the first epoch

in human history in which large numbers of people have become able to separate the question 'Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?' from the question 'Are you suffering?'" (*Contingency* 198). The former question is about the public sphere because it confirms that "you" have the same belief, idea, or desire as "us." In other words, this question is a strategy to widen the limit of "we." However, the latter question is about the private sphere because it calls for others who are in pain. According to Rorty, this is the condition of solidarity. Rorty then defines this in his own terms as follows: "In my jargon, this is the ability to distinguish the question of whether you and I share the same final vocabulary from the question of whether you are in pain. Distinguishing these questions makes it possible to distinguish public from private questions" (*Contingency* 198). Rorty's idea of "the final vocabulary" criticizes the sole criterion of the liberalists' moral judgement. Thus, the final vocabulary not only solves the division of the people, but also divides friends and foes because *others* simply cannot agree with liberal ideas. Therefore, Rorty suggests that we should call to others in the private sphere. Based on this, I propose that one should distinguish between *the public vocabulary* and *private vocabulary*. The latter is also—just like Williams's idea of culture and Rorty's condition of solidarity—an ordinary thing.

In the liberal circle of American literature and literary criticism, the following two critiques are highly predictable. First, it is politically too conservative that I consider solidarity by referring only to white male writers—Powers, Franzen, and Wallace. This is because my argument is similar to the conservative opinion in the Culture War of the late 1980s and 1990s. To this critique, I have already agreed with Rorty's criticism of the Cultural Left. Furthermore, I will confirm these writers' conservatism against the liberal academic circle. Second, it is obvious that the novels of these writers have already been recognized as "Great American novels," which are representative of America at the time. Previous research tends to discuss these novels in the public vocabulary: cultural, social, or political discussions.

Some might argue that my discussion in the private vocabulary is unsuitable in the contexts of previous research. However, in Chapter 2, I contend that this kind of discussion in the liberal discourse or the public vocabulary is full of rigid ideas: the intentional fallacy of critics. To directly confront my research question, I will defend three white male writers' conservatism.

To clarify the idea of public vocabulary and private vocabulary, I will refer to Hannah Arendt, Richard Rorty, Clint Eastwood, and Shinji Miyadai. Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) shows the historical difference between the public sphere and private sphere in ancient Greece. Arendt states, "Historically, it is very likely that the rise of the city-state and the public realm occurred at the expense of the private realm of family and household" because "without owning a house a man could not participate in the affairs of the world" (29). In this sense, the private sphere presupposed inequality of family members; thus, men could have "freedom" to join the public sphere. This private–public relationship in poleis, however, had gradually changed: "since with the rise of society, that is, the rise of the 'household' (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a 'collective' concern" (Arendt 33). The growing economic activities obscured the line between the private–public relationship. Then, a matter in the private sphere, like a family matter, became "a 'collective' concern," meaning that it entered the public sphere. Family matters, such as patriarchy, domestic violence, housework, care of children and the elderly, home discipline, sex, divorce, or solitary death, were discussed in the public vocabulary.

Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is also about the private–public relationship:

> On the *public* side of our lives, *nothing* is less dubious than the worth of those [the democratic] freedoms. On the private side of our lives, there may be much which is *equally* hard to doubt, for example, our love

> or hatred for a particular person, the need to carry out some idiosyncratic project. (*Contingency* 197)

Rorty distinguishes "the democratic freedoms"—the public matters—from "our love or hatred for a particular person"—the private matters. This attitude seems to oppose that, as Arendt explained above, the family/private matters have become "'collective' concern[s]." Private matters, in the end, cannot be resolved by liberal/public ideas because these matters are to be addressed pragmatically by the people involved. This is not about leaving the matters alone. Rather, it is about abandoning the firm belief to resolve the public and private matters simultaneously in the public discussion. One must consider them separately.

By referring to Clint Eastwood and Shinji Miyadai, I aim to approach the Right and conservatism to consider private vocabulary. Eastwood, the film actor/director and ex-mayor, stated his political views at the film festival in 2017: "A lot of people thought it [*Dirty Harry* (1971)] was politically incorrect. That was at the beginning of the era that we're in now with political correctness. We are killing ourselves, we've lost our sense of humor. But I thought it was interesting and it was daring" (Kilday). Eastwood's critique of political correctness does not mean that he is cruel to others. Rather, the politically *in*correct protagonists in his movie, such as Frankie Dunn in *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and Walt Kowalski in *Gran Torino* (2008) show that they will help someone they love, that is, their *friends*, motivated not intellectually but voluntarily. Miyadai, discussing *Unforgiven*, highly praises Eastwood because his attitude is based not on intellectualism but on voluntarism. The latter is, according to Miyadai, the roots of Right-Wing thought and places a top priority on people's will based on their common experiences, which is explained as *mimesis*. (Miyadai 237). In this context, mimesis is not about representation in aesthetics, nor about mimicking someone special subjectively and actively. Rather, it is about unconsciously

responding to someone special without knowing it. In fact, Miyadai, as a sociologist, works not for changing the whole system of society, but for cultivating and motivating people's minds and sentimentality. Similarly, Eastwood, replying to the question about his continuous filmmaking, states, "If you have good luck with your instincts, you might as well stick with it [film-making]. Intellectualizing or pseudo-intellectualizing, you can get yourself in a real box." (Kilday). I will discuss the difference between intellectualism and voluntarism in Chapter 3.

I believe that I can *use* literature practically to consider the condition of solidarity by reading and discussing its private vocabulary. In other words, I want to criticize literary criticism which uses the public vocabulary and regards characters in novels as the representation of specific groups, larger social issues, or ideas. Usually, the individuals or human relationships articulated in novels are construed as an allegory for public incidents, ideas, or discourses. This is noticeable in the discussion of some postmodern novels or the Novel of Ideas. This kind of critical approach to the novels, however, cannot capture the individualities and lived experiences of each character, nor consider the public sphere in our real lives. Therefore, I will affirm and defend the private vocabulary in the novels of Powers, Franzen, and Wallace to consider the minimum condition of solidarity.

1.3. Three White Male Writers in Contemporary American Literature

Finally, in this dissertation, I will examine the context of contemporary American literature. Powers, Franzen, and Wallace are from the same generation, the so-called, Generation X. Furthermore, the three mega-novels that I discuss in this paper—*The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), *The Corrections* (2001), and *Infinite Jest* (1996)—were published at the turn of the 20th and

the 21st centuries. Stephen J. Burn discusses these three texts and regards them as “post-postmodern” novels:

> The geography and themes of *The Corrections*, then, are close to a synthesis of Franzen’s first two novels, and, as such, it both significantly converges with and diverges from the parallel works by Franzen’s post-postmodern contemporaries: Powers’s *The Gold Bug Variations* and Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*. (93–94)

This is a typical attitude of the critic, who praises the three writers as the representative of contemporary American literature. I do not aim to argue that Powers, Franzen, and Wallace are the representative, nor to historicize and situate them as post-postmodern. Rather, in Chapter 5, I will argue that postmodernism never ended. To consider the question, “Why can’t *we* be *friends*?” and the minimum condition of solidarity, I argue that the three writers are important for the following reason: their texts articulate the (im)possibility of connecting with others in the private sphere.

I shall begin by discussing the academic culture war in American universities between the late 1980s and 1990s, because this is one of the roots of today’s cessation of *friendship* on multiculturalism. In the late 1980s, the course “Western Culture” at Stanford University was criticized as Eurocentric; it was subsequently revised as “Cultures, Ideas, and Values,” which included non-Western texts. This led to controversy between liberals and conservatives. In *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Allan Bloom argues his conservative idea of “what it means to be an American” as follows: “by recognizing and accepting man’s natural rights, men found a fundamental basis of unity and sameness. Class, race, religion, national origin or culture all disappear or become dim when bathed in the light of natural rights, which give men common interests and make them truly brothers” (27). Bloom’s argument is based on the “universality” of the West rather than multicultural

differences, and his idea is apparently incompatible with postcolonialism or cultural studies. In today's humanism, Bloom's idea seems to be old-fashioned because liberal academics usually attach weight to the differences of "[c]lass, race, religion, national origin or culture." One might easily dismiss Bloom's conservative idea; however, then how can *we* talk about *our* "unity and sameness"? In this sense, Bloom was right; the subject *we* no longer represent the whole but small groups; thus, *we* cannot be *friends*.

This problem of "unity and sameness" is still crucial in contemporary American literature because its uncertainty is similar to that of world literature: nobody can talk about the whole. In 2012, Koji Toko admits that this is true in American literature:

> Scholars in American literature do not know how they can talk about the current situation, where many writers from Africa, East Europe, or South and Central America keep publishing many appreciated books. However, scholars in African or South literature or Central American literature do not understand all emigrant writers' activities in the U.S. or U.K. The situation is that everyone knows these writers are doing interesting things, but nobody has a unified perspective to talk about what is going on. (157; my translation)

Contemporary American literature is like world literature: one can no longer discuss the situation based on writers' nationality because each writer has different backgrounds, and one simply cannot have "a unified perspective" to see the whole situation. Hikaru Fujii calls this situation in America "outside, America" or "'America'less American literature." In *From the Terminal to the Wasteland* (2016), Fujii states that young American writers articulate "the world where the movements of people are ordinary" and where there is "the atmosphere of statelessness" (17; my translation). Koichi Suwabe, in accepting Fujii's arguments, points out the problem in this "'America'less"

American literature: “When American writers abandon America, then, who does write about it? If nobody writes about it, American ‘reality’ would get weak and die” (159; my translation). The situation is that different writers with different backgrounds write about different things. Can we define this situation as the same “American literature”? This is exactly what Bloom pointed out in the late 1980s: There is no “unity and sameness” in contemporary American literature.

In this situation, critics cannot have “a unified perspective” or the public vocabulary to fully discuss the complicated reality. In this sense, I believe that criticism, like Burn’s “post-postmodernism,” is meaningless simply because one cannot articulate the reality or zeitgeist only by discussing several novels. To be more precise, these kinds of critiques excessively generalize several novels from their inevitably limited perspectives. This critics’ fallacy has been pointed out in discussions of the mega-novel. In *The Cruft of Fiction* (2017), David Letzler states, “One of the most dangerous temptations in literary criticism is for critics to make generalizations about purported cultural attitudes held by millions of people based on their interpretations of a handful of novels” (26). I agree with his argument about critics’ excess generalization, and he openly acknowledges that his discussion of the mega-novel is based on dismissing the gender and sexuality issues: “There are certain implications this question [how gender relates to this genre] raises: Are there great female mega-novelists who have been suppressed? Are, perhaps, mega-novels inherently sexist? I wish I had something rigorous and interesting to say on this subject, but [...] I don’t” (26). One might criticize his stance for dismissing the issue of gender and political correctness; however, I still agree with his argument about generalization.

On the issue of gender and ethnicity, Stefano Ercolino’s *The Maximalist Novel* (2014) offers a different perspective on mega-novel criticism. Ercolino explains his choice of the texts: “an important reason for excluding these other texts [of McElroy, Vollmann, Gass, and Gaddis] is that they are all American,

while I am also interested in accounting for the supranational aspect of the maximalist novel, its transversal presence in Western literature" (xxi). To understand and prove "the supranational aspect of the maximalist novel," Ercolino excludes the texts of American writers such as Joseph McElroy, William T. Vollmann, William H. Gass, and William Gaddis and includes—in addition to four white male writers including Franzen and Wallace—Zadie Smith, Roberto Bolaño, and Babette Factory. My question is, Why can a discussion dealing with only three non-American writers be called "supranational"? I think that this is an arrogant attitude of intellectuals. As a result, Ercolino's selection of the texts takes political correctness into consideration; this would be more acceptable in the liberal academic circle than the work of Letzler. However, as I will argue in Chapter 4, political correctness sometimes intrudes upon others' individuality and human dignity. I understand that my discussion dealing with three white male writers' texts is limited to one scope of contemporary American literature. However, what one *cannot* speak is sometimes important.

I will argue that critics should rescue themselves from talking in the public vocabulary and begin by considering individual human relationships in the private vocabulary. In doing so, they would be able to discuss white male writers without any excuse. If one took political correctness into account and persisted in generalizing the argument, one would contribute to prolonging the imagined public vocabulary or metanarrative so that in doing so one thinks one can talk about the whole. Instead of talking in the public vocabulary, I propose that we should begin by considering our familiar, ordinary, and private relationships with others and then widen the target of "we." With this constant effort, we can truly think about the public sphere in the end. My discussion on three white male writers is about practically *using* their texts to criticize public vocabulary in the rigid liberal academic circle, to imagine the minimal condition of solidarity, and to practice our private vocabulary in our lives.

Based on Rorty's pragmatism, I use the word *using* in literary criticism to argue that one should pay attention to the *function* of novels. Thus, I am less likely to consider the aesthetics of the novels and argue for their cultural importance. The function of novels is what literary critics should argue both inside and outside of the academic discipline of literature. Otherwise, more and more people will believe that literature is useless and will spend less time reading novels or poems in the age of the internet. I do not aim to suggest that literature should be used as evidence of historical events or social issues. Rather, I propose that literature can be used to consider our existential question in the private sphere, asking the ethical question of how to live a better life with others. When no longer discussing literature in the public vocabulary, one will discover its practical function in the private sphere. I will maintain this perspective through the discussions in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6. In Chapter 6, I will particularly probe the connection between literature and the real practice of preventing suicides. To do this, first, the intellectual jargon in the discussions of novels will be radically criticized, and then a connection between representation and reality will be explored because literature is *ordinary* and is not something that only intellectuals possess.

2. Intentional Fallacy of Critics

2.1. After the Intentional Fallacy

In exploring authors' intentions and interpretations, W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley published "The Intentional Fallacy" in 1949, a monumental paper that preceded Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author" (1967) and Michel Foucault's "What is the Author?" (1969). The intentional fallacy has been an established reference since the work's publication and remains a tangible idea among some disciplines in the humanities. In the paper, Wimsatt Jr. and Beardsley insist that an author's historical records, including (auto)biography or private letters, cannot be a referential point to interpret their literary texts because art should be judged only in the public sphere. Non-reference to the author's background, according to the paper, enables critics to freely read and discuss literary texts away from authorial intentions. Theoretically speaking, the author's ideas, personal details, and intentions would never prove the legitimacy of their literary texts. In this sense, it can be said that the reader is more privileged than the author when they read the texts.

After "The Intentional Fallacy," Barthes's "Death of the Author" articulates the textual autonomy and the "birth of the reader" theoretically. Barthes states that the death of the author means the birth of the reader:

> Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's

unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (148)

Barthes's famous statement must have supported and encouraged many critics who wanted to interpret literary texts based on their -ism or position. In this context, reception theory, famous for the work of Stuart Hall, has been handed down to cultural studies, where Left-Wing critics are dominant. However, Barthes's idea of the reader must be further discussed; it does not simply support critics' freedom to interpret literary texts from their own politically coherent positions: "Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (Barthes 148). The author's privileged position is replaced by the reader; however, "the reader" in this context is not given a proper name; being "without history, biography, psychology." Critics cannot simply substitute "the reader" for themselves.

There are many ongoing discussions about the intentional fallacy,[1] and I do not intend to discuss the right or wrong of it. In this paper, I aim to question the *critics'* intentions, which have been overlooked behind textual autonomy. "The Intentional Fallacy" and "Death of the Author" have released literary texts from their authors; however, simultaneously critics' intentions, hiding behind texts, have become transparent, creating what should be called *intentional fallacy of critics*.

With this critical mind, this paper aims to determine a pattern among the texts of Richard Rorty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and David Foster Wallace, an ethic of representing others with modesty. The texts of these three writers—"Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) by Spivak, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989) by Rorty, and *Signifying Rappers* (1990) by Wallace—

[1] One of the most famous critiques of the intentional fallacy is E.D. Hirsh's *Validity in Interpretation* (1967). Hirsh's subsequent criticism, *Intention & Interpretation* (1992, edited by Gary Iseminger), updated the discussion.

were all published around 1990. While their positions as writers are different, their texts share the same pattern: a perpetual critique of their subject position. For Rorty, this is articulated when he casts doubt on the subject "we." Spivak directly questions the critic's attitude and responsibility to represent others. In his essay on rap, Wallace, as a white male "yuppie," continuously asks himself about his "entitlement" of representing Black culture with modesty.

Literary critic Michiko Kakutani criticizes postmodernism as a prime cause of post-truth,[2] pointing out "personal testimony" in the context: "Academic writers began prefacing scholarly papers with disquisitions on their own 'positioning'—their race, religion, gender, background, personal experiences that might inform or skew or ratify their analysis" (70). Critics' statements of their identity, according to Kakutani, would be subjective and thus blur the objective facts. However, I partly disagree with this Kakutani's argument because critics' expression of their identity is sometimes important in questioning their subject position; without this, one cannot represent others. On "personal testimony," I clearly distinguish between the subject "we" strategy and autocriticism: the former should be abandoned, and the latter should be defended. My discussion will consistently defend this autocritical and pragmatic attitude to criticize the intentional fallacy of critics in literary criticism.

2.2. Who Are "We"?

I will tackle the issue of the subject "we" strategy by questioning the subject word "we." This is an ordinary word; the subject "we" is used in daily life. In academic papers, the editorial "we" is often preferred to the subject

[2] On postmodernism, I completely disagree with Kakutani and attempt to counter her discussion in Chapter 5. Additionally, Kakutani, who criticizes "personal testimony" in her book, refers to Wallace's text a great deal. My question is the following: What does Kakutani think about Wallace's personal testimony in *Signifying Rappers*?

"I" because "I" is too personal to speak objectively. However, this "we" sometimes indicates an unclear group of people. "We" might share the same background or the same nationality. "We" might share, across the borders of countries, the same thoughts or ideas. A fiction about "us" could be a great story that would unify a group of people emotionally. Although this word is useful, appealing, and touching, it could be simultaneously dangerous because it unifies some people and excludes others at the same time. "We" perpetually must decide the arbitrary and practical limit of "us." The question is, Who are "we"?

In the essay titled "In the 21st Century, We Are All Migrants," fiction writer Mohsin Hamid states, "Perhaps thinking of us all as migrants offers us a way out of this looming dystopia" in a situation divided between "natives and migrants" and "If we are all migrants, then possibly there is a kinship between the suffering of the woman who has never lived in another town and yet has come to feel foreign on her own street and the suffering of the man who has left his town and will never see it again" (Hamid). Thus, a single story of "we" attracts some people but makes others feel disgusted. This is sadly a simple fact. The narrative of a single story of "we" is not peculiar to the fiction writer but is shared in other academic discussions. For instance, in *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (2019), Jan Nederveen Pieterse insists on "hybridity" as a condition of globalization. In the Introduction, he declares that his theoretical background owes to his identity:

> *We* [Pieterse's family] are Eurasians and hybrid in a genealogical and existential sense. This is not a matter of choice or preference but a just so circumstance. It happens to be a matter of reflection because my work is social science. My family history then is steeped in the history of western expansion, colonialism, and intercontinental migration. I don't mention this because I think it is unusual but rather because I think it is common; one way or another, *we* are all migrants. (4; emphases

added)

Again, who are "we" in these sentences? The signified of "we" in the first line is apparently his family. Then, the final sentence, "we are all migrants," insists that the story of "we" is "common" because, as in Hamid's essay, human beings have historically moved without borders. Therefore, Hamid and Pieterse aim to widen the range of "us" strategically.

This statement, "we are all migrants," is preferred in migration studies. For instance, in *We Are All Migrants* (2015), Gregory Feldman states, "By defaults, we are all migrants" (xii), and in "We Are All Migrants" (2022), Jaan Valsiner insists that "We will always be migrants—and that keeps our societies alive" (Valsiner). Surely, the discourse of "we are all migrants" is, in a sense, probably correct from the perspective of human history. What I want to point out here is that in postcolonial studies and cultural studies, the commonization of "we" is uncritically done by some critics and scholars. This single story of "we," based on the writer's identity, would partly succeed in including some empathized people but unavoidably exclude others who do not identify with it. If, as Hamid suggested above, this is an era divided between "natives and migrants," then how can "migrants" be *friends* with "natives"? When the former says, "We are all migrants," most of the latter would say, "We are *not* migrants at all." Through the era of Trump and Brexit, the liberals' strategy of inclusion, the strategy of populism, failed to solve the problem but even provoked ill feelings among "natives."

The subject "we" strategy is not only the Left's matter but also the Right's in today's politics. In *Who Are We—And Should It Matter in the 21st Century?* (2021), Gary Younge criticizes the Right's use of identity and states, "There is nothing inherent in any identity, or the politics that emerge from it, that makes it necessarily either reactionary or progressive" (15). Despite criticizing the Right, what Younge points out is two different aims of the political strategy: "The rights of white people, Christians or men are no less

important than those of black people, Muslims or women. The issue is whether those who seek to rally those groups are campaigning for rights that should be exclusive or universal" (15). The matter of being "exclusive or universal" is not about the Left or the Right; it is about whether the aims are ethically right or wrong. However, this is also the matter of identity politics because any identities are not "universal" in the end. The subject "we" strategy like "we are all migrants" always faces this dilemma; no matter how the critics claim the historical fact about our identities, people acknowledging different identities feel alienated from "us."

Rorty warns against the commonization of "we" and was aware of the matter of being "exclusive or universal" in 1993. Rorty's Oxford Amnesty Lecture titled "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," questions the legitimacy of European liberalism, which is not universal but just Western intellectuals' ideal:

> Outside the circle of post-Enlightenment European culture, the circle of relatively safe and secure people who have been manipulating one another's sentiments for two hundred years, most people are simply unable to understand why membership in a biological species is supposed to suffice for membership in a moral community. This is not because they are insufficiently rational. It is, typically, because they live in a world in which it would be just too risky—indeed, would often be insanely dangerous—to let one's sense of moral community stretch beyond one's family, clan, or tribe. ("Human Rights" 178)

Rorty's viewpoint, which sees the limited legitimacy of liberalism, suggests considering the commonization of "we." The liberal subject of "we" is not only arbitrary but cannot include others who are "[o]utside the circle of post-Enlightenment European culture." However, although it is impossible and even nonsensical to preach universal correctness, it must be *universal* to care

about others. Facing the oxymoron of liberalism, Rorty denies preaching the universality of justice by teaching knowledge and thematizes "sentimental education"—an emotional motivation to consider others. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty concludes his discussion by suggesting a practical approach to the oxymoron, noting that the seemingly contradicted attitude is the essence of the "liberal ironist:"

> The self-doubt seems to me the characteristic mark of the first epoch in human history in which large numbers of people have become able to separate the question "Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?" from the question "Are you suffering?" In my jargon, this is the ability to distinguish the question of whether you and I share the same final vocabulary from the question of whether you are in pain. Distinguishing these questions makes it possible to distinguish public from private questions, questions about pain from questions about the point of human life, the domain of the liberal from the domain of the ironist. It thus makes it possible for a single person to be both. (*Contingency* 198)

Not lecturing the universal righteousness but devoting ourselves to caring for others by saying the simple words "Are you suffering?" must be the only way to imagine the pain of others, and this should be a necessary thing that "we" can do *universally*. This oxymoron of universalness is the attitude of people who Rorty calls the "liberal ironist." Thus, it is "possible for a single person to be both" liberalist and ironist. Furthermore, it is necessary to be both because having a pragmatic attitude can only widen the limit of "we" and simultaneously respect people outside of "we." You should be humble about what you believe as justice and should not be conceited in thinking that you can make others believe what you believe. Rorty's strategy of the liberal ironist is more than important; without it, one can no longer care about others,

who are totally different. This is not an abstract idea but a practical, concrete, and pragmatic way of living.

This helps literary critics reconsider the strategy of inclusion that aims to widen the limit of "we" based on the critic's -ism and position. A narrative like "we are all migrants," no matter how "right" the argument is, would inevitably exclude otherness. In academic discussions of literature, it is common for critics to usually read a text and discuss it by using the subject "we." Again, who are "we"? What is this transparent, inarticulate, and undecidable figure? The narrators of the story, including fiction writers and literary critics, conceal their identity "I" under the subject of "we" and have solidarity with *no one* in the end. The subject "we" strategy based on their identity hides the critics' arbitrary way of reading and identifies with what they want to read in a text. I call this situation the intentional fallacy of critics.

I do not aim to completely exclude the subject "we," because, as Rorty explained, it is universal that we must care for others, and that would be realizable by widening the range of "us." The point is, whether one pays attention to the usage of the subject "we." Considering the subject "we" means that "we" *cannot not* question the very existence of the subject "I" and others outside of "us." Without the subject "I," no one can read literature. Thus, we have no choice but to decide upon the range of the subject when reading and discussing a text pragmatically. There is no other way to find how a single person can be both "I" and "us."

In literary criticism after the intentional fallacy, the criticism based on an -ism might have been supported by the idea of textual autonomy. In this situation of the intentional fallacy of critics, I think it is necessary to consider *how* literary texts have been read by critics. The simple and uncritical subject "we" can never represent others, and the critics' act of representation contains much to consider. Without this consideration, one cannot escape the intentional fallacy of critics. Based on Rorty's discussion of the subject "we,"

I would like to find a way or an ethic to represent others. This way or ethic of representation will be explained theoretically by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and practically by David Foster Wallace.

2.3. Can Critics Represent Others?

As a Marxist and feminist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a literary critic who is extremely conscious of her act of representation and her -ism and is autocritical of her works. To consider the intentional fallacy of critics, I shall read Spivak's monumental paper, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in which she questions the representation by critics rather than fiction writers. The point is that Spivak critically pays attention to the double meaning of representation: "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 275). The former indicates a political sense of representation—to speak on behalf of a group of people. The latter indicates what artists do—to express something in the form of a poem, novel, music, sculpture, painting, photograph, etc. When talking about representation, we must consider its two meanings by distinguishing them. Keeping this in mind, I will focus on the critics' acts of representation and discuss their responsibility/response-ability of representing literary texts. My position as a critic is anti-identity politics and pro-I-narrative, both of which are compatible. This will be probed by defending what we *cannot* represent.

First, I will explore Spivak's idea of critics' responsibility/response-ability. Her trenchant critique of "Intellectuals and Power," a conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, is worth considering because she questions critics' responsibility/response-ability of representation in both the political and aesthetical senses. In the conversation, Deleuze states,

"Representation no longer exists; there's only action" (Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" 206–07). Spivak contends that Foucault and Deleuze have abdicated their responsibility as critics. Spivak says that their statement that the masses can represent themselves is the "transparent" criticism: "Further, the intellectuals, who are neither of these S/subjects, become transparent in the relay race, for they merely report on the nonrepresented subject and analyze (without analyzing) the workings of (the unnamed Subject irreducibly presupposed by) power and desire" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 279). The critics' statement, "representation no longer exists; there's only action" is ironical; the critics' choice of not speaking recursively *represents* their subject position. This is the act of "analyzing (without analyzing)"; the critics' denial of representation *is* one way of representation.

This reflexivity of representation is related to the critics' responsibility/response-ability: "One responsibility of the critic might be to read and write so that the impossibility of such interested individualistic refusals of the institutional privileges of power bestowed on the subject is taken seriously" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 280). Intellectuals/critics are always privileged subjects to speak; thus, Spivak adds "to Said's analysis the notion of the surreptitious subject of power and desire marked by the transparency of the intellectual" (280). For Spivak, who concludes her discussion by stating that the "subaltern cannot speak," the attitude saying "representation no longer exists; there's only action" means that critics have abandoned their responsibility/response-ability. The critics' act of reading and writing means not being onlookers but being participants, who must enter the ring with others and speak in their own words.

While critics' responsibility/response-ability makes them participate in the discussion, this does not mean that they should speak based on their identity politics. Spivak clearly declared herself against identity politics. One theme of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is Sati in India, a historical Hindu practice. Spivak's roots as Indian is an issue in the paper; however, she

indicates her identity rather than speaking based on her identity politics. Self-referentially, Spivak mentiones her way of referring to her roots being from India:

> My Indian example could thus be seen as a nostalgic investigation of the lost roots of my own identity. Yet even as I know that one cannot freely enter the thickets of 'motivations,' I would maintain that my chief project is to point out the positivist-idealist variety of such nostalgia. I turn to Indian material because, in the absence of advanced disciplinary training, that accident of birth and education has provided me with a *sense* of the historical canvas, a hold on some of the pertinent languages that are useful tools for a *bricoleur*, especially when armed with the Marxist skepticism of concrete experience as the final arbiter and a critique of disciplinary formations. Yet the Indian case cannot be taken as representative of all countries, nations, cultures, and the like that may be invoked as the Other of Europe as Self. (281)

The reason Spivak refers to India is that she was accidentally born there and accidentally had a good education ("accident of birth and education"). Thus, when Spivak discusses representation, she simply cannot help but consider her subject formation and position, which have been formed through mere accident or *contingency*. Accepting contingency about oneself means persistently criticizing "concrete experience as the final arbiter and a critique of disciplinary formations."

This attitude is exactly like Rorty's pragmatism: his attitude of denying "the final vocabulary." He defines it as "[t]hese are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies" and "in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives" (*Contingency* 73). Therefore, only the liberal ironist, Rorty suggests, "has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she

currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered" (*Contingency* 73). We encounter people or books by chance and make our vocabularies; thus, they must be variable and can never be final. Representing something aesthetically and politically as "the final arbiter" (Spivak) or "the final vocabulary" (Rorty) is what critics must avoid; that is, they must keep paying attention to their act of representation and must not place a label on others. Thus, the critics' responsibility/response-ability is to have a pragmatic attitude toward others. This is an ethic of critics, who think of themselves based on mere contingency and understand that "disciplinary formations" will never be completed.

Spivak's self-consciousness as a critic is apparently superior to the subject "we" strategy because the subject "we" is too big to narrate some sympathizing stories and to include others. Referring to India as Spivak's roots does not aim to represent the "Other of Europe as Self," which is inevitably thrown into the stereotyped narrative against Eurocentrism. In this sense, "we" can never include nor represent others. Spivak articulates this when she talks about the consciousness of the subaltern: "When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work *cannot* say becomes important" (287). What critics can say is limited; thus, they must be humble in their work and understanding of their limitations, and, at the same time, pragmatically choose to speak what they can speak or choose not to speak what they cannot speak with responsibility.

Spivak's strategy of representation is realistic, practical, and pragmatic for living with others. When Spivak confronts an obscure nobody, she articulates an ethic of representation: "Here are subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant labor, the tribals, and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside. To confront them is not to represent (*vertreten*) them but to learn to represent (*darstellen*) ourselves" (288–89). For critics/intellectuals, facing the masses/others is not about politically

representing (*vertreten*) them, saying "we are all migrants," or "representation no longer exists; there's only action." Rather, it is about learning to aesthetically represent (*darstellen*) their own attitudes and subject positions. As cited above, Spivak considers the double meaning of representation in the political and aesthetical senses. That is to say, the act of politically representing others is inseparable from the act of aesthetically representing oneself; representing others without representing oneself is impossible. Critics' subject position between the two senses of representation would require them to have the modesty to speak. For critics to be modest, they must know their own limitations and respect that they cannot speak for others. This ethic of modesty is what Spivak discusses in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" patiently.

Today, when anyone *can* literally speak anything on social medias, the issue of the ethics of representation, which is not black or white, has been widely dismissed. While fake news and conspiracy theories of the Right are rampant, political correctness, identity politics, and cancel culture of the Left do not seem to carry out their proper functions; both sides aim not to criticize but exclude each other. Both never seem to come to a mutual agreement. This is not a discussion but a total division. Under the circumstances of social medias, where no mutual agreement exists, the issue of the ethics of representation cannot be acceptable. At the end of the paper, Spivak concludes her discussion by stating, "The subaltern cannot speak" and "Representation has not withered away" (308). To simply and uncritically believe that the masses can speak has eroded the reliance on intellectuals/critics and caused populism. This is a simple fact today. The modesty of representation, acknowledging "the subaltern cannot speak" or "the intellectuals/critics cannot politically represent others" coexists with the recognition of aesthetically representing the own subject position. Only this pragmatic attitude—going back and forth between criticizing yourself and representing others—is the critics' responsibility/response-ability. The subject position

will never be fixed; thus, dismissing this indispensable process is what I call the intentional fallacy of critics.

2.4. The Entitlement for Yuppies to Represent Rappers

While American fiction writer David Foster Wallace is widely known as a great essayist, one of his early essays, *Signifying Rappers* (1990), co-written by Mark Costello, has seldom been discussed in the academic field. "'The Rare White at the Window': A Reappraisal of Mark Costello and David Foster Wallace's Signifying Rappers" (2015) by Tara Morrissey and Lucas Thompson is a rare work in that they retrospectively rank the text in Wallace's literary career and focus on the issue of race. In this chapter, I will read *Signifying Rappers* as a highly critical text that demonstrates and practices the pragmatic attitude discussed above: going back and forth between criticizing oneself and representing others.

Signifying Rappers consists of three parts, and the first chapter is titled "Entitlement." Are these two white males qualified to represent Black culture? They acknowledge that there is "No question that serious rap is, and is very self-consciously, music by urban blacks about same to and for same" (Wallace and Costello 24–25). Serious rap is nothing but of, by, and for Black people, and white people are the absolute outsider. Furthermore, "Serious rap's a musical movement that seems to revile whites as a group or Establishment and simply to ignore their possibility as distinct individuals" (25). When talking about rap, white people become completely faceless and nameless mobs. In *Signifying Rappers*, Wallace's part of "Entitlement" begins as follows: "Please know we're very sensitive to this question: what business have two white yuppies [Wallace and Costello] trying to do a sampler on rap?" (21). His concern is similar to the very question I have discussed so far, which is critics' subject position of representation. *Signifying Rappers* critically raises

the same question of representation: the entitlement of white yuppies to represent rappers.

Because Wallace and Costello understand that an objective analysis of serious rap is impossible, they, particularly Wallace, cannot avoid representing their act of representing rap; reflexive analysis and narrative are essential. The closed culture of, by, and for Black people forbids the approach of white people: "Our point of departure, essay-wise, was always less what we knew than what we felt, listening; less what we liked than why" (24). They do not simply amplify their knowledge about serious rap and dedicate themselves to clarifying their subject position of how and what they actually feel toward Black culture. This autocritical and self-referential narrative is unavoidable when trying to represent others. Based on this, Wallace states, "For the white, behind his transparent cultural impediment, though, the Hard rap begins in the mood to resemble something more like temblor, epiclesis, prophecy: it's not like good old corporate popular art, whose job was simply to remind us of what we already know" (33). There is an uncrossable distance between mainstream entertainment and serious rap, which is sublime for white people, like Wallace, and totally the other. This sense of distance is important for Wallace because "all from the other side of a chasm we feel glad, if liberal-guilty, is there: some *space* between our own lawned split-level world and whatever it is that lends the authenticity" (32–33). For white people, serious rap remains the complete other because the distance or space is never closed. However, Wallace finds the sublime there and can never stop peeping. This conscious guilt is articulated as "liberal-guilty"; watchers already trespass the gap and, at the same time, cannot cross it. However, they try to trespass over and over. This condition is what I call *infinite reflexivity*.[3]

Their act of peeping at serious rap on the other side could potentially result in arrogant intellectualism. This is articulated as the act of sightseeing

[3] This will be discussed in Chapter 5 about David Foster Wallace.

from the train or the daily act of watching TV:

> So an easy analysis, through the fast train's glass, of rap as the latest occasion for the postliberal and highly vicarious guilt we find as exhilarating as it is necessary—that we like to play voyeur, play at being kept, for once, truly outside; it assuages, makes us think what's inside that torn-down world refers to us in no way, abides here decayed because Meant To, the pain of the snarling faces the raps exit no more relevant or real than the cathode guts of Our own biggest window. The white illusion of 'authenticity' as a signpost to equity, the sameness-in-indifference of '80s P.R.: Let Ghetto Be Ghetto, from the train. (76)

Arrogant intellectualism causes a misunderstanding that critics *can* represent others. Only intellectualism with modesty, like Spivak suggested, will make critics think twice about the distance between what object they want to represent and what subject they are. Seeing and representing outside from a safety zone, such as this side of "the fast train's glass" or "the cathode guts of Our own biggest window [TV screen]," is nothing more than peeping cultural studies. In "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" (1993), Wallace, who has been known as a TV addict, asserts repeatedly that watching TV for several hours a day can cause a serious misunderstanding of reality. Visitors, viewers, or critics think that they can see and represent the outside "torn-down world" without directly touching it.

Instead of representing the other from the outside, Wallace suggests that you should get off the train:

> Except but now here's what's neat: Step out, even just for a moment, and it turns out that this time it isn't the train that's moving, it's the gutted landscape of rap itself; and the 'ruins' that are its home and *raison* aren't nearly the static archeology they seem, they themselves

> are moving, arranging themselves, becoming something no less bombed-out or dire but now somehow *intended from within*, a hegemony that matters, a self-conscious apposition, moving into expression, into Awareness, 'thriving' culturally somehow, copulating even; so that what had looked from the moving glass to be a place's and people's past-in-present reveals itself now a ruined totem to *total* presence—a separate, unequal, Other place-and-time, exploding outward. (76–77)

When getting off the train, one realizes that the train does not move at all and that only the landscape is actually moving. The culture of serious rap barely stops changing because it is "a separate, unequal, Other place-and-time, exploding outward" from where you live and watch on your monitor. Facing fluid cultural emergence, one simply cannot watch, talk about, and represent it from a solid, safe place. This attitude of these critics shares much with Japanese folklorist Kunio Yanagita's idea of *reflection*. Eiji Otsuka introduces this idea to criticize pop culture studies in Japanese universities, where many young scholars publish academic papers about pop culture without any reflection on the context of Japanese folklore and of themselves. Referring to Yanagita's *How to Study Folklore* [『郷土生活の研究法』] (1935), Otsuka contends that if one wants to know the ordinary people, one must consider their own subject position and whether they are one of the people or a privileged intellectual. Without this reflection, mass culture studies would be impossible (Otsuka 135). Wanting to avoid partaking in peeping cultural studies, Wallace steps inside of the culture from a safety zone, understands that white yuppies cannot represent Black rappers, and then, with modesty, tries again to speak pragmatically.

Wallace represents neither Black culture nor white people; that is, his words "for the white" can be distinguished from identity politics. One must read "for the white" not as his identity politics, but as his statement of modesty to understand his limited ability to know and to represent the object.

This expression of modesty has a similar pattern to Rorty's attitude toward the liberal ironist. Rorty's act of always relativizing his subject position but never universalizing it focuses on the private and individual calling for others. Similarly, for Spivak, representing others politically must involve aesthetically representing the critics' subject position. The three of them share this pattern: the critics' attitude of perpetually questioning their subject position and then trying to represent others with modesty. Only having this attitude can thematize the intentional fallacy of critics.

2.5. Intentional Fallacy of Critics

The subtitle of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946) is "The Representation of Reality in Western Literature." Mimesis is rephrased as representation; he highly assesses literary realism, which literally reflects the real world at the time, and literary modernism, which reflects the consciousness of the narrator. Thus, it can be generally said that literary texts' necessary and sufficient condition is reflecting or representing *something*. Based on this fact, the works of literary critics and scholars is to *represent* representation. When considering literary texts, they necessarily and sufficiently have this process of double representation, or re-representation.

This axiom is rarely questioned; critics often argue that the text represents something, but they do not always state that *they* represent the text as something. Marxist criticism, for example, sees the characters in literary texts as *the public*, focusing on their work, economic situation, or harsh living environment, and some critics argue that these elements in the text represent *the class* of the characters. Seemingly, this process of criticism is widely accepted, but to be more precise, this could hide critics' intention; the process is nothing but *critics'* representation of the text. Focusing on the class of the character, or regarding them as the public figures, fails to see them as *the*

private figures. This private sphere of the characters in the text is often erased by critics' transparent act of re-representation; this is what I call the intentional fallacy of critics. In addition, speaking for something should question the subject position of the critic. We are not free from this infinite reflexivity.

When literary critics and scholars talk about the text, the subject of the act of representation is not the text itself, but the critics and scholars themselves. This chapter has demonstrated that Rorty, Spivak, and Wallace, in confronting this fundamental issue directly, have perpetually questioned their subject positions, and tried to represent others with modesty. The transparent subject "we" without consideration of the limitation cannot represent others politically and aesthetically. To overcome the intentional fallacy of critics, autocriticism, not the subject "we" strategy or identity politics, is indispensable. To express critics' subject position should not be about their foundation of reading texts, but about their *calling* for readers. Then, the readers can *respond* to it. This must be the ideal and essential cycle of responsibility/response-ability between authors and critics, and between critics and their readers.

3. A Critique of Intellectualism: Richard Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* or Pragmatic Sentimentality

3.1. Anti-Intellectualism?

Richard Powers's third novel, *The Gold Bug Variations*, has a form of love story with an apparently banal plot. Some readers, particularly those with a taste for abstruse postmodern novels, might think that the story is clichéd. Indeed, soon after the novel was published, some reviewers criticized the story of *The Gold Bug Variations* as clichéd or dull. In a review for *The New York Times*, Louis B. Jones proposes a critical view that "Mr. Powers isn't interested in the subtleties of characterization but in the larger pattern. He writes fiction that aspires to the condition of music, austere and abstract, without being humorless" (Jones). How can one respond to such criticism? Maybe one can ignore it and discuss some gimmicks or ideas in the novel, but one should not underestimate the fact that *The Gold Bug Variations* was written in the form of a love story. The aim of this paper is not to judge whether the love story of *The Gold Bug Variations* is good entertainment or a failure in novelty. The fact is that, by writing this love story with various kinds of knowledge, Powers articulates his position as a fiction writer: anti-intellectualism.

Before explaining why I regard Powers, though he is apparently an intellectual writer, as anti-intellectualism, I must first refer to Powers's unique background as a fiction writer. Although Powers initially studied physics and then shifted to English literature, he did not become a specialist in a specific disciplinary field and chose instead to become a novelist. Because of his unique academic background, many critics and scholars praise Powers's encyclopedic knowledge scattered in his novels. On the grounds of the density

or structural complexity of his fiction, Powers is occasionally compared to the older novelist Thomas Pynchon. However, American critic Tom LeClair distinguishes Powers from Pynchon in respect of their educational backgrounds: "Powers, [William T.] Vollmann, and [David Foster] Wallace were educated in the Age of Information: and they acquired an expertise nowhere evident in the work of the previous generation, Pynchon's fiction included" (13). Powers's interdisciplinary background is surely his advantage as a fiction writer and, as LeClair argues, certainly deepens his fictional world. My interest lies in the reason why Powers chose to write such a novel as *The Gold Bug Variations*, which is seemingly a clichéd love story but with a complex narrative structure and encyclopedic knowledge drawn from several disciplines. Critics and literary scholars tend to discuss and evaluate the novel from the perspective of American postmodern literature. However, before criticizing the element of the love story too easily, one must consider its form more seriously, not least because Powers is, as already noted above, such an intellectual writer that his choice of the form of the novel must be far from trivial.

I assume that Powers's choice of the clichéd love story is his pedagogical strategy to criticize intellectualism from the inside of disciplinal cultures. In this sense, I want to regard Powers as anti-intellectual. In *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963),[4] Richard Hofstadter notes the precondition of his discussion: "This book is a critical inquiry, not a legal brief for the intellectuals against the American community" (20) and does not simply and contemptuously dismiss anti-intellectualism. Rather, he recognizes that anti-intellectualism is rather common in American education: "it has been noticed that intellect in America is resented as a kind of excellence, as a claim

[4] The specific events in the 1950s behind Hofstadter's book are McCarthyism and the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower (known as Ike). Interestingly, the first accidental meeting of Ressler and O'Deigh is related to Eisenhower. Ressler points out O'Deigh's mistake of her board, saying: "'I like Ike. How about yourself?' My [O'Deigh's] introduction to Stuart Ressler's sense of humor" (18).

to distinction, as a challenge to egalitarianism, as a quality which almost certainly deprives a man or woman of the common touch. The phenomenon is most impressive in education itself" (Hofstadter 51). This attitude of the American people is reminiscent of Clint Eastwood's films and is widely known as grassroots conservatism. Shinji Miyadai praises Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) for his rightist idea not as intellectualism but as voluntarism (Miyadai 232–37), which places emphasis on human intention rather than intellect or reason. I want to put Powers's pedagogical strategy into these contexts. *The Gold Bug Variations* aims to criticize intellectualism for its elitism and praise the grassroots attitude of voluntarism.

The following discussion tries to confirm Powers's pedagogical strategy as voluntarism. First, I will determine how the text has thus far been read from the viewpoint of intellectualism. Second, I will point out the limits of intellectualism and evaluate the protagonist's "cub translation" as Powers's articulation of voluntarism. Finally, I will consider the ending of *The Gold Bug Variations* from the viewpoint of voluntarism and argue that some criticisms of the clichéd love story show the intentional fallacy of critics talking in the public vocabulary. My discussion will assert that the private vocabulary can articulate Powers's pedagogical strategy, which can be called pragmatic sentimentality.

3.2. Discipline, Culture, and Intellectualism

No one can deny that Powers is an intellectual writer; however, it is insufficient or even misleading to praise his intellectuality and educational background. Why did he refuse to be a specialist in a particular disciplinary field and choose to become a fiction writer? This question relates to Powers's attitude toward discipline and intellectualism, because he is a kind of writer who tries to cross disciplinary borders and to convey various knowledge from

different disciplines in his novels.

Powers's idea of "cultures" can in part provide an answer to the question. In 1959, British scientist and novelist C. P. Snow declared at the Rede Lecture the disciplinary divide between science and literature and expressed the situation as "two cultures." In *The Two Cultures*, Snow argues that there is "[b]etween the two [literary intellectuals and scientists] a gulf of mutual incomprehension—sometimes (particularly among the young) hostility and dislike, but most of all a lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other" (4). Snow's argument, which caused controversy with British literary critic F. R. Leavis, is still relevant when observing the situation in today's universities. In an e-mail conversation on literature and science, titled "Bordercrossings: A Conversation in Cyberspace," a participant asks Powers what he thinks about the validity of the "two cultures" ideas. Powers rejects this dichotomy and offers an alternative suggestion: "many cultures." He states, "Two cultures? The answer to that one depends a lot on the gauge you set on culture. At fine magnifications, we probably want to talk not about two cultures, but about hopelessly many" (Stites 48). "Many cultures" rather than two does not simply mean rejecting a difference between the sciences and humanities but acknowledging "many" differences between countless cultures: "The similarities in the ways we all attempt to solve experience are, in the wide lens, probably more important than the differences" (Stites 48). To acknowledge the differences and then to assert the similarities. These words could explain why *The Gold Bug Variations* is about the relationship between biology, music, and the act of writing. The novel tries to prove the similarities among them rather than the differences. This could be a suitable interpretation of Powers's words: "The same, only different: That's the oxymoron at the heart of *Gold Bug* [*Variations*]" (Stites 108). Snow's "two cultures," the disciplinary divides between the sciences and humanities, cannot capture Powers's creativity. His perspective on cultures or disciplines, on the

contrary, would be more comprehensive than Snow's limited viewpoint.

Powers's attitude toward "many cultures" reflects his academic background; he has rejected becoming an intellectual in a discipline. Therefore, writing novels rather than writing academic papers represents his subject position of anti-intellectualism. Some might argue that Powers *is* a representative of intellectualism; however, this cannot fully explain the question of Powers's attempt at fiction writing and his choice of the clichéd form of love story in *The Gold Bug Variations*. In an interview with Motoyuki Shibata in 2000, Powers states his epistemological view as follows: "I don't see the heart and the head as being opposites and needing to choose between emotional knowledge and intellectual knowledge" (*Nine Interviews* 154). This "head and heart" can be considered as Powers's manifesto as a fiction writer because he occasionally declares this in interviews, such as the one in 2001 (Williams, "The Last Generalist" 110) and another in 2003 (Fuller, "An Interview with Richard Powers" 107). "Head/intellectual knowledge" could be said to refer to knowledge in various disciplines, such as the literary, musical, or biological theories mentioned in *The Gold Bug Variations*. This knowledge, Powers asserts, cannot separate itself from "heart/emotional knowledge," which refers to what one perceives or connects with empathetically. Provisionally, I would like to assume that Powers intentionally articulates this "heart/emotional knowledge" as the form of the love story. However, it is insufficient to state that Powers succeeds in representing ample knowledge from several disciplines in a love story. I argue that Powers criticizes closed disciplines and intellectuals and embodies his subject position as anti-intellectual in his novel. Therefore, the clichéd love story is pragmatically introduced in *The Gold Bug Variations*

This viewpoint, however, has not necessarily been shared in previous research. Joseph Tabbi, a literary theorist in postmodern literature, criticizes Powers's idea of "head and heart": "I have started to sense that Powers's oft-stated ambition to combine 'head and heart' diminishes, rather than develops,

narrative's capacities" (226). Another accusation is more specific to *The Gold Bug Variations*. Critic William Deresiewicz states, "what's missing from the novel is, well, a novel. The characters are idealized, the love stories mawkish and clichéd, the emotions meant to ground the scientific speculations in lived experience announced rather than established" (Deresiewicz).[5] If Tabbi and Deresiewicz are right, then "a novel" and "lived experience" would be absent from the novel *The Gold Bug Variations*.

How can one argue against these criticisms? Previous research on the novel tends to attach too much importance to knowledge from several disciplines rather than the story itself. Jay A. Labinger examines the parallel structure of *The Gold Bug Variations* and Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Goldberg Variations*. Scholars such as Scott Hermanson and Tom LeClair shed light on the scientific aspects of the novel by invoking chaos theory or systems theory. From the perspective of intertextuality, Joseph Dewey compares the novel with Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* and J.D. Thomas focuses on its relation to religious texts. As philosophical discussions, Mitch Frye examines the rhetoric in the novel referring to Gilles Deleuze's *Rhizome*, and Patti White compares the novel with Jacques Derrida's *Différance*.

In one of the series of "Understanding Contemporary American Literature", Joseph Dewey began with the remark that "Richard Powers writes big novels of ideas" (*Understanding* 1). This is a typical attitude of scholars with good intentions: they tend to only focus on Powers's intellectual capacities and do not question Powers's subject position to reject the singular discipline or culture. These critics' readings of Powers's novel thus far show only half of his novel: "head" rather than "heart." In this sense, I insist that *The Gold Bug Variations* calls for reading the clichéd love story using the "head" and "heart" seriously. This paper will read another half of the novel

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[5] The reason I particularly focus on Deresiewicz's criticism here and later is that his comment had long been referred to as a "critical response" on the web page for "Richard Powers" on Wikipedia. Although many readers, including critics and literary scholars, must have read this criticism, there have been no persuasive counterarguments.

academically: the sentimentality of the clichéd love story.

3.3. "My Cub Translation" or Voluntarism

Powers's critique of intellectualism, or his subject position of anti-intellectualism and voluntarism is articulated as a clichéd love story with knowledge beyond the borders of disciplines. To substantiate this, I will read *The Gold Bug Variations* as Powers's articulation of the correlation between knowledge of genetics, music, and the love story. The story consists of three different narratives: a love story of young scientist Stuart Ressler and married woman Jeanette Koss in 1957–58, another love story of librarian Jan O'Deigh and Franklin Todd in 1983–84, and O'Deigh's present narrative in 1985–86. The narrative structure is an imitation of Bach's *The Goldberg Variations*: 30 variations/chapters are placed between two "Arias," the intro and outro of variations. My discussion of the text focuses on the narrator O'Deigh's "translation," which not only means the so-called translation from one language to another but can be construed as an "interpretation with differences." This "translation" also connects with the protagonists' acts of writing their stories.

The first Aria placed before chapter 1 begins with this rhetorical question: "What could be simpler?" (7). Reading through the novel, one finds that the question is Stuart Ressler's favorite phrase. In the 1950s, Ressler was a young biologist whose model may be molecular biologist Marshall Nirenberg, who found the existence of messenger RNA in the 1950s (Dewey, "Hooking" 65). In the narrative in the 1980s, Jan O'Deigh and Franklin Todd look up to the middle-aged Ressler, like their father, who is now a mysterious ex-biologist. After Ressler's death, O'Deigh, in the present tense, starts to learn molecular biology to understand what Ressler meant to say: "Awake, I let the man [Ressler] ask the question I'd earlier forestalled: *what could be*

simpler? He remained a geneticist despite everything, partial to the purposive pattern, the generative thread" (13). Ressler's rhetorical question remains an enigma for O'Deigh and readers. The final Aria, however, only states: "What could be simpler? In rough translation: Once more with feeling" (639), and then the novel ends. For readers, the question of this "translation" remains unsolved because it requires interpreting "once more with feeling."

The novel articulates this "translation" in two ways: RNA translation in biology and genetics and the protagonists' acts of writing their stories. Although he withdrew from his laboratory life before publishing the thesis, the former "translation" is what Ressler discovered in the 1950s in relation to Bach's *The Goldberg Variations*: "After intensive, repeated listening, I could hear the first suggestion of what had covertly fascinated me" (191). His discovery is at first ascribable to his experience of wonder at finding a common pattern between RNA translation and the structure of *The Goldberg Variations*: "The strain separated like an independent filament of DNA—part of the melodic line, but simultaneously apart. I made the momentous discovery that it was a note-for-note transcription of the master melody" (191).

This "note-for-note transcription of the master melody" is exactly the homologous pattern between genetics and music, which evokes Gregory Bateson's epistemology: "*Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality*" (8).[6] Bateson's epistemology is, in short, to determine the common patterns in different species, connect them on a higher level, and then generalize them in cultural anthropology. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, Ressler's ah-ha moment is discovering the common pattern between RNA translation—the nucleobase of DNA (A, C, G, and T) slightly changes to RNA (A, C, G, and U)—and *The Goldberg Variations*—the master chord of Aria iterates with different

[6] Powers refers to Bateson in his essay about the systems novel: "One of the caveats of systems theory, as elaborated by Gregory Bateson, is that the map is not the place" ("Making the Round" 307).

melodies on each variation—"with feeling" or with a sense of wonder.[7]

"Translation" also intimately intertwines with the protagonists' acts of writing their stories. At the beginning of the novel, Jan O'Deigh starts to learn genetics by herself after she receives a letter from her ex-boyfriend Franklin Todd, which tells her about Ressler's death: "I managed to avoid that imperative [the active obligation to extract cache from courier], ignore the mess in his message, until Frank left, Ressler died. [...] Time to start my cub translation, to learn the place, as I'm likely to be here a little longer" (86). Then she quits her job, stays at home, and begins to learn genetics. When we read through the novel, we find that her "cub translation" results in "a layman's guide to nucleotides" (615), which is supposed to be her scientific narrative of *The Gold Bug Variations*.

The relationship between "translation" and the act of writing is more clearly articulated by another protagonist Franklin Todd, who narrates the story of the young Stuart Ressler in the 1950s. One day, O'Deigh receives a letter from Todd telling her about his anxiety about storytelling.

> The words that might tell me who the fellow was are no longer the words of the original. A coat of metaphor between me and the life I want to write. Words are a treacherous sextant, a poor stand-in for the thing they lay out. But they're all I have—memory, letters, this language institute. Translation would be impossible, self-contradicting at the etymological core: there would *be* no translation were it not for the fact that there is *only* translation. Nothing means what its shorthand pattern says it does. (352)

This is Todd's dilemma of "translation": the unavoidable differences between

[7] For the relationship between science and music with a sense of wonder in the text, see my article "A Sense of Wonder: Gregory Bateson and Glenn Gould in Richard Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations*" (2018).

what it is and what he writes, between reality and its representation. Considering the fact that at the end of the novel, readers discover that the narrator of the story about Ressler is Todd, it can be said that this metafictional statement is related to the narrative of *The Gold Bug Variations* as a whole and Powers's act of writing his story. In the text, Todd/Powers announces the impossibility and contradiction of "translation." This announcement must be the author's existential problem, because Todd seems to be reluctantly abandoning writing.

Contrary to her reluctant correspondent, O'Deigh's learning and writing refute the impossibility of "translation." Her learning and writing are also existential problems; she was so afraid of the risk of mutation that she decided to sterilize herself. Sometime before she meets Ressler and Todd, she, as a librarian managing the Question Board, receives "a request for the latest scientific line on mongolism" (383). To the request, she, with an air of confidence, responds: "the broadly established explanation: Down syndrome is the result of trisomy—a third chromosome 21. Airtight, complete, exact. I couldn't imagine improving upon it" (383). However, the questioner does not seem to be satisfied and asks about Down syndrome over and over. Finally, contrary to the scientifically established fact that late childbearing increases the risk, a 23-year-old mother with a child with Down syndrome appears in the library. Then O'Deigh "finally knew what she was asking. Was it her fault?" (384). At this moment, O'Deigh's past explanations, which can be rephrased as "intellectual knowledge" in Powers's term, are revealed to be lacking in "emotional knowledge."

This experience of facing the limit of "intellectual knowledge," which has been a reference point to knowing the world for a librarian like O'Deigh, shows the limit of intellectualism. This recursively makes O'Deigh undergo an operation for sterilization: "I could hear my own mutations accumulating; it was either hurry into a baby-making I was not ready for, or wait, Russian roulette, for my own blueprint to betray me" (385). O'Deigh has already

known the risk of Down syndrome as a scientific fact. The incident of meeting the 23-year-old mother involuntarily makes O'Deigh recognize the risk, however low it is; thus, as a result, she can no longer leave her childbearing up to chance ("Russian roulette"). Her decision causes the end of her relationship with Todd. If one reads their relationship from the perspective of the limits of intellectualism, their acts of writing their stories after their breakup and the death of Ressler can be interpreted as their realization of voluntarism.

My reading thus far logically verifies that O'Deigh's act of learning and writing can be construed as her realization of a correlation between "intellectual knowledge" and "emotional knowledge," in other words, voluntarism. The following description, which is supposed to be part of "a layman's guide to nucleotides," is a good example of her realization:

> 3. Variation. Differential dying creates divergence. This is my sticking point tonight. I make the catch only slowly: variation is two-tiered. First: the ten thousand wrigglers in a pound of anchovy spawn are all different. Trivially individual. [...] I loved one man distinct from all others, or at most, two. Already halfway to difference's second tier: the difference between Franklin and that anchovy spawn. A difference of some difference—where all the tempest still comes from. (328)

This scientific explanation of "variation" about how the mutation of DNA restores biodiversity gradually gains the aspect of her personal emotion toward her beloved, who is so different from others that she loved him. In this part of "a layman's guide to nucleotides," one can read the essence of her "cub translation": the interpretation of scientific theory through her subjectivity. As a result, the text written by O'Deigh articulates the correlation between the scientific theory and her emotions, which is absolutely essential in her learning and writing. In this sense, "a layman's guide to nucleotides" is,

because of O'Deigh's/Powers's "translation," no longer full of disciplinary jargons but becomes something that laymen, the readers of this love story, can also learn "with feeling." O'Deigh overcomes intellectualism and realizes voluntarism.

This "translation" is also remarkable in another love story: the one between young scientist Stuart Ressler and married Jeanette Koss in the 1950s. It is revealed at the end of the novel that Franklin Todd has written the story. Ressler's discovery of messenger RNA is partly triggered by a record of Bach's *The Goldberg Variations*, which was a present from Koss. Through intense listening, Ressler finally discovers the same pattern between genetics and music:

> Steeped in the music, he [Ressler] teaches himself a vocabulary to describe what he hears in the profusion of notes. He borrows those terms he is most familiar with. Canon and imitation, audible even without names, become transcription. Phrase and motif become gene. He hears polypeptides in a peal of parallel structure, differentiation in a burst of counterpoint. (267–68)

Biological terms like "transcription," "gene," and "polypeptides" appear in the text, which describes *The Goldberg Variations*. Keeping in mind that the narrator of the text is Franklin Todd, who has shown anxiety about "translation," the above quotation seems to suggest that he confronts the inevitable change by "translation" ("Translation would be impossible") and finally affirms it.

In this love story in the 1950s, the correlation of "intellectual knowledge" and "emotional knowledge" is also examined in the adulterous relationship between Ressler and Koss because it is an anxious relationship between information and emotion. Despite Koss being a married woman, they fall in love desperately and simultaneously prove the existence of messenger

RNA. Finally, however, Koss leaves a letter confiding, "I give you pleasure to match your inbred fantasy, and take, in return, a painless biopsy, a little tissue you will never miss. I could forgive myself for having tried to steal your genes" (596). From the letter, Ressler understands that Koss has suffered from infertility with her husband, so she has attempted to determine who is the cause of the infertility. Her intention is partly her trial run to have a baby: "She means discovery. Science. An urge greater than what I am after: in vivo. And she will never have it" (596). Because her "science" is so much emotional, sentimental, and voluntaristic, Ressler, as a real intellectual, has no choice but to abandon science. Among these two couples in the 1950s and 1980s, abandoning intellectualism and realizing voluntarism are common; thus, the couples are variations.

3.4. Pragmatic Sentimentality

Based upon the discussion on "translation" in the love story, I shall return to Deresiewicz's criticism: "the emotions meant to ground the scientific speculations in lived experience [is] announced rather than established" (Deresiewicz). A serious limitation of this argument is that Deresiewicz distinguishes the protagonists' emotional aspects from scientific theories. My discussion, on the contrary, refutes this binary argument by reading *The Gold Bug Variations* as Powers's articulation of the correlation between "intellectual knowledge" and "emotional knowledge," as abandoning intellectualism and realizing voluntarism. Furthermore, to fully interpret the last line of the novel, "What could be simpler? In rough translation: Once more with feeling," I will consider Powers's pedagogical strategy to motivate his readers to overcome intellectualism and to make sense of voluntarism: pragmatic sentimentality.

Literary scholar James Hurt points out the metafictionality at the end of

chapter 30: "In *Gold Bug* [*Variations*] the conclusion is ironic and ambiguous; Todd both is and isn't the author of the 1957 narrative; Jan both is and isn't the author of the 1985 one. And much of the richness of the book comes from these authorial ambiguities" (37). The readers are thus forced to think about the ambiguities of the text, as the text does not fully clarify the authorship of the narratives. The metafictionality of the novel is worth noting, because metafiction, in general, foregrounds the existence of the readers of a text. Regarding the role of metafiction, Patricia Waugh states that "'Meta' terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers" (3). This can be widely recognized as a definition of metafiction. Additionally, the important effect of metafiction shows up in the readers' act of interpretation, as Waugh states, "Such novels supposedly expose the way in which these social practices are constructed through the language of oppressive ideologies, by refusing to allow the reader the role of passive consumer or any means of arriving at a 'total' interpretation of the text" (13). Readers are not allowed to fully understand the text because ambiguities and contradictions already exist in the text, and these can never be resolved. Readers naturally continue to be engaged in the interpretation of the text. Thus, it can be reasonable that "once more with feeling" directly calls for its readers to respond because of its metafictionality.

Powers's pedagogical strategy in choosing the form of a love story would be to open up academic disciplines to a larger readership. This reminds me of Spivak's strategy in *Death of a Discipline*. Against the Eurocentrism of Comparative Literature, Spivak affirms the importance of cooperating with Area Studies on the Third World in today's postcolonial and global situation:

> We cannot not try to open up, from the inside, the colonialism of European national language-based Comparative Literature and the Cold War format of Area studies, and infect history and anthropology with

> the 'other' as producer of knowledge. [...] The most difficult thing here is to resist mere appropriation by the dominant. (*Death of a Discipline* 10–11)

Her emphasis on opening up "from the inside" does not recommend dismissing or abandoning European Comparative Literature just because its Eurocentrism and male-dominance exclude the emergent or the residual of the outside of Europe. Rather, the important point here must be the strategical cooperation between Comparative Literature and Area Studies "to resist mere appropriation by the dominant."

I want to re-contextualize Spivak's viewpoint to read Powers's pedagogical strategy in *The Gold Bug Variations*. Some might argue that Spivak's point is limited to specific areas such as Comparative Literature and Area Studies; however, one can certainly read her idea more generally, because, as the three chapters of *Death of a Discipline*—"Crossing Borders," "Collectivities," and "Planetarity"—suggest, Spivak develops wide-ranging discussions from the perspective of "the planet" as a supplement of "the globe." In another article, Spivak criticizes today's global situation because it "is on our computers" and "[n]o one lives there," and then she proposes "the planet to overwrite the globe" ("Imperative" 338). The title of *Death of a Discipline*, which declares the death of *a* discipline, seems to suggest that a singular discipline can no longer exist in this age of Planetarity. We "cannot not" unlearn the known and imagine other possibilities "from the inside."

In the light of the lessons learned from Spivak, let me return to Powers's alternative idea of "many cultures": "The similarities in the ways we all attempt to solve experience are, in the wide lens, probably more important than the differences" (Stites 48). My discussion about "translation" in *The Gold Bug Variations*, however, does not simply celebrate the similarities among genetics, music, and the act of writing. Let me emphasize that O'Deigh's learning and writing are articulated as "my *cub* translation" and "a

layman's guide to nucleotides" (emphases added): O'Deigh and Todd are not professionals or connoisseurs but amateurs. The important point of cooperation among different disciplines is, as Spivak suggests, to "infect" the disciplines "with the 'other' as producer of knowledge," with utmost care "to resist mere appropriation by the dominant." Powers refused to become any professional in any specific discipline and chose instead to be a fiction writer. When an amateur like O'Deigh talks about biology, the text is infected with her emotion, "with feeling," and is no longer an academic paper in biology written by a specialist. This is the peculiarity of the "cub translation": the narrators find similarities among many cultures and articulate them in their own terms. This act of writing can open up the closed discipline "from the inside."

The attitude "to resist mere appropriation by the dominant" can stretch back to Spivak's predecessor, Raymond Williams. His essay titled "The Idea of a Common Culture," although an ordinary word like "common" paradoxically makes it more difficult to understand, is highly suggestive of opening up a closed discipline or culture. First, one should pay attention to the vital distinction between "a common culture" and "a culture in common": "It would not be a common culture (though it might be possible to call it a culture in common) if some existing segment of experience, articulated in a particular way, were simply extended—taught—to others, so that they then had it as a common possession" ("The Idea of a Common Culture" 4). A "common culture" does not simply mean a culture shared by many people or taught by top-down education. This would be "a culture in common."

Then, what is a common culture? Williams articulates it clearly as the attitude "to resist mere appropriation by the dominant":

> For it follows, from the original emphasis, that the culture of a people can only be what all its members are engaged in creating in the act of living: that a common culture is not the general extension of what a

> minority mean and believe, but the creation of a condition in which the people as a whole participate in the articulation of meanings and values, and in the consequent decisions between this meaning and that, this value and that. ("The Idea of a Common Culture" 4)

A "minority" in this context does not mean a disadvantaged person, such as ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities, but rather a limited number of intellectuals. The problem is that they dominate the articulation of "meanings and values" in culture and society, and that a majority—a large number of ordinary people, not a limited number of privileged people—cannot participate in the creation of its culture and society. This is a difficult process; the idea of a common culture is ultimately an ideal goal of democracy. Williams's essay was originally written in 1967, and one should bear in mind its political context, which has since changed:

> the point, simply, is that one would not be fully qualified to participate in this active process unless the education which provides its immediate means—developed speaking, writing, and reading—and which allows access to the terms of the argument so far, were made commonly available." ("The Idea of a Common Culture" 4)

Williams's assertion is specific: it is essential for working-class people to gain the capacities of "developed speaking, writing, and reading" for them to participate in democracy.

One cannot easily dismiss its context and relate Williams's idea to the current discussion too hastily; however, it is possible to re-contextualize his perspective and re-situate it into the discussion of *The Gold Bug Variations*. "From the inside" of the American postmodern literature, Powers succeeds in articulating the process of correlating "many cultures" with their intellectual aspects *and* emotional aspects simultaneously. The love story, rather than

academic papers, enables a wide range of readers to experience the process of learning and to engage in imagining the experiences of others. The last line—"What could be simpler? In rough translation: Once more with feeling"—calls for readers to respond, to imagine their own story reflexively. The text endows the readers with the responsibility/response-ability to imagine others' experiences as their own. As Spivak affirmatively states regarding literary education, "we have nothing else to engage with than training the imagination" (*Readings* 4).

The experience of reading as training of the imagination does not simply mean, as Williams asserted above, that "minority" teaches "majority," because it is done to cultivate subjectivity. Ressler's idea of science accurately represents Powers's idea of "culture": "Science is not about control. It is about cultivating a perpetual condition of wonder in the face of something that forever grows one step richer and subtler than our latest theory about it. It is about reverence, not mastery" (411). Ressler's scientific idea is focused on "cultivating," which etymologically connects with the word "culture." This is also reminiscent of Powers's idea of disciplines, which is rephrased as "many cultures." One can read Ressler's scientific idea as, more broadly, Powers's idea of cultures/disciplines from the textual level. Narrators, including Powers, do not control or master the whole text but leave ambiguities and, by doing so, open up the text. The text allows readers to actively cultivate "a perpetual condition of wonder" through the engaged reading and "cub translation" of it into one's own experiences. This attitude toward cultures/disciplines is what the text requires the readers to acquire: "our capacity to feel it."

Motoyuki Shibata calls Powers "quite an educational writer" (*Powers Book* ii), which I want to probe further. Finally, I introduce Rorty's "sentimental education" and compare it with Powers's pedagogical strategy. In "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," Rorty states how Western intellectuals should spread the idea of human rights realistically: "This

substitution would mean thinking of the spread of the human rights culture not as a matter of our becoming more aware of the requirements of the moral law, but rather as what [Annette] Baier calls 'a progress of sentiment.'" (181). The idea of human rights, according to Rorty, inevitably stems not only from one's knowledge but from emotional motivation; therefore, Rorty considers sentimentality:

> This process consists in an increasing ability to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences. It is the result of what I have been calling 'sentimental education.' The relevant similarities are not a matter of sharing a deep true self that instantiates true humanity, but are such little, superficial similarities as cherishing our parents and our children—similarities that do not distinguish us in any interesting way from many nonhuman animals. ("Human Rights" 181)

Apparently, Powers and Rorty share a great deal. The strategy of widening the target by motivating others emotionally (emotional knowledge by Powers) and sentimentally (sentimental education by Rorty) can call for one to consider human rights and respond. Some might argue that this kind of sentimentality easily connects with populism or totalitarianism; however, one must not hasten to this conclusion. I believe that sentimentality cannot be denied because one cannot live in a society without it. Of course, Powers and Rorty do not intend to agree with totalitarianism. Rorty states, "We want moral progress to burst up from below, rather than waiting patiently upon condescension from the top" ("Human Rights" 182). This is exactly what Powers's love story aims to do. I want to call this strategy *pragmatic sentimentality*.

The form of the love story is essential to gain a larger readership because academic papers are generally read only by specialists, while novels

are, more or less, entertainments. This is one side of American postmodern literature; connecting high and low culture and widening readership. However, as mentioned above, some critics like Deresiewicz pan the love story as clichéd or lacking in "lived experience." My discussion about Powors's pragmatic sentimentality would rectify Deresiewicz's criticism and redeem the role of readers. The form of the love story opens up knowledge from several disciplines to a larger readership *and* simultaneously makes the readers engage in reading the difficult text "with feeling," with a groundswell of sentiment. When O'Deigh finishes writing her "layman's guide to nucleotides," she says, "The purpose of science was to revive and cultivate a perpetual state of wonder. For nothing deserved wonder so much as our capacity to feel it" (611). While O'Deigh in the text learns biology by herself, the readers, from a higher perspective, can learn it by reading three different narratives. In this sense, "our capacity to feel" wonder is a question not only of O'Deigh, but of the readers as well. O'Deigh's experience and Ressler's experience, written by Todd, are shared by the readers reading the text.

"Cub translation" is a grassroots activism. The form of a love story, precisely because of its clichéd plot, opens up cultures/disciplines to readers. This is symbolically articulated when O'Deigh talks about "translation": "Translation, hunger for porting over, is not about bringing Shakespeare into Bantu. It is about bringing Bantu into Shakespeare. [...] The aim is not to extend the source but to widen the target, to embrace more than was possible before" (491). Based on the discussion thus far, allow me to re-articulate these words as "[cub] translation, hunger for porting over, is not about bringing [cultures/disciplines] into [the readers]. It is about bringing [the readers] into [cultures/disciplines]." The last Aria—"What could be simpler? In rough translation: Once more with feeling"—is the textual call for the readers to imagine, to respond, and to *act*. For the readers, it is "time to start [your] cub translation."

Finally, Powers's pragmatic sentimentality to call to his readers is not

about an order from above to the public; rather, it is a private and individual call to others. The end of the conversation between O'Deigh and Todd, after their reunion, is Todd's rhetorical question: "Who said anything about lasting?" (683). Based on the discussion above, Todd's last words can be construed as their realization of voluntarism. They broke up because of an outstanding difference between the two sides: their existential matter of whether to have a baby. Then, the readers must realize that the characters' disagreements are not logically resolved. However, through their act of "translation," they are emotionally motivated to reunite again and start their relationship once again—"once more with feeling." This mere sentimentality is what academic discussions are less likely to focus on because it is not logical or intellectual. Remember what Clint Eastwood has shown in his movies over and over: the characters' voluntaristic attitude toward protecting their *friends*. There is no logic or knowledge. They are only motivated to do so. As stated above, you cannot deny sentimentality because you cannot live with others, with your *friends*. In this sense, Todd's private vocabulary is critical to show their voluntaristic attitudes; their "translated" relationship will never be the same as the former, and also their -ism is still different. Nevertheless, they choose to be *friends* again sentimentally. This ending of *The Gold Bug Variations* is clichéd and, simultaneously, indispensable for our existence.

4. A Critique of Political Correctness: Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* or Human Dignity

4.1. Political *In*correctness or Human Dignity

Let me begin my discussion about Jonathan Franzen's mega-novel *The Corrections* (2001) by referring to Giorgio Agamben's aphorism during the COVID-19 pandemic era.

> The dead—our dead—have no right to a funeral, and it is unclear what happens to the bodies of the people we love. Our neighbour has been cancelled, and it is surprising that the churches are keeping quiet on this. What are human relationships becoming, in a country that has resigned itself to the idea of living like this for the foreseeable future? And what is a society that values nothing more than survival? (18)

Agamben's essays, published at the very beginning of the pandemic era, raise the question of how society had failed humanity. Agamben keenly indicates that no funeral has been conducted for the dead bodies; this—a human dies without being cared for by his/her family or friends at all—is nothing more than "bare life," dismissing human dignity. Agamben's aphorism has been harshly criticized by many intellectuals and scholars, including his English translator, Adam Kotsko, who argues that Agamben, having been regarded as the Left, is rather close to the Right in this pandemic era:

> If any action by the state, including by state medical authorities, is always intrinsically oppressive, then we have no alternative but to fall back on our own individuality—exactly the libertarian position that the

right wing has used for decades to cut off in advance any effort to challenge existing power structures. (Kotsko)

In Kotsko's article, "the right wing" is associated with conspiracy theories and anti-vaccination movements by "a right-wing crank" (Kotsko). Apparently, in humanities, where being the Left is dominant among intellectuals and scholars, being the Right has become incorrect from the perspective of political correctness. In this context of humanities, I would argue that Agamben's subject position as a libertarian conserves individuality and human dignity in a politically *in*correct way, which I aim to support in this paper.

Interestingly, Kotsko introduces Agamben as "the Italian philosophy giant who is a bit like the Jonathan Franzen of the field" (Kotsko). While I completely disagree with his criticism of Agamben, I agree with this comparison. Similarly, in the essays titled *How to Be Alone*, Franzen states that his writings are about "the problem of preserving individuality and complexity in a noisy and distracting mass culture: the question of how to be alone" ("A Word about This Book" 6). Agamben and Franzen do not rely on "existing power structures" and political correctness, and they respect individuality to conserve human dignity. This is what Franzen's novel *The Corrections* articulates: firmly resisting political correctness to *correct* our lives. In this chapter, first, I will examine Franzen's non-fiction writings pronouncing abandoning cultural engagement. His declaration can be construed as his strong intention to narrate the story in private vocabulary rather than public vocabulary. Then, I will argue that *The Corrections* is about the alienation of the family, which is never corrected. Finally, I will read a self-referential moment in realism and prove that this clichéd dramatic irony is a critical moment in Franzen's novel. This self-referential moment, paradoxically articulated as a never-uttered private vocabulary, aims to conserve individuality and human dignity outside of the story; it calls for

readers to respond in their own lives.

4.2. Abandoning Cultural Engagement

In a 1996 issue of *Harper's* magazine, Jonathan Franzen, who had already published two postmodern novels—*The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988) and *Strong Motion* (1992)—published an essay titled "Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, a Reason to Write Novels." In this essay, Franzen mainly debates whether a novel still has cultural agency in contemporary (the 1990s) life, where TV dominantly provides a vast amount of news and entertainment. Soon after *The Corrections* was published in 2001, the essay was retitled "Why Bother?" in the 2002 essay collection *How to Be Alone*. Because of the contents and simultaneity, critics and scholars, like Stephen J. Burn, suggests reading the essay as a preface to *The Corrections*: "In virtually every critical interpretation of *The Corrections*, the argument in 'Perchance to Dream' is treated as a kind of preface to the novel itself" (Burn 50). This shows that Franzen's essays and *The Corrections* are inseparable.[8]

In the *Harper's* essay, Franzen writes about the difficult situation readers and writers are in: "The novelist has more and more to say to readers who have less and less time to read: Where to find the energy to engage with a culture in crisis when the crisis consists in the impossibility of engaging with the culture? These were unhappy days. ("Why Bother?" 65). The situation of his "unhappy days" is harsh, particularly to writers: The harder they attempt to engage with culture by devoting many pages to articulating their ideas about culture and society, the fewer readers feel like trying to read the novel because it is tiresome and *not fun*. Except for a limited number of critics and scholars, readers in general do not want to struggle to read difficult novels, particularly

[8] For another example of the discussion, see Cristoph Ribbat's "Handling the Media, Surviving *The Corrections*: Jonathan Franzen and Fate of the Author."

in the days of TV and mass consumer entertainment. Under these circumstances, Franzen "began to think that there was something wrong with the whole model of the novel as a form of 'cultural engagement'" ("Why Bother?" 65). What Franzen supposes here as novels engaging in culture are the American postmodern mega-novels written by the previous generation. In the essay titled "Mr. Difficult," he criticizes, as the ironical title suggests, the difficulty of those novels:

> I liked the *idea* of socially engaged fiction, and I was at work on my own Systems novel of conspiracy and apocalypse, and I craved academic and hipster respect of the kind that Pynchon and Gaddis got and Saul Bellow and Ann Beattie didn't. But Bellow and Beattie [...] were the writers I actually, unhiply enjoyed reading. ("Mr. Difficult" 247)

This shows that Franzen's mindset toward fiction-writing was radically changed when he was writing *The Corrections*.

A change from a postmodern "hip" attitude to a seemingly naïve or "unhip" attitude—reminiscent of Powers's clichéd love story in his *The Gold Bug Variations*—is articulated as "character-driven realism" (Studer and Takayoshi). In the essay, Franzen states that: "postmodern fiction wasn't supposed to be about sympathetic characters. Characters, properly speaking, weren't even supposed to exist. [...] I seemed to need them" ("Mr. Difficult" 247). Of course, one cannot uncritically accept the extreme argument that all postmodern novels have an absence of "sympathetic characters," and Franzen, on the contrary, succeeds in writing them. In fact, "Mr. Difficult" is also an autocriticism of *The Corrections* because the essay begins by introducing a complaint from one of his readers: "Who is it you are writing for? It surely could not be the average person who just enjoys a good read" ("Mr. Difficult" 239). The reader calls not only William Gaddis but also Franzen himself Mr. Difficult. Franzen's (auto)criticism of writing difficult novels indicates that

he at least cherishes his "unhip" way of writing "character-driven realism" rather than the "hip" way of writing a big social or postmodern novel.[9]

However, in the preface to *How to Be Alone*, Franzen complains about how "The *Harper's* Essay" has been misread: "in fact, far from promising to write a big social novel that would bring news to the mainstream, I'd taken the essay as an opportunity to renounce that variety of ambition" ("A Word about This Book" 4). This is true. In the *Harper's* essay, he clearly declares to "renounce" his desire to write a big social novel:

> At the heart of my despair about the novel had been a conflict between a feeling that I should Address the Culture and Bring News to the Mainstream, and my desire to write about the things closest to me, to lose myself in the characters and locales I loved. Writing, and reading too, had become a grim duty, and considering the poor pay, there is seriously no point in doing either if you're not having fun. As soon as I jettisoned my perceived obligation to the chimerical mainstream, my third book began to move again. ("Why Bother?" 95)

If one literally reads Franzen's words, it is obvious that his third novel, *The Corrections*, is intentionally written not to be a big social novel. In this sense, this extract from the essay is a critical point. However, some previous discussions on *The Corrections*, which of course mentioned the *Harper's* essay, do not cite this line. I assume that the *Harper's* essay is Franzen's declaration to withdraw himself from talking in the public vocabulary; he chooses to tell a story in the private vocabulary.

Franzen's changed attitude as a fiction writer, related to the current discussion, shows that he is conscious of the intentional fallacy of critics. Franzen articulates this in *The Corrections* through Marxist critic Chip

[9] For more about Franzen's attitude toward Postmodernism, see Robert Rebin's "Turncoat: Why Jonathan Franzen Finally Said 'No' to Po-Mo."

Lambert. One of the main characters in *The Corrections* is Chip, an associate professor who runs a theoretical course titled "Consuming Narratives" (41). In this course, Chip, as a Marxist critic, refers to his beloved Marxists, critically reads corporate ads, and criticizes their hidden intentions. Melissa, a brilliant student, harshly confutes Chip at the end of the semester:

> 'This whole class,' she said. 'It's just bullshit every week. It's one critic after another wringing their hands about the state of criticism. Nobody can ever quite say what's wrong exactly. But they all know it's evil. They all know "corporate" is a dirty word. And if somebody's having fun or getting rich—disgusting! Evil! And it's always the death of this and the death of that. And people who think they're free aren't "really" free. And people who think they're happy aren't "really" happy. And it's impossible to radically critique society anymore, although what's so radically wrong with society that we need such a radical critique, nobody can say exactly. *It is so typical and perfect that you hate those ads!*' (44)

His "critical" perspective does not move Melissa's heart because she does not engage with Chip's (and Marxists') ideas at all. In the academic essay titled "Franzen and the 'Open-Minded but Essentially Untrained Fiction Reader,'" Seth Studer and Ichiro Takayoshi, referring to the scene above, argue that "Lambert's problem is more complicated than the bald narrative (a folk-reading exposes the fatuity of Theory) initially suggests: the professor's critical reading appears silly despite the fact that on substance it is correct" (Studer and Takayoshi). Despite Melissa's arguments above, Studer and Takayoshi acknowledge that Chip's criticism is still "critical" and "correct": "The confrontation has less to do with the aridity of critical theory or the naiveté of undergraduates and more to do with the pathos of the family feud between literature professors and literature majors, between the two sorts of

readers, critical and uncritical" (Studer and Takayoshi). Studer and Takayoshi juxtapose Chip and Melissa as "critical and uncritical," but their dichotomist interpretation, in the end, hides Melissa's (or Franzen's) *critical* argument for critics—the intentional fallacy of critics. Again, Melissa has been a good student in Chip's class, but she does not engage in Chip's Marxist ideas. This matter of engagement is highly critical because Melissa harshly points out that seemingly "objective" cultural criticism by Chip in nothing but his existential matter and his intention to criticize capitalism, because Chip as a critic once "believed that it was possible to be successful in America without making lots of money" (32). Chip cannot argue against Melissa's contention, because her point, although he cannot accept it, explains his intention as a critic accordingly. After this, Chip gets fired from his tenure track for having a sexual relationship with Melissa, and he ultimately sells his theory books for money. Chip's ideal as a critic completely gives in to the temptation of sex and money. Chip's public vocabulary cannot reconcile with his private matter.

In contemporary literature, this type of novel—in which the author writes literary theory into the story—can be regarded as what Mitchum Huehls calls "the post-theory theory novel." This is a new trend in contemporary literature following the trends of realism and experimentalism. Referring to Nicholas Dames's "Theory and the Novel," Huehls points out that the function of theory has been to reveal the fragility of representations: "Theory spent decades revealing the indeterminacy of realism's ostensibly stable representations" (282). After critics experienced postmodern literature or poststructural criticism, the form of realism already connoted "theory": "realism is fighting back, capturing and describing theory's slippery signifiers in the fixed and forthright prose of the conventional novel form. Dames thus sees the incorporation of poststructural themes and concepts into novelistic content as realism's ultimate defanging of theory" (Huehls 282). Huehls calls this situation "the realist turn in contemporary fiction" (282) and illustrates it with examples from *The Corrections* and *Freedom*. In this situation, a

discussion attempting to reveal some hidden meanings or depths of theory in the text can be what Spivak criticizes as "literature as evidence" (*Readings* 4) because there is always a possibility that contemporary literature may already *know* and *use* theory. This type of discussion may determine the validity of the theory by using the text as proof. Realism represents theory because it *is* already in reality.

Rather than seeing the text as evidence of reality, Spivak suggests that "we have nothing else to engage with than training the imagination" (*Readings* 4). Spivak's suggestion of "engagement" is—this is Spivak's main argument—regarded as an essential attitude of the readers of the text because she attaches a high value to not only the well-known texts themselves but also the individual's subjectivity to engage with the act of reading. In an interview with Larry McCaffery, David Foster Wallace also mentions "engagement": "we all buy the books and go like 'Golly, what a mordantly effective commentary on contemporary materialism!' But we already 'know' U.S. culture is materialistic. This diagnosis can be done in about two lines. It doesn't engage anybody" (McCaffery, "An Expanded Interview" 26–27). In these sentences, the term "materialistic" can be assigned to any keywords in literary criticism or cultural studies. As long as anything like "materialistic" already exists in reality, reading texts as "evidence" of reality "doesn't engage anybody" in society. Wallace continues as follows:

> What's engaging and artistically real is, taking it as axiomatic that the present is grotesquely materialistic, how is it that we as human beings still have the capacity for joy, charity, genuine connections, for stuff that doesn't have a price? And can these capacities be made to thrive? And if so, how, and if not why not? (McCaffery, "An Expanded Interview" 27)

To prevent falling into a pattern of reading "literature as evidence," one must

acknowledge that things, like being "materialistic," are inherent in the real world. Wallace emphasizes the "capacity" for one's feelings. This subjectivity relates to Spivak's suggestion and Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations*: "The purpose of science was to revive and cultivate a perpetual state of wonder. For nothing deserved wonder so much as our capacity to feel it" (611).

Franzen's irritation at being judged and misunderstood by others must derive from critics' anticipation and desire that Franzen would talk in the public vocabulary and engage with culture and society. Rather, he chooses to talk in private vocabulary to engage with his family or, more precisely, his father.[10]

4.3. Never Being Corrected

The Corrections is a novel about the Lambert family living in the fictional city of St. Jude in the late 20th century. The members of the family have their own problems and are represented as dysfunctional. Alfred and Enid Lambert, an elderly couple, live in an old house in St. Jude. Alfred, a demanding father, develops Parkinson's disease and becomes more difficult with his wife and children. Throughout the novel, his nagging wife Enid struggles to hold "one last Christmas" with the whole family. The aged couple has three grown children: Gary, Chip, and Denise. The eldest son, Gary succeeded in his job as a banker but has a problem with his family (another dysfunctional family in the novel) and becomes addicted to alcohol. The second son, Chip, an associate professor on Cultural Marxism, loses his job because he had a sexual relationship with his student Melissa. Now he is a struggling fiction writer, sometimes asking his younger sister Denise for

[10] In the essay titled "My Father's Brain," Franzen talks about his own father's death in 1996. While the details are different, Alfred and Franzen's father share much in common.

money. Though Denise succeeded as a chef, she has sexual relationships with both her restaurant's owner and his wife, and then she gets fired. Basically, each chapter of the novel focuses on one of the family members, and at the end of the novel, the five of them finally gather at the Lamberts' house for "one last Christmas." The moment, which Enid has waited impatiently for, goes as follows:

> 'Merry, merry, merry Christmas!' Enid said, looking each of her children in the eye in turn.
>
> Alfred, head down, was already eating.
>
> Gary also began to eat, rapidly, with a glance at his watch.
>
> Chip didn't remember the coffee being so drinkable in these parts.
>
> Denise asked him how he'd gotten home. He told her the story, omitting only the armed robbery. (539–40)

Clearly, this is far from a happy time at home. Soon after, Enid's long-cherished family breakfast comes to blows, and Gary leaves the house. The relationship between the Lamberts is complex, and their communication does not work out. One cannot stop regarding the Lamberts as a dysfunctional family. The reason for this is derived from their own alienation.

Alienation is known as a difficult word because, as Raymond Williams points out, "[q]uite apart from its common usage in general contexts, it carries specific but disputed meanings in a range of disciplines from social and economic theory to philosophy and psychology" (*Keywords* 3). Nonetheless, Williams explains the dominant usage of alienation in the late 20th century as "[t]he most widespread contemporary use is probably that derived from one form of phycology, a loss of connection with one's own deepest feelings and needs" (*Keywords* 5). This suggests that alienation is widely used not only as an interpersonal split but also as one's internal and personal problem. Though this is helpful in understanding today's meaning of alienation, the historical

formation of this word is more complex. Williams traces the history of the term and states that alienation "has been used in English from C14 to describe an action of estranging or state of estrangement (i)" and that "[f]rom C15 it has been used to describe the action of transferring the ownership of anything to another (ii)" (*Keywords* 3). Adding to the meanings of (ii) to (i), Hegel and Marx, according to Williams, produced an important variation:

> Man indeed makes his own nature, as opposed to concepts of an original human nature. But he makes his own nature by a process of objectification (in Hegel a spiritual process; in Marx the labour process) and the ending of alienation would be a transcendence of this formerly inevitable and necessary alienation. (*Keywords* 4)

Our states of alienation, according to Williams, seem impossible to end until a thesis and antithesis interact and sublate or until capitalism ends. In this sense, alienation certainly exists in our lives as something seemingly impossible to solve. Bearing in mind the notion of alienation, the Lamberts' alienation is beyond "corrections" in *The Corrections*.

As stated above, each member of the Lamberts is alienated; however, the word "alienate" appears only once in the text. Some might argue that being used only once indicates that the term is unimportant. However, I want to shed light on this textual detail to discuss the entire text. The term "alienate" appears in the scene of Denise and her temporary girlfriend, Becky. Denise cannot, or more exactly does not, acknowledge her sexual identity and sexual relationships with both a male and female. When she marries a male, she cannot stop seeing her lesbian friend Becky, who criticizes Denise for being unaware of her identity as a lesbian:

> The worst was her [Becky's] contention that Denise, at heart, was a liberal collectivist pure lesbian and was simply unaware of it.

‘You’re so unbelievably *alienated* from yourself,’ Becky said. ‘You are obviously a dyke. You obviously always were.’

‘I’m not anything,’ Denise said. ‘I’m just me.’

She wanted above all to be a private person, an independent individual. She didn’t want to belong to any group, let alone a group with bad haircuts and strange resentful clothing issues. She didn’t want a label, she didn’t want a lifestyle, and so she ended where she’d started: wanting to strangle Becky Hemerling. (380; emphasis added)

In *The Corrections*, Becky appears only in a few pages; she is definitely a minor character. And, as previously stated, the term “alienate” appears only once in the entire text. Although this character and the term seldom appear, Becky’s criticism of Denise is precise because she, later in her life, commits sexual infidelity with both the owner of her restaurant and his wife at the same time, resulting in her being fired from her job. This is the main incident in Denise’s story. Thus, the fact that the term “alienate” is used only once by a minor character does not mean that it is unimportant. Rather, one should read the infrequent term as extremely important because it indicates that the members of the Lambert family can never use this term in their communication or monologue because they are unaware of their own alienation. One should read that only Becky, the *other* of the family, can point out Denise’s (and the Lamberts’) alienation.

Although the terms “alienation” or “alienate” are not used often in the text, the other family members are definitely alienated. For example, in his monologue, the stubborn father Alfred cannot stand the selfishness of others. When young Alfred, as a worker in a railroad company, stays at a motel on business, he cannot sleep and shakes with rage because of his neighbors’ noisy behavior: “He blamed his fellow guests for their indifference to the fornication, he blamed all of humanity for its insensitivity, and it was so unfair. It was unfair that the world could be so inconsiderate to a man who

was so considerate to the world" (244). A disagreement between Alfred's diligence and others' negligence tears him apart; this is totally "unfair" to him. The readers, however, know that this Alfred's anxiety is itself "unfair" because he is a typical and crucial patriarch. As soon as he comes home and finds a mess, he neglects Enid's apology and abruptly rages against her: "'Do you remember,' he said, 'that I asked you to take care of the mess at the top of the stairs? That that was the one thing—*the one thing*—I asked you to do while I was gone?'" (248).

However, although Enid's struggles to hold "one last Christmas" with her children seems like the actions of an old-fashioned grandma, Gary's wife Caroline rejects her efforts as "Christmas mania" (183), which causes a stormy relationship with Gary. This is not Gary's ideal, who does not want to be like his father Alfred. Gary, "who as a boy had been allowed half an hour of TV a day and had not felt ostracized," generously "let[s] the boys watch nearly unlimited TV" unlike Alfred; however, ironically "[w]hat he hadn't foreseen was that he himself would be the ostracized" (169–70). Gary's younger brother Chip, as noted above, "believed that it was possible to be successful in America without making lots of money" (32). When Chip is fired from his job, he sells his faithful Marxist treatises to date his girlfriend: "Facing a weekend with Julia, who could cost him fifteen dollars at a cinema refreshments counter, he purged the Marxists from his bookshelves and took them to the Strand in two extremely heavy bags" (91–92). And an opportunity to earn big money causes him to have an erection: "Something was giving him a hard-on, possibly the cash" (116). Although the term "alienation" is rarely used in the text, every member of the Lambert family says incoherent things and exhibits inconsistent behaviors. This is reminiscent of Williams noting "a loss of connection with one's own deepest feelings and needs."

As long as the title of the novel is *The Corrections*, readers cannot help but read the text anticipating the characters' alienation to be solved or "corrected;" however, the situation is not so simple. Franzen crucially and

uncannily makes Denise, as an unborn baby on the inside of Enid's belly, witness Alfred's domestic violence: "Worst was the image of the little girl curled up inside her, a girl not much larger than a large bug but already a witness to such harm" (278). At this moment, Alfred is aware of his mistake: "Alfred lay catching his breath and repenting his defiling of the baby. A last child was a last opportunity to learn from one's mistakes and make corrections, and he resolved to seize this opportunity" (278). We notice that the word "corrections" appears in Alfred's monologue. However, Alfred's expectation to "make corrections" to his family relationship could not be realized, which is indicated in the following uncanny sentence: "What made correction possible also doomed it" (278). The readers cannot simply keep believing that the Lamberts' alienation will be "corrected." Franzen does not correct the Lamberts' alienation.

This discussion also relates to the philosophical discussion of alienation. Koichiro Kokubun, referring to Heidegger, Marx, and Hannah Arendt, rejects the original state of alienation. According to Kokubun, the reason why the original state of alienation has been discussed is that the critics wanted to solve alienation: "What we have to acknowledge here is a typical symptom. This reflects the desire of critics, which is nothing but the desire to return to the original state" (183; my translation). This irresistibly makes one consider the alienation of others. One might put a label on others in an attempt to understand them. *The Corrections* accuses its readers of being accomplices; the readers' and critics' willingness to judge someone always violates the individuality of others. Alfred is a typical patriarch and often cruel to his wife Enid. However, you must not understand that he is just a representation of one idea and not jump to the conclusion that he is simply evil.

4.4. A Self-Referential Moment in Realism

As previously noted, the readers of *The Corrections* cannot help but anticipate that the Lamberts' alienation will be "corrected." In *Jonathan Franzen: The Comedy of Rage*, Philip Weinstein also mentions the readers' anticipation or desire in their reading: "As readers, we *want* protagonists to change. Lives envisaged without correction may be as unacceptable as an author's facile impression of 'corrections'" (142). The previous discussions on *The Corrections*, as a whole, do not simply believe in the "corrections" of their bad relationships; a crucial problem of interpretation still remains unsolved. Shedding light on the relationship between Chip and Alfred and the narrative structure of the text, I will argue that *The Corrections* aims to conserve individuality and human dignity.

Alfred, so stubborn that he refuses to listen to his family, trusts Chip only. The catastases of the novel are the final Christmas morning with the Lamberts and the final conversation with Alfred and Chip, which is located just before the final short chapter of the novel, titled "The Corrections." In this scene, Alfred is finally in a nursing home and tells Chip to abet his suicide, but Chip rejects him. Literary scholar Ty Hawkins interprets the scene as Chip's "correction" of his postmodern thought: "it is only once Chip has released himself from the excessive influence of, as Franzen writes, 'his feminists, his formalists, his structuralists, his poststructuralists, his Freudians, and his queers'" (82). According to Hawkins, Chip's amendment or "correction" makes himself forgive and love his father: "he [Chip] can forgive Alfred and love him—refusing Alfred's injunction, which Alfred voices near the end of his life, to "'put an end to it!'" (82). Hawkins's interpretation of the scene, focusing on Chip's (and Franzen's) postmodern thought and regarding it "as a step toward the affirmation of interdependence necessary to assert human connection in an age of greed" (82), seems like a criticism of, from a wider perspective, postmodernism itself. However, his

discussion (un)intentionally dismisses the sequence of the conversation between Alfred and Chip as an important sentence.

I would like to argue against Hawkins's interpretation by closely reading this ambiguous moment in the text. Before reading the very scene in which Alfred desperately says, "put an end to it!" to Chip, one must pay attention to the sequence of their conversation and confirm the trace of what Hawkins calls a "human connection." When Alfred is confused in a nursing home, the conversation between Alfred and Chip proceeds as follows:

> 'Dad, Dad, Dad. What's wrong?'
>
> Alfred looked up at his son and into his eyes. He opened his mouth, but the only word he could produce was 'I—'
>
> I—
>
> I have made mistakes—
>
> I am alone—
>
> I am wet—
>
> I want to die—
>
> I am sorry—
>
> I did my best—
>
> I love my children—
>
> I need your help—
>
> I want to die—
>
> 'I can't be here,' he said.
>
> Chip crouched on the floor by the chair. 'Listen,' he said. 'You have to stay here another week so they can monitor you. We need to find out what's wrong.' (555–56)

Alfred's speech and his ideas are completely torn apart: Chip has no way of knowing what Alfred really wants to say, which are the sentences beginning with "I" without quotations. Against his will, Alfred only utters, "I can't be

here," and Chip does not understand his father's disgrace, contrition, and affection for his family but literally understands his uneasiness away from his home.

One can find a variation of this discommunication in the novel *Purity* (2015). The protagonist Purity "Pip" Tyler seeks her biological father and happens to meet two middle-aged men separately: celebrity hacker Andreas Wolf and journalist Tom Aberant. The latter is, in fact, Purity's father. These men were old friends and shared a secret: a past murder committed by Andreas. The highlight of the story is the moment when Andreas and Tom confront each other, and Andreas, hiding his mind and abusing Tom unintentionally, commits suicide.

> When Tom had caught his breath, Andreas turned to him and opened his mouth. He would have liked to say *Everything is a horror to me. Won't you be my friend again?* But instead a voice said, 'By the way? I saw your daughter naked.'
>
> Tom's eyes narrowed.
>
> He would have liked to say *You won't believe this, but I loved her*. 'I told her to strip, and she stripped for me. Her body is exquisite.'
>
> 'Shut up,' Tom said. (*Purity* 511)

Andreas's italicized interior monologue—this can be interpreted as his true mind wanting Tom to "*be [his] friend again*"—is out of Tom's understanding. This form of narrative is just like the discommunication of Alfred and Chip in *The Corrections*. This form of narrative is an example of dramatic irony: the audience (the readers) of the text can understand the situation whereas the characters (Chip and Tom) cannot. I do not aim to discuss the novelty or innovation of Franzen's persistent choice of dramatic irony. In fact, it is a clichéd narrative structure. The fact that Franzen has continuously used clichéd dramatic irony at the climax of his mega-novels shows that our

individualities are absolutely our private matters; others must not easily judge or *correct* them. This is a simple ethic.

While Studer and Takayoshi call *The Corrections* "character-driven realism," some previous discussions have read the novel as realism rather than experimental.[11] This can be partly because Franzen criticizes postmodern experimental fiction in his essays. Robert L. McLaughlin refers to Franzen's criticism of postmodern fiction as "a postmodern U-turn": "The solution [...] lies in adjuring the experimentalism of postmodern fiction, the clever self-referentiality that can become a closed circle of books talking to each other and never touching anything that might be called real" (286). Franzen's criticism of experimentalism, particularly of self-referentiality, may lead to reading his novels as anti-postmodern fiction. Paul Dawson sees the trend of contemporary British and American literature as "a prominent reappearance of the ostensibly outmoded omniscient narrator" (143), stating that "*The Corrections*, then is an overt example of a novelist's deployment of omniscient narration as part of a broader project to reassert the authority of the novel in contemporary culture" (151). This discussion deduces that *The Corrections* is not a self-referential experimental novel but character-based realism, whereby an omniscient and anonymous narrator neutrally narrates from a higher perspective than the characters' viewpoints.

Although this deduction is reminiscent of an ordinary form of realism in literary history, *The Corrections* is not a simple throwback but has a critical moment. At the end of the (dis)communication between Alfred and Chip, the narrator, who has neutrally represented the situation the Lamberts are in, is suddenly in the foreground, and self-referentiality emerges.

> 'I'm asking for your help! You've got to get me out of this! You have to put an end to it!'

[11] See Susanne Rohr's "'The Tyranny of the Probable'—Crackpot Realism and Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*."

> Even red-eyed, even tear-streaked, Chip's face was full of power and clarity. Here was a son whom he could trust to understand him as he understood himself; and so Chip's answer, when it came, was absolute. Chip's answer told him that this was where the story ended. It ended with Chip shaking his head, it ended with him saying: 'I can't, Dad. I can't.' (560)

Then, the chapter closes. Chip cannot accept Alfred's last and desperate plea to help him kill himself. At this moment, the reader confronts an uncanny sentence: "Chip's answer told him that this was where the story ended." This has two possibilities for interpretation. One possibility is that "the story" indicates Alfred's "story" of committing suicide. This one can be ended by Chip's denial of aiding Alfred's suicide. When literally reading the textual surface, this interpretation is reasonable. Another possibility is that, as long as one reads the text more closely, deeply, and critically, the story of *The Corrections* itself has ended. This reading sees the text as self-referential.

If it is really the text's self-referential moment, the meaning of the final and short chapter, "The Corrections" is worth considering. As mentioned previously, the readers of *The Corrections* cannot help but anticipate "corrections" of the Lamberts' alienation. In this sense, the last chapter, "The Corrections" is a mere sequel to the story because the end of the previous chapter "was where the story ended." In fact, this last chapter is only seven pages long and from the limited viewpoint of Enid; thus, the internal thoughts of Alfred and Chip are never narrated. Even though this short, extra chapter is located outside of the story and is titled "The Corrections," they are not achieved in the story. They are literally outside of "the story."[12]

When James Annesley discusses *The Corrections* in the context of

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[12] Christoph Ribbat sees the final chapter of "The Corrections" as a hopeful ending for Enid, but he does not mention the line "this was where the story ended." See "Handling the Media, Surviving *The Corrections*: Jonathan Franzen and the Fate of the Author."

globalization, he critically points out Franzen's contradictory attitude between the *Harper's* essay and *The Corrections*: "it is curious that only Franzen himself seems unable to grasp the implications his brush with notoriety raises for understandings of fiction's relationship with publishing, the media, and globalization" (121). Annesley's critique of Franzen's act of publishing is a complete fallacy because no one can read an unpublished book. Annesley also (un)intentionally dismisses Franzen's renouncement of writing a big social novel. In fact, Annesley does not (or cannot) cite Franzen's declarations of renouncement in the *Harper's* essay ("As soon as I jettisoned my perceived obligation to the chimerical mainstream, my third book began to move again") and in "A Word about This Book" in *How to Be Alone* ("in fact, far from promising to write a big social novel that would bring news to the mainstream, I'd taken the essay as an opportunity to renounce that variety of ambition"), both of which are essential citations in my discussion. While Franzen criticizes the self-referentiality and experimentalism of postmodern literature in his essays, one cannot simply believe that his novels are no longer postmodern experimental literature.[13] This situation leads to, once again, considering that Franzen writes about "the problem of preserving individuality and complexity in a noisy and distracting mass culture: the question of how to be alone." Franzen knows that his texts, whether fiction or non-fiction, can be interpreted by some critics arbitrarily.

Franzen's persistence in using clichéd dramatic irony and self-referentiality at the end of his big realism novels indicates his ethic: to conserve individuality and human dignity in the age of political correctness. Alfred is a typical old man who is still patriarchal and cannot change, update, or correct his "belated" attitude in his later life. I think this realism is what Franzen aims to articulate in *The Corrections*, abandoning cultural engagement and public vocabulary and engaging in private vocabulary to

[13] This issue is also my research question in my discussion about David Foster Wallace.

conserve human dignity. However, the private vocabulary is never uttered by Alfred and Andreas, even in their respective final chances to directly communicate with family or friend. Mutual understanding is never achieved and failing to utter their private vocabulary "was where the story ended." This self-referentiality to put the private vocabulary outside of the characters' communication makes readers imagine the possibility; if Alfred tells his honest feelings in his own private vocabulary to his son Chip, they *could* understand each other, and their alienation *could* be corrected. In this sense, *The Corrections* calls for its readers to respond to conserve human dignity; only by communicating in private vocabulary can one be *friends* with others.

5. A Critique of Metanarrative: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* or Anti-Post-Postmodernism

5.1. New Metanarrative from the 1990s

When critics talk about contemporary American literature or, more specifically, about white male writers' ambitious novels, they tend to agree with the presupposition that postmodernism is bygone. Something *after* postmodernism, such as "digimodernism," "metamodernism," or, more directly, "post-postmodernism," has been broadly discussed these days. Although these ambitious terms, seeming to address zeitgeist after postmodernism, have not been established among disciplines of Humanities, the end of postmodernism around 1990 seems to resonate more in American literature. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (2015), Brian McHale, an expert on postmodern fiction, declares that postmodernism was over. The other expert, Stephen J. Burn titles his book about Jonathan Franzen, Richard Powers, David Foster Wallace as *Jonathan Franzen* as *the End of Postmodernism* (2008). Undoubtedly, people witnessed unprecedented changes and drastic shifts worldwide around 1990: the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990, a thaw of the Cold War in 1991, and the invention of The World Wide Web in 1989. The same year, *Heisei* Era, a stagnant period lasting three decades, began in Japan. To this ending and beginning of these eras, some literary critics share the view that postmodernism was over around 1990. This kind of discussion corresponds with the time Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1992), was published.

Here are my questions: Is the end of postmodernism really a fait accompli? Or is it just among the post-postmodernism critics? While the end

of postmodernism remains doubtful, David Foster Wallace, broadly regarded as the representative or the center of the movement, has been read based on this presupposition. In this chapter, I aim to criticize this new movement of post-postmodernism by reading David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and essays.

What *is* postmodernism?[14] It has been a controversial idea for over half a century, because the essence of postmodernism has been controversially defined by many critics. One of the most famous and influential is a definition by Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), in which he argued that metanarratives were no longer present in science and culture. In this situation, without metanarratives, according to Lyotard, only little narratives would simultaneously occur within each divided group, so these groups would never be unified in the name of the universal discourse. Usually, postmodern literature, showing similarities with philosophical discussions, is characterized by relativity and reflexivity. On relativity, postmodern literature tends to deny one established viewpoint to narrate (denial of metanarratives) and likes to see a thing from different perspectives and juxtapose two or more relative (or sometimes completely different) narratives (recognition of little ones). The narrators' self-consciousness about their text; in other words, their reflexive and constant dialogue, is well known as a form of metafiction in reflexivity. While postmodern literature includes these features, such as fragmentation, intertextuality, magic realism, maximalism, minimalism, or pastiche, relativity and reflexivity are also philosophical and literary keywords.

Against this postmodern currency, many critics have considered David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* a representative of fiction after postmodernism: post-postmodern literature. There are primarily two reasons: Wallace's

[14] The research question of McHale's *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* is "what was postmodernism?", which apparently derives from Lyotard's question, "what is postmodernism?". I still persist in the latter question because I argue that postmodernism never ends.

critique of postmodernism and critics' attempt to read Wallace's texts as an achievement to overcome postmodern irony. First, Wallace clearly criticizes postmodernism in his famous essay "E Unibus Pluram" and in an interview with literary critic Larry McCaffery. In both texts, Wallace disputes that postmodern irony spreads in our daily lives through television and that "postmodern irony's become our environment" (McCaffery, "An Expanded Interview" 49). Second, many critics of Wallace studies read Wallace's literary texts by referring to his own essays and argue that his novel, especially *Infinite Jest*, succeeds in evading postmodern irony.[15] The keywords of this discussion are depth, affect, the end of irony, and the new form of sincerity. "New sincerity" is gradually gaining a reputation in contemporary American literature. Adam Kelly's work, referring to "E Unibus Pluram" and *Infinite Jest*, can briefly be summarized as the restoration of affect and depth among characters, or between the reader and writer. A sense of affect or sincerity recovers to communicate from the heart, and this sincere attitude toward others seems to appear not on the surface but from the depth. Michiko Kakutani, even though she does not use the terms like post-postmodernism or new sincerity, dramatically refers to Wallace's critique of postmodernism and harshly criticizes it for causing post-truth politics, that is, the death of objective truth. These kinds of discussion—admiration for depth and affect and critique of irony—are the features of anti-postmodernism. In this chapter, I want to give these anti-postmodern attitudes of critics a general term, post-postmodern discourse.

In this situation, I will reason that Wallace's own critique gives literary critics, figuratively, a stamp of approval to read his literary text as an achievement to overcome postmodern irony or postmodernism. My skepticism toward post-postmodern discourse derives from the differences in critique of

[15] Cory M. Hudson criticizes this situation in Wallace Studies, where critics refer to Wallace's essays as a foundation to read his fiction. See "David Foster Wallace Is Not Your Friend: The Fraudulence of Empathy in David Foster Wallace Studies and 'Good Old Neon'" (2017).

postmodernism between Wallace and post-postmodern critics. Moreover, post-postmodern discourse itself carelessly aims to recover new metanarratives, which have been critically denied by postmodernism and deemed unacceptable. In this chapter, I will examine Wallace's fiction, essay, and interview pertinent to his critique of postmodernism, and contrast it with post-postmodern discourse from the perspective of *irony*. Then, I will elucidate the *depth* representation in *Infinite Jest*. Finally, I will discuss Michiko Kakutani's critique of postmodernism and deduce that her discussion is similar to the other post-postmodern discourse, aiming to recover a new metanarrative. My discussion will closely read Wallace's texts and demonstrate how they consistently, modestly, and critically attempt to illustrate to us: an ethic to live until the day people die in the postmodern condition. My critique of post-postmodernism or new metanarrative will value private, individual, and surface solidarity.

5.2. Daily Excessiveness of Irony

In *Post-Postmodernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (2012), Jeffrey Nealon acknowledges the viciousness of double prefixes: "'Post-postmodernism' is an ugly word" (IX) but simultaneously aims to update Jameson's *Postmodernism*. His ambitious post-post is "hardly an outright overcoming of postmodernism. Rather, post-postmodernism marks an intensification and mutation within postmodernism" (IX).[16] About post-postmodern literature, Nicoline Timmer arranges a list of the characteristic of the novel as follows:

[16] The word "mutation" is initially used in Jameson's *Postmodernism*, where he states that the Postmodernist works in art achieve "new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness" (31).

> in the post-postmodern novel 'sharing' is important; for example sharing stories as a way to 'identify with others' (and to allow others to identify themselves with you); others identifying with 'your' story is in this type of novel a very important way of restoring some faith in the coherence and legitimacy of one's 'own' feelings and thoughts (therefore: of constructing an identity, a meaningful self-narrative). (359)
>
> a desire for some form of community or sociality is highlighted in the post-postmodern novel, in other words: 'a structural need for a we.' (359)
>
> the post-postmodern novel hinges on creating empathy (between characters, between narrators and characters, between narrators or characters and narratee, between fictional figures and the flesh and blood 'real' reader). (360–61)

In short, the post-postmodern novel emotionally peruses solidarity with others, a consistency of "us," the "real," or sincere relationship.

Another ambitious post would be Lee Konstantinou's "postirony": "In the face of postmodern culture, transcending irony's limitations becomes an urgent artistic, philosophical and political project. I call this project *postirony*" (88). Surely, he pays attention to his usage of the prefix: "I use postirony herein not to name a period concept or new cultural dominant; instead, postirony designates the effort to move beyond the problems that irony has created for contemporary life and culture" but at the same time wants to go beyond postmodern irony: "postironists have undertaken more and less ambitious efforts to move beyond postmodern irony in search of firmer emotional, artistic and political ground" (88).

Their addition of post- represents, notwithstanding how humble they are

about inaugurating a new metanarrative, the critics' intention to do so. Initially, post- means *next* or *after*, which could not avoid representing more than "mutation," and does inevitably depict "a period concept or new cultural dominant." Usually, things like ideas, mind, literature, and zeitgeist change as time goes by, and something novel continues to be produced. If writers admired Thomas Pynchon, they would not write the same literature as their predecessors. Individual changes, and differences are irreversible facts. The question is, Can critics regard writers' innate changes and differences from their predecessors as a new mode, new concept, or new dominant? The critics intend to go beyond postmodernism; the postmodern irony is apparent from their terminologies, such as post-postmodernism and postirony. However, this trend to add post- is problematic because, at least, it overlooks or fails to interpret Wallace's attitude toward postmodernism.

Undoubtedly, Wallace's critique of postmodernism has empowered many critics to criticize postmodernism and read Wallace's literary texts as post-postmodern fiction. As previously mentioned, Wallace's critical essay "E Unibus Pluram" is a cornerstone to consider post-postmodernism. In the essay, Wallace argues that he and his contemporaries, born around 1960 and called the X or MTV generation, have been raised by the image of television and "want to persuade you that irony, poker-faced silence, and fear of ridicule are distinctive of those features of contemporary U.S. culture" ("E Unibus Pluram" 49). Wallace recognizes postmodern irony as a colossal problem because television, a way of knowing reality, is literary at the center of almost everywhere in the houses. On the monitor, postmodern irony, remaining only in name, is so rampant that Wallace "argue[s] that irony and ridicule are entertaining and effective, and that at the same time they are agents of a great despair and stasis in U.S. culture, and that for aspiring fiction writers they pose especially terrible problems" ("E Unibus Pluram" 49).

Furthermore, Wallace's calling famous postmodern writers, such as John Barth, William Gaddis, and Thomas Pynchon, "our postmodern fathers" ("E

Unibus Pluram" 64) would encourage critics to consider post-postmodern discourse. According to Wallace, the postmodern irony is "critical and destructive, a ground-clearing," but "irony's singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks. This is why Hyde seems right about persistent irony being tiresome" ("E Unibus Pluram" 67). The term "constructing," in the context of postmodernism, is reminiscent of deconstruction, a well-known keyword of postmodernism. In post-postmodern discourse, deconstruction, a powerful way to analyze and criticize the consistency of language and culture, seems ineffective to reconstruct something new. Thus, reconstruction rather than deconstruction is *justice* for the critics.

In Wallace's words, "persistent irony" rather than "constructing" particularly interests me. The essay is about the relationship between irony and television; the problem already mentioned suggests that television is an influential way of knowing the actual world in Wallace's lifetime. The television, Wallace articulated, is full of postmodern irony producing sarcasm and cynicism. Then, is it justified if we throw away our television as all evil? The situation is beyond simple as Wallace himself had suffered from TV addiction. As Wallace eloquently poses, the problem relates to "persistent irony" in our daily lives by watching television passively for several hours every day. It may be coined as the *daily excessiveness of irony*. In "E Unibus Pluram," daily excessiveness is explained as "doses":

> Television, in other words, has become able to capture and neutralize any attempt to change or even protest the attitudes of passive unease and cynicism that television requires of Audience in order to be commercially and psychologically viable at doses of several hours per day. ("E Unibus Pluram" 50)

This expression, "at doses of several hours per day," literally reminds us of

the usage of the drug.

Surely Wallace criticizes television and its irony but does not put a label on inherent wickedness: "By saying that Image-Fiction aims to 'rescue' us from TV, I again am not suggesting that television has diabolic designs, or wants souls, or brainwashes people" ("E Unibus Pluram" 52). Instead, he continues as follows: "I'm just referring again to the kind of natural Audience-conditioning consequent to *high daily doses*, a conditioning so subtle it can be observed best obliquely, through examples" ("E Unibus Pluram" 52; emphases added).[17] His argument is too simple to consider academically. The true problem is, according to Wallace, that we waste too much time watching TV in our daily lives, period. Wallace argues it over and over: "When everybody we seek to identify with for six hours a day is pretty, it naturally becomes more important to us to be pretty, to be viewed as pretty" or "everybody else is *absorbing six-hour doses* and identifying with pretty people and valuing prettiness more, too" ("E Unibus Pluram" 53; emphases added). This simple fact that Wallace worries about the situation where we watch television too much is unheeded. In "E Unibus Pluram," Wallace does not suggest something after irony but makes witty remarks about the situation we live in; the daily excessiveness of irony.

In *Infinite Jest*, the matter of daily excessiveness is articulated with marijuana, called "Bob Hope." At the beginning of the novel, one of the protagonists, Hal Incandenza attends an interview at a university, where his inner self and outer self are completely divided. While he thinks he talks exceedingly shrewd, his actual words are "*Sub*animalistic noises and sounds" (14), and his gesture is like "[a] writhing animal with a knife in its eye" (14). The reason for Hal's division might be complex because his life is fraught with hardships. They include a problematic relationship with his parents, a

[17] There are two versions of "E Unibus Pluram" in *Review of Contemporary Fiction* and *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. From the former version to the latter, Wallace added the adjective "daily" to the original version "high doses." Apparently, Wallace clarifies daily excessiveness in the latter.

mental disorder related to his tennis training, and his daily use of marijuana stated as "one-hitters are small, which is good, because let's face it, anything you use to smoke high-resin dope with is going to stink" (49). Compared with the suicide of Hal's father James O. Incandenza, who kills himself by putting his head in a microwave oven, the use of marijuana seems to be trivial and unserious. In effect, the other character Kate Gamport, a member of Ennet House and suffering from mental depression because of marijuana, says: "Marijuana. Most people think of marijuana as just some minor substance, I know, just like this natural plant that happens to make you feel good the way poison oak makes you itch, and if you say you're in trouble with [Bob] Hope—people'll just laugh. Because there's much worse drugs out there" (76). However, Kate has a suicide risk, saying: "I didn't want to especially hurt myself. Or like punish. I don't hate myself. I just wanted out. I didn't want to play anymore is all" (72).

No matter how minor just one dose is, high daily doses might, in the long term, cause a serious problem. Marijuana, legal in Canada or many US states, differs from other serious drugs like cocaine or heroin. In this sense, television and marijuana are similar. As previously cited, Wallace "just refer[s] again to the kind of natural Audience [or Addict]-conditioning consequent to high daily doses, a conditioning so subtle it can be observed best obliquely, through examples." My discussion, up to now, indicates that *Infinite Jest* should have had more than 1000 pages because none but such a long story can show the matter of daily excessiveness through many different characters and perspectives.

Besides television and marijuana, the other stuff in *Infinite Jest* signifies the matter of daily excessiveness repeatedly. For instance, rats are the metaphor for drug addicts "as they'd been doing like hyper-conditioned rats for years" (195). In the conversation between Steeply and Marathe in the desert, Steeply talks about an experiment of rats, which finally die in euphoria: "the rat would press the lever to stimulate his *p*-terminal over and

over, thousands of times an hour, over and over, ignoring food and female rats in heat, completely fixated on the lever's stimulation, day and night, stopping only when the rat finally died of dehydration or simple fatigue" (471). Another example is that J.O. Incandenza's film called "the Entertainment" or "Infinite Jest" is a kind of weapon: "the subject's mental and spiritual energies abruptly declined to a point where even near-lethal voltages through the electrodes couldn't divert his attention from the Entertainment" (549). Undoubtedly, the film is similar to television regarding daily excessiveness. Wallace, a television addict, must have known this for too long.

The situation many critics refer to in "E Unibus Pluram" and declare post-irony or post-postmodernism is estranged from Wallace's intention to criticize "persistent irony," or the daily excessiveness of irony. Wallace does not necessarily invalidate what post-postmodern critics want to establish. In his famous commencement speech, Wallace says, "Everybody worships" ("This Is Water"). In the case of literary critics, some worship a literary history, a desire to establish what comes *after* postmodernism. They have addressed contemporary history after 1990 by acknowledging postmodernism and irony as potential adversaries. Their addition of post- is, as Nealon acknowledges, nothing but "ugly," which shows how post-postmodern discourse may be problematic.

5.3. The Depth on the Surface

In *Postmodernism*, Fredric Jameson states that a feature of postmodernism as cultural dominant is "the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (9) and "the waning of affect" (15). Intending to illustrate new cultural dominance after Jameson, Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen's *Metamodernism* argues that historicity, depth, and

affect are back after postmodernism. In his paper about autofiction, Gibbons concludes his discussion with “a renewed desire to recognize personal feelings and interpersonal connections” (130). The other post-postmodern discourse, a movement of new sincerity is fashionable in literary criticism. Adam Kelly, reading Wallace’s texts, calls the writer’s attitude of hoping sincerely to communicate with the readers new sincerity. In Kelly’s discussion, the textual depth instead of the surface, “flatness or depthlessness” is important for the author’s and characters’ attitudes in communicating interactively: “Through Mario’s response, we glimpse the possibility of a more affirmative understanding of Madame Psychosis’s voice. For him, the voice has ‘the low-depth familiar[ity] [of] certain childhood smells’” (142). Both metamodernism and new sincerity aim to recover what we have lost in the postmodern era: solidarity with someone from the depth of our hearts or some emotional things.

Against this post-postmodern criticism, I want to assert that the new discourse is not beyond postmodern reflexivity. We confidently would say that the author’s voice and its characters in *Infinite Jest* were no longer “flatness or depthlessness.” However, Wallace’s representation of depth does not foster communication with others but indicates a cause of discommunication. I will also argue that *Infinite Jest* upends a dichotomic model of surface and depth, thus throwing its characters into an inescapable situation of daily excessiveness.

Infinite Jest comprises roughly three different threads of the story: Hal Incandenza in his tennis academy, Don Gately in his Ennet House and at Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) meeting, and Steeply and Marathe in the desert. At the scene of the AA meeting, many drug and alcohol addicts, suffering from abuse, neglect, sexual harassment, or violence, appear. One of the characters, a woman, a runaway girl at sixteen and then a stripper, confesses her trauma experiences at the AA meeting. Her foster family adopts her as a daughter and has a biological, paralyzed daughter. These two share the same bedroom, where their father comes night after night and, always smiling awkwardly,

habitually rapes his paralyzed daughter, putting on a mask and wig of an American actress Raquel Welch. The adopted daughter, pretending to sleep next to them, fears revenge and can do nothing for her. After the horrible incident in the dark bedroom, the adopted daughter always helps take off the mask from the raped paralyzed daughter, never seeing her face. One night, the wig twins around her hair and cannot be taken off. Inevitably, the adopted daughter turns on the light and sees the raped daughter's face under the mask for the first time:

> when she finally got the mask off, with the vanity mirror still blazing away, the speaker says how she was forced to gaze for the first time on Its [the biological daughter's] lit-up paralytic post-diddle face, and how the expression thereon was most assuredly quite enough to force anybody with an operant limbic system[142] to leg it right out of her dysfunctional foster family's home, nay and the whole community of Saugus MA, now homeless and scarred and forced by dark psychic forces straight to Route 1's infamous gauntlet of neon-lit depravity and addiction, to try and forget, rasa the tabula, wipe the memory totally out, numb it with opiates. (373)

Seeing the face under the mask is, in a word, a traumatized moment, making her do opiates to forget what she saw. In this scene, the act to see the face is a trigger to start using drugs.

The addict woman's monolog is one of the most horrible stories in *Infinite Jest*, but it is by no means enough. The representation of the woman's horrible face shows more than the dichotomic structure of the surface and depth.

> Voice trembling, she accepts the chairperson's proffered bandanna-hankie and blows her nose one nostril at a time and says she can almost

see It all over again: Its expression: in the vanity's lights only Its eyes' whites showed, and while Its utter catatonia and paralysis prevented the contraction of Its luridly rouged face's circumoral muscles into any conventional human facial-type expression, nevertheless some hideously mobile and expressive layer in the moist regions below real people's expressive facial layer, some slow-twitch layer unique to It, had blindly contracted, somehow, to gather the blank soft cheese of Its face into the sort of pinched gasping look of neurologic concentration that marks a carnal bliss beyond smiles or sighs. Its face looked post-coital sort of the way you'd imagine the vacuole and optica of a protozoan looking post-coital after its shuddered and shot its mono-cellular load into the cold waters of some really old sea. Its facial expression was, in a word, the speaker says, unspeakably, unforgettably ghastly and horrid and scarring. (373)

The paralyzed daughter's face, hard to change expression, shows the depth on the surface. Her face consists of three different layers rather than the dichotomic surface and depth. The first layer is Raquel Welch's mask, taken off by the adopted daughter. The second layer appears on her face surface: "real people's expressive facial layer." Then, the third layer is disclosed violently as "some hideously mobile and expressive layer." It is the representation of the depth on the surface in *Infinite Jest*.

The biological daughter's face or *surface* is not usually an expressive look due to her paralysis, but her *depth* drastically changes. The depth, "blindly contracted, somehow, to gather the blank soft cheese of Its face into the sort of pinched gasping look of neurologic concentration," terrifying the biological daughter and making her run away from her foster family. Seeing the multi-layered face is overly substantial to forget by using some drugs and inevitably makes her suffer a trauma. The depth on the surface or its violent exposure puts her in an awkward position: the daily excessiveness of drug. It

is a feedback loop, including drinking alcohol, watching television, and using marijuana reflexively. It makes one feel like doing it all over again. The feedback is infinite, occurring among many characters in *Infinite Jest*; the feedback loop's very beginning of suffering is, like the adopted daughter seeing the multi-layered face, filled with the factual terror of the depth of the surface. I want to call the process of daily excessiveness *Infinite reflexivity*.[18]

As cited above, the depth of the face is problematically represented as "a carnal bliss beyond smiles or sighs." Some might suggest that this white male writer's expression of "a carnal bliss" of an incestuously raped woman is misogynistic and unacceptable.[19] Therefore, against Adam Kelly's new sincerity, Edward Jackson and Joel Nicholson-Roberts criticize Kelly's theory as "re-constitut[ing] a white male liberal humanist subject" (12). They refer to the adopted daughter's confession and argue that "it means denigrating her victimization as a frivolous self-indulgence, and in order to reaffirm a mode of recovery that, though the novel presents it as equally applicable, in fact prioritizes men as its ideal recipients and practitioners" (18). The female characters are represented as abuse, domestic-violence incest, or rape victims; however, they do not represent victims of the real world in a political sense. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states that "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy" (275). It is unreasonable to identify a fiction writer's representation as reality. My position as a critic depends on the belief that, notwithstanding how male-dominant a novel is, we cannot attribute it to its author.

No matter how male-dominant and misogynistic the representation is,

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[18] This term owes Shinji Miyadai's idea, Infinite Reflexivity (無限の再帰性) in his discussion of postmodernism. See『〈世界〉はそもそもデタラメである』[*"World" Is in the First Place a Lie*] (2008).

[19] Wallace himself is often criticized as a misogynist or sexist related to the #Metoo movement.

infinite reflexivity is exceedingly critical as it runs rampant in our postmodern culture. In *Infinite Jest*, the daily excessiveness discussed above connects to infinite reflexivity among different characters, facing the depth of the surface. Many alcohol and drug addicts in Ennet House and at the AA meetings have suffered from child abuse or have been neglected by their parents. Hal once experiences finding his father's suicide, an actual trauma. At the moment, he thinks that "*That something smelled delicious!*" (256) and finds his father, burning his head in the microwave oven, unexpectedly and tragically dying. Like his father, an alcoholic addict, always drinking Wild Turkey, Hal clandestinely gets high using Bob Hope. Other than that, the killer cartridge called "the Entertainment" or "Infinite Jest" is a representation of daily excessiveness=Infinite reflexivity: "The medical attaché, at their apartment, is still viewing the unlabelled [sic] cartridge, which he has rewound to the beginning several times and then configured for a recursive loop" (54). Once starting to do it, one would never stop until one dies—this is like one is in eternal hell, where one has no other choice but to "abide" over and over, as Gately does, or one finally ends up with a complete division of inside and outside, as Hal does.

The fear of touching the depth of the surface—a violent disclosure of the inside to the outside—shares with Jonathan Franzen's texts. For instance, in *Freedom*, an autobiography written by Patty Berglund, where she confesses her betrayal of her husband, Walter, is read by him, making some "mistakes." Although the post-postmodern critics tend to praise the recovery of depth, emotionally connecting us with others, the depth of the surface in *Infinite Jest* is not altogether naïve: contrarily causing an addiction named daily excessiveness. Generally, we live our lives showing the surface of ourselves and, comparatively, hiding the depth, enabling us to live socially. None of us can communicate with each other without moderate mimicry. In this sense, many characters in *Infinite Jest* lack this restrained attitude and suffer from infinite reflexivity in a very postmodern way. While discussing a post-

traditional society as known as reflexive modernization, Anthony Giddens connects the problem of tradition and addiction:

> In premodern societies, tradition and the routinization of day-to-day conduct are closely tied to one another. In the post-traditional society, by contrast, routinization becomes empty unless it is geared to processes of institutional reflexivity. There is no logic, or moral authenticity, to doing today what one did yesterday; yet these things are the very essence of tradition. The fact that today we can become addicted to anything—any aspect of lifestyle—indicates the very comprehensiveness of the dissolution of tradition (we should add, and this is not as paradoxical as it seems, 'in its traditional form'). The progress of addiction is a substantively significant feature of the postmodern social universe, but it is also a 'negative index' of the very process of the detraditionalizing of society. (71)

In post-traditional societies, the power of tradition in providing us with a common routine now wanes, leaving behind senseless and meaningless daily repetition. This daily excessiveness, as *Infinite Jest* focuses on, means boredom, frigidness, irritation, and addiction. Remember what Wallace states as "day to day trenches of adult existence" in his commencement speech, "This Is Water."

> Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed. Think of the old cliché about 'the mind being an excellent servant but a terrible master.' ("This Is Water")
>
> This, like many clichés, so lame and unexciting on the surface, actually expresses a great and terrible truth. It is not the least bit coincidental that adults who commit suicide with firearms almost always shoot

themselves in: the head. They shoot the terrible master. And the truth is that most of these suicides are actually dead long before they pull the trigger. (This Is Water)

The commencement speech in 2005, three years before Wallace's suicide and several years "after the end of postmodernism," as post-postmodern critics suggest, seems to raise a similar question. How could we live in a moderate way in a postmodern society, where we live our daily lives without any foundation? Through the commencement speech or his career as a writer, Wallace had pursued the one ethic to live in a literary sense until he committed suicide.

5.4. Infinite Reflexivity or New Metanarrative Never Exist

As discussed above, the critics broadly share the same anti-postmodernism idea behind post-postmodern discourse. Initially, many critics and scholars in different disciplines have diversely defined postmodernism and criticized it concerning the difference between modernism and postmodernism. In this chapter, I focus on more recent criticism of postmodernism as a negative legacy, regarding it as a root of post-truth. Needless to say, post-truth, pertinent to the 2016 United States presidential election and the Brexit referendum, is an influential word chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016, defining it as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Language). The very situation today, I firmly believe, proves that postmodernism is never-ending, where the metanarrative does never exist after the modern age and so-called alternative facts are rampant worldwide. Here, I contend that the post-postmodern discourse depicts the critics' intention;

they wish to recover empathy with others and objective truth by rejecting postmodernism in the post-truth era. Toward the critique of postmodernism=post-truth, I will demonstrate the difference between the critics' intention and Wallace's texts and claim the impossibility to inaugurate the new metanarrative.

The Death of Truth by literary critic Michiko Kakutani harshly criticizes that postmodern relativism justified the plurality of truth and the death of objective facts. Kakutani articulates: "For decades now, objectivity—or even the idea that people can aspire toward ascertaining the best available truth—has been falling out of favor" (17). The relativism, "embraced by the New Left, eager to expose the biases of Western, bourgeois, male-dominated thinking; and by academics promoting the gospel of postmodernism" (18), is now "hijacked by the populist Right, including creationists and climate change deniers who insist that their views be taught alongside 'science-based' theories" (18). Kakutani does not peruse their texts but introduces the Paul de Man scandal of 1987, criticizing deconstructions. Moreover, referring to Evelyn Barish's biography *The Double Life of Paul de Man*, she mentions de Man's personality: "an unrepentant con man—an opportunist, bigamist, and toxic narcissist who'd been convicted in Belgium of fraud, forgery, and falsifying records" (57–58).

The extremism of the Nazis is unacceptable, but I question Kakutani's way of criticism; if the writer's personality matters, why does not she mention Wallace's personal life? In Wallace's biography, originally published in 2012, D.T. Max describes it as "[o]ne night Wallace tried to push [Mary] Karr from a moving car. Soon afterward, he got so mad at her that he threw her coffee table at her" (175).[20] Before Kakutani published her book, Wallace's

[20] In 2018, the same year Kakutani's, *The Death of Truth* was published, Mary Carr tweeted about the harassment from Wallace in the #Metoo Movement, which was an opportunity that Wallace's harassment was broadly known. Although *The Death of Truth* was not related to the incident, Kakutani could intentionally dismiss it while she wrote about de Man's personal life.

misogynistic behavior toward women had been well known. In 2013, Rebecca Rothfeld confessed her emotional conflict between Wallace's literary splendidness and misogyny as "my ready forgiveness of the author, my totally unfounded yet near boundless belief in the Wallace who had written so beautifully and my attendant disbelief in the Wallace who had spoken so crassly" (Rothfeld). It occurs to me that Kakutani intentionally chooses not to mention Wallace's misogyny because she regards him as an anti-postmodernist on her side. Kakutani's problematic attitude as a critic involves her labeling postmodernists as inherent vices and rivals with vexing problems for the liberal.

At the end of Kakutani's discussion, she cites Wallace's critique of postmodernism to support her argument:

> The trickle-down legacy of postmodernism, Wallace argued, was 'sarcasm, cynicism, a manic ennui, suspicion of all authority, suspicion of all constraints on conduct, and a terrible penchant for ironic diagnosis of unpleasantness instead of an ambition not just to diagnose and ridicule but to redeem. You've got to understand that this stuff has permeated the culture. It's become our language'—'Postmodern irony's become our environment.' The water in which we swim. (164)

Wallace's text cited above is part of an interview with Larry McCaffery; Kakutani's rephrased words "the water in which we swim" are apparently from Wallace's commencement speech "This Is Water." The situation where postmodern irony is rampant is hard to see and talk about due to its daily excessiveness. Thus, Kakutani asserts that some people no longer capture the objective truth by citing Wallace's postmodern critique.

To Kakutani's postmodern critique, Mineo Takamura responds in his essay about George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by contrasting Kakutani and Richard Rorty:

> Kakutani and Rorty discuss the same novel [*Nineteen Eighty-Four*] and read opposite things in the text. For Kakutani, it is an ethical and brave act that Winston endures the torture to protect truth and freedom and declares, 'Two plus two make four.' On the contrary, for Rorty, Winston's 'very act' to defend truth desperately causes oppression and cruelty. Kakutani would opine that postmodernists like Rorty were the origin of post-truth as they regarded the truth as an undecidable figure. However, Rorty would reject Kakutani's attitude to isolate truth from lies and pursue the former because this could yield friends and foes and interfere with 'solidarity.' (261; my translation)

Evidently, Kakutani, utterly rejecting postmodernism, cannot reconcile with a postmodernist Rorty. Of these two positions, I agree with Rorty's view of truth. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he denies "the final vocabulary," what Kakutani calls "truth," because what we think as *truth* depends on where we were born and where we live; namely, a mere *contingency*. Similarly, as the United States is divided into red states and blue states in the 21st century, people who happen to be born in New York or Texas would believe different truths. Due to the contingency, half might support the death of truth, but the other might not.

Rorty's viewpoint crystalizes the problem of Kakutani's argument though she criticizes the death of truth. In other words, due to a respect for objective facts, her discussion depends on her firm belief that universal and inexorable truth exists. Thus, the truth is what postmodernists like Rorty have *not* recognized or mentioned persistently and patiently. It is what they have not trusted: metanarrative. Despite not using the words such as metamodernism, new sincerity, or post-postmodernism, Kakutani's text also shows the critic's intention to recover the truth or new metanarrative by rejecting postmodernism as a negative legacy. It is what post-postmodern

discourse does, the intentional fallacy of critics.

Surely Wallace criticizes postmodernism, but this should not mean that postmodernism has been over. In Kakutani's citation above, Wallace's words, "postmodern irony's become our environment," are rephrased as "the water in which we swim." Then, we need to read particularly closely "This Is Water" because the intention of the two seems to be different. Before the punch line ("This is water. This is water."), at the end of the speech, Wallace mentions *Truth*; "[t]he capital-T Truth is about life BEFORE death" ("This Is Water"). Then, he continues:

> It is about the real value of a real education, which has almost nothing to do with knowledge, and everything to do with simple awareness; awareness of what is so real and essential, so hidden in plain sight all around us, all the time, that we have to keep reminding ourselves over and over. ("This Is Water")

Notably, what Wallace considers truth is beyond "knowledge" but about "awareness" until the "very" day we die. Truth is to Wallace, not about what we know but about what we must be conscious of and thus can be construed not as *being* but as *our awareness*. Then, Wallace pragmatically remains aware by saying "this is water" twice. The water in this context means *reality as it is in itself*, like water for fishes. In this sense, Wallace's act of awareness is never-ending.

For Kakutani, the problem is the situation where postmodern irony is rampant. Thus, once one gets out of the "contaminated" water, one can have the truth. In Kakutani's view, there reasonably exists the outside of the water. However, Wallace does not say, "Get out of the water" but just repeats "This is water" two times. He chooses not to imagine and mention the outside of the water. He says this act of awareness is "unimaginably hard to do this, to stay conscious and alive in the adult world day in and day out" ("This Is Water").

We do nothing but be in water/reality. The question is, How do we live socially by compromising with others, hiding our depth properly, and disguising ourselves on the surface? This is the question of daily excessiveness that Wallace shows in *Infinite Jest*: how to live in infinite reflexivity until we die. Not to imagine the outside of reality but to struggle to live pragmatically. Fishes cannot live outside of water.

It is what the characters in *Infinite Jest* show as their lived experiences. Most of them, suffering from many kinds of sadness and loneliness, are not saved. It is no exaggeration to state that literally infinite suffering is written throughout more than one thousand pages. The paralyzed daughter raped by her father, the traumatized woman witnessing the depth of the surface, Hal altogether at odds between his inner self and outer self, or Gately and the other addicts in Ennet House are not saved at all. In daily excessiveness and infinite reflexivity, they cannot connect and empathize with others from the bottom/depth of the heart. However, private, individual, and surface solidarity remains possible for them. Again, Rorty's view of solidarity is beneficial to grasp it: "The self-doubt seems to me the characteristic mark of the first epoch in human history in which large numbers of people have become able to separate the question 'Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?' from the question 'Are you suffering?'" (*Contingency* 198). The former question asks the final vocabulary/metanarrative, similar to post-postmodern discourse. On the contrary, the latter question asks about private, individual, and surface solidarity, the only way to be with others.

Rorty's solidarity elucidates a considerable detail of human relations in *Infinite Jest*. Randy Lenz, a drug addict in Ennet House, habitually kills animals in his neighborhood just for fun. On the way home from an AA meeting, the other addict Bruce Green follows Lenz, preventing him from finding and killing animals. Gradually, Lenz finds himself becoming fond of Green, listening to him and nodding agreeably:

> Yet Green is not so quiet and unresponding that it's like with some silent people where you start to wonder if he's listening with a sympathizing ear or if he's really drifting around in his own self-oriented thoughts and not even listening to Lenz, etc., treating Lenz like a radio you can tune in or out. Lenz has a keen antenna for people like this and their stock is low on his personal exchange. Bruce Green inserts low affirmatives and 'No shit's and 'Fucking-A's, etc., at just the right places to communicate his attentions to Lenz. Which Lenz admires. (547)

Green's seemingly trivial nodding means a lot to Lez. At least, it is overtly meaningful for Lenz to stop killing animals: "So it's not like Lenz just wants to blow Green off and tell him to go peddle his papers and let him the fuck alone after Meetings so he can solo" (547). In infinite reflexivity, where one has no choice but to bear reality by talking to ourselves, "this is water/reality" over and over, one only has just a little bit of possibility to speak to others for solidarity: just saying "Are you suffering?" "No shit" or something like private, individual, and surface words.

Since post-postmodern discourse is not entirely about David Foster Wallace, my discussion so far is not enough to refute it altogether. However, as I discussed, many critics regard Wallace's texts as the cornerstone of post-postmodern discourse. Therefore, their reading of the texts is simplified and unified, dismissing Wallace's intention. My arguments include the daily excessiveness of postmodern irony, the fear of the depth on the surface, and infinite reflexivity. Post-postmodern discourse, in short, aims to *re*construct the already *de*constructed situation. The act of reconstruction by post-postmodernism is, hypothetically, part of postmodernism; they try to recover the new metanarrative but end up establishing many little narratives, no longer mentioning the whole but a part of it. Like many characters in *Infinite Jest,* most of us must find it hard to live in postmodern societies in the situation of

never-ending infinite reflexivity. However, an intellectual legacy of postmodernism in philosophy and literature teaches us the attitude of not talking about justice broadly but thinking about things persistently, pragmatically, and sincerely in-between the binary situation. Thus, post-postmodernism, lapsing into binary thinking, is unacceptable.

6. I Was Seen: Forever Overhead or Forever Nothing Below

6.1. To Be Seen, or Not to Be Seen

In 2005, at Kenyon College, David Foster Wallace delivered a commencement speech titled "This Is Water," in which he contended, "Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed" and "The capital-T Truth is about life BEFORE death" ("This is Water"). Wallace questioned the act of choosing to keep living in postmodern infinite reflexivity; however, Wallace committed suicide in 2008. We experienced the death of the author in a literal sense, not theoretically. Then, how can literary criticism confront his suicide? Posthumously, his readers cannot help but see a trace of suicide in his texts. In this chapter, I want to read Wallace's suicidal thoughts in his short story "Forever Overhead" (1999), focusing on the motif of seeing and being seen. However, the discussion on representation is not enough to consider Wallace's death; rather, I will choose to consider the ethic of living a "life BEFORE death." This is not about representation; it is about our real lives.

Then, as Wallace's successors, I want to consider American poet and novelist Ocean Vuong and Japanese artist Kyohei Sakaguchi. Vuong's first novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), is generally regarded as autofiction.[21] Max Porter praises that "it seems obvious now that a gay young poet born in Saigon would write the great American novel" (Brockes). Aside from Vuong's ethnicity or sexuality, I will discuss how the novel's ethical

[21] See B. David Zarley's "Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* Reads More Like a Memoir Than a Novel," Claire Armitstead's "War Baby: The Amazing Story of Ocean Vuong, Former Refugee and Prize-Winning Poet," Kat Chow's "Going Home With Ocean Vuong," and Mitchell Kuga's "Ocean Vuong Explores the Coming-of-Age of Queerness."

attitude toward life and death differs from that of Wallace. I will also connect my discussion of American literature with Sakaguchi's activities. In particular, I will focus on his music album, *Eien ni Zujyou ni* (『永遠に頭上に』), *Forever Overhead* in English. Through consideration of his song and suicide prevention activity, I try to conserve an ethic to live a "life BEFORE death" with others, with *our friends*.

6.2. "Forever Overhead"

Wallace was always an ogler. In the essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," Wallace insists that lonely people, particularly fiction writers, tend to know reality only through television because they watch TV almost every day. At the beginning of the essay, Wallace says, "Fiction writers as a species tend to be oglers. They tend to lurk and to stare. They are born watchers. They are viewers" ("E Unibus Pluram" 21). The self-consciousness of being a watcher seems to be in the nature of fiction writers, who observe and represent the reality around them or, on their monitors. Accordingly, they, as subjects who watch, do not want to be objects to be watched: "The result is that a majority of fiction writers, born watchers, tend to dislike being objects of people's attention. Dislike being watched" ("E Unibus Pluram" 21). This assertion of uncomfortableness in being watched is worth considering because the self-consciousness of being unwatched sometimes makes one feel unbearably lonely.

Wallace's short story, "Forever Overhead," succeeds in articulating this uncomfortableness of being fully dismissed by others. A 13-year-old adolescent boy comes to a pool with his family on his birthday. His family—unlike The Lambers in *The Corrections* or The Incandenzas in *Infinite Jest*—does not seem dysfunctional at all:

> Your family likes you. You are bright and quiet, respectful to elders—though you are not without spine. You are largely good. You look out for your little sister. You are her ally. [...] In all things they are proud of you, satisfied, and they have retreated to the warm distance from which pride and satisfaction travel. You all get along well. ("Forever Overhead" 7).

Although their relationship is not so bad, the distance between the boy and his family is a bit complicated. This is articulated through the boy's act of watching. He is a complete watcher, seeing considerable details of the pool, just like a fiction writer does:

> The pool is a system of movement. Here now there are: laps, splash fights, dives, corner tag, cannonballs, Sharks and Minnows, high fallings, Marco Polo (your sister still It, halfway to tears, too long to be It, the game teetering on the edge of cruelty, not your business to save or embarrass). Two clean little bright-white boys caped in cotton towels run along the poolside until the guard stops them dead with a shout through his bullhorn. The guard is brown as a tree, blond hair in a vertical line on his stomach, his head in a jungle explorer hat, his nose a white triangle of cream. A girl has an arm around a leg of his little tower. He's bored.
>
> Get out now and go past your parents, who are sunning and reading, not looking up. (8)

There are many kinds of people in the pool and at the poolside: the boy's little sister, almost crying, playing with her friends, two other boys running on the poolside, the guard, and the boy's parents sunning and reading. The boy avidly watches "a system of movement" but his family does not see him. The second paragraph of the above quotation shows that his parents are "not looking up"

when he approaches them. While this is a mere detail in the story, I want to focus on this because the boy ceaselessly keeps watching the environment and is seen by nobody in the entire story.

While nobody watches the boy, only "black eyes" stare at him. The latter half of the story is about the diving board of the pool. The boy, by himself, waits in a line to use it, and before jumping, he still watches his parents from above: "Look out past it. look across. You can see so well. Your mother is in her deck chair, reading, squinting, her face tilted up to get light on her cheeks. She hasn't looked to see where you are" (10). What watches him is not his parents but "black eyes": "Two flat shadows in the broad light. Two vague black ovals the end of the board has two dirty spots" (13). These black spots on the board, articulated as "eyes of skin" (16), are permanent traces of people jumping from the board: "They are from all the people who've gone before you. [...] and you see that the two dark spots are from people's skin. They are skin abraded from feet by the violence of the disappearance of people with real weight" (14). Once the boy goes up on the board, he can no longer stop. This fact makes him confused: "Forever below is rough deck, snacks, thin metal music, down where you once used to be; the line is solid and has no reverse gear; and the water, of course, is only soft when you're inside it" (15). The "soft" water of the pool, once one jumps from above, becomes "hard" in the end.

Imagining hitting the "hard" water apparently scares him but he has "no reverse gear." No matter how he struggles with the situation in front of him, he has no choice other than diving. An adult behind him says "Hey kid" (14) over and over. At last, the boy steps into "black eyes" and then, disappears forever:

> So which is the lie? Hard or soft? Silence or time?
>
> The lie is that it's one or the other. A still, floating bee is moving faster than it can think. From overhead the sweetness drives it crazy.

> The board will nod and you will go, and eyes of skin can cross blind into a cloud-blotched sky, punctured light emptying behind sharp stone that is forever. That is forever. Step into the skin and disappear.
>
> Hello. (16)

This passage is more than the description of the boy's fear of diving; rather, this is the description of the boy's (or Wallace's) complicated state of mind. For the man behind, the boy keeps "still" like a "floating bee," but actually his thought "mov[es] faster than it can think." While his parents do not see him, only the "blind" black eyes of skin left by countless and nameless people watch him. This can be construed as a death drive, his temptation to step into "forever." After Wallace's suicide, as previously mentioned, readers cannot help but interpret a trace of death in Wallace's texts. Not his family, but only "black eyes" watch the boy. Hence, his thought of being seen tempts him into diving/falling.

The motif of not being seen would be Wallace's existential question. In *Infinite Jest*, James O. Incandenza Sir. (Hal's grandfather) morbidly keeps talking to his son, James O. Incandenza Jr. in his youth. While Wallace argues that fiction writers tend to "[d]islike being watched," J. O. Incandenza Sir finally confesses that he wanted to be seen by his father: "God I'm I'm so *sorry*. Jim. You don't deserve to see me like this. I'm so scared, Jim. I'm so scared of dying without ever being really *seen*" (*Infinite Jest* 168). Incandenza Sir. is addicted to alcohol, and his son, Incandenza Jr. will be similarly addicted in the future. Finally, Incandenza Jr. commits suicide without being seen by anybody in the same way as his father once feared. If we cannot make any *friends* in our lives, we would die by ourselves, without being seen by anybody. Wallace's statement of being a complete watcher is contradictory and inseparably related to his fear of dying alone. Confronting the fact that Wallace, nonetheless, actually killed himself, his reader must take responsibility/response-ability to live a "life BEFORE death." This must be

an ethic for the readers.

6.3. Forever Nothing Below

Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is a novel about "life BEFORE death." In American literature, Wallace and Vuong are so different that one might think the comparison is unreasonable. However, there are some reasons why I juxtapose their texts. First, some motifs in Vuong's text are reminiscent of *Infinite Jest*. At the beginning of the novel, Hal Incandenza attends a college interview. Though he intends to talk intelligently, people in the room hear "*Sub*animalistic noises and sounds" (*Infinite Jest* 14). This shows that Hal's inside and outside are completely divided at the end of the story. Adults around him lay him down, and one instructor of the tennis academy says "On court he is gorgeous" (*Infinite Jest* 14). This passage might have influenced Vuong because, in *Infinite Jest*, students in the tennis academy play the game called Eschaton, in which the tennis court is used as a model of the earth. Second, Wallace and Vuong are interested in writing about the same motif of drug addiction. The protagonist Little Dog's lover, Trevor, dies after taking an overdose of heroin and opioids in 2008 or 2009. Coincidentally, Wallace committed suicide in 2008. While this might be a mere coincidence, at least their awareness of this issue in contemporary American society is similar. Third, the motif of seeing and being seen plays a crucial role: the question of life and death.

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous has, like "Forever Overhead," an obsession with watching. The protagonist's grandmother Lan, in her youth, is in Vietnam during the period of war. The section on the Vietnam War begins as follows: "It is a beautiful country depending on where you look" (35). Other than this sentence, variations in the same theme are found throughout the

text.[22] In the summer of 2003, a 14-year-old Little Dog begins to work at a tobacco firm, where he meets a white male, Trevor: "That August, in the fields, it was he who came into my vision" (94). At the very beginning of their meeting, the motif of seeing is foregrounded. Hence, the brief encounter of their sights is important in the text:

> What I felt then, however, was not desire, but the coiled charge of its possibility, a feeling that emitted, it seemed, its own gravity, holding me in place. The way he watched me back there in the field, when we worked briefly, side by side, our arms brushing against each other as the plants racked themselves in a green blur before me, his eyes lingering, then flitting away when I caught them. I was seen—I who had seldom been seen by anyone. I who was taught, by you [Rose], to be invisible in order to be safe. (96)

In a review of the book, Min Hyong Song states, "Trevor is a troubled and sensitive young white man, and when they meet there is instant sexual attraction" (Hyong Song). This interpretation of homosexuality is reasonable because soon after they have sex. However, Hyong Song dismisses the motif of seeing and being seen, which is poetically and beautifully articulated. When literally reading Little Dog's narrative that states, "What I felt then, however, was not desire," one must read this as a critical moment that articulates more than sexual desire. For Little Dog who has not been seen by anybody, the simple fact that he "was seen" achieves true existential happiness.

[22] "Cleopatra saw the same sunset. Ain't that crazy? Like everybody who was ever alive only seen one unset" (99), "[The stereo's] red eye winking" (126), "To gaze at what pleases [...] is, in itself, replication—the image prolonged in the eye, making more of it, making it last" (138), "That night, as Trevor slept besides me, I kept seeing the raccoon's pupils, how they couldn't shut without the skull. I'd like to think, even without ourselves, that we could still see. I'd like to think we'd never close" (185), "I [Mr. Zappadia] said color in what you *saw*" (227).

Little Dog's mother Rose keeps saying that he should be an invisible boy because she is completely conscious of being an outsider, a Vietnamese immigrant in America. When Little Dog was a child, Rose told him, "Remember. Remember. You're already Vietnamese" (230). Naturally, she could have said, "You're already American" since they have moved to America. For Rose and Little Dog, as invisible outsiders, "American" is not about what they become. Hence, the fact that an American actually saw him is itself more important for him than "instant sexual attraction." When Trevor says that he hates his father, Little Dog thinks, "Up until then I didn't think a white boy could hate anything about his life. I wanted to know him through and through, by that very hate. Because that's what you [Rose] give anyone who sees you" (97). For Rose, while others in America see her, they are not *friends* at all, but *foes*. Little Dog, however, experiences that he "was seen" privately and gradually understands Trevor, who was once a complete "foreigner" to him. Once again, their first meeting meant more than "instant sexual attraction"; it concerned Little Dog's existential problem about sentimentality.

Their relationship begins when Little Dog emotionally identifies with Trevor due to their similar living situations; the text articulates, through the eyes of a Vietnamese-American boy, the forgotten whites in America. For instance, Little Dog narrates, "Trevor the hunter. Trevor the carnivore, the redneck" (155) and he describes white people in Hartford, Connecticut, as follows:

> A phrase used by the economic losers, it can also be heard in East Hartford and New Britain, where entire white families, the ones some call *trailer trash*, crammed themselves on half-broken porches in mobile parks and HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] housing, their faces OxyContin-gaunt under cigarette smoke. (213).

The derogatory terms like "redneck" and "trailer trash" are reminiscent of the 2016 presidential election and its aftermath, when the so-called "white working class" was "remembered" in the U.S.[23] Working at a tobacco firm as a teenager, living in a trailer house, and hating his drunken and violent father,[24] Trevor is a nameless white working-class man who loses his life at the age 22 by taking heroin and OxyContin.[25] In this sense, Trevor, as a white male, is an invisible outsider in America, just like Little Dog. However, at the moment when their eyes briefly meet, they are no longer invisible.

This brief sentimentality that connects Little Dog with Trevor is deeply related to the novel's title: *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous.* This title is rephrased in the text: "In a world myriad as ours, the gaze is a singular act: to look at something is to fill your whole life with it, if only briefly" (175). As cited above, maybe intentionally, the word "briefly" was used at the scene of the brief encounter of their sights. Based on the fact, to be "briefly gorgeous" in life, the act of seeing someone special or being seen by them is indispensable. The motif of being "briefly gorgeous" is repeated at the ending: "If, relative to the history of our planet, an individual life is so short, a blink of an eye, as they say, then to be gorgeous, even from the day you're born to the day you die, is to be gorgeous only briefly. [...] To be gorgeous, you must first be seen, but to be seen allows you to be hunted" (238).

When Little Dog says "Trevor the hunter" above, what does he mean? This question is about Little Dog's ethical choice of life when facing Trevor's untimely death. The word, "hunter" is related to a buffalo jump[26] in the novel. One day, Little Dog and his grandmother Lan watch TV, on which a herd of

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[23] See Joan C. Williams's "White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America" (2017).

[24] Trevor's father, drinking alcohol and watching TV, never sees Trevor (141–44).

[25] Trevor's early death is an example of the opioid crisis. Since 1996, a semi-synthetic opioid called "OxyContin" has been widely used, particularly among white working-class people. See "'You Want a Description of Hell?' Oxycontin's 12-hour Problem" (2016).

[26] Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is a World Heritage Site in Canada. See the official website (https://www.canada.jp/movies/post-261/).

buffalos keeps jumping from a cliff and dying. Since Lan does not understand the mass suicide, Little Dog says: “They [the herd of buffalos] don’t mean to, Grandma. They’re just following their family. That’s all. They don’t know it’s a cliff” (179). At the end of the novel, Trevor’s final conversation is about this TV program on the buffalo jump. Trevor says, “They don’t got [sic] no choice about it. It’s just the law of nature” (237). Then, Little Dogs asks, “like their family’s just going forward and they go with them?” (237). Trevor replies, “Like a family. A fucked family” (237). Apparently, “a herd” is a metaphor for “a family,” which is one of the most important motifs of the novel. The fact is that one’s family, generally speaking, changes or determines one’s life. In “Forever Overhead,” the boy, who is never seen by his family, chooses to be seen by the “black eyes” and “jumps” from overhead—a metaphor for suicide. Trevor, who hates his father but cannot escape from his life as “trailer trash,” is addicted to drugs and opioids, and dies. Little Dog, who has been abused by his mother, escapes from Hartford to enter university. While Trevor follows his “fucked family,” Little Dog, by chance, does not follow the herd and stops *jumping*. Trevor has “no choice” to escape from his family in his life, just like a buffalo in the herd.

The current discussion is not enough to fully explain why Little Dog calls Trevor a “hunter,” and Trevor is actually “a prayer” hunted by his “fucked family.” The novel is narrated by Little Dog, who has experienced Trevor’s death and still lives. This is reminiscent of the boy in “Forever Overhead,” who, fomented by a man saying “Hey kid,” jumps from overhead. While the boy is not seen by his family, Little Dog is actually seen by Trevor; however, after Trevor’s death, Little Dog understands that “To be gorgeous, you must first be seen, but to be seen allows you to be hunted.” This can be construed as Little Dog’s attitude toward the late Trevor: Little Dog is the one who is seen by the “black eyes” of death or hunted. The pain of losing his beloved forces him to the edge of a cliff/diving board. If he had stayed with his family in Hartford, he would have followed his family and Trevor with

"no choice." The difference between them is a mere contingency; as readers know, Little Dog can read and write a story. This extraordinary ability gives him a chance to enter a university away from home: "That reading is a privilege you made possible for me with what you lost" (240).

What readers receive from the novel is an ethic: if "hunted" by suicidal feelings, one must live a "life BEFORE death." At last, Little Dog again thinks about the buffalos: "And just as the first one steps off the cliff, onto air, the forever nothing below, they ignite into the ochre-red sparks of monarchs" (241). In comparison with "Forever Overhead," one can recognize that this is a fine counterargument. While the boy regards the moment he jumps as forever, Little Dog denies forever overhead in favor of "the forever nothing below." This is the ethic of the novel: to live a "life BEFORE death." No matter how difficult life is, you must go on living with your *friends*. And if you choose to die, there is "forever nothing below." Little Dog continues, "And like a word, I hold no weight in this world yet still carry my own life. And I throw it ahead of me until what I left behind becomes exactly what I'm running toward—like I'm part of a family" (241–42). In fact, he left Trevor and his family and now loses both of them. Still, he runs away from the "black eyes" of death and chooses to live. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, ethically affirms a "life BEFORE death."

6.4. The Bottom of the Sea or *Forever Overhead*

To fulfill an ethic of living a "life BEFORE death" is easier said than done because this is not only about discourse but about everyday life. This opinion should not be limited to the discussion of literature. Rather, I want to leave the discussion of representation and take a step toward practice. Aiming to connect representation with practice, I will introduce another "Forever Overhead," a music album performed by Kyohei Sakaguchi, a Japanese

prolific artist. Sakaguchi started as an architect and built “Zero Yen House,” which was a project to build a house for free. Besides working as a writer, musician, and painter, he has continued, for over a decade, his own suicide prevention hotline service called *Inocchi No Denwa* (いのっちの電話), in which he talks with strangers in his private vocabulary. His altruistic activity, however, is not entirely altruism but also his self-care; he has bipolar disorder and is preventing his own suicide.[27] In an article from *The New York Times*, Eric Margolis states, “It’s easy to understand how Sakaguchi undertakes many different projects simultaneously—to him, everything is connected. He connects his vegetable garden to his art, his art to his depression, Kumamoto’s history and literary heritage to his writing, and so on” (Margolis). This activity of representation is inseparable from his “life BEFORE death.”

Sakaguchi’s music album called *Eien ni Zujyou ni* (『永遠に頭上に』) might be a Japanese translation of Wallace’s “Forever Overhead.”[28] I want to focus on the song “Kaitei no Syura” (“Asura at the Bottom of the Sea”). Originally, its lyrics were a poem by Michiko Ishimure, who is widely known as a writer and activist for Minamata disease. First, I will introduce the entire text in my English translation and discuss how Ishimure’s poem questions the matter of life and death:

> 「海底の修羅」
> “Asura at the Bottom of the Sea”
>
> 墓場を出て丘をくだる
> I go down the hill from a grave
> 流れをくだる

[27] See his non-fiction *Kurushii Toki wa Denwa Shite* (Call Me When You’re in Pain) (2020).
[28] “Forever Overhead” is translated into Japanese by Haruki Murakami, titled *Eien ni Zujyou ni* (『永遠に頭上に』). Also, Sakaguchi said on Twitter that he got *Infinite Jest* in 2015. (Sakaguchi Kyohei [@zhtsss]).

I go down the current

舟はもういらない

No longer need a boat

わたしが舟だから

Because I am the boat

海底だと思っていたのは

What I have thought of as the bottom of the sea

頂だったのだ

Turns out to be the peak

不知火海

Shiranui (Yatsushiro) Sea[29]

墓にするには浅すぎる海

Is too shallow to be a grave

陽が霧のように溶けこんで来たので

The sunlight streams into the water like a blurring fog

天と海が　そのとき

The sky and the sea

ゆるりと入れ替わったのだ

Slowly change places each other (Ishimure 230–31; my translation)

From the first line, one notices that this poem is suicidal. After escaping a grave, the protagonist goes directly into the sea. Similar to the boy jumping from overhead, here, the protagonist jumps into the water. The only proper noun in the poem, the "Shiranui (Yatsushiro) sea" indicates that the sea is the source of Minamata disease. However, this poem does not drive one crazy; rather, it encourages the reader to keep living positively and beautifully. The line "What I have thought as the bottom of the sea" suggests that the protagonist sinks to the depths of despair. Then, the next line, "Turns out to

[29] The Shiranui Sea, also called the Yatsushiro Sea, located Kyushu, Japan, is famous for Minamata disease.

be the peak" conveys that suffering is relative. Little Dog also shared this perspective as "briefly": "If, relative to the history of our planet, an individual life is so short, a blink of an eye" (Vuong 238). When the protagonist, standing on the peak, looks up from the depth of the sea, the water overhead looks like the sky because "the sunlight streams into the water." This sunlight accidentally changes the protagonist's epistemology to see the world differently. This attitude can be construed as Ishimure's ethic to keep living against Minamata disease.

Now, I want to reread the poem in Sakaguchi's *Forever Overhead*, which I value more than Ishimure's poem itself. The reason I evaluate Sakaguchi's recontextualization is that he pragmatically *uses* the text as part of his diverse activities of talking to people who are suffering in the depths of despair. As already noted, Wallace's "Forever Overhead" is about suicidal thoughts and acts, feeling estranged by the "black eyes" of death. However, Sakaguchi's *Forever Overhead* is about fleeing from suicidal thoughts and changing one's perspective when suffering. Relating to Wallace's short story and Ishimure's poem, Sakaguchi succeeds in showing an attitude toward living a "life BEFORE death" a little bit longer. His activity as an artist is a self-care and simultaneously saves others' lives. This is more directly done by his other devoted activity, *Inocchi No Denwa*, which literally makes his activity more than representation. When suffering people call Sakaguchi to talk with him in their own private vocabulary, they can be *friends* only briefly. At least, for over a decade, many people who have called Salaguchi have not killed themselves, which is profoundly significant.

If writers, artists, or critics only represent something in the public vocabulary, this would be nothing more than discourses. This is Rorty's condition of solidarity: "The self-doubt seems to me the characteristic mark of the first epoch in human history in which large numbers of people have become able to separate the question 'Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?' from the question 'Are you suffering?'" (*Contingency*

198). To be *friends*, simply talking to people in the public vocabulary is not enough; the private vocabulary, like "Are you suffering?", must be used to make *us* become *friends*. Sakaguchi's artistic and practical activities are precisely how representations should be used pragmatically. Not only do his paintings and music relieve people's anxiety, but his *Inocchi No Denwa* also actually helps people to live, literally using the private vocabulary like "Are you suffering?." For these reasons, I place a higher value on the private vocabulary than on the public vocabulary throughout my discussion.

After Wallace's suicide, Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and Sakaguchi's *Forever Overhead* take responsibility/response-ability for fulfilling a "life BEFORE death" with others, with *friends*. In "Forever Overhead," if the boy had been seen by his parents, he would not have gone to the diving board alone and not been seen by the "black eyes." In *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, if Trevor had been treated warmly by his father, he would not have died young. If they had been seen by their *friends*, they would have lived a little bit longer. Being seen by *friends*, even only briefly, makes one feel safe, comfortable, or happy. Without this, we simply cannot keep living. This must be a vital moment in our lives, and we must not depreciate its value.

7. Conclusion

"Why can't *we* be *friends*?"—this ordinary but difficult question has been the central theme of this paper. This question is not about the public, but about the private. By distinguishing them in my discussion, I aimed to widen the target of literary criticism to the private sphere, to our daily lives. As stated in the Introduction, I believe that literature is *ordinary*, similar to Raymond Williams's idea that "culture is ordinary." The academic discussions and literary criticism of contemporary American literature are often full of intellectual jargon and the public vocabulary of politics and society. In this sense, my position is anti-intellectual and voluntaristic. No matter how "public" their arguments are, critics' intentions always matter.

In Chapter 2, I criticize this situation as the intentional fallacy of critics. A typical case is identity politics, in which one's private pain, interest, and ideology instantly become public discourses. The subject "we" strategy aims to widen the critics' private matters to the public sphere. The problem is that "we" cannot be *friends* in the public sphere simply because "we" are different. "We" have different ethnical, sexual, educational, financial, national, and individual backgrounds. "We" have different beliefs, ideas, knowledge, justices, and truths. Thus, the solidarity of "we" is, in the long run, divided into friends and foes. My recognition of the condition of solidarity is that *we* can be *friends* only in the private sphere. To explain this, I use the first person singular *I* and the second person singular *You* many times in my discussion, because I believe that the accumulation of this effort of communication enables *us* to be *friends* in the end.

My theoretical interest in this paper is to consider and criticize the subject "we" in the public sphere and to propose a different perspective of the subject *we* in the private sphere. To do so, I introduce the categories of public vocabulary and private vocabulary as theoretical backgrounds for my

discussion. The philosophical and critical texts of Richard Rorty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and David Foster Wallace demonstrate the ways of criticism in the private vocabulary. Rorty states that one should pay attention to the limit of the subject "we" because the liberal subject of it does not include others who have different beliefs and ideas. Furthermore, "we" have different backgrounds by a mere contingency. Based on the contingency of lives, Spivak and Wallace indicate ways of criticism from their private sphere. Spivak states that she ultimately *cannot* represent subalterns—nameless Indian widows. However, if intellectuals stop speaking for others or claim that others can speak for themselves, they are abandoning their responsibility/response-ability. Based on her Indian identity and education, Spivak perpetually questions her subject position as a critic and pragmatically tries to represent others. Similarly, Wallace states that he, as a white yuppie, has no entitlement to talk about Black rappers. This is why his rap criticism is meta; he probes his subject position of being drawn to serious rap and steps into the cultural scene, which continuously changes. The I-narratives of Spivak and Wallace are far from identity politics. There is no other way to begin to speak from one's subject position in a private vocabulary. Rorty, Spivak, and Wallace show that critics can perpetually question their subject positions and still try to represent others with modesty.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are literary criticisms of three white male writers—Richard Powers, Jonathan Franzen, and David Foster Wallace—based on the intentional fallacy of critics. I choose these three writers because their intellectual and voluntaristic texts motivate readers to consider their lives "BEFORE death" pragmatically. I respect the value their texts articulate—that is, to share something valuable, respectable, and beautiful with others in the private sphere and to be *us*, to be *friends*. This is unimaginably difficult, or almost impossible for *us* in this postmodern, divided society. *We* no longer have something in common socially and politically in the public sphere. Therefore, one must pay attention to the possibility of the minimum solidarity

in the private sphere. However, the characters in these writers' novels are generally related to public matters. In other words, their private lives in the novels are discussed in a public vocabulary. I try to criticize this situation and to consider the relationships of the characters as the private matters.

Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* is about two couples of different generations and while the couple in the 1950s could not be *friends*, the couple in the 1980s found a possibility to be *friends* again. However, due to Powers's intellectual background and his elegant technique as a writer, the novel has been praised from the perspective of intellectualism. In this academic context, I argue that Powers is more voluntaristic than intellectual, proving his anti-intellectualism. Of course, this does not mean that Powers presents a conspiracy theory or disrespected intellectual knowledge. Rather, I demonstrate that his emotional and sentimental respect for knowledge is a necessary aspect of his novel. The protagonist, Jan O'Deigh, once refuses to become pregnant because of the risk of childbearing. Her decision is based on "intellectual knowledge" and confuses her lover Franklin Todd emotionally. After her breakup with Todd and the death of Stuart Ressler, O'Deigh starts to learn biology, narrates it in her own words/in her private vocabulary, and experiences "a sense of wonder," just like Ressler has done. Her experience is about learning "intellectual knowledge" and "emotional knowledge" simultaneously. This is the reason why O'Deigh and Todd, having spent a year narrating their stories, finally reunite and choose to be *friends* once more. To O'Deigh and Todd, Ressler's death means a great deal; they ethically *respond* to his death and choose to live their lives together "once more with feeling."

Therefore, the function of *The Gold Bug Variations* is making its readers experience "pragmatic sentimentality." My phrase "pragmatic sentimentality" is an oxymoron. These two words have opposite meanings; however, one should have both attitudes, similar to Rorty's strategy of the liberal ironist. Intellectuals cannot teach "emotional knowledge;" it must be learned through lived experience. Thus, literary critics should *use* the novel pragmatically in

literary education. *The Gold Bug Variations* is Powers's attempt to open the closed circle of intellectualism; therefore, I argue that we should stop discussing the novel using the public vocabulary inside of the academic circles and *use* it as "sentimental education." This must be a critic's responsibility/response-ability.

Franzen's *The Corrections* is about the impossibility of being *friends* with family members in the era of political correctness. Before Franzen published *The Corrections*, he declared that he had abandoned a "hip" attitude and "cultural engagement." This statement can be construed as Franzen's will to stop talking in the public vocabulary and to start talking in the private vocabulary. In his novel, members of the Lamberts family are completely alienated without the possibility of making "corrections." The title *The Corrections* makes its readers anticipate that the Lambers will be corrected and become *friends* again; however, they do not. This is indicated not only by the story, but also by its form. The seemingly unhip story of *The Corrections* shows its readers a self-referential moment, which is the critical point in Franzen's realism. The final conversation between the father Alfred and his son Chip is conducted without Alfred sharing his internal thoughts, and "this was where the story ended." This clichéd dramatic irony and self-referential moment of the text are critical because, right after this, the final short chapter, titled "The Corrections," begins, and it is placed literally *outside* of the story. Without understanding this critical form, some critics have argued that the novel is faithful to realism or that the Lamberts' alienation is "corrected." Against these criticisms, I demonstrate that Alfred cannot "correct" his alienation and dysfunctional relationships with his family and be *friends* with Chip and other family members in the era of political correctness. Thus, his individuality and human dignity are deprived.

Therefore, the function of *The Corrections* is that it reminds its readers of the importance of others' individuality and human dignity. It is easy to criticize a man like Alfred as a belated patriarch, sexist, or misogynist. Of

course, I do not completely deny this criticism, but I also insist that everyone cannot update or "correct" their "belated" ideas to fit the varying hour. Critics must understand that they cannot have "the final vocabulary" (Rorty) to judge people only from a liberal perspective. Franzen's subject position to withdraw "cultural engagement" is articulated in the relationship between Alfred and Chip. Thus, *The Corrections* reflexively functions as a critique of the liberal ideas of political correctness, which deprives an old man of his individuality and human dignity.

Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is about the (im)possibility of *us* being *friends* in the postmodern era due to its infinite reflexivity, but there is a hope for the private, individual, and surface solidarity. Some critics argue that postmodernism ended around 1990 and declare the new metanarrative "post-postmodernism" by referring to Wallace's critique of postmodernism. However, I argue that the critics' declaration of post-postmodernism must be invalid because Wallace and his texts, the important referential points of the criticism, do not indicate the end of postmodernism. Rather, particularly in *Infinite Jest*, Wallace expresses daily excessiveness of irony, the depth of the surface, and infinite reflexivity as postmodern matters, and he existentially questions how we can keep living in this situation. In the post-postmodern discourse, new sincerity or postirony place more emphasis on sincerity than irony by referring to Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram," where he warns about the daily excessiveness of irony on television. This warning is repeated in *Infinite Jest* through people's "high daily doses" of marijuana. There, Wallace questions the high frequency of irony and does not simply reject it. There is also a diagnosis of the surface of postmodernism and the depth of post-postmodernism, which can help people connect with others. Against this criticism, I demonstrate that *Infinite Jest* illustrates a more complex depth/surface structure than post-postmodern discourse and emphasizes that depth on the surface is truly hideous for us. Just as "This Is Water" indicates, people can become addicted to drugs, alcohol, television, or various kinds of

entertainment because of the infinite reflexivity of postmodernism. Wallace's attitude disagrees with Michiko Kakutani's critique of the post-truth. While Kakutani, referring to Wallace's critique of postmodernism, asserts that postmodernism is a cause of post-truth and assumes the existence of truth outside of postmodern irony ("the water in which we swim"), Wallace understands that we have no choice but to stay inside of it. Thus, Wallace's existential question is how to live in "the water" before we die. This is articulated in the private relationships of his characters. One of the addicts Randy Lenz gets a friend Bruce Green on the way to his home and he cannot kill animals on the streets anymore. What makes him stop killing animals is not an ethical discipline in the public vocabulary but a brief conversation with a friend in their private vocabulary.

Therefore, the function of *Infinite Jest* is telling its readers that, under the pressure of postmodern infinite reflexivity, there is no metanarrative to give us the foundation of our lives or to judge the right or wrong of others. Basically, the condition of postmodernism is explained as a lack of metanarratives, or big stories. I believe this is still true in the 21st century because the subject "we" is invalid in the public sphere; there are many different, divided, and incompatible groups simultaneously; thus, "we" cannot be *friends* in the public sphere. It is difficult for all of us to in this postmodern infinite reflexivity, where there are no foundations nor referential points for our lives. Thus, as *Infinite Jest* suggests, only private vocabulary can help *us* be *friends* in postmodern infinite reflexivity. This is the minimal condition of solidarity in the private sphere.

Based on the previous discussion of the three writers' texts, Chapter 6 steps from representation to practice. Wallace insisted on an ethic of "life BEFORE death" in his commencement speech "This Is Water;" however, soon after, he committed suicide in 2008. To assume Wallace's will, I introduce two successors, Ocean Vuong and Kyohei Sakaguchi. Wallace's short story, "Forever Overhead," illustrates a teenage boy who is not seen by his family

and jumps from a diving board. This can be construed as Wallace's suicidal thoughts. Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* has the same motif of "jumping" but adopts a different stance. While Wallace was seen by the "black eyes" of death, Vuong chooses to run away from them and concludes, "forever nothing below." This different stance from Wallace is derived from the experience of being "seen" by a friend. Sakaguchi's music album titled "Forever Overhead" (『永遠に頭上に』) had a similar motif. The song called "Asura at the Bottom of the Sea" (「海底の修羅」), originally written by poet Michiko Ishimure, illustrates the different perspective of "overhead." Sakaguchi's representation is more than an aesthetic; his artistic activity consists of talking with others in his private sphere to prevent their suicides. Representation can function to save others' lives when used in the private sphere.

In summary, three white male writers' texts from the 1990s and 2000s warn about today's academic situation. Their texts are partly liberal and partly conservative. My discussion focused on the latter aspect of the texts and criticizes the rigid and closed liberal circle. Private vocabulary does not directly solve public matters. Rather, just like the accusations that Wallace committed sexual harassment in his private life, it is sometimes in a gray zone. As Hannah Arendt suggests, the private matter is also "a 'collective' concern" at the same time. Thus, the gray zone of the private matter is often discussed in public vocabulary and judged in the public sphere. Although sexual harassment is never acceptable, Wallace's texts remain critical and valuable in the postmodern infinite reflexivity.

You should stop labeling others as right or wrong from your limited perspective (one's perspective is always limited) and acknowledge that there are others who talk in different private vocabularies. From this realization, you can talk with others close to you in your private vocabulary and gradually may use the subject *we* to represent your relationship with others. Then, *we* could be *friends*. The condition of solidarity is the accumulation of this

perpetual act, and literature can be used to imagine this reality. Not excluding the gray zone of different private vocabularies and continuing to strive for their coexistence ultimately lead to the consideration of public matters.

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