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Vulnerability as the Beginning of Care in Modernist Literature:
F. Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, Henry Miller, and J. D. Salinger

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Introduction

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

“Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.” (*Gatsby* 5)

In this opening line of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator, Nick Carraway, introduces the intertwining of two themes: vulnerability and care. Nick presents his vulnerability in his youth as the key reason for his father's advice. In other words, while his vulnerability does not make him independent, it serves as the point where care from his father begins. It is crucial that he does not reject this vulnerability, even now that he is no longer young. On the one hand, he tells the story of his youth in the past tense, suggesting that he has already overcome his vulnerability. On the other hand, his use of the expression “more vulnerable” in a comparative sense implies that he is now “less vulnerable,” not completely free from his vulnerable state, still vulnerable. This subtle acknowledgment of his continued vulnerability is reinforced by another key theme: care, as is embedded in his surname, “Carraway.” Phonetically resembling “care-away,” his name seems to imply that he is distant from the need for care. However, the precise preservation of his father's advice, word for word, reveals the opposite—that his sense of self remains inseparable from his father's care. Thus, Nick's opening words

anticipate the possibility of vulnerability as the beginning of care.

This study explores vulnerability as the beginning of care in the works of four modernist writers: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, Henry Miller, and J. D. Salinger. Their works are often seen as depicting the modernist subject as self-sufficient, closely connected with the American ideal of the self-made man or the myth of the American Adam. In this image, vulnerability seems to be presented only as a negative condition to be overcome. These four writers have often been treated as contributors to the traditional American emphasis on the self-sufficient modernist subject. In addition to the classical character of Jay Gatsby as a symbolic figure of the self-made man in *The Great Gatsby*, the motif of the private detective in Chandler's works, the autobiographical style of Miller's novels, and the dropout narrative in Salinger's works all appear to reinforce the image of independent individuals who reject vulnerability. In fact, these interpretations align with how modernist studies have traditionally read their works. As György Lukács, a significant figure in modernist discourse, argues, in modernist literature, one is "by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (Lukács 20). In this context, their works seem to be entirely disconnected from the question of care. However, the opening line of *The Great Gatsby* suggests an alternative possibility, challenging the traditional image of modernist writers: vulnerability can be the starting point of care. This study aims to demonstrate that it is vulnerability, rather than self-sufficiency, that characterizes their works, questioning the modernist subject in relation to the possibilities of care.

As this is a study of modernist writers, it is necessary to clarify why the framework of modernism can be applied to the discussion of vulnerability and care. While the term “modernism” is generally accepted as referring to a period that spans roughly from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, modernist scholarship often uses it as a reference point for debates over what constitutes the “modern.” Vincent Sherry provides an insightful perspective when he avoids defining modernism as a specific period, instead focusing on its etymological meaning. According to Sherry, the term modern comes from the Latin word *modo*, which refers to the narrow time span of “just now”: “*Modo*, ... , means something narrower than an adjectival understanding of ‘recent’ or ‘current’; it finds its meaning as a temporal adverb, telling the time of an action occurring not simply ‘today’ or even ‘now’ but ‘just now’” (Sherry 2). This sense of time conveys an attitude that makes the “just now” independent, separating it from both the past and the future. In this way, it parallels the aspect of Nick’s attitude toward vulnerability. Nick also attempts to highlight his current independence by recounting his vulnerable state in the past tense.

Modernism’s strong sense of the “right now” has also greatly influenced modernist studies in the field of literature, particularly with an emphasis on the individual. Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas, Paula Martín-Salván, and María J. López argue that one of the central concepts in the traditional understanding of modernism is the solipsistic and isolated modernist individual. They point to Lukács’s discussion of modernist literature as a major source of this perspective. According to them, Lukács developed a fundamental assumption in modernist studies: while “in realism, individual

existence is inextricably linked to its social and historical context, in modernism the subject appears as naturally isolated and unable to fit into a community” (Rodríguez-Salas, Martín-Salván, and López 2). Other influential literary scholars, such as Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton, share this image of the individual in modernism. As a result, modernist literature has often been characterized by a sense of the self as separate from the other:

The modernist novel becomes, thus, the site of conflict and misalliance—emotional, moral, perceptual, cognitive, spiritual, or epistemological—between the internal self and external reality, hence the associated themes of isolation, solipsism, and self-destructiveness commonly identified as central to modern fiction” (Rodríguez-Salas, Martín-Salván, and López 3).

What traditional modernist studies have focused on in literary works is this image of the modernist subject as an isolated individual.

The term “modernism,” however, contains an aspect that can challenge the traditional understanding of “right now.” In this respect, Giorgio Agamben’s unique interpretation of the Latin word *modo* as a temporal gap is particularly insightful:

The adverb *modo* means in Latin “a short time ago, just now, recently.” This indicates, in the “now,” a small temporal gap, which is not so much a chronological past as a non-coincidence of the moment with itself, obliging it to stop and take itself up again. We could say, then, that the temporal form of mode is neither the past nor the present nor, even less, the future.

(Agamben, *Use* 173)

Agamben does not interpret the word *modo* as a brief moment disconnected from both the past and the future. Rather, it is a temporal gap where distinctions of time are continuously shifting. For Agamben, this sense of time prevents one from being a stable individual: “being is a flux, and substance ‘modulates’ itself and beats out its rhythm—it does not fix and schematize itself—in the modes” (Agamben, *Use* 173). This aspect of *modo* can be directly compared to Nick’s ambivalent attitude toward vulnerability. While Nick seems to present his current self as independent, he remains vulnerable, as his constant reflection on his father’s advice indicates. Nick’s attempt to articulate his present identity as independent ironically underscores his inextricable connection with the other.

This ambiguity of *modo*, which renders the self-sufficient self unstable, resonates with several reexaminations of modernist studies since the beginning of the 21st century. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz suggest that modernist studies should expand in “temporal, spatial, and vertical directions” in what they call “new modernist studies” (Mao 3). Paul Saint-Amour offers a perspective of “weak modernism” with “weak theory.”¹ Rodríguez-Salas, Martín-Salván, and López point out that modernist works have consistently explored not only the question of the individual but also the question of community, with key concepts like “finitude,” “singularity,” and “exposure.”² This recent trend in reexamining modernist studies demonstrates the impossibility of defining modernism as a fixed identity. Rather, modernism is characterized by its temporal gap, which constantly undermines its definition.

The question of vulnerability in this study can be categorized as part of these reexaminations of modernist studies, with the two keywords “vulnerability” and “care” as interconnected themes. First, vulnerability is defined as the possibility of being wounded, as the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* states: “That may be wounded; susceptible of receiving wounds or physical injury” (“Vulnerable”). As Nick juxtaposes his vulnerability with his youth, it tends to be seen as a negative condition to be overcome or avoided, particularly during the process of growing up. However, the word contains another meaning that cannot be reduced to such a negative condition. It is instructive to note that the *OED* provides an alternative definition, emphasizing vulnerability’s “openness”: “Open to attack or injury of a non-physical nature; esp., offering an opening to the attacks of raillery, criticism, calumny, etc.” (“Vulnerable”). While this openness is an exposure to risks that should be avoided, such as “the attacks of raillery, criticism, calumny” (“Vulnerable”), the inclusion of “etc.” in the definition suggests that it can also represent the possibility for the self to be widely exposed to the other. Indeed, Nick’s vulnerability in his youth opens him up to his father’s advice. In this sense, vulnerability provides a significant perspective that challenges the traditional understanding of modernism, which has solely emphasized the solipsistic and isolated modernist individual. Thus, the ambiguous meanings of vulnerability are articulated within the framework of modernism.

This study attempts to explore the positive meaning of vulnerability in modernist literature. The topic of vulnerability first emerged as an academic focus in the 1980s, through analyses in the fields of welfare and

feminism, such as Robert E. Goodin's *Protecting the Vulnerable: A Reanalysis of Our Social Responsibilities* (1985) and Virginia Held's "Non-contractual Society" (1987). Scholars in these fields have shared an alternative view of vulnerability, proposing that it can be a starting point for thinking about relationships with others, rather than merely a negative condition to be overcome. In its early stages, the discussion tended to focus on groups traditionally considered vulnerable, such as women and colonized peoples. However, around the turn of the 21st century, a series of crises, including natural disasters, terrorism, immigration issues, and inequality, began to raise awareness that vulnerability is a fundamental human condition, not a limited condition of the vulnerable. At this point, in what Marianne Hirsch calls "vulnerable times," "vulnerability has emerged as a productive concept in a number of seemingly unrelated fields—in studies of the environment, social ecology, and political economy, on the one hand, and in developmental psychology, on the other" (Hirsch 82). Similarly, the field of literary studies has produced a range of explorations, such as Jean-Michel Ganteau's *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Vulnerability in Contemporary British Fiction* (2015) and Jennifer Travis's *Danger and Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: Crash and Burn* (2018).

What distinguishes this study from recent literary studies on vulnerability is its connection to another theme: care. Discussions of care initially emerged in the field of developmental psychology in conjunction with feminist theories. A key work, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), sheds light on the

ethics of care as a female voice marginalized by the ethics of justice, often viewed as a male voice. According to Gilligan, while the latter is based on the autonomous individual, the former is based on “the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt” (Gilligan 63). Acknowledging that both voices are important, Gilligan points out that the latter has unfairly dominated the former. Since Gilligan’s argument, the notion of care has been the subject of evolving debates in various fields, such as Nel Noddings’s *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), Joan Tronto’s *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (1993) in politics, and Fabienne Brugère’s *L’éthique du «care» (The Ethics of Care)* (2011) in political philosophy. There are also literary studies focusing on care, such as Arne De Boever’s *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel* (2013) and Kimiyo Ogawa’s *Kea no rinri to enpawamento (The Ethics of Care and Empowerment)* (2021).

Compared to these previous studies, the uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on male writers. Originally, care studies were inseparable from the context of feminist theories. Following Gilligan’s influential work, the ethics of care has often been identified as a female voice. In this context, men have typically been seen as the oppressors of care. However, the relationship between Nick and his father offers the possibility that care can also emerge between men. Certainly, what Keath Fraser calls “another reading of *The Great Gatsby*” suggests that Nick is homosexual, in which his relationship with his father can be interpreted as an example of his homosexuality. What is important, however, is that their relationship begins

with vulnerability, not sexual desire. Given the ambiguous meaning of vulnerability, the relationship between Nick and his father should be read as something beyond a simple homosexual bond. This study, therefore, re-examines their relationship in terms of the possibility of care in male writers.

It should be noted that the attempt to highlight vulnerability in white male writers, which may initially seem contradictory, can ultimately lead to the reclamation of traditional masculine power and privilege, despite its apparent purpose. Jean M. Lutes and Jennifer Travis warn that, while she discusses the emergence of male emotional and bodily injury in the post-Civil War period, this attention to vulnerability can serve as a means of restoring masculine power and privilege. Under the guise of challenging authorized male texts, it can also reinforce their primacy in the lists of what is taught and studied.³ In a similar vein, Lilie Chouliaraki argues that claims to vulnerability are often indistinguishable from claims to the power to speak out, particularly when they become what she terms the “weaponization of victimhood.”⁴ Contrary to its association with powerlessness, vulnerability studies in male writers can easily be co-opted as a means of reclaiming power.

The attempt to connect vulnerability with care in male writers is significant in this context because it opens up a different possibility—one that cannot be reduced to the reclamation of the right to speak out. The opening scene of *The Great Gatsby* serves as a precursor to this direction. While Nick appears to emphasize his current state as no longer vulnerable, what he actually demonstrates is that his voice is interwoven with his

father's, as he meticulously preserves his father's words. While he seems to strongly preserve a "male voice," this act paradoxically undermines his position as an independent man who is self-sufficient through his own voice alone. Nick's experience of care thus constitutes a unique event in which clear agency becomes radically blurred—an essential aspect of care that this study explores through the works of four writers. In fact, Travis presents the study of vulnerability in white male writers not only as a means of consolidating masculine hegemony but also as a potential challenge to it.⁵ What is at stake here is the latter possibility, explored through the significant connection between vulnerability and care.

In this context, this study selects Fitzgerald, Chandler, Miller, and Salinger to challenge their popular reception as contributors to the conventional image of the modernist subject as an isolated individual. In common interpretations of their works, Fitzgerald reinforces the American ideal of the self-made man through his character Jay Gatsby, who breaks free from his past to pursue his dreams; Chandler popularizes the image of a man as what John T. Irwin calls "his own boss" through the motif of the private detective in his Philip Marlowe series;⁶ Miller presents a strong sense of self by merging his novels with the genre of autobiography; Salinger portrays a teenage dropout named Holden Caulfield, who is generally accepted as an innocent figure within a corrupt society. These popular images have reinforced the image of the individual as separate from others, as traditional understandings of modernism often emphasize. Against this backdrop, this study presents an alternative reading of these four writers, revealing their strong preoccupation with the interrelationship

between vulnerability and care. Resonant with the ambiguous meaning of vulnerability that Nick presents in the opening of *The Great Gatsby*, these writers demonstrate that it is exactly when their characters appear to exhibit self-sufficiency that they expose their vulnerability. What is significant is that this exposed vulnerability for these male writers, which could be viewed as an adverse condition for the ideal self-made man, does not represent an antithesis to the ideal of the independent individual. Rather, it can literally be understood as “openness,” in line with the etymology of the word “vulnerability,” for the relationship of care, a keyword derived from Fitzgerald’s work.

To explore the possibilities of vulnerability as the beginning of care, this study connects the four authors in thematic continuity while revealing the uniqueness of each writer. First, Chapter One extracts the keywords “vulnerability” and “care” from *The Great Gatsby* as the core of the entire study. Chapter Two examines Fitzgerald’s two short stories, “An Alcoholic Case” and “Family in the Wind,” to demonstrate that these keywords extend beyond *The Great Gatsby*. Next, Chapter Three analyzes Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* in terms of the two keywords, focusing on the problematic identity of the private detective. Chapter Four explores thematic developments in *The Long Goodbye*, particularly the motif of aging. Chapter Five then focuses on Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, comparing it to Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography to articulate vulnerability and care in Miller’s problematic representation of “life.” Chapter Six examines Miller’s *Sexus* to reveal how his preoccupation with “life” is linked to the question of potentiality as openness to the other. Finally, Chapter Seven analyzes the connection

between vulnerability and care in the dimension of time through Salinger's war story "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor." Chapter Eight demonstrates how temporal vulnerability creates a relationship of care between the living and the dead in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Thus, this study explores vulnerability as the beginning of care in these four modernist writers. Echoing the trend known as new modernist studies, it challenges the traditional assumption of the modernist subject as an isolated individual. While these four writers seem to represent modernism through their apparent rejection of vulnerability, what truly characterizes their work is, rather, the exposure of vulnerability, which brings about "openness" for the relationship of care. Although the theme of care has often been discussed in the context of welfare and feminism, these writers present an alternative possibility for care in male writers, beginning from vulnerability.

Chapter One

The Beginning of Vulnerability as the Beginning of Care

in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*⁷

Introduction

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the first-person narrator, Nick Carraway, emphasizes that he plays an irreplaceable role for Jay Gatsby by stating that he finds himself "on Gatsby's side, and alone" (*Gatsby* 105), while simultaneously criticizing other people, such as Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who are responsible for Gatsby's tragic death as "careless people" (*Gatsby* 115). This contrast between Nick and the "careless people" suggests that he implicitly defines himself as the only person who "cares" for Gatsby. In fact, while admitting that Gatsby is a man who represents everything for which he has "an unaffected contempt" (*Gatsby* 5), Nick continues to demonstrate his "care" for Gatsby, as evidenced by the fact that he tells Gatsby's story at book length. A critical question then arises: what makes Nick care for Gatsby, and what does he specifically mean by "care"?

In response to this question, this study proposes that Nick's care begins from vulnerability as an event that disrupts the boundaries between the self and the other. Vulnerability can be a critical concept in Nick's narrative because it starts with his reference to vulnerability in his youth. While Nick seems to confess that he has overcome his vulnerability, he finds it in Gatsby, which becomes a major reason why Nick begins to care for him. This care intertwines with the motif of substitution, unsettling the

clear boundaries between Nick and Gatsby. *The Great Gatsby* can be thus read as a story of this vulnerability as the beginning of care.

From the Failure of the Self-made Man to Care for the Vulnerable

The Great Gatsby is the story of first-person narrator Nick Carraway's memories of the character of Jay Gatsby. Nick, a Midwesterner, comes to New York to study finance after serving in World War I. He rents a house in a place known as "West Egg." Across the bay, in "East Egg," Nick's cousin Daisy lives with her wealthy husband. Soon Nick hears rumors about his neighbor, a man named Gatsby, who lives in the mansion beside his small house. One night, Nick sees Gatsby stretching his hand toward Daisy's house across the bay. It is gradually revealed that Gatsby was once Daisy's lover. While he was in a relationship with Daisy, Gatsby had no money, which led to the end of their relationship. Despite this breakup, Gatsby became successful in the underworld, enabling him to purchase his mansion. Nick also learns that the name "Gatsby" is not his real name but one he gave himself to deny his poor birth. With Nick's help, Gatsby and Daisy are reunited, and it seems that they have rekindled their former passion for each other. However, as Daisy is already married, she cannot return Gatsby's love. In the confusion of her feelings, she causes a hit-and-run accident. To defend Daisy, Gatsby blames himself for the accident, which leads to the tragedy of being shot by the victim's husband. With the end of Gatsby's dream, Nick decides to return to the Midwest.

Many critics have shared the consensus that "Gatsby is the American self-made man—indeed, a self-invented man" (Brucoli xi). The OED

defines the term “self-made man” as follows: “a man who has achieved wealth, status, etc., through personal effort or hard work, rather than by accident of birth, esp. one who has come from a poor background” (“Self-made Man”). Gatsby’s life, in which he separates himself from his family background to reclaim Daisy, epitomizes the definition of the term. As Jeffrey Louis Decker states, he symbolizes a traditional self-made man tale in America:

Through the eyes of Fitzgerald’s narrator, Nick Carraway, Gatsby appears in the guise of the archetypal, if somewhat misguided, self-made man in America. Gatsby’s upward struggle is inspired by traditional purveyors of middle-class success, such as Ben Franklin and Horatio Alger Jr. (Decker 52)

Certainly, one can interpret Gatsby’s tragic ending as questioning this ideal image of American individuals. However, Nick’s act of presenting him as “great” Gatsby serves to reinforce the mythic image of Gatsby as a self-made man.

For this study, which attempts to read *The Great Gatsby* through the lens of vulnerability and care, it is necessary to confirm that the image of Gatsby as the embodiment of a self-made “man” has been criticized as a typical modernist individual associated with male-centered “carelessness.” Referring to Nick’s comparison of Gatsby’s dream to the astonishment of Dutch sailors at their first sight of America, Nicolas Tredell highlights this trend in critical reception: “Nick’s version of the American Dream, and perhaps Fitzgerald’s, could be indicted with being androcentric, male-centred—it was ‘*man*’ (my italics) who ‘must have held his breath’ at his

first sight of the New World” (Tredell 101-2). As Tredell notes, previous studies in this context criticize *The Great Gatsby* for its mistreatment of female characters, reducing them to just objects of male-centered romantic imagination.⁷ In the same vein, Judith Fetterley delivers a particularly harsh critique of the problem of gender. According to Fetterley, what critics see as Gatsby’s universality as a representation of the American ideal of self-creation is merely supported by the male characters’ romantic imagination of women, which disregards who they really are. Fetterley harshly criticizes *The Great Gatsby* for reinforcing the traditional male-centered power structure, where “men are legitimate subjects for romantic investment and women are not; men can support it and women cannot; Daisy must fail Gatsby but Gatsby need not fail Nick” (Fetterley 95). From this standpoint, which reads *The Great Gatsby* as a story of “men,” the interconnected themes of vulnerability and care seem incompatible because it is the male characters, especially Nick himself, who should be accused of being the “careless” ones toward the vulnerable.

Nonetheless, his apparent “careless” character as a man cannot be reduced to a simple lack of care. Rather, it demonstrates his complex relationship with care. What is suggestive is Fetterley’s quote of Nick’s distorted image of West Egg in what he calls “fantastic dreams” (*Gatsby* 114) when he decides to leave:

In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a

house—the wrong house. But no one knows the woman’s name,
and no one cares. (*Gatsby* 114)

The phrase “no one cares” certainly appears to confirm Fetterley’s criticism of the male characters’ lack of care for women. Since Nick is one of the people living in West Egg, he must share their carelessness there. However, it cannot be overlooked that, as “care” includes concern and interest, Nick at least “cares” for the nameless woman by including her in his narrative. In other words, if Nick had no care for her at all, she would not even emerge in his narrative. He seems to distance himself from care, yet repeatedly demonstrates it.

Viewing the novel through the lens of vulnerability suggests that *The Great Gatsby* can be interpreted as a story of care rather than the myth of the self-made man. As Jennifer Travis points out, vulnerability is opposed to the American ideal of the self-made man: “If vulnerability suggests fallibility, dependency, and uncontrollability, it is everything that self-made manhood rejects” (Travis, *Danger* 8). What makes Nick’s narrative of *Gatsby* particularly unique is that, although he seems to reject vulnerability superficially, he consistently emphasizes that they remain vulnerable beneath their self-made appearances. Consequently, this vulnerability leads Nick to “care” for *Gatsby* in a unique way. By challenging the myth of the self-made man, the story demonstrates the relationship of care between the vulnerable.

Vulnerability as a Condition to Be Overcome for the Self-made Man

On the surface, Nick’s narrative presents vulnerability as a condition

to be overcome in order to become a self-made man: “In my younger and more vulnerable years, my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since” (*Gatsby* 5). The use of past tense suggests that, since he is no longer young, he is also no longer vulnerable. His narrative thus begins with this apparent denial of his vulnerable condition.

In what sense has Nick overcome his vulnerability? Nick suggests in the first part of the story that he has overcome his vulnerability because he has what he calls an “advantage” in deflecting criticism. Generally, vulnerability is often associated with the possibility of being physically wounded, as the *OED* defines the adjective “vulnerable” as follows: “That may be wounded; susceptible of receiving wounds or physical injury” (“Vulnerable”). However, Nick’s father’s advice implies that his vulnerability is linked to criticism: “‘Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,’ he told me, ‘just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had’” (*Gatsby* 5). In fact, the *OED* provides another definition of vulnerability related to criticism: “Open to attack or injury of a non-physical nature; especially, offering an opening to attacks of ridicule, criticism, calumny, etc.” (“Vulnerable”). The episode involving rumors about Nick’s past lover suggests that he has overcome his vulnerability in this regard. During Nick’s first visit to Tom and Daisy’s house, when Nick is about to leave, they ask him if he got engaged in his hometown, which he flatly denies. In addition to what he tells them, he further explains in his first-person narrative: “Of course, I knew what they were referring to, but I wasn’t even vaguely engaged” (*Gatsby* 17). Here, it

is important to note that it is unclear whether the rumor is true or not because Nick can lie to deny the rumor as long as he is the first-person narrator. Nick boasts of his honesty, stating, “I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known” (*Gatsby* 41), though no one can verify whether he is telling the truth within his narrative. For Nick, overcoming vulnerability is portrayed as this advantage, allowing him to deflect criticism.

Nick’s attempt to overcome vulnerability is closely tied to his development as a self-made man. To introduce his background, Nick explains that he moved to New York to live independently of his family. While his attempt to live independently is personal, Nick often implicitly associates it with the American myth of the self-made man. For example, in the episode where Nick gives directions to a newcomer in the neighborhood, he likens himself to “an original settler” (*Gatsby* 7). Furthermore, “West Egg,” the name of the place he moves to, easily evokes the image of the American frontier spirit. More importantly, Nick confesses that the real reason he moves to New York is to escape rumors about his lover: “The fact that gossip had published the banns was one of the reasons I had come East” (*Gatsby* 17). His independent life is defined by his attempt to escape criticism. Nick thus tries to become a self-made man by denying his vulnerability.

Nick’s aspiration to overcome vulnerability is also reflected in his portrayal of Gatsby. While Gatsby is often criticized for his mysterious background by other people, Nick mythologizes Gatsby’s self-made greatness by explaining how he transformed himself into “Jay Gatsby”:

“His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God” (*Gatsby* 65). The phrase “Platonic conception” deserves particular attention here. Certainly, in this context, it should be interpreted as Gatsby’s pure imagination of himself. However, beyond the immediate context, the adjective “platonic” also conveys the idea of a non-sexual relationship, rooted in the spiritual aspect of Plato’s philosophy. In addition, the noun “conception” has another meaning distinct from “imagination”: “pregnancy.” This seemingly contradictory image—pregnancy without a sexual relationship—can be seen as a precise expression of Gatsby’s origin, as he creates “Jay Gatsby” without support from anyone else. Against the criticism of Gatsby’s background, Nick mythologizes Gatsby as a completely independent being.

These behaviors of Nick shed new light on the motif of the self-made man in terms of his attempt to overcome vulnerability. Nick’s behavior as he strives to become a self-made man cannot be reduced to an attempt to become “a man who has achieved wealth, status, etc., through personal effort or hard work” (“Self-made man”). What truly characterizes him is the act of self-creation without the involvement of others. As John T. Irwin explains, it is the imaginative attempt at self-invention with the “notion of creating another self, of imagining and objectifying a persona and a life based on one’s mental image of an ideal other (*the real me that ought to be*)” (Irwin, *Scott* 158). What Nick does to himself and sees in Gatsby is nothing but this attempt to become a self-made man in this sense. Nick

possesses this aspect that seeks to reject the self that is created by others, as he tries to fully overcome his vulnerability.

Vulnerability as Openness

Nick's portrayal of vulnerability as a condition to be overcome implies that it unsettles his identity as a self-made man. What is most characteristic of Nick's narrative is that, while he seems to reject vulnerability as a negative condition, he repeatedly finds vulnerability in Gatsby, which prompts Nick to care for him. Then, why can vulnerability be the beginning of care? One possible answer lies in Erin C. Gilson's definition of vulnerability as openness. Gilson defines vulnerability as follows: "vulnerability is defined by openness and, more specifically, to be vulnerable is to be open to being affected and affecting in ways that one cannot control" (Gilson 2). By emphasizing openness, Gilson's definition suggests that vulnerability initiates a process that unsettles self-enclosure, placing one in a state of openness to the other. It is in this vulnerability as openness that Nick's care for Gatsby begins.

Vulnerability as openness is suggested at the start of the story. When Nick begins his narrative with the sentence, "In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since" (*Gatsby* 5), he suggests that it is Nick's condition of vulnerability that can be the beginning of his father's care for him. Notably, Nick quotes the advice in direct speech: "'Whenever you feel like criticising any one,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had'" (*Gatsby* 5). This use of

direct speech shows that Nick's first-person narrative is not only confined to his own voice but also open to the voice of others. Furthermore, Nick implies that his relationship with his father is tied to vulnerability as openness: "He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that" (*Gatsby* 5). Nick's impression, "He didn't say any more," conveys that he does not completely understand his father's advice. This seemingly negative impression highlights that Nick "reserves" it as the voice of the other. Even when he states, "I understand that he meant a great deal more than that" (*Gatsby* 5), he does not specify what "more than that" entails, avoiding a forced paraphrase that would confine it within his own self-enclosed interpretation. Thus, while the opening sentences suggest that Nick has overcome his vulnerability, they actually reveal a crucial openness in his narrative.

Nick's entire narrative is similarly characterized by the exposure of his vulnerability beneath the guise of a self-made man. While Nick seems to have the "advantages" as a first-person narrator, his narrative has always been open to various criticisms and challenges. Based on Kent Cartwright's analysis, it has become a widely accepted view that Nick is typically considered an unreliable narrator.⁹ Scott Donaldson points out Nick's apparent contradiction: contrary to his own claim that he is "inclined to reserve all judgment" (*Gatsby* 5), Nick does not suspend judgment at all; instead, "he judges and condemns virtually everyone he meets in the course of the novel" (Donaldson 132). Also, Shoji Noma finds the narrative unreliable, noting that while Nick states that "life is much more

successfully looked at from a single window, after all” (*Gatsby* 7), Daisy’s car accident is caused by Myrtle’s confusion of Gatsby’s car with Tom’s when she sees it from “one of the windows over the garage” (*Gatsby* 81).¹⁰ His narrative is thus imbued with vulnerability, as it is constantly open to criticism.

Vulnerability as openness can also be indirectly seen in Nick’s involvement with the bond business. When explaining why he left his family to move to New York City, he refers to his decision to learn the bond business: “I decided to go East and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I supposed it could support one more single man” (*Gatsby* 6). At first glance, this explanation suggests an attitude of financial independence from his family, a key aspect of being a self-made man. However, the fact that Nick chose the job because “everyone I knew was in the bond business” underscores his inextricable ties to others, quite literally symbolized by the word “bond.” Moreover, the bond business itself only functions in relation to others, as “bond” means “That with or by which a thing is bound” (“Bond”). Thus, Nick’s choice of the bond business is inseparable from vulnerability as openness.

The vulnerability Nick reveals as openness is echoed in his relationship with Gatsby. While Nick tries to portray Gatsby as his ideal of a self-made man, he also continually exposes Gatsby’s vulnerable side. One example is the rumors about Gatsby at one of his parties, where guests speculate about who Gatsby is, suggesting he may have killed a man or been a German spy. This susceptibility to rumors highlights his similarity to Nick, as both are open to criticism. What is striking is that Nick does not

view this vulnerable side of Gatsby as entirely negative. Instead, he suggests that it may be what draws people to care about Gatsby: “We all turned and looked around for Gatsby. It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world” (*Gatsby* 32). Similarly, Nick begins to care for Gatsby in the same sense. After getting to know each other, Nick is invited by Gatsby to go for a drive, where Gatsby tells Nick about his background. Nick immediately realizes that Gatsby is lying, with his obvious mistake about San Francisco being in the Midwest. Notably, the image Nick envisions in response to Gatsby’s vulnerability is significant: “The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned ‘character’ leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne” (*Gatsby* 44-45). The image of “leaking sawdust at every pore” visually represents “openness.” Significantly, it is this vulnerability as openness that drives Nick’s strong interest in Gatsby, as he reflects: “My incredulity was now submerged in fascination now” (*Gatsby* 45). Just as Nick’s father shows care for his son’s vulnerability, Nick also begins to care for Gatsby after seeing his vulnerability. Through the visual image of the hole, Gatsby vividly embodies vulnerability as openness.

Vulnerability as openness is also evident when Nick learns about Gatsby’s love for Daisy. After the drive, Nick learns from Jordan that Gatsby bought his house so that Daisy would be just across the bay. On the one hand, his attempt to win Daisy back appears to be the behavior of a self-made man trying to overcome his past impoverished condition on his

own. On the other hand, what he does to achieve his goal is merely wait for Daisy, which is the opposite of a self-made man's behavior. This other side of Gatsby is articulated in contrast to the song "The Sheik of Araby," which the children sing in the background of the conversation between Nick and Jordan. Throughout the description of the scene, Nick includes the lyrics in which the Sheik of Araby declares, "Your love belongs to me" (*Gatsby* 53), actively taking the woman's place: "At night when you're asleep / Into your tent I'll creep—" (*Gatsby* 53). Gatsby's behavior regarding Daisy sharply contrasts with this active man. As Jordan says, "He's afraid, he's waited so long" (*Gatsby* 53); what Gatsby is really doing is merely waiting for Daisy in his house, showing his complete dependence on her actions. Again, it is important to note that it is this vulnerable side of Gatsby that arouses Nick's intense interest in him. Nick describes his surprise about Gatsby's hidden love for Daisy as an experience of openness: "He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor" (*Gatsby* 53). With the passive "delivered," the metaphor of "delivery" overlaps with Gatsby's passive manner. As an event of being delivered from the closed space of the "womb," it accurately expresses Gatsby's openness.

In the latter part of the story, Nick begins to actively care for Gatsby whenever he faces vulnerability. When Nick accepts Jordan's offer, he successfully arranges for Gatsby and Daisy to meet again. Though their past passion seems to be momentarily rekindled, Gatsby becomes disappointed because Daisy will not clearly declare her love for him instead of Tom. Gatsby confides in Nick that he feels distanced from Daisy. Gatsby's timid behavior contrasts sharply with the mythical image of him that Nick has

created: “He broke off and began to walk up and down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers” (*Gatsby* 72). The words “desolate” and “discarded” indicate that Gatsby is in the midst of unstable change, caught in the flow of time. What is important is that it is this vulnerable Gatsby whom Nick actively begins to care for: “‘I wouldn’t ask too much of her,’ I ventured. ‘You can’t repeat the past’” (*Gatsby* 72). Koichi Suwabe highlights the significance of the verb “venture” in this passage. Before this scene, as Jordan’s offer shows, Nick’s involvement with Gatsby was passive, since he did not engage with Gatsby unless compelled. In contrast, in this scene, Nick “ventures” to speak to him, showing a shift from his passive to an active approach.¹¹ While Nick mythologizes Gatsby, his direct involvement with him begins with the exposure of Gatsby’s vulnerability.

Gatsby’s vulnerability continues to evoke a powerful image of openness as Nick himself unsettles the mythologized Gatsby. As mentioned above, Nick mythologizes Gatsby as a self-made man through the unique phrase “platonic conception.” However, when Nick describes Gatsby’s first encounter with Daisy, this mythologized image is completely undermined by the act of kissing:

He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips’ touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (*Gatsby*

With specific reference to his lips, Gatsby's loss of "the mind of God" is presented as an opening to Daisy. This opening radically subverts the mythologization of Gatsby, as Nick closes the description with the completion of "incarnation," which contrasts sharply with the image of "platonic conception." The image of openness is further emphasized through Nick's physical "holes":

Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggle upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever. (*Gatsby* 73)

In keeping with the reference to Gatsby's mouth, Nick's lips also become a physical hole. This openness reflects the impossibility of expressing his emotions in his own words, symbolizing the complete loss of the "advantages" he is supposed to possess as a first-person narrator. Through this series of physical "holes," his narrative presents vulnerability as openness.

The exposure of vulnerability as openness reaches its peak with the hit-and-run accident. Traditionally, the car motif in Fitzgerald's work has been analyzed as a symbol of the American Dream, closely tied to the classic American road narrative. Ann Brigham argues that it represents "the

self-made individual who is not tethered to an ancestral past or social order that might predetermine—or immobilize—the future” (Brigham 52). This association of the past and social order with immobility is particularly suggestive in *The Great Gatsby*, as Yasuhiro Takeuchi notes that Gatsby’s dream is inseparable from the motif of mobility. Takeuchi highlights this dichotomy of mobility and immobility as the contrast between dream and reality through Gatsby’s sense of hope, described as “a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy’s wing” (*Gatsby* 65) or “one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away” (*Gatsby* 5). The car motif in Nick’s narrative underscores how cars serve as an explicit metaphor for this mobility/immobility as dream/reality. Crucially, as Takeuchi argues, this mobility as dream is unsustainable forever; it is inevitably destined to a halt, revealing immobility as reality. In other words, the moment when the car stops exposes the fundamental truth that individuals cannot fully control their mobility.¹² The hit-and-run accident epitomizes this exposure of vulnerability, especially through Myrtle’s grotesquely wounded body with openness:

Michaelis and this man reached her first, but when they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped a little at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long. (*Gatsby* 89)

Through her body's wounds and open mouth, Myrtle epitomizes vulnerability in her death. Needless to say, this vulnerability as openness is not limited to Myrtle's role as a victim of the accident. It simultaneously exposes Gatsby's vulnerability, as he cannot control the car driven by Daisy, immediately identified as the culprit by witnesses. In this sense, Myrtle's dead body, with its openness, radically challenges the mythologized image of Gatsby in Nick's narrative.¹³

Despite its gruesomeness, the accident still highlights the openness in Nick and Gatsby's relationship. After the accident, Nick finds Gatsby and quickly learns that he is trying to take the blame for Daisy. Once again, Nick actively cares for Gatsby, such as by going to check on the Buchanan house for him. More importantly, Gatsby's confession about his secret past occurs in the midst of the accident: "It was this night that he told me the strange story of his youth with Dan Cody—told it to me because 'Jay Gatsby' had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice, and the long secret extravaganza was played out" (*Gatsby* 95). Along with the image of broken glass, Nick learns what Gatsby had been hiding within himself. What had been closed off in the idealization of Jay Gatsby as a mythical figure is now exposed through this vulnerability.

Substitution as Care

What exactly does vulnerability as openness mean for Nick's narrative of Gatsby? This study offers a possible answer: it raises the question of care. Vulnerability as openness blurs the boundary between self and other in Nick and Gatsby's relationship. This blurring of boundaries is

particularly evident in one of the central motifs of the story: substitution. In contrast to Nick's ideal of the self-made man, the motif of substitution reveals what French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas calls "the impossibility to come back from all things and concern oneself only with oneself" (*Otherwise* 114). Through this motif of substitution, Nick's relationship with Gatsby leads to what should be called "care."

The question of care can be drawn from Nick's ambiguous attitude toward Gatsby. While Nick initially expresses his contempt for Gatsby in retrospect, stating that "Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (*Gatsby* 5), he never stops caring for him, as his entire narrative is an expression of his care for Gatsby after his death. Nick's ambivalent attitude toward Gatsby resonates with the etymological ambivalence of the word "care" itself. While "care" carries positive emotions of "attention" and "concern" for others, it can also signify negative emotions like "anxiety" and "worry" within oneself. The Care Collective explains this ambiguity through the word's etymological origins: "The word care in English comes from the Old English *caru*, meaning care, concern, anxiety, sorrow, grief, trouble—its double meanings clearly on display" (Care 25). In this sense, the word "care" itself "overflows with paradoxes and ambivalence" (Care 25). These paradoxes and ambivalences precisely characterize Nick's attitude toward Gatsby. Nick highlights the paradoxical and ambivalent meaning of care through the contrast with Wolfsheim's attitude. After Gatsby's death, Nick cares about the fact that nobody comes to Gatsby's mansion, so he directly asks Wolfsheim to come. What is significant here is Nick's awareness that his actions are

“superfluous” (*Gatsby* 106), as Gatsby’s death has already been publicly announced. Despite this awareness, Nick feels a strong sense of defiance when Wolfsheim sends only a telegram instead of coming in person: “When the butler brought back Wolfsheim’s answer I began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all” (*Gatsby* 106). Nick cannot explain why he feels such scornful solidarity with Gatsby, even though he knows his actions are “superfluous.” This contradiction becomes even clearer when Nick visits Wolfsheim’s office. When Wolfsheim justifies his refusal to visit by saying, “I can’t get mixed up in it” (*Gatsby* 110), Nick responds, “There’s nothing to get mixed up in. It’s all over now” (*Gatsby* 110). Ironically, Nick’s words convey that he is more “mixed up in it” than anyone else, far from being “all over now.” Nick’s attitude toward Gatsby precisely mirrors the ambivalence of the word “care” through these contradictions that he embodies.

Reading the question of care in the relationship between Nick and Gatsby may raise doubts from a gender perspective, as the concept of care has often been discussed from a feminist point of view. Since Carol Gilligan’s classic work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, the focus has been on the fact that care has traditionally been imposed on women as a feminine value, often neglected in the masculine ideal of individual autonomy. From this feminist perspective, the relationship between Nick and Gatsby could even be subject to criticism, especially given their bond as men. Indeed, what Keath Fraser calls “another reading of *The Great Gatsby*,” which discusses the possibility of Nick as a homosexual, has become a popular interpretation

today. However, it is precisely due to Nick's ambiguous attitude toward Gatsby that the question of care in their relationship should be reconsidered, broadening its interpretive possibilities. Given Nick's preoccupation with vulnerability, this reading opens up new possibilities for a relationship of care that begins with vulnerability. Joaquim Braga and Mário Santiago de Carvalho describe the link between vulnerability and care as follows: "'Vulnerable' is not synonymous with 'weak,' just as 'caring' is not just 'healing.'" Through our experience of the world, vulnerability identifies and anticipates care" (Braga and Carvalho 7). This new reading of the relationship between the two male characters thus holds contemporary significance, challenging its gendered limitations and emphasizing vulnerability as the beginning of care.

What kind of relationship of care, then, does Nick's narrative specifically present? With vulnerability as openness, the narrative presents a distinctive event in which the boundary between self and other is radically unsettled. In his reading of Fitzgerald's late essay "Crack-up," the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze points out that Fitzgerald's works are filled with the image of "cracks," using motifs like old plates or glass. For Deleuze, the image of the crack is striking because it represents a problematic relationship between inside and outside: "The real difference is not between the inside and the outside, for the crack is neither internal nor external, but is rather at the frontier. It is imperceptible, incorporeal, and ideational. With what happens inside and outside, it has complex relations of interference and interfacing, or syncopated junctions—a pattern of corresponding beats over two different rhythms" (*Logic* 155). The image of

the crack as a problematic boundary applies directly to Nick. As mentioned earlier, Nick starts his narrative by exposing his hidden vulnerability that consists of the mixture of his voice and his father's voice. What underlies his first-person narrative is, in Deleuze's terms, "complex relations of interference and interfacing" (*Logic* 155). The peculiar feeling of being "within and without" (*Gatsby* 27) that Nick experiences at the party Tom invites him to precisely captures this problematic relationship between the self and the other.

Care, understood as the blurring of boundaries between the self and the other, manifests as a prominent motif in Nick's narrative: substitution. Takeuchi argues that the novel's recurring pattern of mobility and immobility as dream and reality necessarily underscores the significance of this motif. According to Takeuchi, this duality of mobility and immobility as dream and reality fractures the identity of each character; consequently, the story is filled with instances of misidentification, wherein one person can become a substitute for another.¹⁴ Among the many examples Takeuchi discusses, the act of substitution in Nick's family background is particularly worth reconsidering in relation to this study. Nick explicitly uses the word "substitute" when describing his family history:

The Carraways are something of a clan and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today. (*Gatsby* 6)

Although the opening sentence, “The Carraways are something of a clan,” reflects Nick’s self-contained ideal of family, he soon reveals that his family used a substitute for his grandfather’s brother to avoid the war. This act of substitution suggests that, despite its claim to be “something of a clan,” the Carraway family is inherently vulnerable, as its survival depended on the presence and support of others.

This motif of substitution is dramatically repeated in Gatsby and Daisy’s relationship, particularly in the hit-and-run accident. While driving Gatsby’s car, Daisy accidentally runs over Myrtle, Tom’s mistress. This accident, which places Daisy in a vulnerable position as the driver, prompts Gatsby to claim that he was driving in her place. Consequently, Gatsby is killed by Myrtle’s husband, who believes Gatsby was the one who killed his wife. This series of events demonstrates that vulnerability brings about care as substitution, with multiple confusions between the self and the other. Gatsby’s body, shot while lying on a pool mattress, is described as follows: “A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of transit, a thin red circle in the water” (*Gatsby* 104). Through this physical rupture, the description conveys the uncertainty of the boundary separating the inside and outside of Gatsby’s body. On the one hand, Gatsby ironically embodies the ideal of the self-made man by positioning himself as the driver in response to Daisy’s accident. On the other hand, with the word “accidental” repeated twice, Gatsby’s self is not what he can create by his own will. His ideal of the self-made man is realized only when he is fully exposed to the

possibility of violence from others. The image of these cracks visually embodies care as substitution, with these radical confusions between the inside and the outside.

The motif of substitution also emerges in the relationship between Nick and Gatsby. After Gatsby is killed, having taken responsibility for the hit-and-run accident, he becomes powerless against criticism. This vulnerable situation compels Nick to “get someone for him: “I’ll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don’t worry. Just trust me and I’ll get somebody for you—”” (*Gatsby* 106). The phrases “for him” and “for you” strongly imply Nick’s role as Gatsby’s substitute. This impulse is reinforced when Nick sees that no one shows any “care” for Gatsby, leading to the feeling that he is being interrogated by the dead:

I went back to the drawing room and thought for an instant that they were chance visitors, all these official people who suddenly filled it. But, though they drew back the sheet and looked at Gatsby with shocked eyes, his protest continued in my brains:

“Look here, old sport, you’ve got to get somebody for me. You’ve got to try hard I can’t go through this alone” (*Gatsby* 106).

Here, Nick presents Gatsby’s voice in direct speech. This could be interpreted as Nick’s subjective imagination, but at the very least, Nick relinquishes the “advantage” of the first-person narrator and allows the other’s voice into his own. In other words, he speaks for Gatsby. The episode of the mistaken telephone call underscores the confusion between

Gatsby and Nick: “‘Hello!’ I interrupted breathlessly. ‘Look here—this isn’t Mr. Gatsby. Mr. Gatsby is dead’” (*Gatsby* 107). As a substitute, Nick’s self is radically confused with Gatsby’s.

Care as substitution fundamentally unsettles the ideal of the self-made man that Nick is trying to convey, as Gatsby’s voice within him serves as the foundation of his entire narrative. The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’s discussion of substitution provides a meaningful perspective here. Describing substitution as “the impossibility to come back from all things and concern oneself only with oneself” (*Otherwise* 114), Levinas writes: “In the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to others, without being able to resign, and thus as incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give” (*Otherwise* 105). Levinas’s rephrasing of this “incarnation” of the self by the other as a “gestation of the other in the same” (*Otherwise* 105) is highly significant for Nick because it contrasts sharply with the “Platonic conception” through which he presents Gatsby as the embodiment of the self-made man. In contrast to the ideal image, Nick’s self is shaped by the other as a substitute for Gatsby.

The confusion between Nick and Gatsby is further underscored by the blending of first- and third-person narration. Ron Neuhaus identifies a crucial confusion in Nick’s first-person narration in the following passage, where Nick imagines Gatsby waiting for a phone call from Daisy after the hit-and-run accident:

I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn’t believe it would come

and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about...like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees. (*Gatsby* 104)

Neuhaus critically observes that Nick's narrative begins with the subjective "I have an idea," then shifts to an assertive "must be," and ultimately, it becomes unclear who is speaking to whom: "The passage concludes with an ooze of saccharine rhetoric addressed to no one, from no one, and about no one whose identity has been established in the fiction" (Neuhaus 50). This confusion in the first-person narrative can be reread as a positive expression of care from the perspective of substitution, as Nick embodies the confusion of identity. Nick's first-person narrative itself becomes an expression of substitution for *Gatsby*.

At the end of the story, when Nick decides to return to the Midwest and visits *Gatsby*'s empty house one last time, he finds an obscene word on the white step and erases it with his shoe. This seemingly insignificant episode suggests that Nick continues to care for *Gatsby*, even after his death. The presence of the obscene word highlights *Gatsby*'s complete vulnerability to criticism, even after his death. By erasing the word on behalf of the deceased *Gatsby*, Nick once again assumes the role of

Gatsby's substitute.

Confusion of Careless People

While Nick demonstrates care that begins with Gatsby's vulnerability, there is a problematic aspect worth considering. On the one hand, Nick emphasizes his identity as a caring individual by comparing himself to others as "careless people," especially Daisy and Tom, who contribute to Gatsby's death but show no care for him: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness" (*Gatsby* 115). On the surface, his critical view of these people seems to create a simple binary: Nick is careful, and the others are careless. However, since Nick's care, beginning from vulnerability, questions the idea of the self-made man, it naturally raises a question: if Nick establishes his identity as a caring individual so firmly, would this not be an alternative version of the self-made man? What characterizes Nick's care is the fact that he himself questions this simple binary of careful/careless people. Nick's narrative indirectly suggests that even those he judges as "careless people" are also vulnerable, for whom he also demonstrates care as a substitute. Again, as the Care Collective points out, the "very concept of 'care' overflows with paradoxes and ambivalence" (Care 25). Nick himself suggests that his attempt to define "carelessness" is inseparable from such confusion when he states, "It was all very careless and confused" (*Gatsby* 115). In relation to the self-made man, it is this confusion that fundamentally characterizes the theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care.

What complicates Nick's judgment of others as "careless people" is his relationship with Jordan, who at one point becomes his steady girlfriend. In the first part of the narrative, when Nick first meets Jordan, they have a curious conversation about driving. Observing Jordan's reckless driving, Nick calls her "a rotten driver" (*Gatsby* 41) and advises her to "be more careful" (*Gatsby* 41). While Jordan claims she is careful, she asserts, "It takes two to make an accident" (*Gatsby* 41), referring to Nick's carefulness: "I hate careless people. That's why I like you" (*Gatsby* 41). Jordan's words seem to confirm Nick's identity as a careful person while subtly hinting at her own carelessness. However, later in the narrative, Jordan overturns this identity. When Nick decides to return to his home after Gatsby's death, he tells her their relationship is over. Then, Jordan brings up their earlier conversation about driving, but with a different view of Nick's carefulness: "Well, I met another driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess" (*Gatsby* 114). Here, Jordan implies that Nick is actually a careless driver. Furthermore, given Jordan's belief that "It takes two to make an accident" (*Gatsby* 41), this suggests the possibility that Nick himself could cause an accident. This possibility is crucial because it directly aligns him with Daisy, who, as a careless driver, actually causes the accident. Thus, Nick's relationship with Jordan fundamentally unsettles his identity as a caring individual.

In fact, even though Nick tries to portray Daisy as a careless person, his narrative never entirely ignores her vulnerability. In the first half of the story, when Daisy talks to Nick about her daughter, she confesses that she had "a very bad time" (*Gatsby* 15). Nick waits for her to elaborate, but she

does not provide any details: “Evidently she had reason to be. I waited but she didn’t say any more” (*Gatsby* 15). Here, Nick implies that there is something about Daisy that he cannot know, stepping away from his advantage as the first-person narrator. This hidden care for Daisy continues even when he criticizes her. When Daisy expresses her wish for her daughter to be “a beautiful little fool” (*Gatsby* 15), she self-deprecatingly laughs at herself for becoming “sophisticated” (*Gatsby* 16). Nick detects some insincerity in her when the conversation stops: “The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me” (*Gatsby* 16). What is important in this seemingly critical judgment of Daisy is Nick’s use of the verb “felt” and the conjunction “as though.” These expressions suggest that what Nick perceives as insincerity is subjective, leaving open the possibility of a reality different from what Nick felt. As long as Daisy remains within Nick’s first-person narrative, she is deprived of the opportunity to clarify this possibility, left completely open to Nick’s criticism. In this sense, Daisy embodies the vulnerability that Nick himself tries to overcome. Beneath Nick’s apparent criticism of Daisy as one of the “careless people,” the confusion in his narrative quietly reveals Daisy’s vulnerability.

Nick’s care for Daisy’s vulnerability is further demonstrated by his emphasis on the simple fact that she changes over time. When Gatsby tells Nick about his determination to “repeat the past” (*Gatsby* 72), he paraphrases it with the unique expression, “I’m going to fix everything just

the way it was before” (*Gatsby* 73). The verb “fix” is noteworthy because it means to “fasten, make firm, or stabilize in position” (“Fix”). In this sense, Gatsby’s attempt is to make Daisy unchangeable over time. In contrast, Nick’s narrative repeatedly foregrounds the simple fact that Daisy does change with time. A clear example is the scene where Gatsby meets Daisy’s daughter for the first time. Nick describes Gatsby’s confusion upon seeing the child: “Gatsby and I in turn leaned down and took the small reluctant hand. Afterward, he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don’t think he had ever really believed in its existence before” (*Gatsby* 76). Gatsby’s surprise clearly stems from the fact that Daisy did not have a child in the past. This simple fact that Daisy cannot be fixed serves as undeniable proof that she, too, is a vulnerable being. Daisy’s vulnerability is further highlighted by the fact that Nick also changes over time. In his narrative, Nick admits that he has turned thirty, emphasizing his own change over time: “Thirty—the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair” (*Gatsby* 88). Once again, Nick shares with Daisy the vulnerability of individuals who inevitably change over time.

Nick’s recognition of Daisy’s vulnerability is also reflected in the motif of substitution. In the scene where Gatsby and Tom argue over Daisy’s love, Gatsby forcefully asks Daisy to declare that she loves him and not Tom. Unable to fulfill this request, Daisy simply states that she loved both Tom and Gatsby. For Gatsby, whose sole purpose is to “repeat the past,” her answer is far from satisfactory, so he continues to press her to love only him. Meanwhile, Tom exposes Gatsby’s illegal activities,

emphasizing Gatsby's foolishness in making such a request. In the midst of this argument between the two men, Daisy is able to say only a few words:

It passed, and he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room.

The voice begged again to go.

"Please, Tom! I can't stand this any more." (*Gatsby* 87-88)

Daisy's limited words demonstrate her vulnerable state in two ways. First, Gatsby speaks excitedly only about himself, leaving her unable to respond. Second, Nick, as the first-person narrator, describes Daisy in long sentences, reducing her to just "the voice." The brevity of her words compared to the excited, lengthy statements of the men—"Please, Tom! I can't stand this any more" (*Gatsby* 88)—accurately reflects her inability to express her true thoughts. At first glance, this might seem to highlight Nick's advantage as the first-person narrator, able to describe everything in his own words. However, what is significant here is that Nick quotes Daisy's limited words in direct speech. Leaving what Daisy truly thinks "no longer tangible," Nick preserves her limited words within his narrative. Through this confusion, Nick unwittingly acts as a substitute for her, just as he does for Gatsby.

The confusion between careful and careless people might lead one to question whether Nick is truly a “carer” after all. In fact, this very confusion supports the inseparable connection between Nick and the theme of care. The impossibility of determining whether Nick is a carer implies that he cannot be a self-made man, independent and self-sufficient. It is true, as Scott Donaldson criticizes, that “he judges and condemns practically everyone he meets in the course of the novel” (Donaldson 32), despite his claim that he’s “inclined to reserve all judgment” (*Gatsby* 5). Nevertheless, his narrative continually exposes his own contradictions and ambivalence, emphasizing the fact that each individual is relational and interdependent through their vulnerability. This is precisely what the theme of care seeks to articulate, as Virginia Held explains: “The ethics of care . . . characteristically sees persons as relational and interdependent” (Held, *Ethics* 13). When Nick says, “It was all very careless and confused” (*Gatsby* 115), he illustrates that the distinction between careful and careless people can be blurred. Nick thus presents this confusion of care as a fundamental challenge to the idea of the self-made man.

Conclusion

The Great Gatsby can be seen as a “beginning” of the exploration of the theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care. Nick opens his narrative with a suggestion that he has already overcome his own vulnerability. From this perspective, he attempts to portray the ideal of the self-made man in America, mythologizing Gatsby as its ultimate figure. However, what truly characterizes Nick’s narrative is his constant

engagement with the vulnerability that lurks beneath these gestures of overcoming it. While exposing his own vulnerability, Nick also recognizes it in Gatsby and exposes his own, which leads to a relationship of care. With the recurrent image of openness, this relationship is defined by the motif of substitution, where the boundaries between the self and the other are radically blurred. This confusion even unsettles the binary opposition of “careful/careless” in Nick’s judgment, ultimately questioning the ideal of the self-made man. The vulnerability that Nick presents as the beginning of care is filled with contradictions and ambivalence. What is important is that these contradictions and ambivalence are resonant with the original etymology of the word “care.” *The Great Gatsby* thus explores the intertwining of two key motifs: vulnerability and care.

Chapter Two

Responsibility to Singularity of the Vulnerable in “An Alcoholic Case” and “Family in the Wind”¹⁵

Introduction

The theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care emerges in *The Great Gatsby* through Nick’s specific use of the word “vulnerable” and his ambiguous attitude toward what he calls “careless people.” Then, does this theme apply solely to *The Great Gatsby*? As discussed in Chapter One, the question of vulnerability and care has often been explored in the fields of welfare and feminism. In this context, literature by male writers is often subject to criticism as an antithesis to these themes. Given this trend in academic discussion, *The Great Gatsby* appears to be an exception among Fitzgerald’s works in its treatment of these two interrelated themes.

To explore this question, *Iryo tanpen shosetsu-shu* (*The Anthology of Medical Short Stories*), edited by Hisao Ishizuka in 2020, offers a useful starting point. As the title suggests, Ishizuka collects short stories related to medicine, aligning with the rise of medical humanities, a field that has examined the relationship between literature and medicine since the 1970s. In this context, Ishizuka selects two of Fitzgerald’s short stories—“An Alcoholic Case” and “Family in the Wind”—and labels them under the themes of “care” and “disaster,” respectively. The inclusion of these stories, along with these labels, highlights Fitzgerald’s hidden engagement with the themes of care and vulnerability, extending beyond *The Great Gatsby*.

This chapter delves into this possibility by analyzing the two short stories from Ishizuka's anthology. While the previous chapter interpreted vulnerability in *The Great Gatsby* as a critique of the self-made man with a reimagining of vulnerability as the beginning of care, this chapter applies that interpretation to these short stories through a new lens: responsibility to singularity. Nel Noddings, a foundational figure in contemporary care theory, argues that the ethics of care is incompatible with universalization. Noddings's idea is especially significant in relation to this study. As Nick's narrative in *The Great Gatsby* suggests, through the use of the proper name in its title, care is not for universal individuals but for singular, unique, and irreplaceable beings. In his narrative, Nick embodies this care for Gatsby as a singular being, particularly through the use of the word "responsible," which introduces the theme of care as responsibility to singularity. The two stories in the anthology serve as key texts for exploring care in this regard. "An Alcoholic Case" presents its antithesis through a failure of care. As its title suggests, the story reduces the alcoholic patient to a "case," rather than recognizing him as a singular being with a proper name. In contrast, "Family in the Wind" portrays a doctor's transformation into a caring individual. The disaster of two tornadoes compels him to face each patient as a singular being, ultimately driving him to care as a response to a young girl for whom he has no specific reason to care. These two stories thus expand the meaning of vulnerability as the beginning of care, bringing into focus the question of responsibility to singularity in a broader context beyond Fitzgerald's single work.

Fitzgerald Studies in Medical Humanities:

Responsibility to Singularity

While Ishizuka points out that “the theme of Fitzgerald and medicine/care is still a blank area in Fitzgerald studies” (Ishizuka; my trans.; 338), Chapter One offers a possible approach to filling this blank by exploring vulnerability as the beginning of care in *The Great Gatsby*. However, one question remains to be further explored: why does Nick feel specifically compelled to care for Gatsby, as the title of his narrative includes his name? The previous chapter does not address this question. This chapter focuses on the question of vulnerability as the beginning of care by introducing the perspective of responsibility to singularity.

This perspective can be found in the “responsibility” Nick feels when confronted with Gatsby’s death. After Gatsby is killed, blamed for the hit-and-run accident, he becomes vulnerable, unable to defend himself against criticism, just as he was always a subject of rumors during his life. In the face of Gatsby’s vulnerable state, Nick feels a sense of responsibility: “At first I was surprised and confused; then as he lay in his house and didn’t move or breathe or speak, it grew upon me that I was responsible, because no one else was interested—interested, I mean, with that intense personal interest to which everyone has vague right at the end” (*Gatsby* 105). Here, Nick perceives himself as solely responsible for Gatsby because no one else seems to care for him. What distinguishes this sense of responsibility is its lack of a clear rationale. Typically, “responsible” is defined as “capable of fulfilling an obligation or duty” (“Responsible”), implying that traditional

responsibility stems from obligation or duty. However, Nick's sense of responsibility lacks these clear rationales. His reason for feeling responsible is simply "because no one else was interested" (*Gatsby* 105), which Nick acknowledges as rather "vague." This lack of a clear reason characterizes Nick's responsibility for Gatsby.

Then, what is the nature of the responsibility Nick feels for Gatsby? Koichiro Kokubun's discussion on responsibility offers a valuable perspective on this question. While arguing that the modern concept of responsibility may have been created to "detect the culprit" in events with unclear causes, Kokubun addresses the fundamental question of what responsibility truly entails. Rather than adhering to the traditional notion of responsibility based on obligation or duty, Kokubun emphasizes responsibility as a response:

Responsibility is linked to response. What is a response? It is to reply, but in response, what matters is how a person responds to acts or events directed toward them in their own way. The crucial point here is responding in one's own way, and if one can only give predetermined, automatic responses, then that response becomes a reaction, not a response." (Kokubun and Kumagai; my trans.; 4-5)

Kokubun argues that this responsibility as a response is something one feels compelled to do, even though no one has explicitly asked for it. When considering Nick's responsibility towards the deceased Gatsby, Kokubun's discussion is thought-provoking. It suggests that Nick's sense of responsibility towards Gatsby, resonating with the words "I found myself

on Gatsby's side, and alone" (*Gatsby* 105), overlaps what Kokubun conceptualizes as responsibility as a response, which is distinct from a reaction as an automatic response.

Another important aspect of responsibility as a response is that, insofar as it is not a "predetermined automatic response" but rather a "response in one's own way," it consistently emphasizes singularity, a concept elucidated by Jean-Luc Nancy. When Nick describes his feeling of responsibility as "that intense personal interest" (*Gatsby* 105), he implies that it is specifically Gatsby whom he cares for, not anyone else. At the same time, Nick hints at his own uniqueness by noting that no one else shows interest in Gatsby. In other words, Nick is irreplaceable as the one who cares for Gatsby. This emphasis aligns with Nancy's conceptualization of singularity. Nancy defines singularity as "singular existences that are not subjects and whose relation—the sharing itself—is not a communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor a self-recognition, nor even a communication" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 25). Indeed, Nick's first-person narrative of *Gatsby* can be seen as a response to this singularity. What Dan Coleman refers to as Nick's "elegiac ambition" can be understood as an articulation of this response in Nick's unique manner: "By insisting from his narrative's outset on its hero's happy ending, Nick sets for himself an essentially elegiac ambition: to ensure that his readers come to the last page of the novel convinced that Gatsby's 'something gorgeous'" (Coleman 426). Nick as the narrator cannot exist without this elegiac ambition, which no one else has. His responsibility for Gatsby is deeply characterized by this sense of singularity.

One might assume that singularity cannot be connected to care because the term often evokes a sense of solitude or isolation, which seems to reject any form of connection with others. However, the concept of singularity itself paradoxically plays a significant role in fostering relationships of care. Nancy's perspective on singularity is crucial for exploring this alternative aspect. Contrary to the common association of singularity with solitude or isolation, Nancy argues that singularity is inseparable from plurality:

In Latin, the term *singuli* already implies the plural, as it designates the 'one' as belonging 'one by one.' The singular is primarily each one and, therefore, also with and among all the others. The singular is a plural. It undoubtedly possesses the property of indivisibility, but it is not indivisible in the same way that substance is indivisible. Instead, it is indivisible in each instance . . . within the event of its singularization.

(Nancy, *Being* 32)

Nancy argues that singularity is not opposed to relationships with others; rather, it can only emerge through them.

This alternative aspect of singularity is closely linked to the question of "cases" in contemporary care theory. Nel Noddings argues that the ethic of care is incompatible with universalization: "I shall reject the notion of universal caring—that is, caring for everyone—on the grounds that it is impossible to actualize and leads us to substitute abstract problem-solving and mere talk for genuine caring" (Noddings 18). Noddings suggests that care must engage with what Nancy calls singularity. In the same vein,

Noddings also emphasizes that those who care must not reduce the cared-for to “cases”:

To be treated as ‘types’ instead of individuals, to have strategies exercised on us, objectifies us. We become ‘cases’ instead of persons. Those of us who are able to escape such situations do so with alacrity, but escape is not always possible, and for some of us, it is rarely possible. The fact is that many of us have been reduced to cases by the very machinery that has been instituted to care for us. (Noddings 66)

When care is an “automatic response,” it becomes merely “universalized care,” or what Noddings calls a “case.” Noddings’s aversion to the “case” concept means that care must be a unique response to a singular being, which cannot be generalized. The question of care in *The Great Gatsby* can thus be reinforced from this perspective of responsibility to singularity.

“An Alcoholic Case”:

Failure of Care through the Reduction of the Patient to a “Case”

“An Alcoholic Case” is a story about the relationship between a nurse and an unnamed alcoholic patient. The nurse is responsible for caring for a cartoonist who has developed alcoholism. While the story does not clarify why the patient has turned to alcohol, it indirectly suggests that his past war experiences have left him severely wounded, both physically and mentally. As a result, the nurse faces significant challenges in dealing with a patient who does not readily comply with her instructions to the extent that she shouts out “All right, drink your fool self to death” (“Alcoholic”

23). Exhausted from her efforts, she decides to stop caring for him.

However, when the referring agency arranges for a replacement nurse, she recalls her professional ethics and chooses to return to him. Upon resuming her care, she notices a strong impulse toward death in him. The story concludes ambiguously, leaving the reader to speculate on the patient's fate, including the possibility of his suicide.

What is noteworthy when reading "An Alcoholic Case" through the lens of responsibility to singularity is the contrast between the titles of the two works. The title *The Great Gatsby* reflects the singularity of Gatsby for Nick, with its use of the definite article "the" alongside the proper name "Gatsby." In contrast, the title "An Alcoholic Case" diminishes the patient's singularity, using the indefinite article "an" alongside the general noun "case." This chapter presents "An Alcoholic Case" as a work that illustrates a failure of care, as the nurse denies confronting the patient's vulnerability. This failure indirectly underscores the importance of responding to singularity in care.

First, the story foreshadows its connection to the theme of vulnerability through the recurring image of broken glass. As Shun Watanabe points out, fragments of broken glass serve as a striking motif throughout the story.¹⁶ Indeed, the narrative unfolds as the nurse struggles with the patient, who adamantly refuses to relinquish a bottle of alcohol, resulting in the bottle shattering: "Suddenly she dropped it like a torpedo, sliding underneath her hand and slithering with a flash of red and black and the words: SIR GALAHAD, DISTILLED LOUISVILLE GIN" ("Alcoholic" 23); "It was on the floor in pieces and everything was silent for awhile"

(“Alcoholic” 23). The nurse worries that the shards of glass may injure the patient, symbolizing his vulnerability. This imagery of broken glass recurs throughout the story, such as when the nurse encounters a broken bus window on the way to the referral center. These instances of broken glass symbolically suggest that both main characters are constantly exposed to vulnerability.

Then, what does vulnerability specifically mean in the nurse-patient relationship? It is depicted as the difficulty of caring for an alcoholic patient. The nurse’s opening words illustrate her struggle to control the patient: “Let-go-that-oh-h-h! Please, now, will you? Don’t start drinking again! Come on—give me the bottle. I told you I’d stay awake giving it to you. Come on” (“Alcoholic” 23). Her words are punctuated by hyphens and commas, accompanied by the pleading phrases “please” and “come on.” The disjointed sentences indicate that the patient continually defies her expectations. What she is experiencing easily evokes Erinn C. Gilson’s definition of vulnerability as “the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability, and uncontrollability” (Gilson 4).

In the first half of the story, the difficulty of care is evident in the nurse’s inability to reduce the patient to merely “a case.” As part of her duties, she maintains a chart for the patient. On the one hand, she documents his condition using numerical values such as his pulse rate, respiratory rate, and temperature: “Pulse 120”; “Respiration 25”; “Temp 98-98.4-98.2” (“Alcoholic” 24). Such numerical records are essential in any medical treatment to diagnose patients objectively. On the other hand, however, this approach also reflects a tendency to treat the patient as a

universalized “case.” What stands out in the first half of the story is the nurse’s significant struggle to reduce the patient to such a “case.” She has difficulty filling in the “Remarks” section of her chart, unable to identify his condition:

Remarks—

—She could make so many:

Tried to get a bottle of gin. Threw it away and broke it.

She corrected it to read;

In the struggle she dropped it and broke it. Patient was generally difficult. (“Alcoholic” 23)

Despite feeling she could make many remarks, she finds herself unable to express them as she intends. Her correction, with the open confession “Patient was generally difficult” (“Alcoholic” 23), reflects the complexity of managing the patient under her control.

Although the nurse’s struggle to control the patient might seem like a negative aspect of care, this difficulty paradoxically holds significant importance from the perspective of singularity. The difficulty signifies that the patient remains a singular being to the nurse, who resists reducing him to a mere case. The singularity of the patient is reflected in the fact that her care for him goes beyond what she refers to as “business.” When the nurse feels she cannot properly handle the patient’s behavior, she laments her helplessness as a professional: “She had no business there, she thought, no business trying to help him” (“Alcoholic” 23). It also becomes evident that she initially refused to care for alcoholic patients, as noted on her agency registration card: “No Alcoholics” (“Alcoholic” 25). These behaviors

suggest that the nurse is supposed to engage with the patient only at a professional level. However, her relationship with him cannot be reduced to mere “business.” He is never just another patient to her; she distinctly separates him from the others. She briefly recalls an elderly Jewish man she had previously cared for in California, but her focus quickly returns to the patient before her: “On this case she was unhappy all the time, but she thought: ‘I guess if I hadn’t liked him I wouldn’t have stayed on the case’” (“Alcoholic” 24). The use of the adjective “this” emphasizes that the nurse’s thoughts are centered solely on him, who is clearly distinguished from other patients.

While this relationship that goes beyond “business” prevents the nurse from fully understanding the patient, it is precisely this inability to understand him that intensifies his singularity for her. As an agency nurse, she has the ability to change her patient at any time, yet she does not. Her strange attachment to the patient is not driven by loyalty to her work, as even she can only explain it in vague terms: “On this case she was unhappy all the time, but she thought: ‘I guess if I hadn’t liked him I wouldn’t have stayed on the case’” (“Alcoholic” 24). The conjunction “but” highlights how her affection contradicts her usual feelings of dissatisfaction: “On this case she was unhappy all the time” (“Alcoholic” 24). Despite her complaints about his troublesome behavior, she inexplicably likes him. It is precisely because she cannot explain why she likes him that he is a singular being for her, irreplaceable by others. When she laments that his behavior is entirely unpredictable, she emphasizes “he” in italics: “This isn’t what I ought to be doing. And this isn’t what *he* ought to be doing” (“Alcoholic”

25). Because he never conforms to her expectations of how he should behave, she cannot reduce him to just a “case.” Indeed, her inability to fully understand him prevents her from acquiring a generalized idea about him, forcing her to focus on his specific qualities:

He did not know about her sisters, and Bill Markoe, whom she had almost married, and she did not know what had brought him to this pitch, when there was a picture on his bureau of his young wife and his two sons and him, all trim and handsome as he must have been five years ago. It was so utterly senseless (“Alcoholic” 25).

This senselessness reinforces his singularity, distinguishing him completely from others.

The nurse’s engagement with the patient’s singularity is further evidenced by her resistance to generalizing him as just another case. At the agency, a colleague asks about the patient’s condition and, after making negative comments, refers to him in general terms as one of the many alcoholics: “I just heard that around town—oh, you know—they want you to play around with them—” (“Alcoholic” 26). This other nurse’s generalization makes the nurse angry, though she is unsure why: “‘Oh, be quiet,’ she said, surprised at her own rising resentment” (“Alcoholic” 26). Immediately after this conversation, the agency chief also refers to the patient as one of “such cases.” In the same way, the nurse resists this generalization, insisting on his individuality by referring to him as “he,” with specific details about their relationship: “He didn’t know what he was doing and he didn’t hurt me in any way” (“Alcoholic” 26); “He was really

nice all day yesterday. He drew me—" ("Alcoholic" 26). Her repeated use of the pronoun "he" reflects her determination to preserve his singularity against the tendency of the other medical staff to treat him as just another "case."

As the story progresses, the nurse's recognition of the patient's singularity, which is paradoxically for her care, is increasingly diminished. First, the nursing agency embodies this rejection of singularity. The agency chief, unaware of the nurse's ambivalence toward the patient, offers to assign her to another "case," considering that the nurse had originally written "No Alcoholics" on her registration card. The following phone conversation clearly illustrates how easily patients and nurses are interchangeable at the agency: "Oh, hello, Hattie. . . . Well, how about that big Svensen girl? She ought to be able to take care of any alcoholic. . . . How about Josephine Markham? Doesn't she live in your apartment house?" ("Alcoholic" 27). Here, the proper names "Svensen" and "Josephine Markham" ironically do not represent their singularity. Instead, they signify how individuals can be so easily replaced at the agency's convenience.

The nurse herself also begins to reject the patient's singularity. Initially contemplating giving up care, she ultimately decides to continue. On the surface, this decision might seem like a positive recommitment to her role. However, what cannot be overlooked is that she transforms her relationship with the patient into what Marimo Fujiki describes as a "romantic" one.¹⁷ The moment she changes her mind is depicted as follows:

The nurse's brown eyes were alight with a mixture of thoughts—

the movie she had just seen about Pasteur and the book they had all read about Florence Nightingale when they were student nurses. And their pride, swinging across the streets in the cold weather at Philadelphia General, as proud of their new capes as debutantes in their furs going in to balls at the hotels.

(“Alcoholic” 27)

The nurse identifies with the characters in the movie and biography through her romantic imagination. In doing so, the singularity of the nurse-patient relationship disappears. As George Monteiro points out, the absence of proper names for the two main characters, while other characters have ones, emphasizes this generalization of the nurse and patient.¹⁸

This escape from singularity transforms the nature of the nurse’s “care” for the patient. With a new resolve, she returns to him: “She was going to take care of him because nobody else would, and because the best people of her profession had been interested in taking care of the cases that nobody else wanted” (“Alcoholic” 28). At first glance, her statement “I’m going to take care of him” (“Alcoholic” 28) seems to emphasize their singular relationship. However, what distinguishes their relationship here from their initial relationship is that she immediately replaces it with a generalized connection between nurses and patients, as indicated by her reference to “the best people of her profession” and “cases.” The transformation of their relationship thus changes the meaning of her resolve to “take care of him.” As mentioned in the previous chapter, the term “care” originally includes both a positive sense of “concern” and a negative sense of “worry.” In this context, her resolve to “take care of him” here can also

be seen as a loss of “concern” for his singularity. This shift in her attitude becomes apparent when they reunite, and the patient tells her that he has drawn a full strip of cartoons for her. She does not comment on it and instead simply asks what he plans to do that evening. Here, she shows no care as “concern” for what he has specifically done for her.

The rejection of singularity is highlighted in a scene where the patient’s physical war wound is revealed to the nurse. As she assists him in dressing, the patient playfully presses a lit cigarette against his bare chest. Due to a copper plate implanted during surgery for his war wound, the fire goes out without causing him any physical harm. At first glance, the copper plate seems to represent the opposite of his vulnerable condition. However, the patient’s playful behavior causes a spark to fly off the copper plate and strike him in the stomach, prompting him to exclaim, “Ouch!” (“Alcoholic” 30). This seemingly comedic moment ironically underscores the simple truth that he remains vulnerable despite the apparent protection of the copper plate. This exposed vulnerability fosters the nurse’s refusal to acknowledge his singularity. When he continues to joke, humorously saying that his wounds will not heal because of the copper plate, the nurse responds: “Well, it’s no excuse for what you’re doing to yourself” (“Alcoholic” 30). Whether intentional or not, the nurse’s words here suggest her tendency to seek reasons for the patient’s behavior, implying her inclination to view him as a case that can be understood through clear causality. In this moment, where the patient’s vulnerability is critically exposed, the nurse’s rejection of singularity becomes even more apparent.

The nurse’s denial of the patient’s vulnerability is also evident in the

ambiguity surrounding his possible death. The final description of the nurse-patient relationship strongly suggests that he dies:

He was looking at the corner where she had dropped the bottle this afternoon. She stared at his handsome face, weak and defiant—afraid to turn even halfway because she knew that death was in that corner where he was looking. She knew death—she had heard it, smelt its unmistakable odor, but she had never seen it before it entered anyone, and she knew this man saw it in the corner of his bathroom; that it was standing there looking at him while he spit from a feeble cough and rubbed the result into the braid of his trousers. It shone there . . . crackling for a moment as evidence of the last gesture he ever made. (“Alcoholic” 30-31)

On the one hand, these descriptions, saturated with a sense of death, can be seen as clear evidence that he commits suicide, possibly with a shard of the broken glass, as the nurse noticed some fragments are missing in the morning.¹⁹ Additionally, the nurse’s words at the beginning of the story, “All right, drink your fool self to death” (“Alcoholic” 23), can be retrospectively interpreted as foreshadowing his suicide. On the other hand, the story never provides a definitive conclusion about the patient’s fate. After the long description of their relationship, the narrative abruptly shifts to a scene where the nurse speaks to the agency about the patient. What she says is ambiguous: “This one could have twisted my wrists until he strained them and that wouldn’t matter so much to me. It’s just that you can’t really help them, and it’s so discouraging—it’s all for nothing” (“Alcoholic” 31).

The uncertainty surrounding his death reflects the nurse's avoidance of confronting his vulnerability.²⁰ In fact, her reference to him starts with "this one," but then shifts to "them," meaning alcoholic patients in general. Ironically, because she leaves the question of his death unresolved, she deprives this generalized "case" of the possibility of dying as a singular being. This ironic implication is further supported by the fact that the final conversation takes place in the nurse's induction office, a space where nurses and patients alike are interchangeable. The patient's singularity, along with his vulnerability and the possibility of a meaningful death, is ultimately rejected.

In conclusion, "An Alcoholic Case" can be read as a story in which the nurse ultimately fails to respond to singularity due to her rejection of vulnerability. Importantly, this failure does not diminish the story's significance in exploring vulnerability as the beginning of care. The final scene can be interpreted as the nurse's reencounter with vulnerability, as she is forced to confront the essential difficulty of providing care.²¹ Above all, it remains unclear whether she ultimately gives up caring for the patient. Through her failure, the nurse paradoxically highlights the necessity of responsibility to singularity, a theme that is further explored in another of Fitzgerald's stories: "Family in the Wind."

"Family in the Wind":

Response to Singularity through Vulnerability

The rejection of vulnerability in "An Alcoholic Case" seems to support the traditional view of vulnerability as a negative condition to be

overcome. The purpose of this study, however, is to challenge this view in terms of vulnerability as the beginning of care. “Family in the Wind” serves as a key example of this challenge with the necessity of responding to singularity.

“Family in the Wind” tells a story of an alcoholic doctor in his forties, named Forrest Janney. Unable to practice medicine due to his alcoholism, Forrest now runs a drug store in his Alabama hometown. One day, his brother Gene asks him to treat his son Pinky, who has been seriously injured by a gunshot. However, Forrest refuses to operate on Pinky because of a deep hatred for him. In the past, Forrest was in love with a 17 years old girl named Mary Decker, but Mary ran off with Pinky, only to later be found dead from starvation. Forrest believes Pinky is responsible for Mary’s death, unable to forgive him. After rejecting his brother’s request, a tornado strikes Forrest’s town. Forced by the disaster to return to his role as a doctor, Forrest encounters Pinky as a patient once again. Despite his hesitation, this time Forrest decides to operate on Pinky, who is now weaker due to injuries from the tornado. Amid the devastation, Forrest also meets a girl named Helen Kilrain, who, despite her cheerful demeanor, has lost her father. Soon after, the town is struck by a second tornado. After surviving this second disaster, Forrest decides to take care of the orphaned Helen. The story ends with Forrest’s determination to start a new “family” with her.

The story begins with Forrest’s refusal to operate on Pinky, an episode that introduces the theme of responsibility. Forrest’s refusal stems from his belief that Pinky mistreated Mary, leading to her death. This

attitude exemplifies what Kokubun describes as “detecting the culprit,” as Forrest holds Pinky solely responsible for Mary’s death. However, the responsibility Forrest places on Pinky is not entirely clear-cut. Forrest himself admits that his judgment may be unreliable due to his alcoholism: “I am thoroughly anæsthetized the great part of the day” (“Family” 87). Gene, who is not an alcoholic, challenges Forrest’s certainty about Pinky’s guilt:

“I’ll do nothing myself to help him, because he ought to be dead. And even his death wouldn’t make up for what he did to Mary Decker.”

Gene Janney pursed his lips. “Forrest, you sure about that?”

“Sure about it!” exclaimed the doctor. “Of course I’m sure. She died of starvation; she hadn’t had more than a couple of cups of coffee in a week. And if you looked at her shoes, you could see she’d walked for miles.”

“Doc Behrer says—”

“What does he know? I performed the autopsy the day they found her on the Birmingham Highway. There was nothing the matter with her but starvation. That—that”—his voice shook with feeling—“that Pinky got tired of her and turned her out, and she was trying to get home. It suits me fine that he was invalided home himself a couple of weeks later.” (“Family” 89)

Gene tries to mention Dr. Behrer’s opinion, but Forrest interrupts him, showing no sign of reconsidering. While it is impossible to determine the

full truth from this conversation alone, what is at least clear is that Forrest does not have the whole picture of Mary's death. Gene's question—"Forrest, are you sure about this?" ("Family" 89)—and Forrest's trembling voice suggest that Forrest can only place responsibility on Pinky by forcefully rejecting any possibility that Forrest might be wrong. In doing so, Forrest denies Pinky's vulnerability by refusing to confront "the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability, and uncontrollability" (Gilson 4). It is strongly implied that Forrest's focus on finding a single "culprit" is a way for him to avoid facing his own vulnerability.

Forrest's imposition of responsibility onto Pinky is further supported by his own attempts to escape responsibility. Pinky's mother, Rose, also pressures Forrest to operate on Pinky. Forrest declines, using his alcoholism as an ironic excuse. His attitude does not reflect a doctor's ethical dilemma over being unable to save a patient. Instead, as Forrest tells Rose, "You see, my decisions are not reliable, and if anything went wrong, it would seem to be my fault" ("Family" 91). What Forrest is trying to avoid is a situation in which he could be blamed. His words, "if anything went wrong," subtly express his desire to escape the reality that he is responsible for his actions. Forrest's avoidance of responsibility reflects his belief that there is always a clear reason behind every event.

What is significant in the story is that Forrest's assumption of responsibility as an act of finding a "culprit" is ultimately challenged by Forrest himself. First, the question of responsibility is highlighted through Forrest's dependence on alcohol. During the drive to Gene's house, Forrest hears that Rose, Pinky's mother, is distraught over Pinky's injury. He

derisively remarks, "She's in the grip of a purely animal instinct" ("Family" 89), criticizing Rose for being unable to control her emotions through willpower. This implies that Forrest believes he can control his own actions through sheer will. However, what Forrest does next ironically demonstrates that his criticism of Rose applies just as much to himself: "The doctor took from his hip a flask containing half water and half Alabama corn, and drank" ("Family" 89). While the narrative uses the active verb "drank," this action easily shifts into a passive condition of being "drunk," as Forrest is already described in the opening scene as being "a little tight at the moment" ("Family" 87), which means that he is drunk. Forrest's dependence on alcohol raises the question of whether he is truly responsible for his actions. In fact, what Forrest perceives as his own will is actually triggered by alcohol: "As the liquor spread over the doctor's insides he felt an instinct to do something, not to violate his prejudices but simply to make some gesture, to assert his own moribund but still struggling will to power" ("Family" 89). Here, with "the liquor" as the subject of the sentence, the grammatical structure indicates that alcohol precedes Forrest's will. This dominance of alcohol over Forrest's decisions undermines his assumption that Pinky is solely responsible for Mary's death.

The challenge to the idea of responsibility as a search for a clear "culprit" is also presented through Forrest's own vulnerability. After refusing to perform surgery on Pinky and leaving Gene's house, Forrest parks his car in front of Mary's house to reflect on her. What is revealed in this moment is that Forrest had never realized the depth of his feelings for

Mary while she was alive: “He had not told Mary Decker how he felt about her; never intended to—she was seventeen, he was forty-five, and he no longer dealt in futures—but only after she ran away to Birmingham with Pinky Janney did he realize how much his love for her had counted in his lonely life” (“Family” 92). Forrest’s failure to recognize his love for Mary reveals that their relationship was never clear, and this in turn calls into question the basis of his harsh judgment of Pinky. He hadn’t fully understood his own feelings, making his criticism of Pinky all the more questionable. Indeed, while trying to justify his refusal to perform the surgery, Forrest is still unable to ignore something inexplicable, even to himself: “Yet he felt pretty bad” (“Family” 92). Forrest’s fixation on blaming Pinky parallels his attempt to avoid confronting his own vulnerability.

The two tornadoes in the latter half of the story force Forrest to change his negative attitude toward vulnerability. One might argue that Forrest’s personal struggles cannot be connected to natural disasters; however, the story links them through the theme of vulnerability, particularly as an event that makes it impossible to search for a “culprit.” This connection is made evident in the description of Forrest sensing the approach of the first tornado. Forrest first notices the shift in the weather: “The sky was now overcast and the grass stirred restlessly and there was a sudden flurry of drops without a sequel. A minute ago it had been warm, but now the moisture on his forehead was suddenly cool, and he wiped it away with his handkerchief” (“Family” 93). The repetition of the word “sudden”

emphasizes that this change is unpredictable for Forrest. This change in the weather then immediately affects his physical state: "There was a buzzing in his ears and he swallowed and shook his head. For a moment he thought he must be sick" ("Family" 93). Like his dependence on alcohol, the approaching tornado appears as a dominant force beyond Forrest's control: "...then suddenly the buzzing detached itself from him, grew into a swelling sound, louder and ever nearer, that might have been the roar of an approaching train" ("Family" 93). Forrest cannot pinpoint a clear reason for what is happening; instead, what becomes evident is the vulnerability he has been trying to avoid confronting.

The description of the tornado articulates the reality that such a natural disaster nullifies the assumption that there is always someone or something to blame. As Ishizuka argues, natural disasters like tornadoes disrupt everyday life suddenly, putting everyone in a radically vulnerable position.²² In addition to Forrest's perspective, the story also presents the event from the viewpoint of Pinky's brother, Butch. When Butch sees the tornado approaching, the description conveys a violent confrontation with vulnerability, regardless of who one is: "First there was the sound, and he was part of the sound, so engulfed and possessed by it that he had no existence apart from it" ("Family" 94). Like Forrest, Butch is rendered completely passive, stripped of his control over the situation. Despite their conflict over Pinky's treatment, both Forrest and Butch are placed in the same condition of vulnerability.

Certainly, the exposure to vulnerability through the tornado is what Forrest calls "something wrong"—a condition to be avoided because it

endangers life. However, as Rebecca Solnit argues, such life-and-death crises can also offer the possibility of opening oneself to others. Solnit explains this alternative aspect of disaster: “Horrible in itself, disaster is sometimes a door back into paradise, the paradise at least in which we are who we hope to be, do the work we desire, and are each our sister’s and brother’s keeper” (Solnit 3). What Forrest encounters is this aspect of disaster. When the first tornado hits the town, Forrest immediately begins preparing medical care for the injured. As he calls for assistance, he naturally forgets his past resentment of Doc Behrer: “The two men stood face to face by lantern light, forgetting that they disliked each other” (“Family” 95). The disaster unsettles the fixed relationship between Forrest and Doc Behrer in the past, leading it to an openness. This shift in Forrest’s identity is expressed by the change in his reference from Forrest to Doc Janney: “‘God knows how many more there’ll be,’ said Doc Janney” (“Family” 96). Forrest is no longer the same man who avoided medical responsibilities under the pretext of alcoholism. The forced confrontation with vulnerability returns him to his role as a doctor.

Importantly, Forrest’s confrontation with vulnerability also leads him to confront singularity. While the storm leaves many people injured, the narrator lists their injuries without generalizing them as “cases”: “The storm had dealt out fractures of the leg, collar bone, ribs and hip, lacerations of the back, elbows, ears, eyelids, nose; there were wounds from flying planks, and odd splinters in odd places, and a scalped man, who would recover to grow a new head of hair” (“Family” 97). The mixture of commas and specific nouns emphasizes that Forrest must address each

injured person individually, without reducing them to a generalized case. In other words, he must care for their singularity. For example, Forrest confronts the individual faces and names of each patient:

Living or dead, Doc Janney knew every face, almost every name.

“Don’t you worry. Billy’s all right. Hold still and let me tie this. People are drifting in every minute, but it’s so damn dark they can’t find ‘em—All right, Mrs. Oakey. Here’s some iodine. . . . Now let’s see this man.” (“Family” 97)

The use of specific names and the adjectives “every” and “this” highlights the singularity of each injured person. Unlike the nurse in “An Alcoholic Case,” Forrest is forced to care for his patients without reducing them to mere “cases.”

This confrontation with singularity leads to a decisive change in Forrest’s relationship with Pinky regarding responsibility. While providing medical treatment to the injured after the tornado, Forrest encounters Pinky again, now in an even more dangerous condition due to the storm. When Forrest previously refused to operate on Pinky, he neglected Pinky’s vulnerability by blaming him as the sole “culprit” for Mary’s death. In this sense, Forrest’s reencounter with Pinky during the crisis forces him to face what he had previously ignored, which changes their relationship: “For a moment the doctor hesitated, but even when he closed his eyes, the image of Mary Decker seemed to have receded, eluding him. Something purely professional that had nothing to do with human sensibilities had been set in motion inside him, and he was powerless to head it off” (“Family” 98). As

Forrest acknowledges his powerlessness, he is forced to abandon his previous view of Pinky as solely responsible for Mary's death. He is now compelled to respond to who Pinky is in the present moment, rather than to the person he used to believe Pinky was. Judith Butler's discussion of responsibility offers a fitting explanation for Forrest's radical change toward Pinky:

In a certain way, and paradoxically, our responsibility is heightened once we have been subjected to the violence of others. We are acted upon, violently, and it appears that our capacity to set our own course at such instances is fully undermined. Only once we have suffered that violence are we compelled, ethically, to ask how we will respond to violent injury. (Butler, *Precarious* 16).

Forrest's new sense of responsibility is emphasized by his attitude toward operating on Pinky. To steady his hands, Forrest drinks alcohol before the surgery. This act of drinking is entirely different from his previous alcoholism because it is no longer about escaping or numbing himself. This time, he drinks to respond to Pinky, marking a disruption of his former identity as a doctor bound by alcoholism.

One might argue that Forrest's change during the first tornado is solely motivated by his role as a doctor, having nothing to do with his response to singularity. The narrator's use of "Doc Janney" and the description, "Something purely professional that had nothing to do with human sensibility had been set in motion inside him" ("Family" 98), could support such an argument. Indeed, it could be said that what he does during

the first tornado is limited to the practice of medicine. However, the story presents another kind of response, one that cannot be reduced to his professional duties. After the tornado, in the devastated aftermath, Forrest meets a girl named Helen, whom he already knows. Aware that she lost her father in the storm, though she does not yet know it, he feels a deep pain, metaphorically described as a “dark universe”: “Around her stretched the dark universe, impersonal, inconsistent” (“Family” 100-1). This metaphor conveys the painful reality that no one is left to care for her, as her father was her only family. At the same time, it signifies that Forrest has no reason to care for her either. He is not a family member, and since Helen is uninjured, he does not need to act as her doctor. Paradoxically, this lack of reason to care for her might mark the beginning of his responsibility as a response with no clear reason. As a singular being himself, Forrest is now forced to confront Helen as a singular being.

At this point, Forrest has no clear reason to involve himself with Helen because he is neither family nor does he need to tend to her as a doctor. Despite lacking a clear reason for care, it is Helen’s attitude toward a cat that transforms Forrest’s ambivalence into a response to her singularity. During the first tornado, as her father was rescuing her, Helen simultaneously rescued a cat, which she continued to care for. When Forrest jokingly remarks that she “only has a cat” instead of any relatives, it reflects the severity of Helen’s situation—she has no one to care for her, and Forrest remains unsure of what he can do. However, her reaction to his joke unsettles his attitude: “‘It’s just a cat,’ she admitted calmly, but anguished by her own betrayal of her love, she hugged it closer” (“Family”

101). Her initial words, “It’s just a cat,” accompanied by the indefinite article “a,” are undoubtedly true in the sense that Helen only accidentally saved it. She has no clear reason to continue caring for it. Yet, by immediately hugging the cat as if to deny her first words, she reveals her attitude of caring for it. When Forrest attempts to universalize the situation by saying, “Taking care of a cat must be pretty hard” (“Family” 101), Helen counters his remark by responding as if the cat is not “a cat,” but the cat, a singular being: “It isn’t any trouble at all. It doesn’t eat hardly anything” (“Family” 101). Notably, Helen’s attitude toward the cat changes Forrest’s attitude toward her. As the narrator describes, “He put his hand in his pocket, and then changed his mind suddenly” (“Family” 101), signaling that Forrest has decided to become an active agent of care, which starkly contrasts with his former passive condition as a “drunk.” He promises Helen that he will return later that day. The image of the “dark universe” that Forrest initially saw in Helen is thus transformed into an act of care, as a response to her singularity.

Responsibility to singularity becomes even more evident through the second tornado. Contrary to the town’s expectations, such as one resident’s belief that “Ain’t going to be a next tornado” (“Family” 101), the second tornado strikes soon after, foregrounding the impossibility of controlling or predicting natural disasters. The extensive damage completely destroys Forrest’s drug store, and it is revealed that Pinky, whom Forrest had operated on after the first tornado, has died during the devastating situation of the second one. This situation signifies that Forrest is stripped of his identity as a doctor. When Forrest decides to leave the town and his brother

Gene asks if he will practice medicine again elsewhere, Forrest only gives an uncertain answer. In this sense, Forrest is forced to become a singular being, no longer defined by a specific identity but simply by being himself. As a singular being, Forrest re-encounters Rose, who has lost her son Pinky. When Forrest says goodbye, Rose responds: “‘Goodbye,’ she responded, and then added in a dead voice, ‘Good luck to you, Forrest’” (“Family” 105). Rose does not blame Forrest for failing to save Pinky’s life. Rather, as the verb “responded” implies, her attitude toward him has shifted to recognize his responsibility as a singular being. This shift is evident in the way she addresses him. When Rose had asked Forrest to operate on Pinky before the tornadoes, she called him “Doc,” saying, “Doc, you do it!” (“Family” 91). This time, without Forrest’s identity as a doctor, she calls him “Forrest,” emphasizing his singularity by directly addressing him. Then, Forrest also responds to Rose as a singular being. On the surface, he seems silent in response to her words: “For a moment he was tempted to say something conciliatory, but he saw it was no use. He was up against the maternal instinct, the same force that had sent little Helen through the storm with her injured cat” (“Family” 105). While one might argue that Forrest generalizes Rose’s feelings by referring to them as “the maternal instinct” (“Family” 105), which could seem contrary to recognizing her singularity, it is important to consider what Forrest learned from Helen’s relationship with her cat. Helen cared for the cat without any clear reason, and similarly, the maternal instinct Forrest observes in Rose here is not reducible to a simple blood relationship. What he sees is Rose’s care for Pinky as a responsibility to his singularity.

This theme of responsibility to singularity culminates in the final scene, where Forrest decides to adopt Helen. The narrator describes the situation after the second tornado as one in which “many families would never be the same” (“Family” 104). For Forrest, this signals a transformation in the idea of family itself. Before leaving town, Forrest learns that Helen has already moved to Montgomery with her cat. He buys a ticket to Montgomery, determined to welcome Helen and the cat as part of his new “family.” When Forrest says to himself, “She hasn’t got any kin. I guess she’s my little girl now” (“Family” 106), there is no clear logical connection between the two statements. This marks a radical shift in Forrest’s understanding of responsibility. At the beginning of the story, responsibility was something Forrest projected onto Pinky by identifying him as the “culprit” for Mary’s death; by the end of the story, responsibility is what Forrest feels for Helen without any clear reason. This shift does not mean that he has overcome his vulnerability. Forrest fully acknowledges his continued vulnerability, symbolized by the recurring motif of “wind”: “In his memory of that terrible week, the winds still sailed about him, came in as draughts through the corridor of the car—winds of the world—cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes—grey and black, expected or unforeseen, some from the sky, some from the caves of hell” (“Family” 106). While his final words, “I guess the old brig can keep afloat a little longer—in any wind” (“Family” 106), may seem uncertain or unreliable, it is this very uncertainty that demonstrates his acceptance of his own vulnerability. This confrontation with vulnerability opens him to Helen, marking the beginning of care as a response to singularity.²³

Overall, the title “Family in the Wind” can be interpreted as a response to singularity. In the first half of the story, which focuses on Pinky’s injury, the Janney family operates under the traditional premise that they must care for Pinky because he is a family member. For example, Pinky’s brother Butch admits that he never thought much of his brother, but still urges Forrest to perform the surgery: “‘Well, I can’t say I ever thought so much of him’—his tone changed defiantly—‘but after all, he’s my own brother—’” (“Family” 93). Butch’s attitude reflects the idea that he cares for Pinky simply because they are family. The phrase “but after all” suggests that family ties serve as an overwhelming reason for care that goes beyond personal feelings. In the second half of the story, which centers on the tornadoes, Forrest’s relationship with Helen redefines this premise of family as being “in the wind,” which means being uncertain and not restricted to blood relations. Forrest cares for Helen not because she is a member of his family, but because he responds to her as a singular being. It is through this recognition of singularity that they become a “family.” In this sense, the title “Family in the Wind,” which seems to represent its uncertainty, is an exact expression for vulnerability as the beginning of care.²⁴

Conclusion

With *The Great Gatsby*, “An Alcoholic Case,” and “Family in the Wind,” Fitzgerald challenges the image of the typical male modernist writer, often seen as affirming the modernist subject as an isolated individual. In *The Great Gatsby*, the relationship of care between Nick and

Gatsby suggests that Nick responds to Gatsby with no clear reason but with a vague sense of being “responsible” for him. Nick’s feeling of responsibility for Gatsby as a singular being resonates with the contemporary concept of responsibility to singularity, which is distinct from automatic response. Nick’s responsibility is directed solely toward Gatsby, aligning with the ethics of care, which holds that care should be given to a singular being rather than generalized into a “case.” “An Alcoholic Case” ironically highlights the necessity of responsibility to singularity through the nurse’s failure to care for the patient, as she reduces him to a “case.” In contrast, “Family in the Wind” shows the doctor being forced to confront responsibility to singularity after being placed in a state of radical vulnerability. While the theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care emerges from a close reading of *The Great Gatsby*, the two short stories demonstrate that this theme extends beyond the interpretation of the single work. They foreground Fitzgerald as a writer who continuously engages with these themes throughout his career, challenging the image of male modernist writers who reject vulnerability and care.

The interpretation of care beginning from vulnerability as responsibility to singularity is particularly important for this study because it provides a methodological guideline. Since the vulnerable individual is a singular being that cannot be generalized, the study should avoid establishing a general definition of vulnerability in advance. In fact, recent explorations related to the themes of care from this perspective have attempted to confront this difficult question, such as Butler’s concept of “this life,” Kokubun’s “forecast error,” and Yasuhiko Murakami’s

“phenomenological qualitative research.”²⁵ These conceptualizations of responsibility to singularity represent attempts to grasp care for singularity in opposition to generalization. It is true that any academic studies require logical consistency, as this study on literature sets the overarching framework of vulnerability as the beginning of care. At the same time, Fitzgerald’s stories require responding to each literary work without imposing a fixed, generalized definition of vulnerability and care. Reading other modernist writers—Chandler, Miller, and Salinger—should be a practice in this responsibility to singularity.

Chapter Three

Vulnerability as Being in the World in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*²⁶

Introduction

Thus, by extracting the perspective of vulnerability as the beginning of care from Fitzgerald's works, this study explores the possibility of extending it into the broader context of modernist literature. Just as Nick sees the ideal figure of a self-made man in Gatsby, traditional understandings of modernism tend to focus on the individual. However, since the emergence of new modernist studies at the beginning of the 21st century, this traditional image of the modernist individual has begun to be called into question. The previous two chapters demonstrate that Fitzgerald's works can be reread within this new trend of modernist studies. The relationship between Nick and Gatsby radically challenges the typical image of the modernist subject as a "man" who "is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (Lukács 20) by presenting a relationship of care rooted in vulnerability. The two short stories—"An Alcoholic Case" and "Family in the Wind"—confirm that this is not an exceptional theme but one of the crucial questions for Fitzgerald, especially regarding the exploration of responsibility to singularity. Rereading Fitzgerald as a modernist male writer naturally raises a question. If the theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care unsettles what the traditional modernist studies read in male modernist writers, is it unique to Fitzgerald? Can this approach to rereading modernist literature be applied to other male modernist writers?

Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled detective fiction featuring Philip Marlowe as a private detective is worth reconsidering in this context. Generally, the image of the private detective can be as easily associated with the traditional understanding of the modernist individual as the character of Gatsby. As the term "private" itself implies, it precisely embodies the image of a "man" who "is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (Lukács 20). As John T. Irwin characterizes it, these detectives are "their own boss," living alone, earning a living, and confronting the world of violence on their own. Moreover, as Jonathan Mitchell suggests, the character of the detective can be easily identified with what R. W. B. Lewis conceptualizes as the American Adam as "an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources" (Lewis 5). Jonathan Mitchell argues that, while Lewis laments the decline of acceptance of the American Adam image in the first half of the twentieth century, it "became a fundamental organizing narrative of American identity in the twentieth century" (Mitchell 1), including in the motif of detective in multiple media. However, Chandler's portrayal of the private detective radically challenges this general image. This chapter explores the hidden vulnerability in the motif of the private detective by refiguring it through Chandler's distinctive concern for "the world," which resonates with Martin Heidegger's concept of "being in the world." Unlike the armchair detective, Marlowe becomes entangled in the cases he investigates, confronting a reality that he cannot predict or control. This vulnerability, inherent in

being in the world, leads to the subversion of his identity as a private detective, opening up the possibility of care even for culprits and victims who are typically excluded from care in traditional detective novels.

“Within and Without”: Fitzgerald’s Works and Hard-boiled Fiction

Some scholars have already noted the connection between Fitzgerald’s works, particularly *The Great Gatsby*, and Raymond Chandler’s hard-boiled fiction. It is well known that Chandler admired Fitzgerald’s works, remarking in one of his letters that Fitzgerald possessed “one of the rarest qualities in all literature” (*Raymond* 140). In fact, Chandler even expressed a desire to work on a movie adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*.²⁷ In addition to Chandler’s respect for Fitzgerald, Richard Anderson points out a strong affinity between the writing style in *The Great Gatsby*, where Gatsby remains a mysterious figure, and that of the hard-boiled detective genre, with Chandler as one of the foremost examples.²⁸ Maureen Corrigan provides a more detailed analysis of this affinity, noting that Fitzgerald refers to himself as a “hard-boiled professional” in the preface to the Modern Library edition of *The Great Gatsby*, and that Nick also uses the term “hard-boiled” when describing the painting of his great-uncle.²⁹ These numerous similarities invite a reading of Chandler’s hard-boiled fiction in comparison with Fitzgerald’s works.

What is particularly notable about this affinity between *The Great Gatsby* and hard-boiled fiction is that, while Nick can be viewed as a detective unraveling the mystery of Gatsby, he is characterized by his vulnerability as a detective with a confused standpoint. On the one hand, as

Corrigan points out, Nick appears to stand “outside” as an observant narrator: “As critics and scholars unanimously affirm, one of the extraordinary advances that Fitzgerald made in *Gatsby* was his decision to have the main character’s tale told from the outside by an observant narrator. That inside-outside perspective preserves the central air of mystery that surrounds *Gatsby* . . .” (Corrigan 129-30). In this sense, Nick indeed seems to play the role of a detective, attempting to uncover the hidden truth behind the mysterious character of *Gatsby*. However, on the other hand, Nick’s “outside” standpoint is quite problematic. As Corrigan observes, “we’re never completely clear on what he’s [*Gatsby*’s] done to make his money” (Corrigan 130), and Nick himself remains unable to fully solve the mystery of *Gatsby*. While Nick claims he is inclined to “reserve all judgments” (*Gatsby* 5), what he reveals in the end is his subjective judgment that *Gatsby* is “great,” as the title of his narrative suggests. One crucial reason for Nick’s vulnerability as a detective is that his standpoint cannot be clearly categorized as “outside.” As Nick describes his position at Myrtle’s party as being “within and without” (*Gatsby* 27), he simultaneously occupies both an “outside” and “inside” perspective. Although he states that “life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all” (*Gatsby* 7), Nick fails to observe the world objectively because he himself is embedded in it. While sharing some characteristics with the detective in hard-boiled fiction, Nick embodies vulnerability through his unplaceable standpoint, which radically unsettles the dichotomy of inside and outside.

This chapter focuses on this confusion of standpoint as vulnerability

in the detective motif in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, particularly through Chandler's characteristic concern for "the world." The motif of the detective typically evokes an external standpoint, as it implies an individual who uncovers the truth of the world from a detached perspective. However, the private detective in *The Big Sleep* is characterized by the deprivation of this transcendental standpoint. Much like Nick's sense of being "within and without," Marlowe is forced to participate "in" the investigation, a process that is supposed to objectively detect the truth. In this condition of "being in the world," Marlowe engages with care that begins from vulnerability, radically unsettling his identity as a detective.

Vulnerability and Chandler's Involvement with the Question of Detective Fiction

The Big Sleep is the first story in the Philip Marlowe series. As Chandler's detective stories are well known for their complicated plots, this work consists of several intertwined cases. First, Marlowe is asked to investigate an extortion case by Guy Sternwood, who has made his fortune in the oil business. Sternwood has received a letter from a man named Arthur Guin Geiger claiming that his second daughter, Carmen, owes him money. Sternwood wants Marlowe to settle the matter, and Marlowe agrees. As he is leaving the house after the meeting, he is stopped by Sternwood's eldest daughter, Vivian. She asks Marlowe if he is investigating her missing husband, Regan, but Marlowe denies it since his client is Sternwood. Soon after he begins investigating the extortion, Marlowe discovers that Geiger is an underground figure, ostensibly posing as a used book dealer while

secretly dealing in pornography. Although Marlowe tries to track Geiger down, he instead discovers Geiger's dead body with a naked Carmen. After several more murders involving Geiger's henchman and his homosexual lover, Marlowe uncovers the truth. Carmen had accumulated gambling debts, for which Geiger had photographed her naked. Sternwood's driver, who was in love with Carmen, found out about their relationship and killed Geiger. When the series of cases becomes public, Sternwood uses his power to cover up his family's involvement. Marlowe is not satisfied with this official conclusion, especially since the mystery of Vivian's missing husband remains unsolved. He decides to continue his own investigation, believing that the series of cases is somehow connected to the husband's disappearance.

At first glance, the seemingly typical detective plot may give the impression that the story is incompatible with the theme of vulnerability. Certainly, detective novels often address physical and psychological wounds, with murder cases frequently at their center. However, starting with Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste Dupin series and popularized through Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, detective fiction initially evolved as analytic fiction. In these works, the wounds depicted are merely a backdrop to the primary goal of uncovering a single solution to mysteries. In this sense, the genre rejects vulnerability by assuming a world where rational solutions are possible. S.S. Van Dine's "fair play method" exemplifies this rejection. He declared that detective fiction is "a kind of intellectual game" (Dine 189), establishing rules for the genre to function as a "game" where mysteries are solved logically and scientifically. In this "game," there is no

room for “the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability, and uncontrollability” (Gilson 3), the very characteristics that Gilson defines as vulnerability.

Moreover, the categorization of *The Big Sleep* as hard-boiled fiction seems to further distance it from the theme of care. Hard-boiled detectives are generally characterized as independent individuals who investigate cases without belonging to any organization, making a living without relying on others. As Irwin states, they are “one’s own boss” in this respect.³⁰ The opening scene of *The Big Sleep* exemplifies this typical hard-boiled detective self-image: “I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with a dark blue shirt, tie, and display handkerchief, black brogues, and black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean-shaved, and sober, and I didn’t care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be” (*Big* 589). Here, Marlowe prominently displays his adherence to the private detective image, asserting control over himself through sheer will. The phrase “I didn’t care who knew it” (*Big* 589) signals a clear indifference to caring. This rejection of care is also evident in his conversation with General Sternwood, where he explains why he became a private detective: “I was fired. For insubordination. I test very high on insubordination, General” (*Big* 594). These words indicate that Marlowe does not place himself in a subordinate position. This image of the hard-boiled detective as a self-made man, independent of others, appears to stand in opposition to the theme of care.

However, what is crucial in Chandler’s works is that they challenge the assumptions of traditional detective fiction. In his essay “The Simple

Art of Murder,” Chandler criticizes detective fiction as “an intellectual game.” For Chandler, murder in detective fiction should not be reduced to such a “game”: “The boys with their feet on the desks know that the easiest murder case in the world to break is the one somebody tried to get very cute with; the one that really bothers them is the murder somebody thought of only two minutes before he pulled it off” (“Simple” 986). The murders Chandler refers to are not part of a game with clear rules that can be solved logically and scientifically; instead, they take place without clear rules. This directly contradicts one of Dine’s rules, which states that the “culprit must be determined by logical deductions — not by accident, coincidence, or unmotivated confession” (Dine 190). Chandler’s art of murder involves precisely what Dine explicitly rejects. As a result, Chandler’s work is filled with “the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability, and uncontrollability” (Gilson 3). In this sense, Chandler’s critique of traditional detective fiction can be seen as an effort to reclaim the vulnerability the genre has traditionally excluded.

Chandler argues that if writers attempt to write about “the murder somebody thought of only two minutes before he pulled it off” (“Simple” 986), they must also write about “the authentic flavor of life as it is lived” (“Simple” 986). Notably, Chandler’s own “life as it was lived” was far from that of “one’s own boss.” Despite his early aspirations to become a writer, Chandler was unable to realize his dream for many years while living with his mother.³¹ In other words, his life was never one he could live entirely on his own terms. After holding various jobs, he was eventually hired by a company associated with the burgeoning oil industry in Los Angeles, thanks

to a friend's support. Unlike his character Marlowe, who was fired for insubordination, Chandler worked loyally for the company. Although he was successfully promoted, he began struggling with alcohol issues in the late 1920s, which were exacerbated by his friend's sudden death and his war experiences. Tom Williams notes that Chandler's alcohol problem likely became serious due to a combination of these complex factors, making it difficult to pinpoint a single clear cause.³² This lack of a clear cause is indicative of his vulnerability, suggesting that his life was subject to forces beyond his control. Chandler's life as an employee in the oil company came to an end when his relationship with a colleague deteriorated, ultimately leading to his dismissal. This process of dismissal contrasts sharply with that of Marlowe, who was dismissed for insubordination by his own choice. Unlike Marlowe, Chandler's life was significantly influenced by his relationships with others. It was through this experience of vulnerability that Chandler was compelled to write detective fiction.

Being in the World: The Care about the World

How, then, did Chandler reconnect the genre of hard-boiled novels with vulnerability? It is through a unique concern for the "world" as "being in the world." As Ryuzo Uchida points out, the figure of the detective can be said to emerge from a concern for the "world."³³ Chandler also repeatedly uses the term "world" to explain what writers of detective fiction should be concerned with:

The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment

houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the finger man for a mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of money-making, where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing; a world where you may witness a hold up in broad daylight and see who did it, but you will fade quickly back into the crowd rather than tell anyone, because the holdup men may have friends with long guns, or the police may not like your testimony, and in any case the shyster for the defense will be allowed to abuse and vilify you in open court, before a jury of selected morons, without any but the most perfunctory interference from a political judge.

(“Simple” 991)

For Chandler, the “world” is never a “game” where a clear, single truth can be detected. It is a world where law and order often fail to function, and where testimonies do not serve their intended purpose. Significantly, what defines Chandler’s interest in this “world” is his unique sense of being “in” it. Chandler rephrases his description of the “world” as follows: “It is not very fragrant, but it is the world you live in” (“Simple” 991). For Chandler, the “world” is one where “you” are actually immersed in it. Since Chandler’s “world” is filled with vulnerability, it is inevitable that “you”

are also exposed to vulnerability. At the core of Chandler's concern for the world lies this sense of "being in the world."

This sense of being in the world becomes more distinct when contrasted with the armchair detective, a typical archetype in analytic detective fiction. Bran Nicol notes that Chandler's phrase "the world you live in" contrasts sharply with the detached perspective of armchair detectives. As suggested by the metaphor of the "armchair," for detectives like Hercule Poirot and Philo Vance, the world is one in which they can deduce a clear, singular truth through logic and deduction. They observe it from a transcendental place, safe from harm, as if seated in an armchair: "The world investigated by the armchair detective is a static one, and he is able to remain detached from it" (Nicol 70). This relationship between armchair detectives and the world is also reflected in the frequent use of the metaphor of the "eye" to describe detectives. The "eye" symbolizes the detective as a distant observer of the world. Sherlock Holmes's whimsical wish in "A Case of Identity" exemplifies this concept of the detective as an "eye":

If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most outré results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable. ("Case" 287-88)

In this instance, Holmes expresses a desire to remove himself from the locations of events to observe them from above. This perspective symbolizes the transcendental position of an armchair detective as an “eye,” sharply contrasting with Chandler’s idea of being in the world.

The relationship between the armchair detective and the world is not merely characteristic of the detective fiction genre. It is also closely connected to the period of modernism in this study, particularly through Martin Heidegger’s discussion of “the age of the world picture.” As a contemporary of Chandler, Heidegger characterizes modernity by what he calls the “world picture,” a unique way of engaging with the world. Heidegger emphasizes that the “world picture” does not mean a “picture of the world.” Instead, it signifies “the world grasped as picture” (Heidegger 67). According to Heidegger, it is in the modern age that the world becomes a picture for human beings because they try to represent it as an object for research while simultaneously establishing themselves as subjects. Heidegger’s exploration of this relationship between humans and the world resonates precisely with the transcendental position of the armchair detective: “The demand springs from the liberation of humanity from the bonds of the truth of Christian revelation and the doctrines of the Church, a liberation which frees itself for self-legislation that is grounded in itself” (Heidegger 81). As Judith Butler explains in her discussion of Heidegger’s concept of the world picture, it implies a distancing from the world: “He pointed out that the subject who stands before such a world picture seeks not only to grasp that visual version of the world in its entirety but finds itself exempt from the world it seeks to know” (Butler, *What* 16). This

world picture precisely mirrors the relationship between the detective as an “eye” and the world, as Butler explains through the act of seeing: “We are in the picture that we see, and the distance established by spectatorship is one that denies or at least suspends what it means to be implicated in the phenomenon that one seeks to know” (Butler, *What* 16).

Marlowe himself suggests that his job as a private detective is distinct from the attitude of seeing the world as a picture. While his investigative methods often conflict with those of the police, Marlowe claims that, as a private detective, he can do what the police cannot, hinting at the motif of seeing:

I’m not Sherlock Holmes or Philo Vance. I don’t expect to go over ground the police have covered and pick up a broken pen point and build a case from it. If you think there is anybody in the detective business making a living doing that sort of thing, you don’t know much about cops. It’s not things like that they overlook, if they overlook anything. I’m not saying they often overlook anything when they’re really allowed to work. But if they do, it’s apt to be something looser and vaguer (*Big* 750)

While Marlowe admits that he lacks the abilities of an armchair detective, he asserts that his work involves addressing what the police overlook. The term “overlook” is particularly suggestive here, as it combines the prefix “over” with the verb “look,” implying that both the police and armchair detectives are characterized as subjects of seeing. In fact, when Marlowe states that what he deals with is “something looser and vaguer” (*Big* 750),

he reveals his own inability to clearly see the world. He never positions himself as being “over” it in order to “see” it. His distinction from the police echoes Heidegger’s challenge to the world grasped as a picture.

Chandler’s concern for “the world we live in” can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim vulnerability by being in the world. Tzvetan Todorov highlights the characteristics of the hard-boiled detective in contrast to the armchair detective, noting that they are physically vulnerable and become involved in the world they are investigating: “Its chief feature is that the detective loses his immunity, gets beaten up, badly hurt, and constantly risks his life. In short, he is integrated into the universe of the other characters, instead of being an independent observer like the reader” (Todorov 51). Importantly for this study, Todorov refers to such a detective as a “vulnerable detective.” Again, this vulnerability does not merely mean that the detective can be wounded. As Koichi Suwabe argues, the detective’s involvement “in” the case can inadvertently transform the entire structure of the case itself.³⁴ To quote Gilson again, it is precisely an experience of vulnerability in which the detective is forced to confront “the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability, and uncontrollability” (Gilson 3). In this sense, the condition of being in the world itself embodies vulnerability.

The sense of being in the world can also be observed in the unique relationship between Raymond Chandler and his works. When *The Big Sleep* was adapted into a movie, director Howard Hawks struggled to decipher who killed the Sternwoods’ chauffeur due to the film’s complicated plot. When Hawks asked Chandler for the truth, Chandler simply responded,

“Damned if I know.”³⁵ This episode is not only indicative of his difficulty in plotting or his sense of humor; rather, it demonstrates Chandler’s distinctive relationship with his work. In general, authors are presumed to occupy a transcendent position that enables them to comprehend the entirety of their works, as they are the sole creators of their worlds. This assumption is particularly true for writers of detective fiction, whose primary focus is the search for hidden truth. In this episode, Chandler is deprived of such a transcendent position. He behaves as if he does not know the truth, living “in” the world. In this sense, the complexity of plots in Chandler’s work can be reinterpreted as evidence that the author himself is engaged in the world without having full knowledge of the truth. This characteristic involvement with his own works is reflected in his unique attitude to plots:

I begin at last to realize that I have a very unorthodox attitude to plots. Most writers think up a plot with an intriguing situation and then proceed to fit character into it. With me a plot, if you could call it that, is an organic thing. It grows and often it overgrows. I am continually finding myself with scenes that I won’t discard and that don’t want to fit in. So that my plot problem invariably ends up as a desperate attempt to justify a lot of material that, for me at least, has come alive and insists on staying alive. It’s probably a silly way to write, but I seem to know no other way. The mere idea of being committed in advance to a certain pattern appalls me. (*Selected* 129-30)

For Chandler, plots are “an organic thing” beyond his control. They are

“alive” on their own, sometimes “overgrowing” into situations even he cannot predict. While Chandler creates the world, he also lives in it.

Marlowe as Being in the World

This condition of being in the world is what characterizes Marlowe from the beginning. When Marlowe first meets Sternwood as a client, he notices that Sternwood is in a wheelchair, unable to stand. At one point, Marlowe almost lights a cigarette but refrains from doing so in front of Sternwood. Observing Marlowe’s behavior, Sternwood tells him not to mind, as he enjoys the smell of cigarettes. With the client’s permission, Marlowe lights a cigarette, and Sternwood remarks, “A nice state of affairs when a man has to indulge his vices by proxy” (*Big* 593). Sternwood’s words, along with the wheelchair motif, clearly position Marlowe as a private detective who is “in the world.” Physically immobilized in his wheelchair, Sternwood cannot directly experience the world. As the phrase “by proxy” suggests, it is Marlowe who experiences the world for Sternwood, who occupies a more transcendental position. The question of being in the world is further emphasized when Sternwood watches Marlowe drink from his wheelchair: “I sipped the drink. The old man licked his lips watching me, over and over again, drawing one lip slowly across the other with a funereal absorption, like an undertaker dry-washing his hands” (*Big* 594). This scene highlights Marlowe’s role as someone who lives “in” the world, in contrast to the transcendent position symbolized by the wheelchair.

An important aspect of Marlowe’s being in the world is his contact

with women. Marlowe is often compared to a medieval knight, but in comparing him to such figures, it is the differences rather than the similarities that are significant, as Nicol characterizes him as an “ironic knight-errant existing in a world incompatible with ‘courtly’ values” (Nicol 76). Whereas medieval knights are characterized by platonic relationships with women, Marlowe is forced to have real, physical contact with them. This relationship is vividly foreshadowed in the Sternwood mansion, where Marlowe sees a large stained-glass window depicting a knight trying to rescue a woman tied to a tree. Contrary to what is depicted, Marlowe feels that the knight is not entirely serious about saving her, and he imagines himself in the knight’s place. As John Scaggs points out, although this scene is often cited to compare Marlowe to a medieval knight, its implications are not straightforward.³⁶ Marlowe’s impression that the knight is not genuinely trying to rescue the woman reflects the traditional attitude of medieval chivalry, which is based on platonic relationships. In contrast, Marlowe’s imagination suggests that his relationship with women is inseparable from physical contact. This is immediately reinforced when he encounters Carmen, Sternwood’s younger daughter, who playfully throws herself at him: “She tilted herself toward me on her toes. She fell straight back into my arms. I had to catch her or let her crack her head on the tessellated floor” (*Big* 591). This scene demonstrates that Marlowe does not live in a mythical world of knights but rather in a world where he is forced to have physical contact with women.

Physical contact with women threatens Marlowe’s ability as a detective by placing him in a vulnerable position. After accepting

Sternwood's case, Marlowe meets Vivian, Sternwood's eldest daughter, who asks if he has been hired to search for her missing husband, Regan. In this first encounter, Marlowe describes Vivian as "trouble":

She was worth a stare. She was trouble. She was stretched out on a modernistic chaise-longue with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings. They seemed to be arranged to stare at. They were visible to the knee and one of them well beyond. The knees were dimpled, not bony and sharp. The calves were beautiful, the ankles long and slim and with enough melodic line for a tone poem. She was tall and rangy and strong-looking. Her head was against an ivory satin cushion. Her hair was black and wiry and parted in the middle and she had the hot black eyes of the portrait in the hall. She had a good mouth and a good chin. (*Big* 599)

This detailed description in Marlowe's first-person narrative suggests that Vivian could indeed be "trouble" for him. Hard-boiled fiction is typically defined by its realistic, emotionless narrative, yet Marlowe's narrative here is clearly mixed with emotion, as he uses impressions like "beautiful" and "good" alongside poetic expressions such as "with enough melodic line for a tone poem" (*Big* 599). Such emotions can easily undermine a detective's ability to judge and deduce, as an objective perspective is needed to see what is truly happening. In contrast, Sherlock Holmes, for instance, avoids contact with women precisely to maintain his sharp detective skills.

Referring to the exceptional case in which Holmes is attracted to a woman named Irene Adler, John Watson, Holmes's friend and confidant, confirms

that women can be dangerous for Holmes, as they can have a negative influence on his analytical abilities: “It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind” (“Scandal” 239). In this sense, physical contact with women can pose a critical vulnerability for Marlowe as a detective.

One might argue that Marlowe’s encounters with women serve only as a background to verify his image as the American Adam, who ultimately rejects them. It is true that Marlowe often refuses to be seduced by women, but this refusal highlights his vulnerability, which prevents him from becoming such a mythical figure. As the investigation progresses, Vivian frequently tries to contact Marlowe to learn what he has uncovered. Marlowe repeatedly keeps his distance from her:

“You’re as cold-blooded a beast as I ever met, Marlowe. Or can I call you Phil?”

“Sure.”

“You can call me Vivian.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Regan.” (*Big* 633)

When Vivian tries to address him by his first name, Marlowe pointedly calls her “Mrs. Regan,” reminding her of her status as a married woman. On the surface, this attitude may appear to confirm his innocence as an American Adam. However, as soon as Vivian leaves, Marlowe’s vulnerability is exposed: “I let the door shut and stood with my hand on it, staring at the hand. My face felt a little hot. I went back to the desk and put the whiskey away and rinsed out the two pony glasses and put them away” (*Big* 634).

What the seemingly hard-boiled narrative reveals is that Marlowe's innocence as an American Adam is always in danger of being compromised. His superficial rejection of women serves as a backdrop for exposing the vulnerability that undermines the mythical image of the detective.

Marlowe's condition of being in the world is also evident in his direct involvement with the case, which makes it impossible for him to maintain the position of an "eye." Initially, Marlowe is hired to investigate the extortion linked to Geiger. Later, upon discovering that Geiger is a dealer in pornography, Marlowe finds Geiger murdered in his house, with a naked Carmen present. What stands out in this crime scene is Marlowe's discovery of a hidden camera inside an object resembling a totem pole near Geiger's body: "It had a profile like an eagle and its wide round eye was a camera lens" (*Big* 614). Although Marlowe is supposed to act as a "private eye," here he becomes the object of seeing. This "within and without" position is further emphasized when Marlowe takes Carmen back to the Sternwood house. After asking the butler to take care of Carmen, Marlowe warns him to keep his involvement a secret: "As a matter of fact, I'm not here. You're just seeing things" (*Big* 617). Although Marlowe seems to assert his position of outside by claiming invisibility, the very act of making this claim confirms that he is being seen by the butler. Through his direct involvement in the case, Marlowe loses the transcendental position of an "eye" who views the world from the outside.

As Suwabe argues about the hard-boiled detective, Marlowe's direct involvement with the case leads to its transformation. After driving Carmen home, Marlowe returns to the crime scene only to find that the body has

disappeared. This disappearance, which occurs while he is away, indicates that his action of leaving the scene for a while has significantly impacted the case itself. Avoiding any direct expression of emotion in his hard-boiled narrative, Marlowe describes his surprise as follows: “That froze me. I pulled my lips back against my teeth and leered at the glass eye in the totem pole” (*Big* 618). The description of being physically “frozen” is suggestive, as it implies that he himself cannot fix the crime scene as a static picture in an ironical tone. Once again, although he seems to “see” the glass eye, he is instead being seen by it. As a result, he exists in a world where his actions actively transform the events taking place. Unable to determine what is happening, Marlowe is left with no choice but to drive home and go to bed. His dream that night symbolizes the impossibility of seeing the world as a fixed “picture”: “A Chinese coat chased a naked girl with long jade earrings while I ran after them and tried to take a photograph with an empty camera” (*Big* 619).

Marlowe himself admits that he is not merely an “eye,” but cannot help but transform the case. When the original investigation into extortion turns into multiple murders, Marlowe is blamed by the police for his handling of the case, and he acknowledges his mistakes:

“So all you did was not report a murder that happened last night and then spend today foxing around so that this kid of Geiger’s could commit a second murder this evening.”

“That’s all,” I said. “I was in a pretty tough spot. I guess I did wrong, but I wanted to protect my client and I hadn’t any reason to think the boy would go gunning for Brody.” (*Big* 670)

Because Marlowe does not observe the world from a transcendental position but is actively involved in it, he always has the potential to change the case. Consequently, the world is filled with events he cannot predict or control. What characterizes Marlowe as a detective is his exposure to vulnerability as a being in the world.

From Business to Trouble:

The Subversion of Identity as Detective

Generally, private detectives, especially when compared to armchair detectives, are expected to investigate cases purely as a “business.” Because they are not primarily motivated by a sense of moral righteousness or a passion for finding the truth, the business of private detectives is the antithesis of caring. What is significant about Chandler’s work, however, is that Marlowe’s involvement in cases challenges this notion of private investigation as mere business. Scaggs explains this transformation from “business” to “trouble”: “Most obviously, Marlowe rarely pursues only the case he is hired to investigate, and the core investigation of each novel is never what he is initially hired to investigate” (Scaggs 178). To borrow the title of Chandler’s short story, “Trouble Is My Business,” Marlowe’s direct involvement in cases turns his “business” into “trouble.”³⁷ This transformation fundamentally subverts the identity of the private detective, who is typically expected to remain detached from the theme of care.

The transformation from business to trouble is evident when Marlowe begins investigating Regan, whom he was not directly hired to investigate. The original extortion case seems to be resolved when it is discovered that

Geiger's murder was committed by the Sternwoods' chauffeur, who was in love with Carmen. The events are published without any mention of the Sternwoods' scandal. Sternwood, as the client, sends his butler to inform Marlowe that the case is over: "In his carefully polite manner, he said that General Sternwood was not feeling very well and that certain items in the newspaper had been read to him, and he assumed that my investigation was now completed" (*Big* 679). If the investigation were simply a business transaction, there would be no more for Marlowe to do. Marlowe himself acknowledges that it would be "smart" to end it: "The smart thing for me to do was to take another drink and forget the whole mess" (*Big* 686). Nevertheless, Marlowe begins investigating the missing Regan. He contacts Eddie Mars, a casino owner who seems to Marlowe to be connected to Regan's disappearance: "That being the obviously smart thing to do, I called Eddie Mars and told him I was coming down to Las Olindas that evening to talk to him. That was how smart I was" (*Big* 686). The smartness he refers to here is clearly sarcastic, as Marlowe himself cannot explain why he is getting involved in this new case that he does not need to engage. Since he was not officially hired to investigate this case, he cannot expect to be paid. Marlowe's investigation thus shifts from business to trouble.

The subversion of Marlowe's identity is further emphasized by the uncertainty of his motives. At his meeting with Mars, Marlowe is questioned about his lack of interest in Regan's case during the initial investigation. While Marlowe admits, "No, not professionally" (*Big* 689), he offers a rather vague reason: "But I know somebody who would like to know where he is" (*Big* 689). When Mars assumes that the "somebody" is

Vivian and replies, “She doesn’t give a damn” (*Big* 689), Marlowe clarifies, “I mean her father” (*Big* 689), indicating that he is referring to Sternwood. However, Sternwood never asked Marlowe to look for Regan; he only requested the investigation of the extortion. In fact, from the opening scene, it is clear that Vivian persistently inquired about Regan. In this sense, the “someone” Marlowe refers to is an ambiguous figure who cannot be clearly identified. Mars’s misunderstanding is thus understandable, as Marlowe himself cannot explain why he is involved in the case. His investigation is a trouble even to himself.

Marlowe’s uncertainty about his own motives highlights the hidden reality that private investigation can always be a trouble, as it requires putting oneself in the shoes of others, including culprits, to uncover the truth. This potential for trouble inevitably blurs the boundaries between investigator and investigated. Ironically, as Marlowe’s own motives become more ambiguous, he begins to understand others from the inside. A typical example is the scene in which Carmen visits Marlowe’s apartment. Carmen openly seduces Marlowe, but he decisively rejects her. At the same time, Marlowe understands what Carmen feels about the rejection, even before she does: “There was a vague glimmer of doubt starting to get born in her somewhere. She didn’t know about it yet. It’s so hard for women—even nice women—to realize that their bodies are not irresistible” (*Big* 707). Here, Marlowe describes Carmen’s inner thoughts as if they were objective facts. The phrase “in her somewhere” suggests that Marlowe is metaphorically placing himself inside her mind. This confusion between subjective conjecture and objective fact is emphasized by his comment,

“She didn’t know it yet,” (*Big* 707) indicating that he understands something beyond her own awareness. Thus, Marlowe’s uncertainty about his own motives is inseparable from his understanding of others’ inner thoughts. The business of being a private detective always has this potential for trouble, leading to the subversion of identity.

Moreover, with the confusion of his identity as a private detective, Marlowe’s self becomes a place for multiple others. During his investigations, Marlowe recalls the people he has met: “My mind drifted through waves of false memories, in which I seemed to do the same thing over and over again, go to the same places, meet the same people, say the same words to them, over and over again, and yet each time it seemed real, like something actually happening, and for the first time” (*Big* 745). In Marlowe’s mind, these people are alive with a strange sense of reality. This description is followed by a detailed recollection of Marlowe’s actual conversations with them, including direct quotes: “This is the last time, Marlowe. The next fast one you pull, I’ll throw you to the lions, no matter whose heart it breaks” (*Big* 746). In these memories, Marlowe makes no subjective judgments about them. They remain distinct as others, yet they also exist within Marlowe himself.

Care for Culprits and Victims as the Vulnerable

The conventional goal of the private detective is to uncover the truth. Then, where does Marlowe’s subversion of identity ultimately lead him? This study proposes one possible answer: care. At the beginning of his narrative, Marlowe declares, “I don’t care who knew it” (*Big* 589), along

with the conviction that “I was everything the well-dressed private detective should be” (*Big* 589). This initial attitude suggests that he presents himself as a private detective who rejects care. However, as Marlowe is forced to engage with the case as a being in the world, his work as a private detective turns into a “trouble,” radically undermining his identity. As a result, the process inevitably leads Marlowe to reconsider the question of care. Unlike the conventional image of a detective, Marlowe’s concern is not focused on discovering the truth. What he ultimately cares about are the culprits and the victims. This care is particularly striking because, in the detective fiction genre, culprits and victims are typically excluded from care. The culprits are condemned for their actions, and the victims vanish from the story through their deaths. What sets Marlowe apart is his care for the most vulnerable figures in the genre.

Marlowe’s engagement in a relationship of care is foreshadowed early on by his “insubordinate” character. As noted earlier, in his first meeting with Sternwood, Marlowe explains that he was fired from the police force for being “insubordinate” (*Big* 594). In this opening scene, Marlowe’s words seem to simply reflect his independent nature. However, when Marlowe begins searching for the missing Regan despite the closure of the extortion case, this insubordinate behavior takes on a different meaning: caring for others beyond the typical scope of private detective work as a business. When Sternwood realizes that Marlowe is looking for Regan, he warns him to stop investigating something the client did not request:

“I didn’t ask you to look for my son-in-law, Mr. Marlowe,” he said.

“You wanted me to, though.”

“I didn’t ask you to. You assume a great deal. I usually ask for what I want.”

I didn’t say anything. (*Big* 748)

Once again, Marlowe’s involvement in the case creates a radical confusion between his assumptions and the actual facts. The conversation confirms that Sternwood never explicitly asked Marlowe to search for Regan—only Marlowe believes Sternwood wanted him to. In this sense, Marlowe is clearly acting insubordinately toward Sternwood as a client. What makes this insubordination significant is that Marlowe is not acting for his own benefit. He emphasizes that the reason he is looking for Regan is out of concern for Sternwood: “You don’t know what I have to go through or over or under to do your job for you. I do it my way. I do my best to protect you, and I may break a few rules, but I break them in your favor” (*Big* 750). The phrase “in your favor” indicates that Marlowe is driven by care for Sternwood. Thus, for Marlowe, the meaning of “insubordination” shifts from independence to an expression of care.

In addition, as in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, an important aspect of care between Marlowe and Sternwood is the motif of substitution. Marlowe articulates Sternwood’s feelings about Regan on his behalf. According to Marlowe, Sternwood was angry at the possibility that Regan had betrayed him, as it appeared that Regan was interested in Vivian for her family’s fortune. Yet, at the same time, Sternwood could not help but like Regan. While initially accusing Marlowe of talking too much, Sternwood ultimately asks Marlowe to officially search for Regan, admitting that

Marlowe is correct:

“I’ll pay you another thousand dollars to find Rusty. He doesn’t have to come back. I don’t even have to know where he is. A man has a right to live his own life. I don’t blame him for walking out on my daughter, nor even for going so abruptly. It was probably a sudden impulse. I want to know it from him directly, and if he should happen to need money, I should want him to have that also. Am I clear?”

I said: “Yes, General.” (*Big 751*)

Sternwood’s question, “Am I clear?” implies that Marlowe’s insubordination leads to the revelation of Sternwood’s true feelings. Initially, the relationship between Marlowe and Sternwood was one where Marlowe experienced what Sternwood could not, as suggested by the motif of cigarettes and alcohol in their first meeting. This relationship evolves into care, similar to what takes place in *The Great Gatsby*.

One might argue that Marlowe’s insubordination becoming an official case represents a regression from care to business. However, Marlowe’s primary focus is far from earning money to make a living. What truly matters to him is his relationship with Vivian. Marlowe’s investigation ultimately uncovers the truth behind the series of events. First, Carmen, due to her mental instability, seduced her brother-in-law, Regan. When he rejected her, she lost control and killed him. Upon discovering that her sister had murdered her husband, Vivian hid the body to protect their father from the devastating truth. In other words, Vivian did not approach Marlowe to find her missing husband; rather, she aimed to keep Marlowe

from discovering his body. When Marlowe reveals this hidden truth, Vivian offers him fifteen thousand dollars as hush money, fearing that her father would be unable to cope with the revelation that one of his daughters had committed murder. Marlowe indirectly rejects the offer: “Uh-huh. I’m a very smart guy. I haven’t a feeling or a scruple in the world. All I have the itch for is money. I am so money greedy that for twenty-five bucks a day and expenses, mostly gasoline and whiskey, I do my thinking myself, what there is of it” (*Big* 761). Needless to say, Marlowe’s claim of being “money greedy” is a sarcastic remark, highlighting that he is not obsessed with money, as emphasized by the contrast with “twenty-five bucks a day and expenses” (*Big* 761). By this point, Marlowe’s relationship with Vivian has moved far beyond a business transaction. Furthermore, Marlowe tells her to think of him if she faces any trouble in the future. Once again, his offer is not motivated by financial gain: “. . . if you have any more trouble, I hope you’ll think of me. I’ll just leave one of my cards in case anything comes up. I do all this for twenty-five bucks a day—and maybe just a little to protect what little pride a broken and sick old man has left in his blood . . .” (*Big* 761). Marlowe shares Vivian’s concern for her father’s health, a matter that is unrelated to his role as a private detective working for a living.

Marlowe’s attitude toward Vivian should be understood as an act of care, according to his own words. When Marlowe reveals the truth, Vivian angrily calls him “a son of a bitch” (*Big* 761), mistakenly assuming his motive is money. Marlowe responds, using the word “care”: “And that makes me a son of a bitch. All right. I don’t care” (*Big* 762). Here, the

phrase “I don’t care” carries a completely different meaning from its usage in the opening scene. Before becoming involved in the series of cases, the phrase represented Marlowe’s rejection of care in favor of his ideal of the detached private detective. Through his involvement in the case, the phrase transforms, signifying the exact opposite, as he now cares for her by unsettling his identity as a private detective.

What makes Marlowe unique is his care even for Carmen, who is ostensibly the “culprit” in the case. In conventional detective stories, which focus on uncovering the truth, culprits like Carmen would be reported to the police for the murder they committed, placing them in the most vulnerable position and open to criticism. However, Marlowe is concerned with Carmen’s vulnerability behind the crime. Acknowledging that Carmen is mentally ill, he suggests that Vivian send her to a hospital where she can be properly cared for: “Will you take her away? Somewhere far off from here where they can handle her type, where they will keep guns and knives and fancy drinks away from her? Hell, she might even get herself cured, you know” (*Big* 762). This suggestion notably differs from how conventional detective stories deal with criminals. By suggesting the possibility that Carmen might be cured, Marlowe continues to share Vivian’s concern for her sister, even though she is the criminal. This inevitably means that Marlowe becomes somewhat of an accomplice, a fact of which he is fully aware. As he leaves the Sternwood mansion, he senses someone watching him: “Outside, the bright gardens had a haunted look, as though small wild eyes were watching me from behind the bushes, as though the sunshine itself had a mysterious something in its light” (*Big*

763). Given that private detectives are often called “private eyes,” this recognition of someone else’s gaze underscores the radical transformation of Marlowe as a detective. Originally, detectives are meant to be the “eyes,” observing and understanding the world from a detached, external perspective. Deprived of this transcendental position, Marlowe is now in the position of the observed. Far from the conventional role of the private eye, Marlowe here becomes fully identified with the culprit.

The care for the vulnerable in detective fiction extends even to the dead, the victims of the cases. As Marlowe leaves the Sternwood house, his thoughts turn to the body of the dead Regan, buried by Vivian in the Sternwood oil field. Although Marlowe knows that, now the truth has been revealed, he no longer needs to dwell on it, he still finds himself caring:

What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that. Oil and water were the same as wind and air to you. You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell. (*Big* 764)

Ironically, Marlowe’s reflection on the meaninglessness of caring about the dead reveals that he cannot help but care. His attitude starkly contrasts with how the dead are typically treated in conventional detective fiction: “Me, I was part of the nastiness now. Far more a part of it than Rusty Regan was” (*Big* 764). In addition to identifying with the criminal, Marlowe also aligns himself with the dead.

Ultimately, Marlowe embodies a care for vulnerability that transcends

the identities of detective, client, culprit, and victim. After identifying with Regan, Marlowe's thoughts turn back to his first client, Sternwood. On the one hand, Marlowe notes that Sternwood has not yet become "part of the nastiness." On the other hand, he recognizes that Sternwood, like Regan, is doomed to die: "He could lie quiet in his canopied bed, with his bloodless hands folded on the sheet, waiting. His heart was a brief, uncertain murmur. His thoughts were as gray as ashes. And in a little while he too, like Rusty Regan, would be sleeping the big sleep" (*Big* 764). While the fact that everyone is doomed to die is simple, its revelation in detective fiction is significant because the genre is typically indifferent to this primal vulnerability. In general, detective fiction uses death as a motif to market itself, as Chandler sarcastically notes: "It is not funny that a man should be killed, but it is sometimes funny that he should be killed for so little, and that his death should be the coin of what we call civilization" ("Simple" 991). Marlowe can be seen as a detective who recognizes this vulnerability, a vulnerability often overlooked in detective fiction. The detective business as trouble ultimately compels Marlowe to care for radical vulnerability itself.

Conclusion

Echoing Fitzgerald's works, Chandler's *The Big Sleep* can be seen as a key text for reconsidering the male modernist subject. As a representative figure of the private detective, Philip Marlowe initially appears to embody the typical isolated individual, evoking the image of "one's own boss" and the American Adam. However, this general image of the private detective is radically questioned by Marlowe's problematic standpoint, marked by a

confusion between inside and outside, reflecting Chandler's characteristic concern for "the world" in detective fiction. Marlowe is deprived of the ability to grasp the world as a fixed picture, forcing him into what Heidegger calls "being in the world." Despite his efforts to uncover the truth about the cases he investigates, he is compelled to engage "in" them, which brings about the possibility of transforming the case itself. This condition of being in the world exposes Marlowe's vulnerability as a detective, shifting his engagement with the cases from business to trouble. In turn, this trouble subverts the very identity of the private detective. What makes Marlowe distinct is that this vulnerability does not mean a failure of his investigation. Rather, it enables him to care for the vulnerable—not only his clients but also the culprits and victims, who are generally excluded from the world of detective fiction. Contrary to the popular image of the private detective, *The Big Sleep* presents vulnerability as the beginning of care and as part of being in the world.

Chapter Four

“A Man with No Home”:

Temporal Vulnerability and Care in the Private Realm

in Raymond Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye*

Introduction

Given that the purpose of this study is to explore the theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care in modernist literature, it is necessary to pose the same question to Chandler as to Fitzgerald: Is *The Big Sleep* an exception for Chandler in its exploration of this theme? This question is particularly noteworthy because Chandler did not stop writing stories featuring Philip Marlowe as the protagonist after *The Big Sleep* but continued the series.³³ This is worth considering, as Marlowe’s vulnerability in *The Big Sleep* radically subverts his identity as a private detective—one who must be his own boss in a world where he is constantly exposed to the possibility of death. Is it possible for Marlowe to remain a private detective while being vulnerable?

The Long Goodbye, published in 1953 as one of the later works in the Marlowe series, sheds light on this question by introducing another aspect of his vulnerability as a being in the world: what Janna Thompson calls “temporal vulnerability.” One notable difference between *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye* is that, while Marlowe is 33 years old in the former, he is 42 years old in the latter. Although it is a simple fact that people age, this portrayal of the protagonist’s aging is unique in the genre of hard-boiled fiction because, as Marlowe himself states in *The Long Goodbye*,

private detectives are supposed to be “tough” (*Long* 423). The aging process strips him of this supposed toughness, making it increasingly difficult for him to remain his own boss. Consequently, this temporal vulnerability inevitably forces Marlowe to confront the question of care. This becomes a particularly critical issue for Marlowe as a private detective, since Chandler defines him as “a man with no home,” a place of care in the aging process.

This chapter examines Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye* as a work that explores the question of care in the private realm through temporal vulnerability. Marlowe is faced with the necessity of “home” as a place of care when confronted with his temporal vulnerability. What characterizes Marlowe is his refusal to accept this conventional place of care. As a private detective, Marlowe instead engages with those who are rejected from home. Through temporal vulnerability, Marlowe demonstrates care in the private realm.

The Process of Aging and the Question of Home:

The Great Gatsby and *The Long Goodbye*

The Long Goodbye tells the story of Marlowe’s relationship with a man named Terry Lennox. Marlowe first meets Lennox, drunk and rejected by his supposed girlfriend, in a bar. He helps Lennox by driving him back to his apartment. Even when they first meet, Marlowe feels somehow drawn to Lennox, though he does not understand why. Although they soon become friends, Lennox suddenly remarries the girlfriend Marlowe had seen at the bar, who turns out to be Sylvia Potter, the daughter of a wealthy man named

Harlan Potter. While Marlowe feels distanced from Lennox, one day Lennox unexpectedly visits Marlowe's apartment with a gun in hand. Realizing that Lennox is involved in a crime, Marlowe helps him escape to Mexico. Later, Sylvia is found dead, and Marlowe becomes entangled with the police, the Potters, and local gangs. During the investigation, news arrives that Lennox had committed suicide in Mexico. The police conclude that Lennox is responsible for his wife's murder, but Marlowe, unsatisfied with the official conclusion, continues his investigation. While Marlowe struggles to find any clues, another client, a woman named Eileen Wade, approaches him with a strange request to protect her alcoholic husband, Roger, from committing suicide. As Marlowe gets involved with the couple, a surprising truth emerges: both Eileen and Roger had connections to Lennox and Sylvia in the past. Roger eventually dies in an apparent suicide, seemingly implicating him in Sylvia's murder. However, it is ultimately revealed that Eileen is the real killer. Marlowe discovers that she had once been Lennox's lover and, unable to accept his marriage into a wealthy family, killed Sylvia.

The Long Goodbye is significant for this study due to its resemblance to Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, as noted by scholars. One notable interpretation comes from Haruki Murakami, who translated both works into Japanese. Referring to Chandler's respect for Fitzgerald, Murakami asserts that Marlowe's relationship with Lennox closely mirrors Nick's relationship with Gatsby. Like Gatsby, Lennox is connected to underground activities and ultimately becomes a substitute for his ex-lover. Murakami's interpretation of Marlowe's ambiguous attitude toward Lennox strongly

resonates with this study's exploration of care that begins with vulnerability: "Marlowe fully acknowledges Terry Lennox's personal weaknesses, the darkness behind them, and his moral decadence. Nevertheless, he befriends him. Marlowe's spirit has a deep connection with Terry Lennox" (Murakami, my trans.; 613). Murakami also points out that both works feature a blurring of identity between subject and object within their first-person narratives, which connects to this study's exploration of care in *The Great Gatsby* in Chapter One.

This chapter further develops the resemblance between the two works in terms of vulnerability as it relates to time. *The Great Gatsby* can be seen as a precursor to *The Long Goodbye*, presenting the theme of vulnerability through the motif of time. When Nick becomes anxious that Gatsby is too deeply involved in his relationship with Daisy, he warns, "You can't repeat the past" (*Gatsby* 72). Gatsby quickly replies, "Why of course you can!" (*Gatsby* 72), adding, "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before" (*Gatsby* 73). As discussed in Chapter One, the verb "fix" is suggestive here, as Gatsby denies the inevitability of change brought about by the passage of time. Unsurprisingly, Gatsby's attempt to "fix everything" ends tragically. Nick understands the futility of Gatsby's endeavor because he realizes that everyone is subject to the flow of time, as reflected in his own thoughts on aging: "Thirty—the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair" (*Gatsby* 88). With Gatsby's failure and Nick's recognition of time's effects, *The Great Gatsby* portrays the fact that we cannot fix time.

This vulnerability inevitably leads *The Great Gatsby* to confront the question of home. Gatsby's belief that he can repeat the past is entirely incompatible with the reality that Daisy has a "home." Nick notices Gatsby's confusion when he meets Daisy's child: "Gatsby and I in turn leaned down and took the small reluctant hand. Afterward, he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before" (*Gatsby* 76). For Gatsby, who believes he can recreate the past, Daisy's child is a shocking reminder that she now belongs to a different reality—one with a family of her own. Gatsby's disconnect from the idea of home is further emphasized when Nick describes him as someone who "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (*Gatsby* 65). The term "Platonic," along with "of himself," suggests a detachment from physical relationships, placing Gatsby outside the flow of time in which Daisy lives, a time where people age and create homes of their own.

On the one hand, *The Great Gatsby* certainly presents home as a place of care for the vulnerable. After Daisy causes the hit-and-run accident, Nick finds Gatsby secretly watching the Buchanan household. Gatsby tells Nick that he is watching to see if Tom will do anything to Daisy. Ironically, contrary to Gatsby's fears, Nick discovers Tom and Daisy sitting at a kitchen table that evokes a strong sense of home:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table with a plate of cold fried chicken between them and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in

agreement.

They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale—and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together. (*Gatsby* 94)

Despite the problematic relationship between Tom and Daisy with Tom's affair, this "unmistakable air of natural intimacy" presents a home where Tom cares for Daisy in her vulnerable state, as she faces the possibility of being accused as the driver who killed the victim. Although Gatsby waits outside, believing Daisy will need his protection, it is Tom who provides her with care. The contrast between the Buchanans' home and Gatsby's lonely vigil outside highlights the meaning of home as a place of care.³⁹

On the other hand, what truly characterizes *The Great Gatsby* is its presentation of an alternative possibility of care: care outside the home. While this study begins by reading *The Great Gatsby* as a story of care in Chapter One, care outside the home can be seen in the scene of Gatsby's funeral. One might argue that this scene shows Gatsby does, in fact, have a home as a place of care because his father attends the funeral. However, it is notable that Gatsby's father consistently calls him "Jimmy," the nickname for "James Gatz," which is the name he rejected at seventeen to become "Jay Gatsby." In this sense, the father cares not for Jay Gatsby but for James Gatz. This care is emphasized when he shows Nick a book containing Gatsby's schedule, including an item titled "GENERAL RESOLVES," written before Gatsby changed his name. The schedule, which

parodies Benjamin Franklin's self-improvement scheme, leads the father to proudly remark, "Jimmy was bound to get ahead" (*Gatsby* 112). The father's expectations for "Jimmy" are entirely at odds with the life Gatsby leads as "Gatsby," particularly since Gatsby has rejected one of his own "GENERAL RESOLVES": "Be better to parents" (*Gatsby* 112).⁴⁰ Against this backdrop of a lack of care within the home, Nick demonstrates the possibility of care outside the home. He observes that no one, apart from Gatsby's father, attends the funeral. Aware of the minister's concern about when to begin the ceremony, Nick asks him to wait half an hour, but it is in vain: "But it wasn't any use. Nobody came" (*Gatsby* 112). At first glance, in contrast to the father's care for "Jimmy," this appears to indicate that no one cares for Gatsby as "Gatsby." However, Nick's observation that "nobody came" to Gatsby's funeral signifies that Nick himself cares for Gatsby, as he had previously stated, "I found myself on Gatsby's side, and alone" (*Gatsby* 105). Thus, the funeral scene foregrounds the relationship between Nick and Gatsby as a care outside the home.

This chapter explores *The Long Goodbye* in terms of this question of temporal vulnerability as a beginning of care outside the home. An important feature of this later work in the Marlowe series is that it challenges the image of the private detective as his own boss. With a clear reference to his age, Marlowe asks himself a question about living alone at this stage of his life: "I am forty-two years old. I'm spoiled by independence" (*Long* 720). Picking up on this reference to his age, John T. Irwin argues that the aging process can be a serious problem in the private

detective genre. According to Irwin, it presents a radical challenge to the American ideal of individualism:

As anyone who has lived past a certain age in the United States knows, philosophies of self-sufficiency are one thing at high noon in bright sunshine when you are twenty-five or thirty, but a far different thing at three A.M. when one is about to be jettisoned into the penultimate void of retirement. (Irwin, *Unless* 58–59)

Indeed, the private detective genre has typically obscured the fact of aging, as Marlowe himself says in the opening scene, “I’m supposed to be tough” (*Long* 423). If a private detective is supposed to be a man who lives independently without a family, he can only do so as long as he is enough to be “tough” against the aging process. As Irwin notes, what makes *The Long Goodbye* unique is that it confronts this question of time, a hidden fact of the genre of hard-boiled fiction.

Confronting the reality of aging can easily be linked to what Janna Thompson calls “temporal vulnerability” in relation to the broader theme of vulnerability. Thompson uses the phrase “being in time” to highlight the obvious, yet often overlooked, condition that we are always in time with the impossibility of remaining unchanged. She defines this condition as “temporal vulnerability.” Although Thompson’s essay limits the discussion of temporal vulnerability to intergenerational relationships, she notes that it can manifest in various ways: “Temporal vulnerability could also mean being subject to the unforeseeable events of the future: to fortune and the fickle finger of fate” (Thompson 163). The process of aging in *The Long*

Goodbye can be seen as one such example, especially as it unsettles the toughness that defines Marlowe as a private detective.

This temporal vulnerability inevitably disrupts the identity of the self-made man that the private detective is meant to embody. It is striking that the disruption of identity in *The Long Goodbye* is subtly foreshadowed through a reference to Fitzgerald. When Marlowe watches Roger in request from Eileen, Marlowe finds a curious note in which Roger mentions Fitzgerald, strangely identifying himself with Fitzgerald: “Signed: Roger (F. Scott Fitzgerald) Wade. P.S. This is why I never finished *The Last Tycoon*” (*Long* 506). *The Last Tycoon* was Fitzgerald’s final work, left unfinished due to his death at the age of 44. Despite the subject “I,” the sentence “I never finished” here conveys the fact that the death prevented the completion of the work. The “I” is a being in time, being subject to an unpredictable future. Roger’s peculiar signature suggests that this temporal vulnerability is directly tied to a confusion of identity. The strange sign “Roger (F. Scott Fitzgerald) Wade” blurs the distinction between Roger and Fitzgerald, implying that identity is always in flux as it changes over time. In fact, Roger’s final writing, which Marlowe discovers just before Eileen murders him, is fragmentary and unfinished: “Getting very bad, very, very . . .” (*Long* 589). Roger, like Fitzgerald, shares temporal vulnerability in that neither was able to complete their final works by their own will.

In relation to the theme of care, temporal vulnerability in the life of a private detective raises questions about the role of the “private” realm, especially in connection to the question of “home.” Generally, home is considered an essential place of care for those who live in time, as aging

makes independent living increasingly difficult. Contrary to this traditional image, *The Long Goodbye* does not present home as a solution to temporal vulnerability. In the latter part of the story, Marlowe's relationship with Linda Loring, Sylvia's sister, deepens to the point where she offers to marry him. Marlowe rejects her offer, explaining that he cannot sustain a married life. This rejection of home raises a question, given his position as a private detective, which, as the adjective "private" clearly suggests, should involve engagement with the private realm. Generally speaking, home is easily identified with the private realm in contrast to the public realm. However, Marlowe is distanced not only from the public realm—as mentioned in the previous chapter, he was fired from his job as an investigator under the district attorney for insubordination—but also from the home. What, then, does the private realm mean for Marlowe? To explore this question, Hannah Arendt's discussion of the private realm provides a useful perspective. Arendt highlights the etymological fact that the term "private" initially meant "deprived" in contrast to "public," though modern people no longer think of this meaning, "due to the enormous enrichment of the private sphere through modern individualism" (Arendt 38). From this original sense of deprivation, Arendt defines "private" as follows:

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an "objective" relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the

possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself. The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people. (Arendt 58)

When Marlowe rejects having a home, he deprives himself of the “possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself” (Arendt 58). His rejection of both the public realm and the home leaves him existing solely in the “private realm,” in the sense that Arendt describes.

While Arendt’s definition of privacy as deprivation evokes a world without care—“Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people” (Arendt 58)—what makes Marlowe stand out as a private detective is his practice of care within this private realm. He consistently emphasizes that, while the home is a primary place of care, there are temporally vulnerable individuals who are excluded from it. As a private detective, Marlowe explores a new possibility of care in the private realm outside of the conventional home.

“The World We Live in” when Chandler Wrote *The Long Goodbye*

As discussed in the previous chapter, for Chandler, detective fiction is a genre that should depict “the world we live in” with a sense of real experience, rather than merely serving as an intellectual game. Therefore,

to understand *The Long Goodbye*, it is necessary to consider what “the world we live in” meant to Chandler at the time of its writing. Notably, Chandler was deeply engaged with the question of home in relation to temporal vulnerability at that time. Unlike Marlowe, who remains single in line with the typical image of a private detective, Chandler married a woman named Cissy before beginning his career as a professional writer. During the period when he was writing *The Long Goodbye*, Cissy’s health deteriorated, and Chandler took on the responsibility of caring for her. Indeed, shortly after *The Long Goodbye* was published, Cissy passed away, and Chandler lamented that he had become “a man with no home” (Day 3). The motif of time in *The Long Goodbye* is inseparable from the “world” Chandler lived in, marked by the loss of his home due to temporal vulnerability.

Cissy’s declining health was a critical event for Chandler, forcing him to confront the simple truth that no one is exempt from temporal vulnerability. Originally, Cissy had been the mother of Chandler’s friend and also a friend of Chandler’s own mother. She was the same age as Chandler’s mother, and she lied about her age when they decided to marry, which can be interpreted as a kind of resistance against temporal vulnerability.⁴¹ However, this resistance was destined to fail, as Cissy’s health continued to decline. Chandler had to adapt his daily routine, taking on household chores to care for her. Judith Freeman describes this change: “She went from being a wife who offered a lot of sexual enticement to her much younger husband to being a wife who was infirm and required his constant care, whom he nursed assiduously through the abominable anarchy

of old age” (Freeman 4). Chandler himself acknowledged the inevitable passage of time, as he wrote in a note to his secretary: “I’ve got to face the fact that Cissy hasn’t got any stamina . . . she’s never going to get back to where she once was” (Williams 346).

Chandler’s confrontation with temporal vulnerability is further underscored by his failed resistance to the passage of time. Although he and Cissy had no children, they had a black Persian cat named Taki, whom they cherished for about twenty years. During Cissy’s decline, Taki passed away from old age, another reminder for Chandler of life’s inability to resist time: “We were a bit broken up over the death of our black Persian cat, aged almost twenty years” (Williams 340). In response, Chandler tried to recreate the past by purchasing another black Persian cat resembling Taki, even giving it the same name. Tom Williams interprets this as an attempt to recreate the time when Cissy was still vibrant: “Ray was trying to recreate the atmosphere of 1932, a time when the world was still open before him and Cissy was able to hold his hand as they made their way through it” (Williams 349). This attempt also failed, as Cissy could not return to her previous condition. Cissy passed away the year after *The Long Goodbye* was published in 1953. For Chandler, writing the novel was deeply tied to his inability to resist the passage of time.

Chandler’s temporal vulnerability was further exposed by his failed suicide attempt. After Cissy’s death, Chandler became increasingly dependent on alcohol and began hinting to his relatives and friends that he might take his own life. Eventually, while his secretary was momentarily distracted, Chandler attempted suicide with a gun in the bathroom. The first

bullet missed, and the second misfired, saving his life. This failed attempt reinforced Chandler's sense of temporal vulnerability. Just as he had no control over Cissy's death, he had no control over his own, either. In fact, Chandler had only vague memories of what happened when he was hospitalized afterward. His lack of control over his own death is a further reflection of his vulnerability to time.

The events surrounding Chandler's temporal vulnerability inevitably led him to confront the question of home. After his suicide attempt, he became dependent on friends and relatives and was eventually taken to a sanatorium. In contrast to the image of a private detective living independently, the loss of Cissy left Chandler unable to live without the support of others. In retrospect, Chandler confessed that Cissy had been essential to his life: "For thirty years, ten months and four days, she was the light of my life, my whole ambition. Anything else I did was just the fire for her to warm her hands at" (*Raymond* 205). Chandler's use of the word "life" is significant, as for him, detective fiction was a genre that should depict "the authentic flavor of life as it is lived" ("Simple" 986). His confession reveals that the question of home was central to his life, in stark contrast to the typical image of the private detective who remains single and self-sufficient. In a letter to his friend Neil Morgan, Chandler admitted that what troubled him most after Cissy's death was the loss of home: "My health has been bad, and every doctor finds something else the matter with me. But what is really the matter with me is that I have no home, and no one to care for in a home, if I had one" (*Raymond* 218). Here, Chandler diverges from the image of the private detective as his own boss.

Instead, he exposes the necessity of home as a place of care for those vulnerable to time.

Certainly, Chandler's letter to Morgan appears to indicate that the issue of home for Chandler is simply that he has lost it. However, what is important is that it also implicitly suggests a possibility beyond this simple loss: care outside the home. On one hand, Chandler's confession may seem like mere lamentation over losing the care of his family members, as he now finds himself a man with no home. On the other hand, what should not be overlooked is that he cannot express this loss without Morgan, a friend who was not a family member of Chandler's. In other words, the fact that Chandler lamented this loss to his friend shows that he still maintained a relationship of care. Indeed, Morgan visited Chandler in the hospital after his suicide attempt and provided him with continuous care.⁴² While Chandler mourned the loss of home as a place of care, he was simultaneously experiencing care outside the home.

One might argue that Chandler encountered this care outside home only after publishing *The Long Goodbye*. However, it is undeniable that the realization that Cissy was inevitably approaching death greatly influenced Chandler's writing during this time. As Williams points out, what distinguishes *The Long Goodbye* from Chandler's earlier works is that "the central murder in the story, that of Sylvia Lennox, happens offstage" (Williams 364), and the truth is revealed only tangentially through Marlowe's relationship with Lennox. Since Marlowe does not play a major role as the investigator in the case, *The Long Goodbye* lacks the mystery typically expected in detective fiction. As a result, the focus of the novel

shifts toward the human relationships rather than the mystery itself. Chandler acknowledged this shift: “I didn’t care whether the mystery was fairly obvious, but I cared about the people, about this strange corrupt world we live in, and how any man who tries to be honest looks in the end either sentimental or plain foolish” (Day 220). This chapter explores the idea that Chandler’s care for “the people” and “this strange corrupt world” cannot be reduced to typical images of detective fiction, such as moral corruption or violence. Instead, what Chandler implies can be interpreted as temporal vulnerability, which he himself experienced. In linking Chandler’s world he lived to his writing, *The Long Goodbye* reveals the possibility of care outside the home.

Marlowe’s Temporal Vulnerability

At first glance, the theme of vulnerability is more evident in *The Long Goodbye* than in *The Big Sleep*. For instance, after being beaten by the police, Marlowe is told by a lawyer, “You’re in a pretty vulnerable business” (*Long* 477). In another example, when Marlowe meets Lennox, he immediately notices the scar on Lennox’s face. Both lexically and visually, the story emphasizes that Marlowe is exposed to the possibility of being easily wounded. However, this easily recognizable physical vulnerability tends to obscure a deeper, more significant kind of vulnerability: temporal vulnerability. What distinguishes *The Long Goodbye* from other Marlowe stories is its clear reference to aging, foregrounding this temporal vulnerability.

Temporal vulnerability is foreshadowed early on, in Marlowe’s first

encounter with Lennox. When Marlowe sees Lennox with Sylvia in a bar, he first describes Lennox's gray hair: "He had a young-looking face, but his hair was bone white" (*Long* 419). In contrast to his youthful appearance, Lennox's white hair highlights the impression that he is aging. When Lennox begins to argue with Sylvia, she points out that he has changed. Sylvia proposes they take a drive in a convertible she thinks is at his house, but Lennox admits he has already sold it. In response, Sylvia looks at him with disdain and mocks his British accent when he gets drunk. As the story unfolds, it is revealed that Lennox once lived a wealthy life in England but has since fallen on hard times. Lennox's white hair symbolizes his change as a being in time.

The fact that Lennox is a being in time is central to Eileen's motive for murdering Sylvia. The story culminates with Eileen committing suicide, leaving a note revealing that she was Lennox's former lover in England and could not forgive him for remarrying Sylvia. She laments that Lennox had changed: "He came back a friend of gamblers, the husband of a rich whore, a spoiled and ruined man, and probably some kind of crook in his past life. Time makes everything mean and shabby and wrinkled" (*Long* 693). Eileen's lament underscores that time completely transforms his identity. With Lennox's gray hair as a symbol, the entire series of events about Lennox conveys this theme of temporal vulnerability.

Although the impossibility of remaining the same over time may seem like a simple fact, it carries significant implications for the detective genre, where private detectives must suppress this fact as long as they are supposed to remain "tough." In Marlowe's first encounter with Lennox,

while Marlowe sees that Lennox cannot get home without his help, he tries to distinguish himself from Lennox by saying, “I’m supposed to be tough” (*Long* 423). Marlowe’s need to affirm his toughness is understandable, as it is required for him to survive as a private detective in a world that is filled with physical violence. However, his use of the phrase “supposed to be” suggests that his toughness is not a given fact but a belief he must assert, implying that he is vulnerable to losing it over time. This vulnerability is further hinted at when Marlowe rents a house from an aging woman who struggles with stairs: “She was getting too old to face them every time she came home” (*Long* 422). While Marlowe’s current ability to climb the stairs contrasts with the woman’s aging, the fact that he is living in her house suggests an implicit connection between them. This implies that Marlowe may eventually face the same difficulties of aging. Beneath his apparent boast of toughness lies an inconvenient truth: even private detectives cannot remain tough forever.

In fact, Marlowe’s belief that he must remain tough is gradually undermined by the passage of time. When he first sees Lennox, Marlowe assumes that he will not see him again: “There was no reason why I should ever see him again” (*Long* 423). Contrary to this expectation, Marlowe accidentally runs into Lennox, this time finding him severely drunk to the extent that the police are questioning him: “The something was Terry Lennox—or what was left of him—and that little was not too attractive” (*Long* 424). On the surface, Marlowe’s description reflects how much Lennox has changed since their first meeting, but more importantly, it signals that Marlowe himself has changed over time. Despite initially

believing that Lennox was not his concern, Marlowe intervenes to help him out of the police's questioning. Furthermore, Marlowe admits that he will continue to be involved with Lennox: "A feeling that next time I'll find you in worse trouble than I can get you out of. I don't know just why I have the feeling, but I have it" (*Long* 427). When Marlowe observes Lennox's changes, what unfolds at the same time is Marlowe's own transformation. Despite his belief in toughness, this change reveals that Marlowe is also subject to temporal vulnerability.

The theme of time is evident in Marlowe's identification with Lennox as being in time. One example of their similarity is their gray hair. When Marlowe is taken to a prison cell as a prime suspect in Sylvia's murder, the night captain describes him with a reference to his gray hair: "Hair dark brown, some gray" (*Long* 460). This mixture of gray hair in his originally dark brown hair points to the fact that Marlowe, like Lennox, is subject to the passage of time. This is further emphasized in the second half of the story with a quote from T. S. Eliot's poem: "I grow old ... I grow old ... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled" (*Long* 715). When asked what the poem means, Marlowe shows no interest and simply replies, "Not a bloody thing" (*Long* 715), just as he boasts of his toughness earlier in the story. However, Marlowe's identical trait to Lennox ironically demonstrates that the simple fact of "getting old" is indeed "a bloody thing" for him as a private detective, as it puts his toughness in jeopardy.

Marlowe's inseparability from temporal vulnerability is most evident in his constant preoccupation with death. While death is a familiar motif in the hard-boiled fiction genre, often used to create an atmosphere of

physical violence, what sets *The Long Goodbye* apart from conventional hard-boiled fiction is that Marlowe's obsession with death is unrelated to physical violence. For Marlowe, death is simply something that comes with time. In the previous chapter, this study explored Marlowe's vulnerability as a being in the world by borrowing the concept of "Dasein," which is translated into English as "being in the world," from Martin Heidegger. What is significant is that this concept of being in the world is deeply intertwined with an attitude toward facing death. As Boris Groys explains, while it appears to be a spatial notion, it also has a strong temporal dimension in relation to death: "The Dasein knows that its existence is endangered by death, that its world can disappear—so Dasein has the angst of death" (Groys 69). In this sense, *The Long Goodbye* reinforces an attitude toward death originally embedded in the character of being in the world.

An impressive example of this occurs when Marlowe returns home alone during the investigation. Although Marlowe should be safe at home with no threat of physical violence, he senses the presence of death: "I seemed to hear a steady ticking somewhere, but there wasn't anything in the house to tick. The ticking was in my head. I was a one-man death watch" (*Long* 683). Here, Marlowe perceives death simply because it is inscribed in time. By comparing himself to a death watch, Marlowe foregrounds his temporal vulnerability as a being toward death.

The Question of Home

For Marlowe, confronting temporal vulnerability inevitably raises

another question that unsettles his identity as a private detective: the question of home. If a private detective is his own boss, he must be independent not only from any group but also from any family members. In this sense, family can threaten his identity because it undermines the condition of being one's own boss. Chandler himself described his later life as being "a man with no home": "What is really the matter with me is that I have no home and no one to care for in a home, if I had one" (Day 3). Similarly, Marlowe's background is rarely mentioned in his narrative, except in his response to Linda's proposal: "I am forty-two years old. I'm spoiled by independence" (*Long* 720). Here, by "independence," Marlowe means that, like a typical private detective, he has no home. *The Long Goodbye* engages Marlowe with the question of home because temporal vulnerability reveals that he cannot remain tough forever. Despite the identity of a man with no home, what characterizes Marlowe is his confrontation with this hidden question in the genre.

The necessity of home for being in time is foreshadowed by Marlowe's living situation. As previously mentioned, in *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe rents a house from the older woman: "It was furnished, and it belonged to a woman who had gone to Idaho to live with her widowed daughter for a while" (*Long* 423). The fact that the woman is older and her daughter is a widow starkly reminds us that everyone is a being in time, highlighting the need for a home to care for those who cannot live alone. This implication is scattered throughout descriptions of the house. When Marlowe takes the drunken Lennox to the rented house, he notes that it was originally intended for family use: "I went out to my kitchen and cooked up

some Canadian bacon and scrambled eggs and coffee and toast. We ate in the breakfast nook. The house belonged to the period that always had one” (*Long* 427). While the first sentence with the subject “I” shows that Marlowe can take care of himself, the following sentences with the subject “we” suggest that the house is designed for a family sharing meals. The seemingly strange setting of a private detective renting a house meant for family use foreshadows the question of home that Marlowe must face throughout the story.

Marlowe exhibits ambivalence toward home. Throughout his narrative, he occasionally questions his lifestyle, even envisioning an alternate life with a family:

The other part of me wanted to get out and stay out, but this was the part I never listened to. Because if I ever had I would have stayed in the town where I was born and worked in the hardware store and married the boss’s daughter and had five kids and read them the funny paper on Sunday morning and smacked their heads when they got out of line and squabbled with the wife about how much spending money they were to get and what programs they could have on the radio or TV set. I might even have got rich—small-town rich, an eight-room house, two cars in the garage, chicken every Sunday and the *Reader’s Digest* on the living room table, the wife with a cast iron permanent and me with a brain like a sack of Portland cement. You take it, friend. I’ll take the big sordid dirty crooked city. (*Long* 625)

This fantasy reveals Marlowe’s ambiguous obsession with home. He seems

to have a negative attitude toward it, saying, “I never listened to” the other part of him. Nonetheless, the overly detailed description of an imaginary family suggests that it remains in him as a vivid image. The command “You take it, friend” ironically conveys his difficulty dismissing this image through his willpower alone.

Marlowe’s ambivalence toward home is also evident in the transformation of his relationships with women. Toward the end of the story, after rejecting Linda’s marriage proposal, Marlowe is left alone in his room and removes the sheets to remake the bed. As Irwin points out, this act of making the bed can be seen as a repetition of his behavior in *The Big Sleep*.⁴³ It symbolizes Marlowe’s rejection of family life to maintain his identity as a private detective, who continues to live independently. What is striking, however, is that *The Long Goodbye* differs from *The Big Sleep* in that it makes Marlowe’s struggle with marriage more visible. In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe describes making the bed by focusing only on what he does: “I put my empty glass down and tore the bed to pieces savagely” (*Big* 709). In *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe describes not only what he does but also how he feels: “I went back up the steps and into the bedroom and pulled the bed to pieces and remade it. There was a long dark hair on one of the pillows. There was a lump of lead at the pit of my stomach” (*Long* 722). The “lump of lead” in his stomach is an apt metaphor for the “weight” of the question of home for Marlowe, now 42 years old. Given this weight, the line he utters immediately afterward, “To say goodbye is to die a little” (*Long* 722), takes on a more complex meaning than simply expressing the pain of parting. For the aging Marlowe, rejecting connections with others

may feel like “dying.” In *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe’s relationship with women is thus closely intertwined with the question of home.

Toward Care in the Private Realm

As Marlowe rejects the marriage proposal, the necessity of a home for addressing temporal vulnerability does not lead him to create one for himself. Instead, he demonstrates the possibility of a different kind of care within the private realm, which he must engage as a private detective. For Marlowe, this private realm is distinct from home. In this sense, this alternative form of care is striking because the home is generally considered a major site of care, especially for those in the process of aging. What characterizes Marlowe as a private detective is this unique care in the private realm.

Care outside the home lies at the core of the relationship between Marlowe and Lennox. In the scene of their first encounter, Sylvia refers to Lennox as “a lost dog” (*Long* 420), implying that Lennox has lost a place that is called home. Marlowe’s impression of Lennox’s apartment reinforces this sense of being lost: “It might have been a hotel room rented for a meeting or a farewell, for a few drinks and a talk, for a roll in the hay. It didn’t look like a place where anyone lived” (*Long* 423). Even when Lennox remarries Sylvia, it does not mean he acquires a home. When Marlowe says to Lennox, “I should guess your home life is adequate” (*Long* 433), Lennox replies, “I don’t have any home life” (*Long* 433). It later becomes clear that both Lennox and Sylvia have other partners—Eileen and Roger—so their married life cannot be considered a home, demonstrating that Marlowe

engages with Lennox as a man with no home.

This deviation from home leads to a distinctive relationship of care in the private realm. After Lennox remarries and distances himself from Marlowe, he suddenly reappears one day at Marlowe's house with a gun in hand. This marks the beginning of the Sylvia murder case and signals Lennox's complete rejection from any possibility of having a home. Suspecting something has happened between Lennox and Sylvia, Marlowe helps Lennox escape to Mexico. Marlowe's attitude is notable because it brings him out from a typical private detective-client relationship. When Lennox asks, "Why are you doing it, Marlowe?" (*Long* 433), Marlowe offers no answer. This lack of a clear reason characterizes Marlowe's approach to Lennox. As Lennox prepares to leave for the airport in Mexico, he confesses that he has left money at Marlowe's house as payment for Marlowe's help. Marlowe rejects the money, saying, "I'd rather you hadn't" (*Long* 446), once again leaving his motivations unclear. Marlowe's refusal of the money makes unclear his identity as a private detective. Even after hearing that Lennox has committed suicide, Marlowe continues to investigate the case. When a police officer asks him why he keeps investigating without a client, Marlowe admits that his motivation has nothing to do with money: "You don't make a dime that way. You wouldn't do it. That's why you're a good cop and I'm a private eye" (*Long* 651). Marlowe's response is not a direct answer, as the question was about why he continues the investigation without pay. His statement, "I am a private eye," becomes more of an ironic expression of his actions that is not appropriate to the typical figure of the private detective. Far from a client-

detective relationship, Marlowe's bond with Lennox can be seen as care in the private realm.

What is important about Marlowe's care in the private sphere is that it engages Lennox as a being in time. Marlowe often cannot explain why he cares so much about Lennox: ". . . the facts didn't tell the whole story by any means. He had been a man it was impossible to dislike" (*Long* 496). No amount of objective facts can account for Marlowe's deep concern for Lennox. Instead, this lack of a specific reason suggests that Lennox is constantly changing for Marlowe, even within the short time span at the beginning of the story. First, Lennox appears as a drunk who lives alone; shortly after, he becomes a kind of friend with whom Marlowe enjoys drinking; then, their relationship grows estranged as Lennox reconnects with Sylvia; later, Lennox becomes a key figure in Sylvia's murder, which Marlowe privately investigates; and during this time, Lennox is reported to have committed suicide. The rapid change in such a short period makes it impossible for Marlowe to assign Lennox a stable identity. Marlowe recognizes this inability to fix Lennox's identity when he compares him to "someone you meet on board a ship": "He was like somebody you meet on board ship and get to know very well and never really know at all. He was gone like the same fellow when he says goodbye at the pier and let's keep in touch, old man, and you know you won't and he won't" (*Long* 476). In contrast to home as a stable place, Lennox is defined by his constant state of being "gone" from any fixed identity. In this sense, the lack of clear reasons for Marlowe's concern for Lennox is the flip side of his attitude toward Lennox's process of change:

Maybe it was like that with Terry Lennox and me. No, not quite. I owned a piece of him. I had invested time and money in him, and three days in the icehouse, not to mention a slug on the jaw and a punch in the neck that I felt every time I swallowed. Now he was dead and I couldn't even give him back his five hundred bucks. That made me sore. It is always the little things that make you sore. (*Long* 476–77)

As his self-correction, “No, not quite,” indicates, Marlowe cannot fully articulate his feelings about Lennox. As a result, he cannot stop caring for Lennox, even after his death. Marlowe's care for Lennox is inseparable from his care for a being in time.

The question of care outside the home appears intermittently throughout Marlowe's investigation. A prominent example is his brief encounter with Dr. Amos Varley, whom Marlowe suspects may be involved in the series of cases. Varley is ostensibly a doctor who cares for lonely older people without a home. Marlowe is not pleased with Varley's seemingly friendly demeanor. Suggesting that Varley is profiting from his care business, Marlowe adopts a confrontational stance. During their conversation, one of the older patients appears, accompanied by a nurse: “A nurse pushed a wheelchair out. The chair contained what was left of a broken old man. His eyes were closed, his skin had a bluish tinge. He was well wrapped up. The nurse wheeled him silently across the polished floor and out of a side door” (*Long* 529). Despite Marlowe's hostility, this scene demonstrates the practice of care outside the home, which Marlowe is also involved. Marlowe makes an ironic remark about Varley's work, probing to

see if he is hiding something, but what is unusual is that Marlowe loses control. He realizes he is becoming more aggressive than necessary: “I ought to knock it off. But he had begun to nauseate me” (*Long* 530). This overreaction suggests that, whether or not Varley is exploiting older people for money, his actions overlap with Marlowe’s investigation into Lennox and care in the private realm. Varley emphasizes the importance of caring for beings in time: “Somebody has to care for these sad old people, Mr. Marlowe” (*Long* 530). While Marlowe resents Varley’s remarks, they share a commitment to care outside the home.

The same question is also woven into Marlowe’s relationship with Roger Wade. Roger confesses that he has become an alcoholic and is unable to control himself, particularly as he ages: “When you’re pushing forty, you don’t snap back the same way” (*Long* 562). This reference to age clearly places Wade, like Lennox and Marlowe, as a being in time. At first glance, the request to prevent Roger from committing suicide seems to fall under traditional domestic care, as Marlowe laments, “I’m not in the market for a job as a male nurse” (*Long* 495), implying that Roger’s wife Eileen should care for him. However, as it turns out that both Roger and Eileen have other partners, their marriage cannot be considered a home in the traditional sense. For example, when Roger is so drunk that he needs care, Eileen asks her Mexican houseboy named Candy to take care of him. When Candy tells Marlowe, “Somebody’s got to take care of him” (*Long* 581), it is significant that this “somebody” is Candy and Marlowe, not Eileen. As Candy is Mexican and Marlowe is a private detective, both are outsiders in Wade’s home. When Marlowe accepts the responsibility to look after Roger, saying,

“I’ll take care of him” (*Long* 581), he and Candy suggest care outside the home.

The climax of Marlowe’s final parting from Lennox is closely tied to the question of care. Toward the end of the story, when a Mexican man visits Marlowe, he immediately recognizes him as Lennox. Lennox tries to rekindle their former friendship, but Marlowe cannot welcome him back. Marlowe cannot forgive Lennox for causing the deaths of Eileen and Roger by not revealing the truth behind his faked suicide. Marlowe’s rejection of Lennox can be seen as care for the dead, who no longer have a home. When Lennox argues, “You could have let things lie” (*Long* 732), Marlowe responds:

I know. After she killed her husband and got away with it, she might have gone on to better things. He was of no real importance, of course. Just a human being with blood and a brain and emotions. He knew what happened too and he tried pretty hard to live with it. He wrote books. You may have heard of him. (*Long* 732)

Even though they are already dead, Marlowe cannot restore his friendship with Lennox while remaining indifferent to Eileen and Roger. Marlowe’s rejection of Lennox is inseparable from his care for those outside the home.

Marlowe’s care continues even at the end of the story. Rejected by Marlowe, Lennox once again becomes a being completely detached from home. Ironically, Marlowe cannot fully abandon his care for Lennox as a “lost dog,” seeing him off with ambivalent feelings:

He turned and walked across the floor and out. I watched the

door close. I listened to his steps going away down the imitation marble corridor. After a while they got faint, then they got silent. I kept on listening anyway. What for? Did I want him to stop suddenly and turn and come back and talk me out of the way I felt? Well, he didn't. That was the last I saw of him. (*Long* 734)

As indirectly suggested by the phrase "That was the last I saw of him" (*Long* 734), Marlowe's ambivalent feelings toward Lennox are not confined to that moment. Even after Lennox leaves, Marlowe continues to think about him. Temporal vulnerability thus compels the private detective to engage in care within the private realm.

One might argue that what Marlowe is doing here is simply recalling the established past rather than viewing Lennox as a being in time. Certainly, Marlowe narrates events from a point where they have already occurred, as he regrets in the middle of his narrative that he might have saved Roger and Eileen if he had known more about Lennox.⁴⁴ However, his narrative is not merely a repetition of the established past. Because Marlowe himself exists within the ever-changing flow of time, his relationship with the past Lennox also does not remain static. Marlowe acknowledges that he cannot always explain Lennox solely through what has actually happened: ". . . the facts didn't tell the whole story by any means. He had been a man it was impossible to dislike. How many do you meet in a lifetime that you can say that about?" (*Long* 496). For Marlowe, Lennox remains someone he cannot fully reduce to "the whole story." In other words, although what happened about Lennox's in the past is fixed,

Marlowe's entire narrative is nevertheless engaged with Lennox in the passage of time.

This unique relationship between Marlowe and the established past is reflected in the recurrent motif of chess. Although Marlowe lists chess among his favorite activities—"I like liquor and women and chess and a few other things" (*Long* 493)—he never plays it with others; instead, he only reenacts past games: "I set out the chess board. I filled a pipe, paraded the chessmen and inspected them for French shaves and loose buttons, and played a championship tournament game between Gortchakoff and Meninkin, seventy-two moves to a draw" (*Long* 574). Although this preoccupation with chess appears to be a mere repetition of the past, what is important is that Marlowe always perceives the possibility that the outcome could be different. When he replays a game by Steinitz, a famous chess player who has been dead for years, Marlowe describes it as follows: "It was a quiet night and the house seemed emptier than usual. I set out the chessmen and played a French defense against Steinitz. He beat me in forty-four moves, but I had him sweating a couple of times" (*Long* 429). With his remark, Marlowe speaks as if he is playing the game in the present moment, unaware of its predetermined result. In fact, after this game, Marlowe even mentions the possibility of a different outcome: "If she had called up half an hour earlier I might have been sore enough to beat the hell out of Steinitz—except that he had been dead for fifty years and the chess game was out of a book" (*Long* 430). In this sense, Marlowe's replay of the game is not merely a repetition of the past. It always holds the possibility that things could have turned out differently. Marlowe's fondness for chess

demonstrates that what has already been done is also inseparable from temporal vulnerability.

Conclusion

The Long Goodbye presents the characteristic private detective, who is clearly described to have become 42 years old, with his temporal vulnerability as the beginning of care outside the home. As Marlowe himself notes, there is a conventional assumption that private detectives are supposed to remain “tough,” which inevitably conceals the simple fact that everyone is subject to the flow of time. When he wrote *The Long Goodbye*, Chandler confronted this temporal vulnerability through his relationship with his wife, who required his care as they both grew older. Despite recognizing the importance of home as a place of care, Chandler was forced to live as “a man with no home,” as he put it. Marlowe in *The Long Goodbye* embodies this experience of “the world we live in” by unsettling his identity as a private detective. As he becomes aware that he, too, is subject to the passage of time, his investigation transforms into a care for those who share the same temporal vulnerability outside the home. In contrast to the typical image of the private detective in the genre of hard-boiled fiction, Raymond Chandler’s works radically question the modernist subject through the lens of vulnerability as the beginning of care, expanding the significance of this theme beyond Fitzgerald’s works into a broader perspective.

This reading of Chandler’s hard-boiled fiction expands the possibilities for male modernist writers in exploring care in relation to the

question of the private realm. Generally speaking, the term “private” is easily associated with the home in the modern period. As discussed in the previous chapters, the theme of care has predominantly been explored in the fields of welfare and feminism, where home is often seen as a site of gender inequality. The Care Collective argues that the home can easily become the prototype for care based on the “maternal bond” (Care 17). Even when the home outsources care that cannot be fulfilled within it, “women end up doing the lion’s share of both unpaid and paid care work” (Care 18). While it is undeniable that this issue of care within the home must be addressed, this assumption about the problem also obscures the question of care for those in the private realm as defined by Arendt. Chandler’s challenge to the genre of hard-boiled fiction, combined with his concern for the world he inhabits, allows him to bring this question into focus through the new possibilities of the private detective. For Chandler, the private realm does not represent an isolated individual living independently outside society. Chandler’s hard-boiled fiction thus needs to be read through the theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care for those with no home that are out of care in the conventional discussion of male modernist writers.

Chapter Five

The Question of Autobiography as Care of the Self: Toward Promiscuous Care with Life against Production in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*⁴⁵

Introduction

Chandler's works present the practice of care outside the home through the motif of the private detective. However, there may still be doubts about whether care outside the home can truly be called care. The idea that care is meant to protect "life" remains strong, suggesting that the home is not just a place where those with temporary vulnerability can help each other, but also a place that produces new lives for future generations. As Lee Edelman conceptualizes as "reproductive futurism," the conventional role of the home is often regarded as a place where the structure of the family, based on heterosexuality, is repeated to maintain this cycle.

Henry Miller's autobiographical novel *Tropic of Cancer* is notable as a modernist work that grapples with this question of care in relation to life. Like Chandler's works, *Tropic of Cancer* appears distant from themes of vulnerability and care, as it is categorized as an autobiographical novel. From an etymological perspective, the genre of autobiography seems to only focus on the life of the self, as the prefix "auto-" in "autobiography" signifies "self," and the middle part, "bio," means "life." This etymological implication is significant for this study because it can be closely connected to what Michel Foucault calls "care of the self." What is particularly

important is that, as Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography*, one of the most famous examples of the genre, demonstrates, this genre encourages the reader to imitate "the life of the self" described there, reinforcing it in a fixed way. What is characteristic of *Tropic of Cancer* is that the self it presents is the opposite of this self-sufficient image traditionally assumed in the genre of autobiography. Calling the genre itself into question, it exposes a vulnerable life, one that opens the self to other vulnerable lives.

This chapter explores vulnerability as the beginning of care in *Tropic of Cancer* through this radical question of life. In contrast to Franklin's *The Autobiography*, Miller's autobiographical novel presents a life characterized by constant deviation from any fixed way. While Franklin's autobiography establishes him as a conventional father figure, inviting the reader to imitate his life, Miller's novel exposes the narrator's vulnerability through his failure to become a father. However, *Tropic of Cancer* explores another possibility in this vulnerability of life. By revealing that modernism is a period when life is rigidly organized for the purpose of "production," the narrator challenges the assumption that life must be organized to produce more life in line with reproductive futurism. As a result, the narrator embodies life against production with what The Care Collective calls "promiscuous care." Beneath the appearance of care of the self, Miller's autobiographical novel conceals a radical challenge to the question of life in modernism.

The Question of the Genre of Autobiography

Tropic of Cancer is what Miller calls an "autobiographical novel,"

based on his daily life in Paris in the 1930s, interwoven with fiction and surrealist writing. The narrator, referred to as “Miller,” wanders around Paris, trying to become a writer but unable to complete his work. Unable to secure a regular job, he continues writing a series of episodes about the people he meets by chance. The narrative concludes with him gazing at the flow of the Seine, experiencing a sense of rebirth.

Although published in France in 1934, *Tropic of Cancer* was banned in the U.S. due to its sexual descriptions, which were regarded too explicit for the time. This publication history has contributed to the general perception of his works as pornography.⁴⁶ Literary criticism of Miller’s works has often focused on challenging this popular image by exploring their various literary possibilities. In the context of this study, key previous analyses have examined *Tropic of Cancer* through the question of autobiography. It is not surprising to read Miller’s works as a form of autobiography, as the first-person narrator is consistently referred to as “Miller,” and the events are based on Miller’s real-life experiences. Early studies, from the 1930s to the 1960s, tended to identify the narrator “I” with Miller, discussing him in terms of selfhood and individuality. While there are always some deviations from real-life events, the notion of reading the text as autobiography was rarely questioned. Then, subsequent scholarship has gradually recognized that the appearance of autobiography raises radical questions about the genre itself. For instance, Jane Nelson explores Miller’s “I” in terms of its potential for transformation beyond the control of the conscious ego, drawing on Jungian psychology’s theory of the self. Tomo Kanawaza categorizes “male autobiography” and “female

autobiography” using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of “becoming-woman.” Kanazawa reads Miller’s work as an example of the latter, with the potential for transformation toward the “minority,” in contrast to the “majority” of male autobiography. Katy Masuga views Miller’s works as examples of what Deleuze calls “minor literature,” which challenges conventional literary genres and languages. These studies no longer address whether Miller’s works are autobiography or fiction but instead question the genre of autobiography itself.

This question of the genre of autobiography can be linked to the idea of vulnerability as the beginning of care, since autobiography can be seen as a practice of what Michel Foucault calls “care of the self.” In his attempt to rethink the question of subject, Foucault focuses on “the idea that one ought to attend to oneself, care for oneself” (Foucault 43), an idea that can be traced back to ancient Greek culture. Dan C. Williamson points out that this attitude of care of the self overlaps with the American ideal of the self-made man: “A large part of Foucault’s legacy amplifies and illuminates a radical, even revolutionary, sense of being and becoming American, whose trajectory is to become who one is not yet” (Williamson 186). Notably, Williamson cites Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography as a representative example. According to Williamson, Franklin’s autobiography is not merely a simple account of what happened to him; it is a practice of self-transformation as “a student of care of the self” (Williamson 203).

The idea of autobiography as a practice of care of the self is supported by the term’s etymological components. The term consists of three components: “auto,” “bio,” and “graphy,” meaning “self,” “life,” and

“writing,” respectively. It is important to note that “auto” also means “self-produced; self-induced” (“Auto-”). Because of this meaning, the “life” depicted in autobiographies is often imbued with the idea of a self-sufficient life. In conjunction with the American ideal of the self-made man, autobiography is characterized by its focus on the life of the self.

Tropic of Cancer can be clearly distinguished from conventional autobiographies by its focus on vulnerable life. First, the vulnerable life in this autobiographical novel is evident in the simple fact that it was exposed to such severe criticism that it was banned in the U.S., given that vulnerability is defined as a condition that offers “an opening to attacks of raillery, criticism, calumny, etc.” (“Vulnerable”). Furthermore, the narrator’s self in *Tropic of Cancer* embodies a characteristic “openness” that makes his life more vulnerable. While Miller asserts that “the theme is myself” (Wilson 215) in his response to Edmund Wilson’s review of the work, showing his preoccupation with selfhood, the narrator’s self is simultaneously open to other selves beyond his own. The following passage illustrates this characteristic self that cannot be restricted to a self-sufficient self:

The man who raises the holy bottle to his lips, the criminal who kneels in the marketplace, the innocent one who discovers that all corpses stink, the madman who dances with lightning in his hands, the friar who lifts his skirts to pee over the world, the fanatic who ransacks libraries in order to find the Word—all these are fused in me, all these make my confusion, my ecstasy.
(*Cancer* 256)

Here, the narrator presents himself as open by incorporating other selves into his own. Additionally, all of these selves—such as the impious, the criminal, the ignorant, the madman, the obscene nun, and the fanatic—are vulnerable to criticism. In these multiple senses, *Tropic of Cancer* cares for vulnerable life.

Reading *Tropic of Cancer* in terms of the question of autobiography holds special significance for this study, starting with a connection to Fitzgerald's works. Miller's autobiographical novel can be linked to *The Great Gatsby* through their shared preoccupation with the idea of autobiography. It is widely accepted that Gatsby imitates Franklin's autobiography by writing his ideal schedule for success in a book he kept during his boyhood.⁴⁷ Gatsby's father shows this book to Nick, saying, "Jimmy was bound to get ahead" (*Gatsby* 112), but it sounds ironic to Nick, given that the father shares this schedule with Nick at Gatsby's funeral. Gatsby's writing contains several misspellings and revisions, such as "No more smokening" (*Gatsby* 112) and "Save \$5.00 [crossed out] \$3.00 per week" (*Gatsby* 112), making it clear that Gatsby can only parody Franklin's autobiography. It is no surprise that Gatsby's care for himself has often been viewed as Franklin's "grotesque extension in time" (Lehan 111). As a result, Gatsby's care of the self appears to be a superficial mimicry of Franklin's ideal, reflected in Nick's description of Gatsby as "a turbaned character leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne" (*Gatsby* 45). However, what this study presented as a major theme in Chapter One is that it is this vulnerability that begins Nick's care for Gatsby. Certainly, Nick displays an ironic tone when he

notices Gatsby's father's reluctance to close the schedule, remarking, "I think he rather expected me to copy down the list for my own use" (*Gatsby* 112). Nick's recognition of Gatsby's vulnerability is clear, as there is no indication that he actually follows through on his father's expectation. Nonetheless, it is also undeniable that Nick includes Gatsby's schedule in his own narrative as it is.⁴⁸ This inclusion of Gatsby's writing in Nick's first-person narrative suggests that Gatsby's care of the self is closely linked to others through his vulnerability. *Tropic of Cancer* similarly engages with the question of autobiography by subverting the conventional meaning of care for the self.

Vulnerable Life as a Deviation from Father:

A Comparison with Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography*

The uniqueness of *Tropic of Cancer* as a work that cares for vulnerable life becomes particularly vivid when compared to Franklin's *The Autobiography*. As an influential text on the concept of the self-made man, Franklin's autobiography can be seen as a practice of fixing life as that of an independent man, especially through the motif of the father. This fixation is intertwined with what Franklin calls "the way to wealth," which provides a clear purpose in life for the reader in the position of his "son." With the clear structure of the author and the reader as the father and the son, the primary concern of Franklin's autobiography is the reproduction of this invulnerable life.

The motif of the father is evident in the fact that *The Autobiography* was originally written as a letter to Franklin's son. The narrative begins

with an address to his son: “Dear Son: I have ever had pleasure in obtaining any little anecdotes of my ancestors” (Franklin 1). As Frank Woodworth Pine explains, Franklin began writing the first part as a letter to his son, which means he narrates from the father’s perspective.⁴⁹ Although Franklin later expanded his writing for a broader audience, he retains the position of the father, addressing the reader as if they were his “son”: “I hope, therefore, that some of my descendants will follow this example and profit from it” (Franklin 101). The phrase “my descendants” underscores the father-son dynamic throughout the text.

Franklin’s autobiography is a practice of fixing life in the role of the father by presenting his own life as a model to be imitated. He addresses the reader as a son:

I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducting means I made use of, which with the blessing of God so well succeeded, my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated.

(Franklin 1)

The word “imitate” emphasizes Franklin’s attempt to create a model life. This model must remain fixed to serve as an example. This fixation is particularly conspicuous in his use of the list of thirteen virtues. When Franklin embarks on “the bold and arduous project of attaining moral perfection” (Franklin 93), he creates a list of virtues to reflect on constantly. His specific method of reflection is described as follows: “I

transferred my tables and precepts to the ivory leaves of a memorandum book, on which the lines were drawn with red ink, that made a durable stain, and on those lines I marked my faults with a black-lead pencil, which marks I could easily wipe out with a wet sponge” (Franklin 100). The indelible ink signifies his continuous effort to keep himself as an ideal self by erasing any instability. Thus, *The Autobiography* is a practice of fixing life as a model to be imitated.

This fixation is further supported by Franklin’s idea of “the way to wealth.” Originally the title of his 1758 essay, “the way to wealth” serves as a precise expression of the purpose of *The Autobiography*. The phrase “the way,” with its definite article, suggests a singular, correct path without deviation. The preposition “to” emphasizes that it has the clear destination of wealth. In this sense, “the way to wealth” aligns perfectly with the life *The Autobiography* aims to present.

The purpose of creating life as a model to be imitated is inevitably tied to the care for its reproduction. This is manifest in one of the thirteen virtues, “Chastity”: “Rarely use venery but for Health or Offspring; Never to Dulness, Weakness, or the Injury of your own or another’s Peace or Reputation” (Franklin 97). While this virtue may appear to recommend an ascetic life, it does not deny sexual desire. Rather, the phrase “Rarely use venery but for Health or Offspring” suggests that it should be used for these purposes. Consequently, Franklin’s life as a father is passed on to the reader as his “son,” who is expected to imitate it. Implicitly, *The Autobiography* is concerned with the reproduction of an identical life.

In contrast to Franklin's *The Autobiography*, Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* raises questions of life within the autobiographical genre. Whereas Franklin's life as a father is depicted as stable, Miller's autobiographical novels present a life marked by his failure to become a father. While both share a focus on the life of the self, Miller's work is characterized by this vulnerable life.

Miller's failure to become a father is illustrated in a traumatic episode involving his baby. In a scene where he encounters a book titled *A man cut in slices*, he suddenly confesses: "And I'll tell no one why, after I had put everything down, I suddenly went home and chopped the baby to pieces" (*Cancer* 39-40). His use of the past perfect suggests that this refers to something he actually did in the past. However, it is difficult to fully understand his meaning since no additional information is provided in the narrative. Yasunori Honda offers a detailed explanation of this cryptic image, suggesting that Miller is referring to his baby with his mistress, Pauline Chouteau, a 37-year-old divorcee, when Miller was 18.⁵⁰ Because they lacked the money for a hospital abortion, Pauline had to abort the baby herself. This traumatic experience became a haunting memory for Miller, as reflected in his words, "I'll tell no one why" (*Cancer* 39), which highlight the impossibility of fully articulating this trauma. While Franklin's life as a father is depicted as stable from the outset, Miller's life is rendered vulnerable due to this failure to become a father.

The narrator's deviation from the role of fatherhood is also evident in his economic dependence on his wife. As an aspiring writer without a steady job, he appears free to roam around Paris. However, he repeatedly

emphasizes his need to communicate with his wife in America regarding his financial struggles: “When we get up it is dark, and the first thing to do is to raise enough dough to send a cable to America” (*Cancer* 21); “I was strolling along the Boulevard Beaumarchais, rich by a hundred francs or so, which my wife had frantically cabled from America” (*Cancer* 41-42). These instances demonstrate the narrator’s financial dependence on others, particularly his wife, underscoring his failure to fulfill the role of a father, which is far from what Franklin calls “the way to wealth.”

The contrast between Franklin’s life as a father and Miller’s life is further emphasized in the narrator’s writing style, which evokes a sense of childhood. Early in the narrative, he explains his approach to writing: “I have made a silent compact with myself not to change a line of what I write. I am not interested in perfecting my thoughts, nor my actions” (*Cancer* 11). Indeed, the narrator presents events as they happen, without reflecting on them from the perspective of the past. As a result, the narrative is frequently interrupted by new events, often left incomplete:

We are living a million lives in the space of a generation. In the study of entomology, or of deep sea life, or cellular activity, we derive more ...

The telephone interrupts this thought which I should never have been able to complete. Someone is coming to rent the apartment ... (*Cancer* 12)

This fragmented writing style, marked by incompleteness, contrasts sharply with Franklin’s methodical approach to life, as exemplified in his pursuit of “the way to wealth.” Miller’s style lacks a clear goal, focusing instead on

living in the moment. Suggestively, Georges Bataille associates Miller's writing style, which emphasizes the present moment, with the childhood phase of life:

It is seemingly rare for the childhood phase of life to be experienced more intensely. Rare too that there should be so many lasting consequences. In no way did this prevent Miller from subsequently acquiring an education. But he continued to be affected by this initial experience and it apparently became his business in this world to see his childhood rebellion through to its end. (Bataille, "Miller's" 69).

Through the metaphor of childhood, Bataille's interpretation of Miller's style suggests that life in *Tropic of Cancer* is the antithesis of the conventional life trajectory with the singular goal of becoming a father.

Vulnerability as Life against Production:

The Subversion of Organization in City/Body

Franklin's *The Autobiography* clearly focuses on life as a father with the purpose of reproduction. The significance of Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* lies in its challenge to this very notion of reproduction. On the one hand, the narrator reveals that the fixation on life as a father is inseparable from the goal of reproduction. On the other hand, Miller-the-narrator's primary concern is to subvert this emphasis on reproduction by highlighting the failure to become a father. In this sense, his apparently aimless wandering through Paris implicitly discloses a modernist trend to impose direction on life for the purpose of reproduction, particularly after Georges-Eugène

Hausmann's renovation of Paris in the 19th century. *Tropic of Cancer* explores this question of life organized for reproduction through two central motifs representing the sites of reproduction: the city and the body.

Despite the narrator's failure to become a father, *Tropic of Cancer* is never a nostalgic recollection of the childhood phase of life. What truly defines this autobiographical novel, with its implication of "bio" (life), is its intense focus on life itself. As previously mentioned, *Tropic of Cancer* is well-known for its explicit expressions related to sexual matters. However, the narrator's concern extends far beyond sex in the narrow sense. He declares an interest in life itself, using the word "life" explicitly: "There is only one thing that is of vital interest to me now, and that is to record everything that is left out in books. No one, as far as I can see, makes use of those elements in the air that give direction and motivation to our lives" (*Cancer* 11). The narrator suggests that there are elements that provide new directions and motivations for life. His use of the adverb "vitality" underscores his deep concern with the very essence of life.

The narrator's preoccupation with life is further characterized by a strong resistance to the concept of reproduction. Toward the end of the story, when he views the landscape from a train, the sight of a "carpet of steel and cement" (*Cancer* 266) makes him feel as though life is being replicated endlessly, without variation. He expresses this feeling in terms of production:

Production! More nuts and bolts, barbed wire, dog biscuits,
lawn mowers, ball bearings, high explosives, tanks, poison gas,
soap, toothpaste, newspapers, education, churches, libraries,

museums. *Forward!* Time is pressing. The fetus pushes against the cervix, but not a drop of saliva to stimulate delivery. Dry, suffocating birth. (*Cancer* 266)

At first glance, the word “production” might seem positive, given the narrator’s interest in life, since it means the “generation or creation of something” (“Production”). However, he immediately compares it to the metaphorical expression “Dry, suffocating birth” (*Cancer* 266), which is the exact opposite of the process of giving birth to life. It is noteworthy that he connects the word “production” with the word “forward,” which is emphasized in italics. Originally, the word “production” is composed of “pro,” which literally means “forward,” and “duct,” which means “to lead” or “pipe.” In this etymological sense, the narrator is right to use the word “production” as a kind of synonym for “forward.” In other words, what the narrator refers to here as “production” is the process of giving life the direction and motivation of “pro/forward.” Kiyokazu Washida’s discussion of the prefix “pro” is useful in this context. Washida points out that there are many words with the prefix “pro” in modern society, such as “project,” “profit,” “program,” and “promote.” According to Washida, all these words represent a forward-looking attitude that sets the goal in advance to determine what should be done in the present moment.⁵¹ In this sense, Miller’s critical view of production is a natural contrast to Franklin, because what Franklin expresses as “the way to wealth” overlaps precisely with the concept of production in its emphasis on the direction and motivation of “pro/forward.”

Tropic of Cancer suggests that life is exclusively directed towards the

purpose of production through the interplay of two distinctive motifs: the city and the body. As Masuga points out, it is certain that expressions related to the body are abundant in Miller's works.⁵² This obsession with the body can be seen as one of the obvious aspects of his interest in life itself. What further characterizes Miller's works is its unique connection to another motif: the city. The epigraph in *Tropic of Capricorn* "On the ovarian trolley" (*Capricorn* epigraph) is a typical example. This unique phrase expresses a part of the city as if it were a part of the body, and vice versa. Similar connections are easy to find in *Tropic of Cancer*: "Smoke coming up between our legs, the tracks creaking, semaphores in our blood" (*Cancer* 19); "The city sprouts out like a huge organism diseased in every part, the beautiful thoroughfares only a little less repulsive because they have been drained of their pus" (*Cancer* 40); "I can feel the city palpitating, as if it were a heart just removed from a warm body" (*Cancer* 63). With an interest in life, the narrator repeatedly makes this kind of connection between the two places.

Why is the connection between the city and the body relevant to the question of life? This study posits that it resonates with Georges-Eugène Haussmann's interest in the "organism," a central figure in the urban transformation of Paris in the 19th century. Haussmann, Prefect of the Seine department under Emperor Napoleon III, is renowned for his project called "Haussmann's renovation of Paris," which aimed to modernize the city by addressing issues related to views, sanitation, transportation, and circulation. What is striking is that, in Haussmann's memoirs, he compares the city to the human body, much like Miller does in *Tropic of Cancer*:

“The underground galleries, organs of the large city, would function like those of the human body. Pure and fresh water, light, and heat would circulate beneath the urban skin like the diverse fluids whose movement and maintenance support life” (Jordan 274). These sentences illustrate Haussmann’s metaphorical overlay of the city and the body. Colin Jones notes that Haussmann viewed the city as an “organism”:

For them the modern city was organism which needed to be analyzed according to a strictly utilitarian examination of urban functions. Napoleon and Haussmann saw themselves as physician-urbanists, whose task was to ensure Paris’s nourishment, to regulate and to speed up circulation in its arteries (namely, its streets), to give it more powerful lungs so as to let it breathe (notably, through green spaces), and to ensure that its waste products were hygienically and effectively disposed of. (Jones 300-3)

To borrow Jones’s expression, Haussmann’s renovation of Paris can be seen as an attempt to give life the direction and motivation of an organism.

The organization of the city/body is directly linked to the prioritization of the reproduction of life. Originally, the English word “organ” first appeared in the 13th century to denote a musical instrument (Williams 227); with the development of natural history and biology in the 18th century, it acquired its dominant reference to living and growing entities (Williams 227). While “organism” often carries a positive connotation today, as seen in terms like “organic farming” or “organic food,” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari critically examine the term in

relation to the question of life. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, they argue that the organs of the body become an “organism” through their connection to production: “Desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way, from not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all” (Deleuze and Guattari 8). For them, this organization is a form of “suffering” because it limits life to the Oedipal triangle (father-mother-child), where the father plays a dominant role. This organization, in turn, deprives the body of alternative possibilities for the “direction and motivation to our lives” (*Cancer* 11).

The narrator in *Tropic of Cancer* presents a radical critique of this organism tied to production. While his narrative style mirrors Haussmann’s in linking the city to the body, his primary concern is to problematize organization. The difference between the narrator and Haussmann becomes clear in his description of the “apartment.” He begins his narrative by describing the apartment he lives in: “I am living at the Villa Borghese. There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced” (*Cancer* 1). Soon it turns out that what he calls “the Villa Borgheses” is an apartment from his descriptions, such as “Someone is coming to rent the apartment” (*Cancer* 12). Etymologically, the word “apartment” implies a state of being “apart.” Initially, the narrator seems to present this state positively, emphasizing its cleanliness and order, likening it to an organism similar to what Haussmann sought to achieve. However, the narrator quickly refutes this state by associating it with death: “We are all alone here, and we are

dead” (*Cancer* 6). In doing so, he equates organized life with death.

How can alternative possibilities for the direction and motivation of life be opened up? *Tropic of Cancer* suggests that this can be achieved by subverting the practice of the organization. In this context, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “body without organs” is particularly relevant. Citing Antonin Artaud, they evoke a radical image of “no organization at all” (Deleuze and Guattari 8):

An incomprehensible, absolutely rigid stasis” in the very midst of process, as a third stage: “*No mouth. No tongue. No teeth. No larynx. No esophagus. No belly. No anus.*” The automata stop dead and set free the unorganized mass they once served to articulate. The full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable. (Deleuze and Guattari 8)

This concept of the body without organs challenges the assumption that the body must be organized as an organism based on production.

Tropic of Cancer can be interpreted as a subversion of the organism by reconfiguring the city/body as a body without organs. First, this subversion of organization in the city is evident in the narrator’s challenge to the condition of being “apart-ment.” On the one hand, as an aspiring writer, the narrator emphasizes the necessity of having a private space to work: “One can sleep almost anywhere, but one must have a place to work. Even if it’s not a masterpiece you’re doing. Even a bad novel requires a chair to sit on and a bit of privacy” (*Cancer* 32). By using the word “work,” he highlights the need to be separated from others to engage in writing as a

productive activity. In this respect, living in an “apart-ment” seems to align with his desire for privacy and productivity. On the other hand, what is unique about the narrator’s writing is that, despite his need for solitude in the place to work, his narrative constantly disrupts this condition of being “apart.” While he complains about the incessant interruptions of his work by newcomers and the conversations of other residents, he details these interruptions as part of his narrative: “I’m keeping an ear open as to what’s going on downstairs. It’s a Mr. Wren and his wife who have called to look at the apartment. They’re talking about taking it. Only talking about it, thank God” (*Cancer* 13). Rather than isolating himself, the narrator actively listens to conversations beyond the walls of his apartment, allowing them to naturally shape his narrative:

They are talking downstairs. Their language is symbolic. The world “struggle” enters into it. Sylvester, the sick dramatist, is saying: “I am just reading the *Manifesto*.” And Tania says—
“*Whose?*” Yes, Tania, I heard you. I am up here writing about you and you divine it well. *Speak more*, that I may record you.
(*Cancer* 29)

The narrator’s writing cannot be considered as a production, as it is not based on an organizing principle. Instead, it blends his own words with the words of others, even those he does not fully understand their meaning: “Suddenly Tania remarks: ‘There is no prominent hall in this place.’ Now what does that mean, if anything?” (*Cancer* 29). His narrative, which is a mixture of his own voice and other voices, thus subverts the state of being in an “apart-ment.

This same subversion is evident in his parasitic behavior, which blurs the boundaries between public and private life. Though he states, “Food is one of the things I enjoy tremendously” (*Cancer* 4), his lack of money forces him to rely on chance encounters for meals, like a parasite. One typical example is his accidental visit to Madame Delorme’s house: “Dancing the streets on an empty belly and now and then calling on strange people—Madame Delorme for instance. How I ever got to Madame Delorme’s I can’t imagine anymore” (*Cancer* 15). The narrator recounts these accidental encounters with strangers, showing a disregard for the distinction between public and private spaces. Through this behavior, he undermines the city as an organized entity.

The narrator’s role as a flâneur, aimlessly wandering without specific destinations, further supports this subversion. Though he aspires to be a writer, he admits that his typewriter often jams, and instead of writing in his apartment, he continues to roam the streets. In fact, much of his narrative consists of miscellaneous descriptions of what he encounters during his urban wanderings. He acknowledges that his best thoughts arise from walking, not from sitting in his apartment: “I ought to be rich enough to have a secretary to whom I could dictate as I walk, because my best thoughts always come when I am away from the machine” (*Cancer* 48). His narrative often becomes indistinguishable from a celebration of the joy of this act of strolling in the street. Notably, the narrator takes pleasure in getting lost in the city, a stark contrast to Haussmann, who sought to eliminate dark and narrow streets for the sake of efficient transportation. In a letter to his friend, Miller extols the adventure of getting lost in the city:

“What eloquent surprises at every turn of the street. To get lost here is an adventure extraordinary” (*Letters* 18). The narrator in *Tropic of Cancer* clearly shares this positive view of getting lost. He typically walks through the city, avoiding public transportation and making no specific plans, leading him to unexpected places: “Sniffing about for food I found myself toward noon the other day in the neighborhood of the Folies Bergère—the back entrance, that is to say, in the narrow little lane with an iron gate at one end” (*Cancer* 69). As the phrase “I find myself” suggests, his narrative is shaped by these “eloquent surprises.” Through the experience of getting lost, the narrator presents the city as a body without organs, in stark contrast to Haussmann’s vision of Paris as an organism.

Resonant with the narrator’s resistance to organization in the city, he also challenges the image of the body as an organism. This challenge is first apparent in his distinctive experience of itchiness that causes the act of scratching. Early in the narrative, after mentioning that he lives in an apartment, the narrator refers to an episode involving Boris, a fellow resident: “Last night Boris discovered that he was lousy. I had to shave his armpits and even then the itching did not stop” (*Cancer* 1). The adjective “lousy” suggests the presence of lice, parasitic insects that would be eliminated in an organized city. Yet, the narrator embraces this disruption caused by itchiness as a chance to connect with Boris: “We might never have known each other so intimately, Boris and I, had it not been for the lice” (*Cancer* 1). This connection between itchiness and friendship is significant, as the sensation of itching prompts the urge to scratch, an act that unsettles the boundary that divides the body into the inside and the

outside. In fact, comparing people to lice, the narrator celebrates scratching as a way to disrupt the skin: “Scratch and scratch—until there’s no skin left. However, the effect upon me is exhilarating. Instead of being discouraged or depressed, I enjoy it” (*Cancer* 12). Through the act of scratching, the narrator challenges the conventional boundaries that organize the body.

Certainly, as mentioned above, Miller’s works are often noted for their explicit sexuality. However, what truly distinguishes Miller’s portrayal of the body is not its explicitness, but its challenge to conventional perceptions of the body. A description of the narrator’s friend Moldorf illustrates this:

He has no veins or blood vessels, no heart or kidneys. He is a portable trunk filled with innumerable drawers, and in the drawers are labels written out in white ink, brown ink, red ink, blue ink, vermilion, saffron, mauve, sienna, apricot, turquoise, onyx, Anjou, herring, Corona, verdigris, gorgonzola
(*Cancer* 4-5)

In line with Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of the concept of “organs,” the narrator presents an image of the body radically different from conventional biological categorization. A similar example occurs when the narrator experiences ecstasy at a concert: “It’s as though I had no clothes on and every pore of my body was a window and all the windows open and the light flooding my gizzards. I can feel the light curving under the vault of my ribs and my ribs hang there over a hollow nave trembling with reverberation” (*Cancer* 74). By describing his pores as “windows” through

which light enters, the narrator disrupts the boundaries of the body, presenting a view of the body that fundamentally challenges the image of the organism.

The subversion of the body strongly aligns with what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the “body without organs,” which deviates from production. A key example is the narrator’s passionate admiration for the painter Henri Matisse. He sees in Matisse a painter who perceives the body in a radically different way, entirely disconnected from production: “The whole run of flesh, from hair to nails, expresses the miracles of breathing, as if the inner eye, in its thirst for a greater reality, had converted the pores of the flesh into hungry seeing mouths” (*Cancer* 163). The narrator observes that Matisse’s paintings fragment and disrupt the body to the point where it no longer resembles an organism. For the narrator, Matisse is a painter with the “courage” to perceive the body in this unique manner: “He it is, if any man today possesses the gift, who knows where to dissolve the human figure, who has the courage to sacrifice a harmonious line in order to detect the rhythm and murmur of the blood, who takes the light that has been refracted inside him and lets it flood the keyboard of color” (*Cancer* 164). The narrator praises Matisse’s approach of sacrificing “a harmonious line” to reveal the “rhythm and murmurs of the blood.” Crucially, this perception of the body is entirely detached from the process of production. Thus, the narrator’s description of the body resonates with Matisse’s paintings, as both present a vivid image of the “body without organs,” opposed to the notion of the body as a productive organism.

Toward Promiscuous Care against Reproductive Futurism

Miller's preoccupation with the question of life gives his autobiographical novel a significance beyond the mere embodiment of care of the self. His rejection of the imperative of reproducing life for the future naturally leads him to focus on the present moment. This temporal focus becomes a resistance against what Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurism," transforming his life into a "happening" where he constantly encounters other lives. With his question of life, the narrator's care is directed toward lives that are outside the realm of production based on the organizing principle. As a result, *Tropic of Cancer* becomes a practice of what The Care Collective calls "promiscuous care." Contrary to the popular image of Miller as a pornographer, *Tropic of Cancer* can be read as a practice of care for other lives against production.

The narrator's subversion of the organism can be understood as a radical critique of what Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurism." Edelman argues that modern society tends to prioritize the protection of children as a self-evident, ultimate purpose for the future. He refers to this future-oriented ideology, which revolves around the reproduction of life, as "reproductive futurism." According to Edelman, it imposes "an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations" (Edelman 3). Reproductive futurism assumes heteronormativity as a means of continuously reproducing children, an ideology grounded in an organizing principle. As a result, life

that exists outside of this organizing principle is excluded from political discourse. *Tropic of Cancer* resonates with this critique of reproductive futurism by focusing on the narrator's concern with life itself. As discussed earlier, the narrator is marked by the trauma of his aborted child and his failure to become a father. The lack of detailed descriptions of the child reflects not indifference but the intensity of the trauma. In this way, the narrator's life is positioned outside the organizing principle. His persistent attempts to subvert the organism can be seen as a resistance to what Edelman calls "reproductive futurism."

The narrator's resistance to reproductive futurism is reinforced by his self-identification as "the happiest man alive" (*Cancer* 1). At the beginning of the narrative, he describes his current condition: "I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive" (*Cancer* 1). This seemingly simple, optimistic view of his situation can be interpreted as a fundamental rejection of the value system that prioritizes the future. The temporal connotations of the word "happy" support this reading. As Sara Ahmed points out, the word "happy" is etymologically linked to contingency and chance: "The etymology of 'happiness' relates precisely to the question of contingency: it is from the Middle English 'hap,' suggesting chance" (Ahmed 30). Given this meaning, "the happiest man" implies a being who lives fully in the present moment, untethered from a predetermined future. In this sense, the narrator's self-identification as "the happiest man" resists reproductive futurism, which prioritizes the future and subordinates the present to the goal of production. Bataille's critique of modern time aligns with this resistance. In his analysis of modern

capitalism's faith in accumulation, Bataille states: "Insofar as we seek something, whatever this might be, we do not live sovereignly; we subordinate the present moment to a future moment, which will follow it" (Bataille, *Unfinished* 126). The narrator's declaration of being "the happiest man alive" despite having "no money, no resources, no hope" can be seen as a rejection of this subordination to the future. The declaration is followed by a strong affirmation of his uncertain self in the present: "A year ago, six months ago, I thought that I was an artist, I no longer think about it, I *am*" (*Cancer* 1). The phrase "I am," emphasized in italics, appears to be a simple statement of existence, but in negating the previous thought that "I was an artist," it can be interpreted as an incomplete sentence, lacking a complement to the verb "am." This absence of a complement suggests that the narrator has no fixed identity beyond his present self. The narrator's lack of a fixed identity strongly resonates with Bataille's idea of being that exists against the future: "In the case of growth, there is the being that does not exist yet, subordinated to the being that will be. I grow, therefore I do not exist yet, I expend, therefore I am. Thus, the being is insofar as it is against the will to growth" (Bataille, *Unfinished* 161). The narrator's sense of time reflects this priority of the present: "No past, no future. The present is enough for me" (*Cancer* 50). His self-definition as "the happiest man alive" can thus be seen as a fundamental rejection of reproductive futurism.

As the happiest man alive, the narrator in *Tropic of Cancer* embodies resistance to a determined future through his rejection of plot. Despite being an aspiring writer, his narrative lacks the well-constructed plot of a

traditional novel. Instead, it consists of a collection of random events that he encounters while wandering through Paris. In *Nexus*, one of Miller's other autobiographical novels, the narrator is criticized for the lack of plot in his novels, which can equally apply to *Tropic of Cancer*. The narrator in *Nexus* responds to this criticism by asking, "Does a novel always have to have a plot?" (*Nexus* 25). The narrator in *Tropic of Cancer* shares this rejection of plot. Significantly, the word "plot" also evokes the idea of organized cities, referring to neatly arranged sections where nothing unexpected happens. In this respect, the rejection of plot is essential to the narrator's identity as the happiest man alive.

What characterizes *Tropic of Cancer* is that its resistance to reproductive futurism involves not only the narrator's own life but also the lives of others, strongly aligning with what The Care Collective calls "promiscuous care." The Care Collective criticizes the fact that, for too long, care has been provided exclusively by 'the market' and 'the family.' In other words, care has been limited to these two dominant domains. In response, they propose the concept of promiscuous care, inspired by Douglas Crimp's essay "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," which challenges the notion that the spread of AIDS was due to the promiscuity of gay men. By using the term "promiscuity" strategically, Crimp questions the fixed image of those outside heteronormativity. He uses the term "not in the sense of 'casual' or 'indifferent,' but in that of multiplying and experimenting with the ways gay men were intimate with and cared for each other" (Care 35). Sharing Crimp's strategic use of the term, The Care Collective explains promiscuous care as "an ethics that proliferates

outwards to redefine caring relations from the most intimate to the most distant” (Care 35). The questioning of production in *Tropic of Cancer* resonates with this notion of promiscuous care. By expanding the notion of care, it fundamentally challenges the premise of reproductive futurism—that only those who can produce are worthy of care.

Under the guise of an autobiography, which is etymologically supposed to focus on the life of the self, *Tropic of Cancer* reveals a strong concern for others as a practice of promiscuous care. While the narrator begins his narrative with the first-person singular “I,” seemingly focused on himself—“I am living at the Villa Borghese” (*Cancer* 1)—this “I” quickly shifts to the first-person plural “we”: “There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced. We are all alone here and we are dead” (*Cancer* 1). The focus then moves to Boris, a friend of the narrator. In an episode where Boris confides that he has lice, which brings the two closer, the narrator includes Boris in the “we”: “We might never have known each other so intimately, Boris and I, had it not been for the lice” (*Cancer* 1). From the beginning, *Tropic of Cancer* shows a deep interest in the lives of others. Indeed, Miller himself clarifies that it was his concern for others that drove him to write the book:

It was about my immediate life in Paris, which was then the life of an exile living on the French without money, who had to use his wits to live, which brought me into contact with the strangest people. They were all kinds—rogues, prostitutes, wastrels, people whom you wouldn’t meet if you were living an ordinary life; and in talking of them I would transcribe their

language. I had reached a point of desperation when I wrote that book. ("Interview" 15)

Miller emphasizes that his autobiographical novel emerged from his care for others. *Tropic of Cancer* is filled with encounters with strange people, and these "strangest people" are not mere supporting characters; rather, they are central to the narrative, forming the very foundation of the novel. It is Miller's strong concern for others that drives his writing.

Importantly, the narrator's concern for others can be understood as promiscuous care, as it is directed toward those outside reproductive futurism. Like the narrator, the people he includes in his narrative also deviate from the organized body/city. For example, Moldorf, a writer friend of the narrator, is described as follows: "Moldorf is word drunk. He has no veins or blood vessels, no heart or kidneys. He is a portable trunk filled with innumerable drawers . . ." (*Cancer* 4). Like the narrator's body, Moldorf's body is presented as a body without organs. Another example is Llona, a prostitute, described as: "She had a German mouth, French ears, Russian ass. Cunt international. When the flag waved it was red all the way back to the throat" (*Cancer* 7). Llona's body, compared to a city, is the antithesis of rationality and order; instead, it is filled with the possibility of getting lost. The people the narrator encounters are those placed outside the organizing principle. The narrator further describes the people he meets in Paris with the metaphor of lice: "People are like lice—they get under your skin and bury themselves there. You scratch and scratch until blood comes, but you can't get permanently deloused" (*Cancer* 12). These lice are precisely what Haussmann sought to eliminate during his renovation of

Paris, aimed at improving sanitation. For the narrator, these eliminable beings in the organized body/city are what invade his life. This metaphor of lice perfectly captures the narrative structure of the autobiographical novel, which is made up of not only the narrator's life but also the lives of others. The narrator's concern for others is promiscuous care for those who deviate from the principle of production.

The popular image of Miller as an obscene or pornographic writer can be reinterpreted through the lens of promiscuous care. While it is true that Miller's works are filled with explicit descriptions of sexuality, leading to their easy categorization as pornography, what distinguishes Miller's engagement with sexuality is his interest in exploring various possibilities outside heteronormativity. In a letter that later became one of the sources for *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller writes about his impression of the Square du Furstemberg, envisioning the possibility of a lesbian community and referring to Marie Laurencin, a French painter and printmaker known for her bisexuality: "Here, if Marie Laurencin ever brought her Lesbians out into the open, would be the place for them to commune. It is very, very Lesbienne here, very sterile, hybrid, full of forbidden longings" (*Letters* 42).⁵³ Miller's tone here is not ironic, as he confesses a positive impression of the place, writing, "Here is where I should like to take rooms" (*Letters* 42). In the same vein, the narrator of *Tropic of Cancer* reveals a positive possibility that challenges heteronormativity, even within seemingly plain sexual contexts: "A missing tooth or a nose eaten away or a fallen womb, any misfortune that aggravates the natural homeliness of the female, seems to be regarded as an added spice, a stimulant for the jaded appetites of the

male” (*Cancer* 162). What the narrator sees is an alternative possibility that lies outside the heteronormative political discourse.

The narrator’s promiscuous care culminates in his extended monologue about his love for what he calls “flow.” He expresses his confusion and ecstasy, quoting what he refers to as “the great blind Milton of our times,” which is commonly interpreted as James Joyce: “I love everything that flows” (*Cancer* 257):

I love everything that flows, everything that has time in it and becoming, that brings us back to the beginning where there is never end: the violence of the prophets, the obscenity that is ecstasy, the wisdom of the fanatic, the priest with his rubber litany, the foul words of the whore, the spittle that floats away in the gutter, the milk of the breast and the bitter honey that pours from the womb, all that is fluid, melting, dissolute and dissolvent, all the pus and dirt that in flowing is purified, that loses its sense of origin, that makes the great circuit toward death and dissolution. (*Cancer* 258)

Through this radical rejection of the future’s priority, the narrator demonstrates his love for everything that is excluded from the process of production, clearly listing these elements in his narrative. This monologue can thus be understood as a manifesto for his promiscuous care.

Conclusion

With its style of autobiographical novel, *Tropic of Cancer* can be read as a radical exploration of the question of care of the self. As Miller is

often perceived through the image of his reputation as a pornographic writer, the autobiographical style of the novel appears to reflect a strong emphasis on the self, particularly through his explicit portrayal of sexual desire. As the U.S. banned the book when it was first published in France, Miller's autobiographical novel has been generally read in this context. However, the comparison with Franklin's *The Autobiography* reveals that the core of Miller's work is actually a deep concern for vulnerable life. The narrator, having failed to become a father, presents himself as a life that cannot be organized for production. His embodiment of a life without organs in the city and the body—the primary sites of organization in the modern era—reflects a resistance to reproductive futurism. By rejecting the prioritization of life in the future, the narrator opens himself up to the present moment as a “happening,” allowing his life to become intertwined with other lives, particularly those excluded from the organized city/body. In this sense, *Tropic of Cancer* subverts the etymological meaning of autobiography, which is traditionally associated with care of the self. Instead, it becomes a practice of promiscuous care for life against production. In addition to Fitzgerald and Chandler, Miller should be reread as a significant figure for understanding male modernist writers in terms of vulnerability as the beginning of care.

Chapter Six

“Why don’t you try to write?”:

From Passion to Com-passion through Impotentiality

in Henry Miller’s *Sexus*

Introduction

While the previous chapter explores the question of care of the self in *Tropic of Cancer*, an important question about the main plot remains unaddressed: Does the narrator succeed in becoming the writer he aspires to be? The narrator begins his narrative by expressing his desire to become a writer, but despite the progress of the narrative, he never achieves this goal. The story concludes not with his success as a writer but with him helping a friend leave for America while he stays in Paris, feeling the flow of the Seine River. Unlike Franklin’s idea of “way” toward a specific goal, the narrator’s initial ambition gradually fades, ultimately disappearing altogether. This motif of an aspiring writer who cannot become a writer is central to this study, as it highlights the paradox of vulnerability as an “ability.” Although the term “vulnerability” contains the word “ability,” it is often associated solely with the “ability to be wounded” (Gilson 8), carrying negative connotations such as “liability to injury, weakness, dependency, powerlessness, incapacity, deficiency, and passivity” (Gilson 5). In *Tropic of Cancer*, the narrator exposes his vulnerability through his inability to become a writer. Paradoxically, however, it is through this very lack of ability that his entire narrative comes to life. With a broken typewriter, the story unfolds through a series of accidental encounters,

which take place when he is away from the apartment room where he is supposed to be writing. In fact, Miller himself confesses that his career as a writer began only after he failed in his initial attempt to become one:

Finally, I came to a dead end, to a despair and desperation which few men have known, because there was no divorce between myself as writer and myself as man: to fail as a writer meant to fail as a man. And I failed. I realized that I was nothing—less than nothing—a minus quantity. It was at this point, in the midst of the dead Sargasso Sea, so to speak, that I really began to write. (*Wisdom* 107)

Significantly, Miller expresses what he discovered through this process of writing as a “potential being”: “What is still more important is that I saw within the frame of the actual the potential being which I am” (*World* 15). This potentiality is unique in that it contrasts sharply with the typical image of “ability,” which is often linked to an invulnerable individual. Miller’s “potential being” is characterized by radical passivity in that he cannot write as a direct, active action. This passivity opens him up not only to his own life but also to the lives of others: “In these lucid moments I saw myself as one of the most solitary and at the same time one of the most companionable of men” (*World* 15). His inability to write lies at the core of his narrative as care beginning from vulnerability.

Sexus, one of Miller’s other autobiographical novels about an aspiring writer, can be reinterpreted as a work that vividly explores vulnerability as a potentiality that is distinct from ability. Like *Tropic of Cancer*, *Sexus* is based on a period in Miller’s life before he had published

any works, but it places an even greater emphasis on his lack of ability to write, as he is repeatedly asked, “Why don’t you try to write?” As many critics have noted, Miller is marked by passivity, lacking the ability to write in an active sense. However, what truly characterizes *Sexus* is that this very passivity gives rise to the narrative. Resonating with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “impotentiality,” the narrator continually rejects the idea of possessing the ability to become a writer in order to explore what Miller calls “potential being.” In this paradoxical writing process, passivity can be reinterpreted as “passion,” which the narrator describes as the driving force behind his writing. Since this passion emerges from passivity, the novel inevitably shifts its focus from care of the self to care for others, particularly those deprived of their “abilities.” Through this contact with other passions, his passivity as passion evolves into what Jean-Luc Nancy calls “com-passion”—a practice of sharing impotentiality with others. Thus, *Sexus* presents the theme of care as com-passion through its exploration of vulnerability as passivity.

Passivity in Fitzgerald’s Two Short Stories

Reading Miller’s *Sexus* through the lens of passion is essential for this study, as it connects Miller’s work with Fitzgerald’s two short stories, “An Alcoholic Case” and “Family in the Wind,” through the shared question of vulnerability as passivity. Some scholars have already noted the connection between passivity and vulnerability. Henk ten Have states about the relationship between these concepts as follows: “Human existence is fundamentally passive since human frailty implies that humans are exposed

to forces beyond their control” (Have 110). Both protagonists in “An Alcoholic Case” and “Family in the Wind” confront this vulnerability as passivity. In the former, the nurse struggles to manage an alcoholic patient whose actions are unpredictable and uncontrollable. In the latter, the doctor is compelled to resume his medical role during the sudden devastation caused by two tornadoes. Both characters are vulnerable because they are forced into passivity by uncontrollable external forces. The discussion in Chapter Two suggests that this passivity can be understood as com-passion in the context of care. In “An Alcoholic Case,” the nurse gradually reduces the patient to a mere “case” in an attempt to predict and control his actions. Paradoxically, this shift from a passive condition to an active one distances her from responsibility for him a singular being. As Chapter Two concludes, this failure of responsibility to singularity is rather significant to foreground the necessity of the passive condition for care. In “Family in the Wind,” while the doctor takes action by treating tornado victims and adopting the orphaned girl, he remains passive. His medical efforts fail to save his nephew, and his decision to adopt the girl is a result of chance. The doctor’s comparison of himself to an old brig “in the wind” (“Family” 106) symbolizes his unchangeable condition of passivity. However, this passivity allows him to share the girl’s condition of being without a family, leading to a relationship of care as a new “family.” Unlike the nurse who transitions into an active subject, the doctor and the girl share their passivity, leading to a relationship of what can be called “com-passion.” Despite their apparent differences, *Sexus* resonates with Fitzgerald’s stories in its reconsideration of vulnerability as passion with a possibility of com-

passion.

Miller's Passivity and the 'I Who Can Do Nothing'

Sexus is one of Miller's autobiographical novels, published in 1947, depicting his experiences in 1920s New York before he leaves for Paris. The narrative begins with his confession that he is "a failure in every sense of the word" (*Sexus* 5). While going through divorce proceedings with his first wife named Maude, he becomes captivated by a female dancer named Mona (referred to as Mara in the initial part of the narrative) to the extent that he wishes to marry her. At the same time, he aspires to become a writer. Although his friends recognize his talent, he struggles to complete his literary works. In the end, the narrator does marry Mona, but she develops a closer relationship with her female partner. Following a brief period of wandering in disappointment over his unusual married life, the narrator returns home with a sense of resignation, feeling that he has nowhere else to go. Ironically for an aspiring writer, the narrative concludes with a surreal dream in which he becomes a dog in a dog show that can only bark, unable to write.

Miller's later novels, including *Sexus*, have not received as much attention as his early works like *Tropic of Cancer*. One significant reason is what many critics identify as a passive attitude in Miller's writing. As discussed in the previous chapter, the narratives of Miller's autobiographical novels consist of random episodes that the narrator happens to encounter, giving the impression that he is too passive. Consequently, while Miller's early works made an impact with their style,

many critics found it difficult to develop some consistent themes in his later works.⁵⁴ A notable example is George Orwell's harsh criticism of Miller's writing. Orwell likens Miller's passivity to Jonah inside a transparent whale: "Only he feels no impulse to alter or control the process that he is undergoing. He has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, *accepting*" (Orwell 178). Although Orwell acknowledges *Tropic of Cancer* as a significant work that reflects the post-World War I atmosphere, he concludes that Miller's importance is limited to his first work: "But he himself seems to me essentially a man of one book. Sooner or later I should expect him to descend into unintelligibility, or into charlatanism: there are signs of both in his later work. His last book, *Tropic of Capricorn*, I have not even read" (Orwell 187). From Orwell's perspective, *Sexus* is simply a repetition of Miller's passive attitude, already seen in *Tropic of Cancer*.

While Miller's passive attitude may easily be perceived as a fault that hinders the development of consistent themes in his writing, Takaaki Yoshimoto offers a significant perspective that invites reconsideration. Yoshimoto argues: "At the end of hell, Miller completely shatters the idea of himself as the 'I' who can do something and blows it away like dust" (Yoshimoto; my trans.; 169). Yoshimoto contends that Miller's early works are imbued with the motif of the "I" who can do nothing. While Yoshimoto's argument is framed within the context of Miller's early works, it also applies to *Sexus*, published in 1949, given the novel's intricate writing process. Miller had already begun writing fragmentary passages for *Sexus* in the late 1920s while working on *Tropic of Capricorn*, one of the

early works Yoshimoto refers to. He started writing *Sexus* in 1942 but set it aside for a period before finally publishing it in Paris in 1949.⁵⁵ In this sense, *Sexus* reflects Miller's preoccupation with the period when he struggled to establish himself as a writer, even after he had gained public recognition. Certainly, it is not uncommon for stories about writers to begin with an "I" who is not yet a writer, such as in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. What sets *Sexus* apart is that the narrator never achieves his goal of becoming a writer, like in *Tropic of Cancer*. On the contrary, the narrative concludes with his dream of becoming a dog that symbolizes a position entirely distant from that of a writer where all he can do is bark, not write. It can even be said that *Sexus* places a more intense light on the motif of the "I" who can do nothing than Miller's early works.

Against the Ability to Write: Impotentiality

Sexus intensely foregrounds the question of the ability to write, focusing on the narrator as an aspiring writer who is unable to write. On the one hand, people surrounding him acknowledge his talent and encourage him, saying, "Why don't you try to write?" On the other hand, he never actualizes this ability to write; in fact, he even resists establishing himself as a writer. What is significant is that his situation does not imply a lack of the ability to write. Instead, it suggests a direction and motivation in life that cannot be reduced to mere ability, resonant with what Giorgio Agamben calls "impotentiality."

The resistance to the ability to write is foreshadowed by the opening scene, where Mona encourages him: "Why don't you try to write?" As the

narrator's first marriage comes to an end, he deepens his relationship with Mona, who recognizes his talent as a writer and urges him to write: "The book was wonderful—she had only begun it this morning. Why didn't I try to write? She was sure I could write a great book" (*Sexus* 16). Her encouragement begins to haunt the narrator: "The little phrase—*Why don't you try to write?*—involves me, as it had from the very beginning, in a hopeless bog of confusion" (*Sexus* 18-19). What is suggestive here is that the phrase "Why don't you try to write?" can not only imply the literal meaning of not writing but also urge him to actually write. In this sense, Mona's words, with the auxiliary verb "could," press the narrator to realize his ability to write. As long as the narrator aspires to be a writer, Mona's urging seems to align with what he wants. However, what is unique about the narrator is his resistance to the actualization of this ability:

The best thing about writing is not the actual labor of putting word against words, brick upon brick, but the preliminaries, the spadework, which is done in silence, under any circumstances, in dream as well as in the waking state. In short, the period of gestation. No man ever puts down what he intended to say: the original creation, which is taking place all the time, whether one writes or doesn't write, belongs to the primal flux: it has not dimensions, no form, no time element. (*Sexus* 19)

The narrator believes that the best part of writing is not its realization but rather the period of gestation, during which nothing is actually written. His focus is directed more toward what he describes as having "no dimensions, no form, no time element" (*Sexus* 19). Thus, the phrase "Why don't you try

to write?” propels him toward resistance to the very act of writing.

What is noticeable is that the narrator’s reluctance to accept the encouragement to write is not a preliminary stage on his path to becoming a writer. Instead, the narrator consistently withholds the actualization of this ability throughout the narrative. For instance, he describes how he writes beautifully about his old friends, Joey and Tony, to the point that it moves him a lot, but he never makes the piece public. Rather, he conceals what should be an achievement as a writer, stating, “It wasn’t something to show an editor: it was something to put away in a drawer, to keep as a reminder of natural processes, as a promise of fulfillment” (*Sexus* 26). This concealment underscores his resistance to actualizing his ability as a writer. What is crucial is the final scene of his narrative. Several years after marrying Mona, the narrator falls into despair because Mona has a female partner, forcing him into an unusual communal life with the three of them. Eventually, his miserable condition leads him to a surreal dream in which he becomes a dog in a dog show. The concluding sentences vividly depict the ‘I’ who cannot write through his barking sounds: “‘Woof woof! Woof woof!’ I barked. ‘Woof! Woof, woof, woof!’” (*Sexus* 506). The narrator ends up becoming a wordless dog, which ironically emphasizes how far he is from achieving his goal of becoming a writer. As the conclusion illustrates, the motif of the writer in *Sexus* is not about the transition from an aspiring writer to an accomplished one. Instead, the refusal to actualize the ability to write is consistently emphasized throughout the narrative.

While the narrator remains in a state of being unable to write, this condition is not simply a negative consequence of lacking ability. Rather,

what he demonstrates is a life that cannot be reduced to mere abilities. An exemplary instance can be seen in a conversation about literature between the narrator and a man he meets on his way home from a friend's party. Although he hasn't written any books yet, the narrator spontaneously claims to be a writer. When asked about the kind of books he writes, instead of confessing the truth, he continues discussing his ideas about writing in relation to life: "One should go cuckoo! People have had enough of plot and character. Plot and character don't make life. Life isn't in the upper storey: life is here, now, anytime you say the word, and anytime you let rip" (*Sexus* 36). Like the image of the dog at the end of the novel, the declaration "One should go cuckoo!" (*Sexus* 36) represents the narrator's contrasting state to the ability to write. However, the narrator links this very state of being unable to write with life itself. He suggests that, even as an aspiring writer, his life is not confined to his ability to write. What makes the motif of the writer in *Sexus* unique is its exploration of life as the "I" who can do nothing.

Why, then, does the narrator persistently resist the actualization of his ability to write? Giorgio Agamben offers a valuable perspective through his discussion of impotentiality. Referring to Aristotle's concept of "impotentiality," Agamben makes a seemingly paradoxical claim: "'Impotentiality' does not mean here only absence of potentiality, not being able to do, but also and above all 'being able to not do,' being able to not exercise one's own potentiality" (Agamben, "What" 43). For Agamben, it is this impotentiality that is deprived in modern life:

Separated from his impotentiality, deprived of the experience of

what he can not do, today's man believes himself capable of everything, and so he repeats his jovial "no problem," and his irresponsible "I can do it," precisely when he should instead realize that he has been consigned in unheard of measure to forces and processes over which he has lost all control. He has become blind not to his capacities but to his incapacities, not to what he can do but to what he cannot, or can not, do. (Agamben, "What" 44)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Miller's care for life in *Tropic of Cancer* questions the conventional direction and motivation assigned to "our life." In this sense, the "I" who can do nothing in *Sexus* strongly resonates with Agamben's concept of impotentiality. Although the narrator is continually encouraged to actualize his ability to write, he resists, preserving his condition as the "I" who can do nothing. What he consistently maintains is what Agamben defines as impotentiality in "our life."

The narrator's negative attitude toward writing can be seen as resistance to the forces that separate life from its impotentiality. The phrase that haunts the narrator, "Why don't you try to write," typically represents a power that urges him to actualize his ability to write. Agamben argues for the necessity of resisting this separation from impotentiality: "Those who are separated from what they can do, can, however, still resist; they can still not do. Those who are separated from their own impotentiality lose, on the other hand, first of all the capacity to resist" (Agamben, "What" 45). The motif of writing in *Sexus* clearly embodies this resistance as defined by

Agamben. A typical example is found in the conversation about writing between the narrator and his friend Kronski:

“What are you doing now . . . in New York?” He asks. I answer that I am doing nothing, really.

“Aren’t you writing?”

“No.” (*Sexus* 325)

The words “I am doing nothing” and his simple denial, “no,” may seem like a negative condition, given his desire to become a writer. From the perspective of Agamben’s notion of impotentiality, it is this negative condition that signifies an active resistance to the separation of life from its impotentiality.

Indeed, what the narrator demonstrates by preserving his impotentiality is the affirmation of a life that diverges from the actualization of what he is capable of. This is clearly illustrated in a conversation with his friend, a lawyer named MacGregor. Initially, MacGregor pities the narrator, insisting that it would take him a lifetime to publish even a single book. From his established position as a lawyer, MacGregor implies that the narrator’s inability to become a writer is purely a negative condition. However, as he continues to criticize the narrator, MacGregor begins to reveal his own doubts about his identity as a lawyer. Eventually, he even expresses envy for the narrator’s current condition of being a “nobody”: “What have I got for all my struggle? I’m a lawyer. So what? I might just as well be a piece of shit. Sure, you bet I’d like to change places. Only I’m not an artist, as you said. I guess the trouble with me is that I can’t swallow the fact that I’m just another nobody. . .” (*Sexus*

140). Ultimately, MacGregor reveals that he cannot accept being a nobody, which aligns with what Agamben describes as estrangement from impotentiality. While MacGregor is no longer a “nobody” after establishing himself as a lawyer, he suggests that it is a lamentable condition to no longer be able to accept that state. For him, it is the narrator’s life in impotentiality that should be affirmed.

Passivity as Passion

Reading the “I” who can do nothing in *Sexus* through the lens of Agamben’s concept of impotentiality reveals another significant concern for the narrator: passivity as passion. As mentioned earlier, critics have often viewed the passive attitude in Miller’s works as a negative aspect that hinders the development of some consistent themes. However, Agamben’s discussion of impotentiality offers a new perspective, interpreting this passivity as a crucial element in the context of writing. Agamben explores the concept of passivity in Aristotle’s discussion of potentiality, which is not tied to actuality, or what Agamben redefines as impotentiality:

“What is potential [*dynatos*] is capable [*endekhetai*] of not being in actuality. What is potential can both be and not be, for the same is potential both to be and not to be [*to auto ara dynaton kai einai kai mē einai*]” (1050 b 10).

In this extraordinary passage, Aristotle offers the most explicit consideration of the originary figure of potentiality, which we may now define with his own words as the *potential not to be*. What is potential is capable (*endekhetai*), Aristotle

says, both of being and of not being. *Dekhomai* means “I welcome, receive, admit.” The potential welcomes non-Being, and this welcoming of non-Being is potentiality, fundamental passivity. (Agamben, *Potentialities* 182)

Since impotentiality is not the potential to actively do something, it is characterized by the attitude of “I welcome, receive, admit.” This passivity of impotentiality is inherently connected to what the narrator in *Sexus* refers to as “passion,” which he considers essential for writers. For him, it becomes a paradoxical potentiality to write the life of the “I” who can do nothing in an autobiographical novel.

The narrator introduces the word “passion” while deeply contemplating what it means to be a writer. He states: “The only time a writer receives his due reward is when someone comes to him burning with this flame which he fanned in a moment of solitude. Honest criticism means nothing: what one wants is unrestrained passion, fire for life” (*Sexus* 28). His ideal writer is not someone who actively engages in the act of writing but rather someone who welcomes, receives, and admits. He is correct in associating this ideal of a writer with the word “passion” in its etymological sense. Typically, “passion” might evoke the image of strong willpower to actively do something. However, just as the adjective “passive” means that “is acted upon or is capable of being acted upon from outside” (“Passive”), passion is primarily characterized by its passivity—something one cannot fully control. The narrator articulates this passive aspect of passion by linking it to the image of the writer to whom someone comes.

This passivity as passion is further emphasized through the connection between the narrator and the crucifixion of Christ. At the beginning of the narrative, he compares himself to the crucified Christ: “I was approaching my thirty-third year, the age of Christ crucified” (*Sexus* 5). As indicated by the past participle “crucified,” the crucifixion embodies radical passivity itself. This comparison is also relevant to the narrator’s use of the word “passion,” as it carries the meaning of the “sufferings of Jesus in the last days of his life, from the Last Supper to his death; the Crucifixion itself” (“Passion”). Given that the narrator is an aspiring writer, his association with passivity might seem like a negative aspect that prevents him from writing actively. However, what is notable is that Miller names the series of works, including *Sexus*, *Nexus*, and *Plexus*, as *The Rosy Crucifixion*. While the adjective “rosy” evokes the color of blood, it also carries positive connotations: “Of an event, circumstance, etc.: that brings happiness, enjoyable, bright” (“Rosy”). In this sense, the title suggests that Miller’s positioning of himself in a state of passivity as passion should be affirmed.

The affirmation of passivity is also supported by the narrator’s specific actions. After comparing himself to the crucified Christ, the narrator describes his current infatuation with Mona. Initially, he reveals his persistent pursuit of her, which might seem to be the opposite of a passive attitude. However, this apparent active behavior is transformed into a passive one. For instance, he envisions the act of visiting her as follows: “I will go directly to her home, ring the bell, and walk in. Here I am, take me—or stab me to death. Stab the heart, stab the lungs, the kidneys, the

viscera, the eyes, the ears.” (*Sexus* 9). Here, the initially active act of visiting her is immediately replaced by the passive act of being stabbed by her. In his relationship with Mona, the narrator further underscores his passivity: “Mara, Mara, where are you leading me? It’s fateful, it’s ominous, but I belong to you body and soul, and you will take me where you will, deliver me to my keeper, bruised, crushed, broken” (*Sexus* 14). The sentence structure, with “you” as the subject and “me” as the object, clearly demonstrates that the narrator places himself in a passive position. Moreover, while Mona changes her name from “Mara” to “Mona” in the narrative, the narrator also finds himself on the verge of having his own name changed: “It was characteristic of her that she should want to change my name too, which she did. I was now Val, the diminutive of Valentine, which I had always been ashamed of—it seemed like a sissy’s name—but now that it issued from her lips it sounded like the name which suited me” (*Sexus* 165-66). As the first-person narrator, he should theoretically be able to change the characters at will. Instead of taking such action, the narrator unilaterally accepts his “given name,” despite feeling ashamed. Under his apparent active attitude, his relationship with Mona highlights the narrator’s radical passivity.

Another notable example of passivity as passion is the act of borrowing money. While the narrator consistently tries to help Mona, who needs funds for her sick father’s medical expenses, he does not have enough money himself and is forced to borrow. Admitting that he has been begging and borrowing ever since he left school, the narrator makes it clear that he is always in debt. Since he is unable to become a writer, he cannot repay

his lenders quickly, which keeps him in a perpetual state of passivity. What is unique about this passivity is that he does not see it as a negative condition to escape. Instead, he claims it is a positive condition he is willing to embrace: "Borrowing is a positive thing, leading negative. To be a borrower may be uncomfortable, but it is also exhilarating, instructive, lifelike" (*Sexus* 61). The motif of borrowing money thus underscores the narrator's passivity as passion.

The narrator's adherence to passivity is further emphasized by his rejection of becoming an agent of his own will. The episode involving a trial ironically illustrates this passivity as a rejection of volition. During his divorce proceedings with Maude, he is summoned to court to be questioned about alimony payments. He does not take the judge's words seriously until he realizes the judge is asking about his will: "I realized that he was asking me if I were willing to pay such and such an amount of alimony regularly for the rest of my days" (*Sexus* 405). Here, the word "willing" carries an ironic tone because the act of paying is not based on his will at all. This irony becomes even more apparent when the narrator sarcastically offers to pay double the amount, to which the judge replies, "We'll make it as you wish" (*Sexus* 405). The narrator's statement about his will cannot be taken seriously, as he flatly responds "no" when asked if he knows the penalty for failing to meet his obligation. His subsequent reflection on the trial reveals his deep commitment to remaining in a passive state: "All I wanted was to know that I was definitely free to put my head in the noose again" (*Sexus* 405). It is precisely in the moment when he is forced to confront his own will that the narrator reveals his

radical passivity.

Exposure of Vulnerability to the Other:

Narrative from the “I” who can do nothing

What makes this passivity unique is that it paradoxically becomes the very potentiality that generates the narrative of the “I” who can do nothing. At first glance, it seems contradictory that the narrator continues to narrate despite lacking the ability to write. His constant passive condition means that all he can do is expose his vulnerable self, unable to become a writer. However, this exposure itself becomes his narrative, as Emmanuel Levinas conceptualizes narrative as an “exposure” to the other. What the narrator presents through his passivity is this vulnerability exposed to the other, creating a narrative from the “I” who can do nothing.

The paradoxical connection between passivity and his narrative is evident in his characteristic attitude of being “wide open” (*Sexus* 43). One day, the narrator writes a story titled “Free Fantasia” and shows it to his friend Ulric. Once again, he implies that his writing is not an active act but a passive one: “It was written blindly, without thought of beginning or end” (*Sexus* 43). Furthermore, he expresses surprise at what he has written: “The *pièce de résistance* was a kick in the slats which I gave the heroine in the act of submission. This gesture, which was aimed at Mara, was more of a surprise to me than it could possibly be to the reader” (*Sexus* 43). The narrator’s surprise suggests that writing for him involves welcoming what comes to him beyond his own intentions. In fact, Ulric remarks that the narrator’s life seems filled with a series of accidental episodes: “Your

whole life seems to be made up of just such incidents. Now why is that, can you tell me?" (*Sexus* 43). Ulric himself offers an answer, suggesting that the narrator is "wide open": "You seem to lay yourself wide open—I suppose that's the secret of it" (*Sexus* 43-44). In fact, the narrator is so open that he even includes in his narrative Ulric's harsh criticism of his story, which implies that the narrator cannot yet be called a writer. What is paradoxical is that, although Ulric's words seem to deny the narrator's ability to write, they naturally become part of his narrative. Consequently, the narrator embodies what he calls "passion" by passively welcoming what comes to him, and this makes him a writer. What enables his narrative is the very attitude of being wide open, as Ulric observes.

To further explain the narrator's unique openness, Emmanuel Levinas's definition of narrative as the "exposure" of vulnerability offers a useful perspective. Levinas challenges the traditional assumption that communication is simply the transmission of information between individuals. He states:

Communication is not reducible to the phenomenon of truth and the manifestation of truth conceived as a combination of psychological elements: thought in an ego—will or intention to make this thought pass into another ego—message by a sign designating this thought—perception of the sign by another ego—deciphering the sign. The elements of this mosaic are already in place in the antecedent exposure of the ego to the other, the non-indifference to another, which is not a simple "intention to address message." (Levinas, *Otherwise* 48)

For Levinas, communication cannot be reduced to a simple intention to convey a message; rather, it is a radical exposure to the other. In this sense, communication as exposure is “the risky uncovering of oneself” (Levinas, *Otherwise* 48). Notably, Levinas paraphrases this exposure as “vulnerability” or “trauma” (Levinas, *Otherwise* 48). He further elaborates with the metaphor of a “wound: “The one is exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it, as a cheek is offered to the smiter” (Levinas, *Otherwise* 49). Levinas thus presents a new perspective on narrative as an exposure of vulnerability.

Levinas’s discussion of narrative is especially applicable to *Sexus*, particularly through the motif of messages. While Levinas critiques the traditional idea of communication as simply delivering messages, the narrator also rejects the conventional process of transmitting messages accurately. Although he aspires to be a writer, the narrator works at a telegraph company to make ends meet. Generally speaking, the primary role of a telegraph company is to deliver messages to the correct address, embodying the traditional view of communication that Levinas criticizes. What characterizes the narrator is his rejection of this role: “The officials of the cosmococcic telegraph world had lost faith in me and I had lost faith in the whole fantastic world which they were uniting with wires, cables, pulleys, buzzers and Christ only knows what” (*Sexus* 15).⁵⁶ Despite working for the company, the narrator rejects the importance of delivering messages correctly. This strange attitude toward messages resonates with his narrative style, which consists of what comes to him beyond his own intentions.

The narrator gradually becomes aware of the importance of exposure as it relates to vulnerability. The concept of narrative as exposure is indirectly hinted at from the beginning. When urged by Mona to write something, the narrator confesses with a sense of humiliation that he has been writing for ten years but has only produced unsatisfying works: “To call attention to this ragged lawn was humiliating” (*Sexus* 21). At first glance, this confession might seem to imply that he is hiding his vulnerability as a writer. However, it can also be interpreted as an act of exposure itself—revealing what he wishes to conceal—because, as the first-person narrator, he could have simply avoided mentioning it. His clearer awareness of the importance of this exposure comes in the episode involving Dr. Kronski, a friend of the narrator. Dr. Kronski, unable to believe that the narrator is acquainted with many prominent psychoanalysts, asks the narrator to play the role of a psychoanalyst for him to prove his knowledge of psychoanalysis. During this experimental treatment, the narrator discovers that Dr. Kronski’s pride prevents him from revealing his inner self, evoking the image of “one vast defense system” (*Sexus* 333). This experience gives the narrator a critical perspective on such a defense system: “It is hopeless to think of security: there is none. The man who would chop off his limbs in order to have artificial ones which will give him no pain or trouble” (*Sexus* 339). This reflection leads to his realization of the importance of exposing vulnerability. He admits that humans seem to have a weaker defense system than insects or animals. What he realizes is that a paradoxical strength lies in this exposure of weakness: “By comparison the human being seems a helpless creature. In the sense that he

lives a more exposed life, he is. But this ability to expose himself to every risk is precisely his strength” (*Sexus* 339). Through repeated use of the verb “expose,” the narrator clearly becomes aware of the importance of revealing his vulnerability.

Certainly, what is written in *Sexus* may appear to be the result of an active process of writing. Nonetheless, what is crucial is that it is always imbued with the passivity of the “I” who can do nothing. This paradoxical passivity is particularly evident in the narrator’s description of Mona:

Studying her morsel by morsel, feet, hands, hair, lips, ears, breasts, traveling from navel to mouth and from mouth to eyes, the woman I fell upon, clawed, bit, suffocated with kisses, the woman who had been Mara and was now Mona, who had been and would be other names, other persons, other assemblages of appendages, was no more accessible, penetrable, than a cool statue in a forgotten garden of a lost continent. (*Sexus* 210)

Here, while the narrator confesses the impossibility of describing Mona, it is this very impossibility that becomes part of his narrative. In this context, the inability to write signifies his vulnerability as a writer, as he lacks the ability to capture what he most wants to express. Paradoxically, it is this vulnerability that allows him to generate his narrative about her: “Her image corresponded to nothing that I had formed in my heart. She had intruded it, slipped it like thinnest gauze between the crevices of the brain in a moment of lesion. And when the wound closed the imprint had remained, like a frail leaf traced upon a stone” (*Sexus* 210). Unable to actively describe Mona, the narrator finds himself in a position where she intrudes

into his narrative. Using the imagery of a wound, all he can do is passively welcome her presence. What he has written is an “imprint” of this passivity as passion.

The narrator’s openness is further highlighted by his inclusion of what might typically be excluded from his narrative. In a series of episodes about his relationship with his ex-wife Maude, the narrator refers to Melanie, Maude’s housemaid, who accidentally witnesses the sexual encounters between him and Maude. Although this autobiographical novel seems to focus on his relationships with Maude and his new wife Mona, Melanie should be a minor figure in the background. However, the narrator cannot exclude Melanie from his mind, without understanding why: “I thought of Melanie, whom normally, were I planning a book of my life, I would never have bothered to include. How had she managed to inject herself when ordinarily I scarcely gave her a thought? What was the significance of this intrusion?” (*Sexus* 248). Despite being the first-person narrator, he is not the active agent who determines what is included or excluded in his own narrative, allowing such “intrusions.” Later, he recognizes that Melanie evokes a contradictory image of “the fleshy and the angelic” (*Sexus* 248) and describes her “inexplicable nature of attraction” (*Sexus* 252). The narrator’s following reflection proves that his narrative is indeed an exposure of his vulnerability: “That Melanie, whom I had heretofore ignored, whom I had regarded as a mere cipher in the complicated sum of experiences, could prove such a rich vein, opened my eyes” (*Sexus* 250).

From Passion to Com-passion

The question of passivity as passion is inseparably linked to the theme of care. As discussed in the previous chapter, the term “autobiography” literally means to write (graphy) the life (bio) of the self (auto). In *Sexus*, one of Miller’s autobiographical novels, passion makes the narrator “wide open,” leading him to focus on the lives of others rather than solely on his own. Crucially, in *Sexus*, these other lives also involve questions of ability. Just as the narrator’s life is marked by impotentiality, the lives of others are similarly far from being defined by abilities. In this sense, they also embody the “I” who can do nothing, representing passivity. This relationship between the narrator and others reflects what Jean-Luc Nancy calls “com-passion,” in which they literally share their “passion.” What *Sexus* demonstrates is this care as “com-passion.”

While the narrator portrays his own life as that of the “I” who can do nothing, his focus consistently turns to others who also lead lives that deviate from those based on abilities. He expresses his concerns regarding writing as follows: “My concern was always for the nobody, the man who is lost in the shuffle, the man who is so common, so ordinary, that his presence is not even noticed” (*Sexus* 19). Indeed, the novel is filled with characters who also embody the “I” who can do nothing. One such character is his friend Ed Gavarni:

Ed Gavarni, for example, who was studying to become a priest; he would have a little gathering at his home expressly for my benefit, so that I could scratch myself in public and thus make the evening somewhat of an event. To prove his interest in the

noble art he would drop around to see me at more or less regular intervals, bringing cold sandwiches, apples and beer. Sometimes he would have a pocketful of cigars. I was to fill my belly and spout. If he had had an ounce of talent he would never have dreamed of becoming a priest. . . . (*Sexus* 21)

Gavarni's life closely mirrors that of the narrator in that both are unable to become what they aspire to be. In other words, Gavarni is also defined by impotentiality. From a traditional autobiographical perspective, his life might not seem worth documenting, as he is what the narrator calls a "nobody." Yet the narrator chooses to write about such lives—those whose presence is barely noticed. It is this care for the impotentiality of others that his passion includes in the autobiographical narrative.

The narrator's engagement with others through passion exemplifies what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "com-passion." In his discussion of what he conceptualizes as "being singular plural," Nancy uses the hyphenated term "com-passion" to emphasize the significance of the prefix "com" (meaning "together") and the noun "passion" (meaning "suffering"). He writes: "What I am talking about here is compassion, but not compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil" (Nancy, *Being* xiii). The narrative in *Sexus* illustrates this "com-passion," which must be distinguished from conventional compassion as pity. While the narrator cares for the lives of others that are typically omitted from traditional autobiographies, he leads a similar life marked by impotentiality. When the narrator defines passion as the act of welcoming others to write their lives,

their relationship becomes an embodiment of com-passion.

The embodiment of com-passion is vividly depicted in the relationship between the narrator and Mona's father. Initially, Mona seems reluctant to reciprocate the narrator's love for her; it turns out she is preoccupied with caring for her father, who is unable to work due to illness. Her father's financial dependence on his daughter signifies that he is also a passive being. Mona mentions that her father originally had such a good sense of humor that he could have become a writer. She then suggests that the narrator should become a writer, as if projecting her father's unfulfilled aspirations onto him. Once again, the narrator is unable to provide a positive response to her suggestion, leaving her disappointed. On the one hand, this episode highlights the narrator as the "I" who can do nothing, maintaining his passive attitude: "Ten minutes of introspective reverie and I was bursting to write a book. I thought of Mona. If only for her sake I ought to begin. And where would I begin?" (*Sexus* 201). On the other hand, it is through the narrator's inability to write that he connects with Mona's father's life as the "I" who cannot become a writer—though not out of pity. The narrator and Mona's father share their passivity, thus experiencing com-passion together.

Com-passion becomes more evident as the relationship between the narrator and Mona's father evolves into another form of passivity, described as "contagion." During a job interview for a position as an employment manager at a telegraph company, the narrator receives a call from Mona informing him of her father's passing. At that moment, an 18-year-old applicant named Fan Rico becomes aware of the narrator's situation.

Despite having just met him, Rico offers to share in the narrator's sorrow, saying, "And now, sir, if you will pardon me, may I suggest that you let me stay with you a little while? I don't think it is good for you to be alone at this moment. When the heart is sad one needs a friend" (*Sexus* 420).

Although Rico had originally come for a job interview, he now chooses to stay by the narrator's side, who had been unable to do anything for Mona's father. The significance of Rico's action lies in the shared passivity through this contagion. While Rico offers to accompany the narrator, and they go roller skating together, Rico remains in a passive state: "We stalked each other like animals, we turned into waltzing mice, we did the deaf-and-dumb act" (*Sexus* 421). In this relationship of care, Rico does not become an active subject. What emerges between them is a contagion of passivity.

As Nancy warns, this com-passion must be distinguished from simple altruism or identification: "Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification" (Nancy, *Being* xiii). The latter part of the episode with Rico illustrates the potential failure of com-passion. After roller skating, the narrator and Rico visit a dress shop to buy a mourning dress for Mona. The Jewish shop owner becomes interested in Rico, and during their conversation, it is revealed that the owner has also lost his son. Gradually, the focus shifts from the death of Mona's father to the story of the shop owner's son's passing. The shop owner also embodies the "I" who can do nothing, as there is nothing he can do in the face of his son's death. However, the shop owner's passivity is gradually replaced by a passionate monologue about the history of Jews in general: "He went into a monologue about the strange blood that had been poured into the veins of the Jews in

their wanderings” (*Sexus* 424). The topic of Mona’s father’s death is buried beneath the shop owner’s identification with the broader suffering of Jews: “As he talked he became intoxicated by this idea of the mixture of races and bloods. The world would be a stagnant pool had it not been for the Jews” (*Sexus* 424-25). Similar to the nurse in Fitzgerald’s “An Alcoholic Case,” the shop owner generalizes the singular event of Mona’s father’s death into a broader narrative of Jews in general. The chapter abruptly ends in the middle of his monologue, illustrating the failure of com-passion when identification takes over.

The abrupt ending of the shop owner’s monologue does not imply that the narrator rejects com-passion with Jews entirely. He shows care for Jews as long as it aligns with the principles of com-passion. Immediately after ending the episode with the shop owner, the narrator begins the next chapter by describing a visit to the ghetto in New York. He states, “I saw the ghetto with new eyes” (*Sexus* 427), but his concern is not for Jews in general. Without using the general noun “Jews,” he focuses on each singular being living in a passive condition: “A man of an olden race standing in a stone trance. He smells the food which his ancestors cooked in the millenary past” (*Sexus* 429); “Some bring their birds, their little pets—warm, tender things pulsing with tremulous beat, learning no new language, no new melodies, but pining away, droopy, listless, languishing in their superheated cages suspended above the fire escapes (*Sexus* 429); “In another cellar an old man sits in his overcoat on a pile of wood counting his coal. He sits in the dark, as he did in Cracow, stroking his beard” (*Sexus* 430). In contrast to the shop owner’s long monologues, these

figures do not speak for themselves. Each one is a singular being in a passive condition. Without generalizing them as representative of Jews in general, the narrator's juxtaposition of each singular passivity is his practice of com-passion.

The surreal dream of becoming a dog in the concluding scene can be interpreted as the culmination of com-passion. In the dream, the narrator becomes a dog at a dog show, competing with another dog to win a prize, which he ultimately does. At first glance, this outcome might suggest a positive interpretation—that he is superior to the other dog. However, it ironically underscores the narrator's ongoing passivity. After he wins, a female judge approaches him with a knucklebone filled with marrow as a prize, but instead of giving it to the narrator, she licks the marrow herself. Unable to act on his own, the narrator can do nothing but allow himself to be taken to her home: "Just as we got to the door the bone slid off and fell to the ground. I tried to scramble out of her arms, but she held me tight to her bosom. I began to whimper" (*Sexus* 506). Beneath the facade of an active victory in the competition, the narrator remains entirely passive, as his inability to do anything but whimper only emphasizes his passivity. In this sense, despite his win, he shares the same passivity as the other dog, who lost the competition. This ironic outcome, rather than celebrating his triumph, highlights their relationship as one of com-passion.

One might argue that finding a positive interpretation in such an excessively self-deprecating ending is difficult. However, it is this radical passivity that underscores Miller's consistent emphasis on com-passion in his autobiographical novels. In the final chapter of *Sexus*, the narrator

describes the tragedy of his failed marriage as a “physiological comedy: “I began to menstruate. I menstruated from every hole in my body” (*Sexus* 498). As Honda notes, this physiological comedy represents a transition from a flesh that does not bleed to a body that does, which ties into the theme of vulnerability.⁵⁷ What is crucial in Miller’s focus on this vulnerability is that he views these wounds not as something to close off, but as openings to share with other vulnerable lives. The narrator’s words in *Plexus*, the second novel of *The Rosy Crucifixion*, affirm this preoccupation with vulnerability:

Once I thought I had been wounded as no man ever had.
Because I felt thus I vowed to write this book. But long before
I began the book the wound had healed. Since I had sworn to
fulfill my task I reopened the horrible wound.

Let me put it another way. . . . Perhaps in opening my own
wound, I closed other wounds. (*Plexus* 640)

In this sense, the ending of *Sexus* cannot simply be interpreted as a negative tragedy. The radical passivity for an aspiring writer culminates his passion for com-passion with other vulnerable lives.

Conclusion

Sexus ends without the narrator ever realizing his ability to become a writer. From the outset, he presents himself as an aspiring writer without the capacity to write. What makes the narrator unique is that he does not attempt to acquire this ability. Instead, he chooses to remain the “I” who can do nothing. In this sense, the narrator’s lack of ability embodies what

Agamben calls “impotentiality,” which places him in a state of radical passivity. Paradoxically, it is this very passivity that generates his narrative. Referring to it as “passion,” this state allows the narrator to remain open to whatever comes his way, even elements that would typically be excluded from his narrative. This passion inevitably leads him to care not only for his own life but also for others, making him what the narrator calls “wide open.” Beneath the surface of an autobiographical novel, which, etymologically, means writing about the life of the self, *Sexus* presents care as “com-passion” for other “I”s who can do nothing.

Reading Miller’s novel in this context highlights the necessity of refiguring male modernist writers in terms of vulnerability as the beginning of care. From the perspective of conventional modernist studies, Miller is often viewed as a writer obsessed with the “I” as an isolated individual, especially through his autobiographical style. For general readers, his works were banned as a kind of pornography, which established his popular image as an outsider in the literary market. For academic scholars, the passive attitude of the “I” makes it difficult to identify a consistent theme worth exploring. Contrary to these popular images, Miller does share the interconnected themes of vulnerability and care with Fitzgerald and Chandler.

Chapter Seven

Belated Letter and Broken Watch:

Toward Care for What is Not Present

in J. D. Salinger's "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor"⁵⁸

Introduction

Up to this point, this study has identified "vulnerability as the beginning of care" as the central theme in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and two medical short stories, and has further developed it through the motif of "being in the world" in Chandler's detective novels and the motif of "life" in Miller's autobiographical novels. Throughout this process, an unanswered question remains, one that was already implicitly presented in *The Great Gatsby*: is the care that begins from vulnerability limited only to the realm of "this world" or "life"? Initially, Nick's care for Gatsby truly begins only after Gatsby has died. At first glance, this event of death may appear to be the ultimate realization of vulnerability, signaling an end to the presence of the vulnerable in "this world" or in "life." However, what is notable about Nick's care for Gatsby is that it is directed toward someone who is no longer present. This raises the question: when does the care beginning from vulnerability end? Is it confined to what is present?

J. D. Salinger's 1950 short story "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" vividly explores this question of time in relation to care and vulnerability. Drawing on Salinger's own wartime experiences, the story portrays a soldier with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the aftermath of World War II. He cannot maintain a stable sense of the present,

as his past memories constantly intrude upon his current self, beyond his control. His inability to maintain stable memories of the past manifests as “trauma,” or a “wound” in time. In this state of temporal vulnerability, the soldier comes across a letter, which has been misdelivered many times, from a girl named Esmé, whom he had met previously. With a broken watch inside due to the misdeliveries, her letter contains a prayer that the soldier did not participate in the first assault upon the Cotentin Peninsula. Since the soldier did participate in the assault, Esmé’s prayer might seem utterly meaningless in relation to his present condition. However, her prayer, though aimed at the past, nevertheless brings him a comforting sense of sleepiness, as if it has reached him across time. Paradoxically, this temporal gap appears necessary for care to extend to what is not present, resonating with Emmanuel Levinas’s unique concept of “time as the relation with the other.” “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor” thus presents a distinctive temporal dimension of care, one that engages even with what is not present.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder as a Vulnerability in Time
in Salinger’s Story and Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*

The story has a complex temporal structure. It begins with an episode in which the first-person narrator, “I,” living in New York, receives a wedding invitation from a woman named Esmé. Although the narrator explains that, unfortunately, he will not be able to attend the wedding, he begins recounting how he met Esmé. In 1944, the narrator was deployed as a sergeant to Devon. The day before relocating to London, he happened to

pass by a church where a children's choir was practicing. Esmé, one of the choir members, catches the narrator's attention. After the practice, the narrator meets Esmé again at a tearoom of the Red Cross. Accompanied by her home teacher and younger brother named Charles, she speaks to the narrator. While demonstrating care for Charles, Esmé indirectly tells the narrator that their father was killed in North Africa, saying it out loud as "He was s-l-a-i-n" ("Esmé" 97) to avoid stating it outright. Esmé learns that the narrator is also headed to a battlefield and wishes him safety, saying, "I hope you return from the war with all your faculties intact" ("Esmé" 97). After this scene of parting with Esmé, the narrative shifts. Under the name "Sergeant X," the narrator describes himself in Bavaria in 1945, suffering from the aftermath of the war. While experiencing both physical and mental disorders, he discovers a letter from Esmé, which had already arrived but remained unopened due to multiple misdeliveries. In the letter, Esmé prays for his safety and encloses a wristwatch inherited from her deceased father, though it seems to have broken in transit. Despite its condition, this belated letter and the broken watch lull X into sleepiness, accompanied by a sense of ecstasy.⁵⁹

As the plot suggests, "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" has often been interpreted as a story about the "trauma" of war. Shoji Noma's *Senso PTSD to Sarinja: Hansen sanbusaku no nazo o toku (War, PTSD, and Salinger: Solving the Mystery of the Anti-War Trilogy)* considers the story to be one of Salinger's typical anti-war works that vividly depicts the protagonist's PTSD. Noma explains that PTSD, in this context, is a mental disorder caused by severe wartime stress, leaving veterans unable to lead

normal lives even after the war. It is accompanied by a range of symptoms, including involuntary recall of past events, avoidance of social interaction, and sleep disturbances. Referring to *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which established official diagnostic criteria for PTSD in 1994, Noma enumerates various symptoms shown in the story, noting that all are manifestations of PTSD. Through his detailed analysis, Noma concludes that the story conveys Salinger's anti-war message.

Although PTSD was officially recognized as a term only in 1980, reading Salinger's work through this perspective allows a connection with *The Great Gatsby*. While *The Great Gatsby* is typically read in the context of the American Dream, it is also clearly a story about characters with World War I experiences, as Nick mentions that he participated in "the Great War" (*Gatsby* 6) and Gatsby recalls the battle in the Argonne Forest.⁶⁰ James Meredith highlights one reason for the relative scarcity of scholarship on Fitzgerald and war, noting that Fitzgerald, a non-combatant, does not depict the brutal realities of the battlefield but instead mostly places a focus on "post-World War I life" (Meredith 165). Among a small number of previous studies from this perspective, Noma offers a persuasive reading of Nick's "wounds" from this post-war period. Noma points out that Nick does not describe the years between the end of the war and 1922, when he arrives in New York. This gap becomes even more unnatural when Nick explains that his relatives gathered to admit his departure with a one-year financial support, even though he was already twenty-nine years old at the time. Noma interprets these anomalies as indications that Nick may have been suffering from what we now recognize as PTSD. As Noma notes, while

the word “shell shock” was used at the time, it was not recognized as an official medical term for diagnosis, leading to the dishonorable treatment of those who suffered from such symptoms.⁶¹ In this regard, Fitzgerald shares a preemptive concern with Salinger about PTSD.

Since PTSD is fundamentally a problem of time, it is significant that *The Great Gatsby* has been criticized for Nick’s vulnerability in relation to time. Thomas A. Pendleton provides a detailed analysis of the inconsistencies in Nick’s chronology, such as how the party at Gatsby’s mansion in Chapter 3 precedes the party at Myrtle’s house in Chapter 2, easily creating confusion for the reader. Developing Pendleton’s analysis, Takaki Hiraishi points out Nick’s “carelessness” with time, despite his judgment of others as careless. Reading *The Great Gatsby* as a story about returning soldiers with PTSD sheds new light on this temporal problem. Since PTSD involves a loss of control over time, Nick’s struggles with chronology can be reread not as mere carelessness, but as an expression of his vulnerability. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Salinger’s “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor” both feature this problem of time.

Echoing the interpretation of *The Great Gatsby* in Chapter One, this chapter foregrounds the question of time in Salinger’s story to reveal that vulnerability in time can also paradoxically be the beginning of care. PTSD, originally stemming from the concept of “trauma” as defined by Sigmund Freud, signifies a state where past experiences involuntarily return to the present, what Freud described as “repetition compulsion.” In his 1914 article “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through,” Freud explains: “The patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten

and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud 150). This loss of control over time represents one aspect of the “squalor” in the story’s subtitle. However, the story cannot be reduced to this negative portrayal of vulnerability alone. Esmé’s belated letter and broken watch suggest that her prayer for the protagonist’s safety is connected to the past in a way that transcends conventional understandings of time. It demonstrates a unique temporality of care that extends beyond the present. In this sense, vulnerability in time can also represent the “love” in the story’s subtitle. This study aims to explore this ambiguous temporality of care, beginning from vulnerability, in light of the implications of the subtitle “with Love and Squalor.”

The Crisis of Responsibility to Singularity

While previous studies have interpreted the story in the context of PTSD resulting from the war, this trauma is a symptom of what happens “after (post) the war,” leaving a gap in the discussion of what the “wound” means during the war. This study aims to demonstrate that the wartime wound is closely connected to a question derived from Fitzgerald’s short stories, discussed in Chapter Two: responsibility to singularity. Through the central motif of letters and the narrator’s self-designation as “X,” the story presents the event of war as a fundamental crisis in responsibility to singularity.

The problem of responsibility to singularity can be explored through a recurring motif in the story: letters. Generally, letters are addressed to a

specific recipient, not to the general public. Although the narrator claims to be a writer, the fact that the entire narrative takes the form of a reply to Esmé's letter highlights the significance of this motif. The connection between letters and singularity is emphasized in the narrator's recollections of his war experience. When he begins to recount his stay in Devon in April 1944, he notes that everyone in his group loved letters: "And as I look back, it seems to me that we were fairly unique, the sixty of us, in that there wasn't one good mixer in the bunch. We were all essentially letter-writing types, and when we spoke to each other out of the line of duty, it was usually to ask somebody if he had any ink he wasn't using" ("Esmé" 88). The narrator's exaggerated claim that there was not a single "good mixer" among them reflects their lack of interest in people in general. What they care most about is to whom they write letters, as each recipient is singular to them. Thus, the narrator's memory of the war begins with a particular focus on letters.

Why is the motif of letters so emphasized in this war story? This study proposes that it presents the war as a fundamental crisis of singularity. This crisis is suggested through the use of gas as a chemical weapon. In the same recollection, the narrator mentions packing a gas mask for London, admitting that he discarded it, believing he could not put it on in time if the enemy used gas: "I'd never get the damn thing on in time" ("Esmé" 88). While the narrator notes the actual use of gas as a chemical weapon in the war, he describes the gas mask's uselessness in terms of time. This overlaps with what Masachi Osawa observes about gas as a chemical weapon. Osawa characterizes gas as a weapon that lacks a specific

source and invades the body unnoticed.⁶² In other words, it reaches anyone indiscriminately, without regard for singularity. This feature of gas contrasts directly with letters, which have a specific “address.” Through the reference to gas, the narrator implies this radical negation of singularity in the war. When he steps outside into a storm, this negation of singularity is further implied in his thoughts about lightning: “I ignored the flashes of lightning all around me. They either had your number on them or they didn’t” (“Esmé” 89). As “number” refers to the “address” of letter recipients, the narrator suggests that lightning can strike randomly, without regard for a specific “address.” For him, war is an event that renders his singularity completely vulnerable.

The deprivation of singularity is not merely a passive condition that the narrator suffers as a victim. It is also deeply ingrained in what appear to be the narrator’s own actions. In his recollection of his stay in Bavaria in 1945, where he refers to himself as “X,” he describes holding a book that belonged to a female official of the Nazi Party whom he had arrested. He gives a detailed account of the arrest: “She had been a low official in the Nazi Party, but high enough, by Army Regulations standards, to fall into an automatic-arrest category. X himself had arrested her” (“Esmé” 105). At first glance, the word “himself” suggests that this arrest was an action the narrator actively performed. However, as the term “automatic-arrest” indicates, the event occurred automatically, according to Army Regulations, entirely independent of the narrator’s own will. The conjunction “but,” which suggests the narrator’s doubt about the justification of the arrest, ironically underscores the powerlessness of his own will in the process.

Even when he appears to be an active agent, he is deprived of his singularity.

The deprivation of singularity in what seems to be an active action is also apparent in the subsequent episode about the inscription in the book. The narrator finds a note written by the woman inside the book: “Dear God, life is hell” (“Esmé” 105). On the one hand, these words seem to offer the narrator a chance to reclaim his singularity, as he perceives them as a kind of “indictment” (“Esmé” 105) questioning his responsibility for what he did. On the other hand, the narrator is unable to confront this responsibility, which only highlights the loss of his singularity. In response to the woman’s words, he attempts to write a quote from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, but then realizes that his writing is completely illegible before he can add Dostoevsky’s name: “He starts to write Dostoevsky’s name under the inscription, but saw—with fright that ran through his whole body—that what he had written was almost entirely illegible” (“Esmé” 105). Here the narrator fails to respond as a singular being in two ways. First, in attempting to quote Dostoevsky, he is unable to write his own words in response to the woman’s. Second, he cannot even inscribe the proper name under his writing. This failure to respond vividly represents the negation of his singularity.

The deprivation of singularity is most explicitly expressed in the narrator’s choice to call himself “X.” In the narrative shift from April 1944 to 1945, the narrator declares that “people change, too” (“Esmé” 103), switching from a first-person narrative to a third-person one, with “Sergeant X” as the central figure. He explains this change as follows:

This is the squalid, or moving, part of the story, and the scene changes. The people change, too. I'm still around, but from here on in, for reasons I'm not at liberty to disclose, I've disguised myself so cunningly that even the cleverest reader will fail to recognize me. ("Esmé" 103)

This "disguise" has been criticized for being unnecessary, as readers can easily identify X as "the thinly veiled narrator from the first half of the story" (Mueller and Hochman 149). Why, then, does the narrator need such an easily detectable disguise? James Miller offers one possible explanation: "the events remain so vividly painful that the narrator must envelop them in anonymity and must remove them from himself by placing them in the third person" (Miller 22). Miller's explanation convincingly accounts for why the narrator separates the first-person "I" from the third-person "Sergeant X," particularly in relation to his painful war experiences. However, considering that these episodes engage with the problem of singularity through the motif of letters, "X" can also be interpreted as an expression of the narrator's inability to be a singular being. The name "X" has a dual meaning. On the one hand, as Miller suggests, the letter "X" is often used to conceal someone's or something's real name, keeping it secret. On the other hand, ironically for the narrator, "X" also marks a specific "spot," such as the "X" "used on maps in adventure stories to show that something is buried in a particular place" ("X"). These dual meanings strongly resonate with the narrator's struggle with singularity. He is deeply preoccupied with letters, yet remains completely deprived of his own singularity. In this sense, the narrator is right when he claims that "the

cleverest reader will fail to recognize me” (“Esmé” 103). They fail not only to identify X as the narrator but also to find any singularity in what he calls “me” in X.

The Problem of the Present:

Time as the Relationship with the Other

At first glance, the motif of letters might seem like a resistance to the crisis of singularity during the war. As mentioned earlier, letters are originally a medium intended for a singular recipient, not for the general public. However, what characterizes the story is that this motif highlights the vulnerability of letters. It reveals a simple fact: while letters are directed toward a singular recipient, they are always exposed to the possibility of misdelivery and may not reach the intended person. Since letters require a process of delivery, a temporal gap always exists between the sender and the receiver. In other words, the sender and receiver can never share the same “present.” In this sense, letters in the story symbolize the gap in time between the self and the other, reflecting what Emmanuel Levinas calls “time as the relation with the other.” Through the motif of letters, the story foregrounds this problem of the present as a form of temporal vulnerability.

The fact that the motif of letters cannot simply resolve the crisis of singularity is evident in the episode of Esmé’s misdelivered letter in the 1945 recollection. Unable to write a letter due to symptoms of PTSD, the narrator accidentally discovers an unopened package, which turns out to be a letter from Esmé. What is crucial here is that the reason he had not

received it earlier was that it had been misdelivered several times: “He saw that it had been readdressed several times. He could make out, on just one side of the package, at least three of his old A.P.O. numbers” (“Esmé” 112). This misdelivery succinctly demonstrates the fundamental temporal vulnerability of letters. When Esmé writes a letter to the narrator, it does not mean that it reaches him in that exact moment. It always takes time for the letter to be delivered. In other words, the narrator and Esmé cannot share the same “present.” The multiple misdeliveries symbolize the narrator’s lack of control over this temporal gap. What the motif of letters ultimately reveals is the problem of the present as a temporal vulnerability.

The problem of the present through the motif of letters foregrounds a simple fact: the narrator has a relationship with the other not only within the same time but also across different moments in time. Regarding this concept of time and the other, Emmanuel Levinas provides an insightful standpoint. Levinas presents the idea that time itself constitutes the relationship with the other in his lecture *Time and the Other*: “The aim of these lectures is to show that time is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but that it is the very relationship of the subject with the Other” (Levinas, *Time* 39). Levinas explores this seemingly strange proposition because he intends to critique the conventional Western assumptions about the relationship with the other, particularly Martin Heidegger’s ontology, which is primarily expressed with the preposition “with”:

Finally, the other in Heidegger appears in the essential situation of *Miteinandersein*, reciprocally being with one another. . . .

The preposition *mit* (with) here describes the relationship. It is thus an association of side by side, around something, around a common term, and, more precisely, for Heidegger, around the truth. (Levinas, *Time* 40-41)

Levinas criticizes this conception of the relationship with the other, arguing that “it is not the preposition *mit* that should describe the original relationship with the other” (Levinas, *Time* 41). In his later works, he develops this idea beyond synchronization with the other, exploring “a relationship between uneven terms, without any common time” (Levinas, *Otherwise* 70). For Levinas, the relationship with the other should not be understood as something that shares the same present.

In fact, the problem of the present can be seen throughout the story. It begins with an episode set in 1950, the “present,” where the narrator, residing in New York, receives a wedding invitation from Esmé, stating that the wedding will take place in England on April 18th. The narrator explains that he cannot attend because the wedding date conflicts with his plans to spend time with his mother-in-law during the last two weeks of April. As Noma points out, this refusal seems unnatural, considering that long-distance international flights were already available in the 1940s. Noma attributes this unnaturalness to the narrator’s ongoing suffering from PTSD even in 1950.⁶³ While acknowledging the validity of Noma’s interpretation, this study adds further significance to the episode as an introduction to the problem of the present. With specific references to Esmé’s wedding date, “April 18th,” and the narrator’s plans to spend time with his mother-in-law during “the last two weeks in April,” the narrative highlights the fact that

the narrator and Esmé cannot share the same time. Certainly, since the narrator immediately suggests that he will celebrate the wedding “wherever I happen to be” (“Esmé” 87), one might argue that what they cannot share is merely space, not time. However, the narrator’s behavior implies that the problem is not just space, but time itself. What he does to celebrate is to write about how he met Esmé: “Accordingly, I’ve gone ahead and jotted down a few revealing notes on the bride as I knew her almost six years ago” (“Esmé” 87). It is unclear when these notes will be read, meaning that he cannot truly celebrate the wedding at the exact time. This episode underscores the problem of the present that they cannot share the same moment in time.

This same problem is subtly embedded in the details of the narrator’s encounter with Esmé in April 1944. When the narrator goes out in Devon, he synchronizes his wristwatch with the clock in the latrine: “Then, after synchronizing my wristwatch with the clock in the latrine, I walked down the long, cobblestone hill into town” (“Esmé” 89). This act of synchronizing time suggests a constant possibility that his wristwatch might be out of sync with the exact present time. This temporal discrepancy is repeated in the episode with the children’s choir. After noticing from a bulletin board that the children’s choir is practicing, the narrator enters the church to listen to them sing. At that moment, he observes that two of the youngest children are slightly dragging the tempo: “A couple of the very youngest children dragged the tempo a trifle” (“Esmé” 90). Once again, the difficulty of sharing the same time is indirectly hinted at in the gap of the tempo.

In addition to these subtle clues, the problem of the present decisively shapes the relationship between Esmé and her father. After the choir practice ends, the narrator enters a tearoom where he reunites with Esmé and her brother Charles, who had left a lasting impression on him during the choir performance. During their conversation, the narrator learns that Esmé's father was killed in North Africa. According to Esmé, her father was such a talented writer that she still keeps some of his letters. Her words about the letters, "I'm saving a number of his letters for posterity" ("Esmé" 99), foreshadow the story's focus on multiple dimensions of the present. Her act of keeping the letters highlights the gap between the past, when her father wrote them, and the present, in which Esmé lives. Additionally, her use of the phrase "for posterity" suggests that the letters might also play a role in the future, when someone else may read them. These multiple layers of time are further emphasized by the fact that Esmé's father was an archivist: "He was an archivist—amateur, of course" ("Esmé" 98). This role of preserving old documents emphasizes the temporal gap between when documents are written and when they are read.

Another significant instance is Charles's peculiar riddle, which can be interpreted as a clue to this relationship with the other across different times. While the narrator and Esmé are conversing, Charles interrupts them with a riddle: "What did one wall say to the other wall?" ("Esmé" 98), to which he immediately gives the answer by himself: "Meet you at the corner!" ("Esmé" 99). This riddle is significant as it implies what Levinas argues about time as the relationship with the other. As long as the relationship is expressed through the preposition "with," one wall and the

other wall cannot “meet” in perfect synchronization. One can meet the other as “you” only when they are not sharing the same time. Charles’s riddle suggests this understanding of time as a relationship with the other in the context of the problem of the present.

The Problem of Re-presentation as a Vulnerability in Time

The story illustrates how this problem of the present can manifest as “trauma” over time. Each of the various symptoms of PTSD exhibited by Sergeant X signifies severe damage to his ability to integrate the past into the present. To use Levinas’s expressions, he is unable to synchronize different “presents” with the preposition “with.” What X suffers from, as a form of “squalor,” is this problem of re-presentation as a vulnerability in time.

First, the problem of re-presentation is evident in the strained relationship between the “I” in 1950 and “Sergeant X” in 1945. As discussed earlier, the narrator refers to himself as “X” when the narrative shifts from April 1944 to 1945, even though the reader can easily identify the narrator as X. What is significant here in terms of the present is that this narrative shift highlights the narrator’s difficulty in identifying his past self with his present self. This is underscored by his declaration that “even the cleverest reader will fail to recognize me” (“Esmé” 103). As the definition “To perceive to be the same as something or someone previously known or encountered; to identify (something that has been known before)” (“Recognize”) illustrates, the verb implies integrating past events into present ones through the prefix “re-.” Thus, the failure of recognition is a

failure to connect two different presents, or a failure of re-presentation. The significance of the relationship between “I” and “Sergeant X” lies in this problem of re-presentation.

The problem of re-presentation is also deeply embedded in X’s symptoms of what is now diagnosed as PTSD. For example, when X attempts to read a novel, he experiences significant difficulty: “. . . for more than an hour he had been triple-reading paragraphs, and now he was doing it to the sentences. He suddenly closed the book, without marking his place” (“Esmé” 104). This symptom is not merely an inability to comprehend the text but is strongly linked to the temporal problem. His need to reread the same passages over and over indicates that he cannot connect what he reads with the present moment. His subsequent action of closing the book “without marking his place” (“Esmé” 104) further articulates this temporal problem. It signifies that it is useless for him to mark where he stopped because he cannot resume reading at that point in the future.

The relationship between the narrator as X and the female low-ranking Nazi official can also be reconsidered in terms of the problem of re-presentation. As mentioned above, when he opens the book that belonged to the woman he arrested, he finds her writing: “Dear God, life is hell” (“Esmé” 105). In terms of time, the present tense “is” shows that this sentence reflects what the woman feels in that moment. Although this statement has become part of X’s past, particularly after the war has ended, it re-emerges as an indictment against him: “Alone on the page, and in the sickly stillness of the room, the words appeared to have the stature of an

uncontestable, even classic indictment” (“Esmé” 105). This indictment from the past, emphasized by the adjectives “uncontestable” and “classic,” overwhelms X’s present. He is unable to re-present it within a stable sense of the present: “X stared at the page for several minutes, trying, against heavy odds, not to be taken in” (“Esmé” 105). This feeling of being “taken in” destabilizes X’s present identity.

The problem of re-presentation as a vulnerability in time is further demonstrated when X reads a letter from his brother in New York. His brother writes: “Now that the g.d. war is over and you probably have a lot of time over there, how about sending the kids a couple of bayonets or swastikas” (“Esmé” 106). The phrase “war is over” reflects the brother’s sense of time, which sharply contrasts with X’s. Unlike X, the brother does not experience the past as an indictment. As the use of the present tense “is” shows, he can easily juxtapose the past event of the war with the present in which he is living. In other words, he can re-present the past with no difficulty. The brother’s comment, “you probably have a lot of time over there” (“Esmé” 106), takes on a bitter irony for X. For X’s present, it can be quite problematic to have “a lot of time.”

X’s vulnerability in time is vividly depicted through the imagery of war in a torn picture enclosed with the letter. Unable to continue reading, X tears the letter, only to find a fragment of a picture showing someone’s feet standing on grass. This image evokes memories of severed feet, likely recalling what X witnessed during the war. The sight of the torn picture overwhelms him with intense physical and mental pain: “He put his arms on the table and rested his head on them. He ached from head to foot, all zones

of pain seemingly interdependent. He was rather like a Christmas tree whose lights, wired in series, must all go out if even one bulb is defective” (“Esmé” 106). The picture may have been an ordinary snapshot taken by his brother, but X mistakenly associates it with the horrors of war. This temporal disconnect is further highlighted by the metaphor of a Christmas tree. Given that the episode takes place “several weeks after V-E Day” (“Esmé” 106), around late May 1945, the comparison to a Christmas tree is clearly out of season, emphasizing X’s inability to situate himself in the present. The contrast with those who have no problem with re-presentation articulates X’s vulnerability in time.

X’s problem with re-presentation is closely linked to what Levinas describes as “time as a relationship with the other.” This can be observed in X’s conversation with his fellow soldier named Clay, who fought alongside him in the war. When Clay enters X’s room, he immediately begins recalling their wartime experiences, repeatedly using the word “remember”: “Remember that time I and you drove into Valognes, and we got shelled for about two goddam hours, and that goddam cat I shot that jumped up on the hood of the jeep when we were layin’ in that hole? Remember?” (“Esmé” 110). X responds with a simple “Yes,” seemingly sharing the memory with Clay, but as he quickly adds, “I don’t want to hear about it” (“Esmé” 110), it becomes clear that X’s memory is fundamentally different from Clay’s. This contrast is further emphasized when X attempts to dismiss Clay with a surreal joke: “That cat was a spy” (“Esmé” 110). The joke represents an attempt to re-present the past event by giving it meaning within a narrative. However, once again, X cannot complete this act and ends up vomiting.

This physical response demonstrates that the past remains an unresolved “other” in him, something he cannot integrate into the present. His failure to re-present, as indicated by his act of vomiting, serves as a direct expression of time as a relationship with the other.

“X felt suddenly sick, and he swung around in his chair and grabbed the wastebasket—just in time” (“Esmé” 110). This description of X managing to vomit into the wastebasket ironically foregrounds the depth of his relationship with time as the other. In the immediate context, the phrase “just in time” simply means that he succeeded in preventing his vomit from spilling onto the floor. However, its literal meaning “right in the midst of time” also perfectly encapsulates X’s vulnerability in time. Unlike Clay, X cannot remember the past in synchronization with the present. On a physical level, he seems to be expelling what is the other from him. Ironically, the phrase also suggests that he remains “just in time,” trapped in this ongoing relationship with time as the other, unable to escape it.

Care for What is Not Present

While depicting the problem of re-presentation as a vulnerability in time, the story does not portray it solely as “squalor”; what truly characterizes the narrative is its revelation that this vulnerability can also be the beginning of care. In the final scene, Esmé’s prayer for X’s safety reaches him, despite the fact that what she prayed for differs from what X actually experienced. The time Esmé prayed belongs to a different present from the time X is suffering. Nonetheless, Esmé’s prayer transcends these different presents to reach out to what is not present. Levinas’s discussion

of time provides an effective perspective on this unique temporality of prayer: “In a prayer in which the worshipper asks that his prayer be heard, the prayer as it were precedes or follows itself” (Levinas, *Otherwise* 10). According to Levinas, prayer can constitute care for those who exist in different presents. The belated letter with the broken watch from Esmé signifies this beginning of care for what is not present.

Resonating with the paradoxical ambiguity of vulnerability, the motif of letters foreshadows the possibility of caring for what is not present. In the 1944 episode, the narrator repeatedly reads letters addressed to him. In the tearoom of the Red Cross, he pulls out letters from his wife and mother-in-law, which he has already read multiple times: “I then looked through all my pockets, including my raincoat, and finally found a couple of stale letters to reread” (“Esmé” 91). The verb “reread,” coupled with the adjective “stale,” implies that the narrator has read these letters repeatedly. Notably, the contents of the letters are so mundane that they do not seem worth rereading: “one from my wife, telling me how the service at Schrafft’s Eighty-eighth Street had fallen off, and one from my mother-in-law, asking me to please send her some cashmere yarn first chance I got away from ‘camp’” (“Esmé” 91). Despite their mundane content, the narrator carries them with him, rereading them whenever he feels the need. This suggests that the letters continue to hold meaning for him, even after their contents have become “stale.” Though they belong to different presents, these letters can always return to the present for the narrator. This possibility of caring for what is not present is also reflected in Esmé’s attitude toward letters. As mentioned earlier, Esmé keeps the letters from

her deceased father “for posterity” (“Esmé” 99). For Esmé, letters do not lose their significance once their messages have been delivered. Her phrase “for posterity” indicates her belief that they can continue to hold meaning for future readers, transcending the specific moment in which they were written.

This unique sense of time strongly resonates with Esmé’s prayer. When Esmé realizes that the narrator must participate in battle, she utters a prayer for him: “I hope you return from the war with all your faculties intact” (“Esmé” 103). Given the story’s preoccupation with the problem of time, her use of the present tense in “I hope” and “you return” holds a significance beyond mere grammatical convention. The present tense can indicate “something that happens all the time or repeatedly” (Murphy 4). In other words, the present tense does not relate solely to a single moment but can engage with different presents, as seen in example sentences like “Nurses look after patients in hospitals” (Murphy 4). This engagement of the present tense with multiple presents is important because it evokes what Levinas describes as the characteristic sense of time in prayer. Esmé’s prayer implies the possibility that it precedes or follows itself, rather than being confined to the moment in which it is uttered.

Indeed, Esmé’s prayer in her letter to X embodies care for what is not present. Despite her wish during their parting, the narrator reveals that he did participate in D-Day and now suffers from PTSD. Consequently, he becomes unable to read letters properly, resulting in a delay in discovering Esmé’s letter, which had already arrived. At first glance, this delay might seem like a negative symbol, only confirming that X belongs to a different

present from Esmé. However, Esmé's letter demonstrates her ongoing care for him, transcending the temporal gap between their presents. She expresses her continued concern for him since their first meeting, specifying the exact date: "I have thought of you frequently and of the extremely pleasant afternoon we spent in each other's company on April 30, 1944, between 3:45 and 4:15 P.M. in case it slipped your mind" ("Esmé" 113). Esmé's use of "I have thought of" in the present perfect tense suggests that their past encounter continues to hold significance in the present moment of her writing. In other words, Esmé's present remains engaged with what is not the present.

The temporality of caring for what is not present is deeply embedded in Esmé's prayer, which paradoxically addresses the past. In the letter, X discovers that Esmé wished he had not participated in the first assault of D-Day:

We are all tremendously excited and overawed about D Day and only hope that it will bring about the swift termination of the war and a method of existence that is ridiculous to say the least. Charles and I are both quite concerned about you; we hope you were not among those who made the first initial assault upon the Cotentin Peninsula. Were you? ("Esmé" 113)

What makes this prayer poignant is that X's presence at the event had already been determined by the time Esmé heard the news. In other words, the prayer is directed toward the fixed past in which X did indeed participate. Does this make her prayer entirely meaningless? To address this question, Osawa's discussion of the temporality of prayer provides a useful

perspective. Osawa points out that some prayers, such as those for the survival of a family member reported lost, are inevitably directed toward the past. While such prayers may seem meaningless because they cannot change what has already occurred, Osawa argues that prayers directed toward the past can rather become the most sincere: “On the one hand, it assumes that the past event has passed, cannot be changed, negated, or chosen. On the other hand, assuming the irreversibility of the event, it arises from its engagement with the past event, as if it could have denied it, changed it, or chosen it” (Osawa, ‘*Jiyu*’; my trans.; 38). Esmé’s prayer, too, is directed toward a past event. Despite its irreversibility, she nonetheless tries to engage with it. The phrase “Sincerely yours, Esmé” (“Esmé” 113) explicitly conveys the depth of her sincerity in caring for what is no longer present.

The broken watch enclosed in Esmé’s letter symbolizes this temporality of care in a paradoxical manner. In the postscript of the letter, Esmé informs X that she has enclosed her father’s heirloom wristwatch as a “lucky talisman” (“Esmé” 113) for him to keep “for the duration of the conflict” (“Esmé” 113), noting that it is “shock-proof” (“Esmé” 113). Contrary to her words, the watch arrives broken. Yet, as discussed above, Esmé’s prayer is characterized by a sense of time that attempts to maintain a relationship with what is not present, a relationship that seems “broken” compared to the assumptions of a normal watch. In this sense, the broken watch itself becomes a “lucky talisman” for X, as he remains “for the duration of the conflict” of PTSD. The broken watch, therefore, directly embodies the temporality of care in Esmé’s prayer.

The final scene demonstrates that Esmé's prayer indeed reaches X as an act of care. Her belated letter, containing the broken watch, induces sleepiness in X: "Then, suddenly, almost ecstatically, he felt sleepy" ("Esmé" 114). The word "suddenly" suggests that X is still in a vulnerable state, unable to control time. Yet this vulnerability is juxtaposed with the feeling of ecstatic sleepiness, reflecting Esmé's wish during their parting that he would return from the war with all his faculties intact: "You take a really sleepy man, Esmé, and he always stands a chance of again becoming a man with all his fac—with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact" ("Esmé" 114). In relation to Esmé's prayer, the use of the present tense here is crucial, as it indicates "something happens all the time or repeatedly" (Murphy 4). X, too, begins to engage with what is not present.

X's characteristic use of hyphens in the final sentence—"with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact" ("Esmé" 114)—emphasizes that time, as a relationship with the other, can become the beginning of care. This expression mirrors Esmé's earlier phrase "He was s-l-a-i-n," which she used when telling the narrator about her father's death. When she said this, it demonstrated her care for her brother, as she avoided stating it directly to spare him from shock. This act of Esmé's care in the past returns to the protagonist's present. Despite existing in different presents, it is through this relationship with the other across time that X's vulnerability transforms into the beginning of care.

The unique relationship between the narrator and Esmé ultimately reveals a paradoxical relationship between time and care: the temporal gap is rather essential for caring for what is not present. This unique

understanding of time is suggested in Esmé's character from the moment the narrator first meets her. During their first encounter, the narrator quickly notices that Esmé is wearing a wristwatch that looks unnatural on her: "Its face was much too large for her slender wrist" ("Esmé" 93). This incongruously large wristwatch symbolizes "Esme's famous malaprops and inflated diction" (Wenke 73), as the narrator observes in his description of her:

She put her hands and wrists farther forward on the table, and I remember wanting to do something about that enormous-faced wristwatch she was wearing—perhaps suggest that she try wearing it around her waist.

"Usually, I'm not terribly gregarious," she said, and looked over at me to see if I knew the meaning of the word. ("Esmé" 93)

What characterizes Esmé is that she inhabits this temporal gap herself. The reason she exists within this gap, as mentioned earlier, is to care for her brother. Wearing her father's wristwatch and using vocabulary that reflects his influence, as the narrator humorously notes—"I said I imagined her father had had quite an extraordinary vocabulary" ("Esmé" 98)—Esmé is attempting to assume her father's role, caring for her younger brother as he might have. It is clear that Esmé is not perfectly suited for this role, as they are accompanied by a home teacher, which vividly demonstrates her condition in this temporal gap. What is crucial, however, is that it is within this temporal vulnerability that the narrator perceives Esmé's care for her brother: "'Father adored him.' She bit reflectively at the cuticle of her

thumb. ‘He looks very much like my mother—Charles, I mean. I look exactly like my father.’ She went on biting at her cuticle” (“Esmé” 93). Although Esmé emphasizes her similarity to her father, her childish habit of biting her cuticle betrays her lingering youthfulness. The narrator’s description captures this temporal gap as a necessity for care.

Finally, the entire structure of the narrative exemplifies the temporal gap as a necessity for caring for what is not present. In the misdelivered letter, Esmé writes to the narrator with the expectation of a quick reply: “Please reply as speedily as possible” (“Esmé” 113). Needless to say, the multiple misdeliveries of the letter result in the opposite of what she expected. Furthermore, during their first meeting, when the narrator confessed he was an aspiring short-story writer, Esmé asked him to write a story exclusively for her someday, to which he promised he would. Although there is no specific mention of how this promise was fulfilled, it seems likely that he never wrote such a story, as he refers to the entire narrative as “a few revealing notes on the bride as I knew her almost six years ago” (“Esmé” 87). Even after six years, there remains some past moments he still cannot fully articulate in his writing. He can only describe their departure, where Esmé waves to him and he waves back, as a “strange emotional moment” (“Esmé” 102). However, the paradox is that the more this temporal gap widens, the stronger their relationship of care becomes. This is because the gap demonstrates their painful longing for care, despite the impossibility of sharing the same present. John Wenke captures this idea well when he suggests that this temporal gap is the main reason why only Esmé’s letter and the narrator’s reply serve as genuine acts of care in a

story otherwise full of miscommunications: “These acts of communication are not spontaneous emanations, but come out of periods of retrospection and consolidation during which each perceives the import of that ‘strangely emotional time’ which they spent together” (Wenke 72). In the story’s present, set in April 1951, the narrator admits he cannot attend Esmé’s wedding. Ultimately, the story conveys that this inability to share the present fosters a deeper relationship of care for what is not present.

The main title, “For Esmé,” confirms the seemingly contradictory nature of care in relation to time. On the one hand, it suggests the narrator’s response to Esmé as a responsibility to her as a singular being. On the other hand, it hints that this response could be misdelivered to another person, someone who does not share her present. When Esmé reminds the narrator of his promise to write a story exclusively for her, she adds an apparently contradictory remark: “‘You’re sure you won’t forget to write that story for me?’ she asked. ‘It doesn’t have to be exclusively for me. It can—’” (“Esmé” 102-3). The unfinished sentence, “It can—,” emphasizes the possibility that the story intended exclusively for her might become a story for others, those who are not Esmé. This interpretation is reinforced by Esmé’s habit of keeping letters “for posterity” (“Esmé” 99), as well as her father’s activity as an amateur archivist. This suggests that letters, and perhaps stories, can be delivered to those who are not present. In fact, when readers engage with this story for Esmé and begin to care for the two characters in their temporal vulnerability, the misdelivery of the story, which is initially intended for Esmé, can be seen as the beginning of care for what is not present.

Conclusion

As a whole, in response to the question of when the care that begins from vulnerability ends, the story offers a possible answer: it does not end in the “present.” The narrative framework presents the war as a crisis of responsibility to singularity. Although the central motif of letters may seem like a direct resistance to this crisis, it instead emphasizes the problem of the present, as Levinas conceptualizes time as a relationship with the other. The narrator is indeed forced into a state of temporal vulnerability, unable to re-present his past memories in the present. What previous studies have identified as symptoms of PTSD can be reread as this problem of re-presentation. However, the story crucially explores an alternative possibility of this problem of time that this temporal gap can also be the beginning of care for what is not present. The combination of the belated letter and the broken watch serves as a precise expression of this paradoxical relationship between vulnerability and care in time.

This reading of Salinger’s story in terms of the problem of the present strongly resonates with the broader question of the period of modernism explored in this study. As discussed in the Introduction, the word modern derives from the Latin “modo,” which denotes the narrow time span of “just now.” It reflects an attitude of focusing on the present moment, entirely separated from the past, which easily evokes the typical modernist subject as an isolated individual. However, as Agamben uncovers, the word “modo” also has another meaning of “a short time ago, just now, recently,” which unsettles the simple definition of “mode” as “the

present moment.” The word “modo” itself contains this gap as a problem of present. With its main focus on PTSD, Salinger’s story illustrates this problem of the present. The narrator’s symptoms of PTSD highlight the impossibility of focusing solely on the present moment, with time as a relationship with the other. Simultaneously, this temporal gap enables the possibility of care for what is not present. Thus, Salinger’s work can be regarded as a key text that critically engages with the challenges of the period known as modernism.

Chapter Eight:

Calling the Dead Up:

The Vulnerable Parody of the Biblical Episode of Lazarus and
the Ontology of the Dead in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*⁶⁴

Introduction

As the previous chapter demonstrates, care can extend to “what is not present” beyond “this world” or “life.” This possible answer to where care ends inevitably raises another significant implication: the possibility of care for the dead. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* can be read as a story that revolves around this question of caring for the dead. Generally speaking, the relationship between the living and the dead easily evokes an asymmetry between the living and the dead. The former are those who are present, while the latter are those who are absent. Then, is the practice of care possible in this asymmetrical relationship?

This chapter explores vulnerability as the beginning of care for the dead in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Beneath the surface of the first-person narration, the protagonist named Holden Caulfield exposes his vulnerability in that his “I” is dependent on the other from the beginning of his narrative. What is distinct about *The Catcher in the Rye* is that it gradually reveals this other, who sustains Holden's “I,” to be his deceased brother named Allie—the one who is not present, existing neither in “this world” nor in “life.” Holden's narrative is unique in its attempt to call up Allie's presence through a parodic reenactment of the biblical episode of Lazarus, in which Jesus Christ miraculously resurrects the dead. Instead of Jesus's miraculous

act, what Holden does is merely wake up sleeping people at peculiar times, as Yasuhiro Takeuchi identifies as a recurrent characteristic act of his⁶⁵: he wakes up his roommate by causing a commotion; he shouts loudly when leaving the dormitory at night, recognizing that it wakes everyone on the floor; he calls a girl he only knows by name and a prostitute at midnight; he wakes up Phoebe when he returns home; and he wakes up a teacher from his previous school by visiting him at night. Needless to say, Holden's parodic act is nothing more than a parody that only lays bare his vulnerability in the face of the dead, confirming the simple fact that the dead are no longer present for the living. However, it is through this vulnerability that Holden paradoxically demonstrates the characteristic ontology of the dead: the more he calls up Allie's absence, the more the presence of what is not present intensifies. This ontology of the dead ultimately leads Holden to a relationship of care between the living and the dead. While Holden cares for the dead Allie, the presence of the absent Allie cares for Holden as the vulnerable living.

The Catcher in the Rye as a Narrative of the Dead

The story is narrated by 17-year-old Holden Caulfield. Presumably in what appears to be a hospital, he recounts what happened to him around last Christmas to "you." Holden, then 16 years old, is expelled from Pencey Prep School due to his poor academic performance. Just before the Christmas break when he was supposed to leave school, he leaves the dormitory earlier than planned and wanders around New York. He continues to label those around him as "phony," including one of his teachers who

compares life to a game, a classmate overly concerned with appearances, and a bar pianist who is excessively conscious of customers' reactions. Despite constantly labeling others as phony, Holden himself is unsure of what he wants to do. For the time being, he decides to return home to visit his beloved sister, Phoebe. Against Holden's expectation, Phoebe gets angry when she learns of his expulsion, angrily asking what Holden wants to do in the future. After some thought, Holden answers, "I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all" (*Catcher* 191).

While generally perceived as a typical novel about adolescent conflicts, critics have pointed out that the story revolves around the deceased, particularly Holden's brother, Allie, who died of leukemia. Although often overlooked in the general summary of the story as one of the adolescent conflicts, Holden distinctly refers to his brother's death with its specific date: "He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946" (*Catcher* 49). As Allie had already passed away by the time Holden is wandering around New York, his presence only appears indirectly through Holden's narrative. Despite this indirect presence, some scholars argue that the deceased Allie lies at the core of what truly matters to Holden. They echo Dedria Bryfonski's observation that the "death of his younger brother, Allie, was a traumatic event in Holden Caulfield's life and is perhaps at the root of the depression he battles in the novel" (Bryfonski 15).

This reading of *The Catcher in the Rye* as a narrative of the dead strongly connects it with Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as a narrative of vulnerability and care. Takeuchi points out that Holden presents a clear

parody of *The Great Gatsby* when he imagines his own death. In this imagination, Holden visualizes his tombstone with the scrawl “fuck you,” the obscene words that always drive him so depressed that he rubs them off whenever he finds them during his wanderings. His obsession with these obscene words and the act of rubbing them off can easily be considered a clear parody of what Nick does when he visits Gatsby’s mansion after his death: “On the white steps an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick, stood out clearly in the moonlight and I erased it, drawing my shoe raspingly along the stone” (*Gatsby* 116). As Takeuchi insists, what is noteworthy in this parody is that Holden plays not only the role of Nick but also that of Gatsby, as this imagination places him both in the tomb and outside it.⁶⁶ Strongly echoing Nick’s words “within and without” (*Gatsby* 27), this confusion between the subject and the object is precisely what characterizes the relationship between Nick and Gatsby in the relationship of care that this study reads in *The Great Gatsby*.

Holden’s Vulnerability as the “I”:

“You” as Mother

It is certain that Holden can be read a character completely detached from the motif of care as a typical traditional first-person narrator in American literature. Such interpretations liken Holden to the figure of the American Adam, viewing him as a symbol of “the simple genuine self against the whole world” (Lewis 198). In this self-sufficient characterization of Holden, he appears to have no relationship with others, especially with the dead as those who are not present. However, Holden’s

narrative raises a fundamental question about this self-sufficiency. What is in question is that his narrative begins with the epigraph “To My Mother” and consistently addresses a “you” as if it were the listener to whom he is speaking. This narrative structure suggests that his narrative is supported by the “you” as a listener, or the “you” as the mother of his existence as the first-person narrator. What truly characterizes Holden’s first-person narrative is this exposure of his vulnerable condition, which necessitates the presence of “you” as a mother.

From the beginning, Holden’s self-sufficiency as a first-person narrator is questioned by his strange relationship with the motif of mother. Before the entire narrative, *The Catcher in the Rye* first declares in the epigraph that the work is dedicated to “mother”: “To My Mother” (*Catcher* epigraph). Then, Holden’s narrative begins by addressing “you” as the listener to whom he is speaking:

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They’re quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. (*Catcher* 3)

One may interpret that the mother in this epigraph refers to Salinger’s mother with no relevance to Holden’s narrative. However, what is

noteworthy is that Holden immediately refers to his mother ironically. While his narrative starts by addressing it to “you,” he refers to his mother as “parents” as if she is a third party, making her presence more subtle by foregrounding only his father, saying “especially my father” (*Catcher* 3). In fact, Holden’s mother only appears as a background voice during Holden’s brief stay at home. Maxwell Geisner points out this contradiction between the epigraph and Holden’s attitude toward his mother: “Though the book is dedicated to Salinger’s mother, the fictional mother in the narrative appears only as a voice through the wall” (Geisner 198). Especially given the tendency to compare Holden to the American Adam, this reference to the mother becomes even more unnatural because the presence of a mother should be rejected from the traditional ideal of a self-sufficient individual.

Then, what does this mother in the epigraph mean for Holden’s first-person narrative? The answer is that she represents the “you” as the “mother” as the listener to Holden’s narrative. Generally speaking, the “mother” is nothing but the one who gives birth to the presence of “I.” In this sense, the “you” at the beginning of Holden’s narrative—“If you want to hear about it” (*Catcher* 3)—can be seen as the mother who gives birth to Holden’s first-person narrative. Holden cannot begin his narrative without this “you,” as long as he starts it by saying “If you want to hear about it” (*Catcher* 3). Michael Cowan’s emphasis on the importance of “you” confirms this interpretation of “you” as a mother: “He clearly counts on ‘you’ to listen respectfully and carefully to his narrative from the moment he starts talking until the moment he stops” (Cowan 42). As Cowan explains, “It takes the presence of a listener to confirm his own presence”

(Cowan 51). Therefore, the “you” as the listener is nothing other than the “mother” that gives Holden the presence of “I” as the first-person narrator.

Holden’s narrative thus exposes his vulnerability, in which he cannot be the first-person narrator without “you” as a mother; this vulnerability is highlighted by his contradictory use of the word “crap.” In the opening sentence, Holden uses this word when he states that he does not feel like telling “all that David Copperfield kind of crap” (*Catcher* 3), which means, in this context, “useless and boring nonsense” (Beidler 219). Although the opening statement may seem like a declaration that he will speak what makes sense according to his will, Holden himself denies it within his narrative. For instance, when Holden’s history teacher Spencer reads the essay Holden wrote aloud, he refers to it as “crap”: “I had to sit there and *listen* to that crap” (*Catcher* 14); “I don’t think I’ll ever forgive him for reading me that crap out loud” (*Catcher* 15). For another example, when Holden accidentally encounters a classmate’s mother and tells her lies about the classmate, he again refers to what he is saying as “crap”: “Then I started shooting the old crap around a little bit” (*Catcher* 61). Contrary to the opening declaration, these examples demonstrate that his narrative can always become “crap,” as “useless and boring nonsense” (Beidler 219). Holden is thus in a vulnerable condition where he cannot be the first-person narrator by himself.

Holden’s vulnerability as a first-person narrator also manifests as an ontological anxiety about disappearing. On his way to bid farewell at Spencer’s house, Holden is struck by a strange feeling that he cannot explain: “I don’t even know what I was running for—I guess I just felt like

it. After I got across the road, I felt like I was sort of disappearing. It was that kind of a crazy afternoon, terrifically cold, and no sun out or anything, and you felt like you were disappearing every time you crossed a road” (*Catcher* 8). The feeling of disappearing here resonates with the unique relationship between “I” and “you” in his narrative. The subject “I” in the first part of the passage disappears by being replaced by “you” in the latter part. Certainly, the subject “you” in this context can be considered to mean people in general, including Holden himself, but this substitution of “I” by “you” visually suggests that Holden’s presence as a first-person narrator is inseparable from “you” as a “mother.”

Importantly, Holden lays bare his vulnerability with the need for a “mother” precisely when he tries to assert his independent condition. Near the end of his wandering in New York, there is a moment when he thinks about the possibility of going out West, where he will pretend to be a “deaf-mute.” Holden is excited by this imagination because he thinks that he will no longer need to talk with anybody: “I thought what I’d do was, I’d pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn’t have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody” (*Catcher* 257). Certainly, this imagination displays Holden’s wish to live in a completely independent condition. However, what is noteworthy is that, while Holden’s imagination of being a “deaf-mute” seems to express a rejection of “anybody” as listeners, he describes it so eloquently and excitedly that it inevitably requires someone to listen to his imagination. In this sense, his apparent rejection of “anybody” as listeners is inseparable from his vulnerable condition of always needing others. Indeed, his imagination

gradually shifts from his independent life to one involving a “mother.” After Holden explains how he would live alone, he adds that he would marry a beautiful girl who is also a “deaf-mute” when he decides to get married. What is significant is that she soon becomes a mother in his imagination: “If we had any children, we’d hide them somewhere. We could buy them a lot of books and teach them how to read and write by ourselves” (*Catcher* 258). What initially seems to express Holden’s desire for an independent “I” ends up revealing his need for a “mother.”

Vulnerable Parody of Jesus Calling up Lazarus

The question of the vulnerability of the “I” that necessitates “you” is repeated in Holden’s relationship with Allie. As people perceive Allie as what is not present, it appears impossible for Holden, as a living person, to have a relationship with him. In this sense, the dead Allie embodies Holden’s ontological anxiety about disappearing. However, Holden confronts this seemingly indisputable fact through a peculiar act: waking up sleeping people. Although this action may seem like mere “crap” initially, it can be interpreted as a meaningful gesture of care for the dead, reminiscent of a parody of the biblical story of Lazarus.

Some previous studies have pointed out that *The Catcher in the Rye*, often seen as a narrative about typical adolescent conflicts, can potentially be connected to the larger narrative of the Bible. As one of the significant studies, Takeuchi finds a significant biblical implication in an episode in which Holden accidentally drops a record on the ground, and Phoebe offers to save its broken pieces. Takeuchi argues that the action of “falling” and

the word “saving” here can be associated with the major biblical theme of “fall” and “salvation.”⁶⁷ Following these previous studies, this study sheds light on a new connection between the story and the Bible by interpreting Holden’s peculiar act as a parody of the episode of Lazarus.

In a series of episodes, one of the explicit examples of the biblical implication is Holden’s phone call to a girl named Faith Cavendish. During his stay in a hotel in New York, Holden lacks the courage to call his childhood friend Jane Gallagher and instead decides to call a girl named Faith, whom he only knows from a brief encounter at a summer party where he received her phone number. Despite it being midnight, Holden makes the call. As Faith is asleep when he calls, she becomes annoyed at being awakened by someone she hardly knows. When Faith recovers some calm after a brief altercation, she says to Holden: “This is certainly a peculiar time to call a person up, though. Jesus Christ” (*Catcher* 72). It is obvious in the context that Faith uses the words “Jesus Christ” as an interjection to express her disgust at Holden’s calling her in midnight. Nonetheless, it is also true that it refers to the name of Jesus Christ. In this sense, Faith’s words imply that Holden can be likened to the biblical figure.

The image of Jesus waking up a sleeping person at a peculiar time may appear nonsensical at first glance. However, it precisely reflects the biblical episode of Lazarus of Bethany. This episode unfolds when sisters from Bethany inform Jesus that their brother Lazarus is ill. They implore Jesus to come to help him. What is notable here is that Jesus does not immediately respond to them. Instead, he remains where he is for two additional days. Only after this delay does he decide to go and “wake up”

Lazarus: “Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11).⁶⁸ By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been dead for four days. The sisters express their sorrow that Lazarus might have been saved if Jesus had come immediately. Nevertheless, despite this delay, Jesus proceeds to “wake up” Lazarus: “And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin” (John 11:43-44). Through the act of “waking up” and the four-day delay, the episode precisely conveys the exact image of Jesus Christ waking up a sleeping person at a peculiar time.

The similarity between Holden waking up sleeping people and Jesus waking up the dead is further supported by the overlap of sleeping people and the deceased in Holden’s narrative. First, it is hinted at in the description of Mr. Ossenburger, the founder of the Ossenburger Memorial Wing of the new dorms. After graduating from Pencey, Ossenburger became wealthy through the undertaking business. Reflecting on Ossenburger’s background as an undertaker, Holden imagines how he dealt with the deceased: “He probably just shoves them in a sack and dumps them in the river” (*Catcher* 20). What is significant here is that the word “sack” also carries the meaning of “bed.” Accordingly, Holden’s imagination of the dead in a sack can evoke the image of sleeping people in bed. Indeed, the word “sack” is often used to refer to sleeping people in his narrative: “Everybody was in the sack” (*Catcher* 60); “Go home and hit the sack” (*Catcher* 169); “She just arose from the sack” (*Catcher* 201). These examples subtly imply that sleeping people are similar to the dead in that

they are in “sacks.”

The similarity is also evident in their use of the word “call.” When Holden wakes up sleeping people, he often does so by calling them, as already mentioned in Faith’s words: “This is certainly a peculiar time to call a person up” (*Catcher* 72). What is noteworthy is that this term “call” carries religious connotations, such as to “summon (a person) from the world of the living to God, heaven, the afterlife” (“Call”), which aligns with Holden’s association with Christianity. More importantly, both Holden and Jesus share the characteristic of calling out to distant places. Holden’s calls are directed to people physically distant from his location, while Jesus’s call is directed to the dead who are distant from the world of the living. This calling to distance places characterizes their actions. In fact, although two Bibles that were popular when Salinger was writing the story does not use the word “call” in the episode of Lazarus, some versions of English translation of the Bible do use it when Jesus wakes up Lazarus, such as “When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43) in the New International Version.⁶⁹ The use of the word in these versions at least implies a plausibility that what Jesus is doing here can be described as “call.”

What is important is that Holden’s calls are explicitly linked to the act of calling the dead. When talking about his favorite books, he brings up the motif of calling: “What really knocks me out is a book that, when you’re all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it” (*Catcher* 22). Regarding authors he feels like calling, Holden first

mentions Isak Dinesen, a writer who was alive in the late 1940s when the story is set, and then adds Ring Lardner to the list, who had already passed away by that time. Holden clarifies that Lardner was deceased at that time: “And Ring Lardner, except that D.B. told me he’s dead” (*Catcher* 22). Additionally, after intentionally excluding Somerset Maugham, who was alive at the time, from the list, Holden adds Thomas Hardy, who was also dead like Lardner: “I’d rather call old Thomas Hardy up” (*Catcher* 22). For Holden, a phone call serves not only to bridge physically distant places but also as a means of connecting the living with the dead. Holden’s call can be thus likened to the call Jesus directed towards the dead Lazarus.

The Presence of the Body of the Dead

While Holden demonstrates his similarities with Jesus, it is also clear that he is fundamentally different from the biblical figure. What Holden can wake up are merely sleeping people, far from the miraculous resurrection of the dead performed by Jesus. In terms of results, what Holden does is nothing more than a parody of Jesus. No matter how many sleeping people he wakes up, Holden merely exposes his vulnerability, showing that he cannot do anything for the dead, especially for his deceased brother Allie. However, it is through this vulnerable parody that Holden highlights care for what the original episode does not: care for the presence of the “body” of the dead. In this respect, Holden’s vulnerability resonates with another biblical episode called *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, which evokes the strong image of Jesus with the body. Thus, Holden’s misunderstanding of the line from Robert Burns’s poem “If a body catch a body” can be

reinterpreted as this special care for the body of the dead.

While Jesus can resurrect the dead, what Holden does is merely a vulnerable parody—this contrast is clearly expressed in their differing engagements with the four-day temporal gap. In the original episode, as mentioned above, Jesus does not immediately leave for the sick Lazarus when he is asked to come, stating, “If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world” (John 11:9). As a result, Jesus was four days late for the death of Lazarus: “So when Jesus came, he found that he had been in the tomb four days already” (John 11:17). Regarding this temporal gap of four days, Holden shows a parodic act, but what is noteworthy is that he does it in the exact opposite way. Holden begins the main part of his narrative about his dropout from Pencey by mentioning that it is Saturday: “Anyway it was the Saturday of the football game with Saxon Hall” (*Catcher* 4). As it turns out, he is supposed to leave Pencey on Wednesday, which means four days later. Then, a series of troubles with his roommates makes him decide to leave that very night: “All of a sudden, I decided what I’d really do, I’d get the hell out of Pencey—right that same night and all. I mean not wait till Wednesday or anything” (*Catcher* 66). This change of schedule means that Holden leaves four days earlier than he is supposed to. Sharing the temporal gap of four days, Jesus and Holden show a strong contrast in that the former is late and the latter is early. Holden as a contrasting image of Jesus is emphasized in the moment he leaves the dorm. Since it is midnight, Holden stumbles because he does not see a light: “Some stupid guy had thrown peanut shells all over the stairs, and I damn near broke my crazy neck” (*Catcher* 68). Here, Holden does

exactly what Jesus warns about leaving early: "If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world" (John 11:9).

Holden's vulnerable parody of Jesus in the episode of Lazarus thus foregrounds not their similarities but rather their differences.

What is significant about Holden as the reversed image of Jesus is that it cannot be reduced to a mere lack of miraculous ability to resurrect the dead. What it most importantly demonstrates is the difference between the two in their care for the dead. Although the episode of Lazarus seems to be summarized as a story in which Jesus resurrects the dead, what is notable is that it completely lacks care for the body of the dead. When Christ calls up the dead Lazarus, his hands are bound with grave clothes and his face is covered by a napkin. Certainly, Jesus says to the people there, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44), but it remains unclear if they actually "loose him" or not, as the next chapter begins, "Many therefore of the Jews, who came to Mary and beheld that which he did, believed on him" (John 11:45). The main focus of the episode is thus placed on the miraculous achievement of Jesus. The body of Lazarus is literally "let go," out of concern throughout the episode.

The core of Holden's role as the reversed image of Jesus lies in his care for the body. While Holden parodies Jesus in the biblical episode, he consistently shows a strong concern for the body. As a result, Holden presents himself as the image of Jesus with a focus on the physical body. This connection between Jesus and the body can be vividly seen in the scene where Holden passes by two men unloading a large Christmas tree from a truck. As Holden passes them on the street, he hears one man say to

the other, “Hold the sonuvabitch *up*! Hold it *up*, for Chrissake!” (*Catcher* 255). Again, the phrase “for Chrissake” in this context is just an expression of annoyance without any specific meaning for the man who says it. However, it undeniably contains the name of Jesus Christ. Holden implies this literal meaning of the phrase when he says, “It certainly was a gorgeous way to talk about a Christmas tree. It was sort of funny, though, in an awful way, and I started to sort of laugh” (*Catcher* 255). As Haruki Murakami explains, the reason Holden finds it funny here is the situation that the phrase “for Chrissake” is uttered as an expression of annoyance about a Christmas tree, a symbol of the day when Jesus was born.⁷⁰ What is more important for this study is that the man uses the phrase along with the word “sonuvabitch,” the abbreviated form of “son of a bitch,” to refer to the Christmas tree. This common pejorative slang expression has special significance here in the context of Christmas. While the original meaning of the word “bitch” is a female dog, it is commonly used to mean “a promiscuous or sensual woman” (Hughes 24), making its literal meaning “son of a promiscuous or sensual woman.” This meaning is strongly incongruous with Christmas because it is the day when the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus through her virginal conception, which means “without any physical contact.” In other words, the Christmas tree as the “sonuvabitch” strongly evokes the body of Jesus, which is completely rejected in the figure of Jesus as the son of the Virgin Mary. In fact, while Holden finds the phrase funny in the situation, it has a strong effect on his body. Holden feels an urge to vomit when he starts to laugh: “It was about the worst thing I could’ve done, because the minute I started to laugh I

thought I was going to vomit. I really did" (*Catcher* 255). Holden's physical reaction confirms that what he presents through the image of Christ as a "son of a bitch" is the body of Jesus.

From the beginning of his narrative, Holden's concern for the body is demonstrated repeatedly. The first specific example can be seen in the episode of his visit to Mr. Spencer's house. When Holden reunites with Mr. Spencer, he describes Mr. Spencer's physical appearance with disgust: "I don't much like to see old guys in their pajamas and bathrobes anyway. Their bumpy old chests are always showing. And their legs. Old guy's legs, at beaches and places, always look so white and unhairy" (*Catcher* 11). Here Holden says he "doesn't want to see," and yet he obsessively "sees" in detail the very body that he claims not to want to see. This contradictory behavior emphasizes Holden's special interest in the body. This interest is also evident in Holden's history exam essay that Mr. Spencer reads immediately afterward. As proof of Holden's failure in history class, Mr. Spencer reads it aloud in front of Holden, revealing that all he has written is a simple explanation of Egyptian mummies. As Holden explains, mummification is an attempt to prevent the decay of the body of the dead. The same obsession with the body can be seen in his imagination about the ducks in Central Park as well. As Holden cannot keep listening attentively to Mr. Spencer's lecture, he begins to wonder where the ducks in the Central Park lake go when the pond freezes. When he says to himself, "I was wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something. Or if they just flew away," (*Catcher* 18), what matters him is a simple fact that the ducks have bodies that can be troubled when the lake is

frozen. Thus, the series of events during his visit to Mr. Spencer's house consistently reveals Holden's obsessive care about the body.

Holden's care about the body emerges in another form: the challenge against the disembodied image of the biblical figure. Right after leaving Mr. Spencer's house, Holden starts bad-mouthing Ossenburger, the founder of the Ossenburger Memorial Wing of the dorm where he used to live at Pencey. Holden's dislike for Ossenburger stems from the fact that, despite making a business out of burials, he keeps preaching to students about the importance of faith in Jesus. What is noteworthy here is that Ossenburger's preaching can be related to the question of the body that Holden keeps obsessing over: "He told us we ought to think of Jesus as our buddy and all. He said he talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving his car" (*Catcher* 23). As Holden critically suggests, Ossenburger assumes Jesus's omnipresence, believing that Jesus can be present no matter where one is. In other words, for Ossenburger, Jesus does not have a body, which allows one to talk to him all the time. Considering Holden's strong interest in the body during his visit to Mr. Spencer's house, his critical attitude toward Ossenburger can be understood not just as a moral aversion to making a business out of burials but also as a challenge against this disembodied image of the biblical figure.

The connection between Holden's obsession with bodies and his challenge against the disembodied Jesus inevitably implies another hidden concern: the body of Jesus. This image emerges with a concrete visual representation in the episode involving a taxi driver named Horwitz. During his wanderings around New York, Holden rides in Horwitz's taxi and recalls

the ducks in Central Park that he imagined at Mr. Spencer's house. On the spur of the moment, Holden asks Horwitz if he knows where the ducks go in the wintertime. Strangely changing the topic from ducks to fish, Horwitz states that the fish do not go anywhere. When Holden questions whether it is possible for fish to stay in a frozen lake without going anywhere, Horwitz answers that it is possible because of their bodies: "Their *bodies*, for Chrissake—what'sa matter with ya? Their bodies take in nutrition and all, right, through the goddam seaweed and crap that's in the ice" (*Catcher* 108). Horwitz's words indirectly hint at the body of Christ in two ways. First, it can be seen in the fact that Horwitz's phrase "Their bodies" is immediately followed by "for Chrissake," a phrase that contains the name of Jesus. Second, the hint is evident in Horwitz's strange change of topic from ducks to fish. As Takeuchi points out, fish have traditionally been used as a symbol of Jesus because the Greek acronym Ichthys, derived from the phrase Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter, meaning "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior," translates to "fish." More importantly, Takeuchi further notes that while Christian orthodoxy prioritizes the spirit, Horwitz's depiction here is distinctive in that it challenges this traditional value by emphasizing "their bodies," which readily evokes the body of Jesus. The fish that Horwitz presents thus serves as an indirect image of the embodied Jesus.⁷¹

What is important in this study is that the image of the embodied Jesus strongly resonates with the theme of vulnerability. First, the motif of wounds is implied in Horwitz's explanation of the fish's bodies. He gives a specific reason why the fish can take in nutrition in the iced lake, saying,

“They got their *pores* open the whole time” (*Catcher* 108). With emphasis in italics in the original text, this image of the body with holes can easily evoke the idea of wounds. Indeed, Holden links the figure of Jesus with wounds when he directly talks about the biblical figure. While Holden displays disgust for Ossenburger’s belief in a disembodied Christ, he clearly states that he likes Jesus himself, saying, “I like Jesus and all” (*Catcher* 130). Notably, immediately after expressing his fondness for Jesus, Holden mentions another biblical figure whom he likes best next to Jesus. He refers to this character as “that lunatic and all, that lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones” (*Catcher* 130). Although Holden quickly changes the topic without providing details, it is clear that this character is the man who hurts his own body in Chapter 5 of the Gospel of Mark: “And always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones” (Mark 5:5). In this biblical episode, Jesus meets the man, discovers that a demon possesses him, learns that the demon’s name is Legion, and frees the man from the demon. Again, as the man’s name remains unclear throughout the episode, the focus of the episode lies in Jesus’s miraculous act of exorcism, where the man’s self-cutting behavior only serves as a background. Holden’s fondness for this man is noteworthy in this respect as it reforegrounds the man’s vulnerability by emphasizing his self-inflicted wounds. Holden’s combined fondness for Jesus and the nameless man thus presents the image of the vulnerable body of the biblical figure.

In fact, Holden continuously presents the body of Jesus with vulnerability while he plays the parodic role. First, in the episode where he

gets into a fistfight with his roommate Stradlater, Holden looks at his wounded body in the mirror, both horrified and fascinated: “I had blood all over my mouth and chin and even on my pajamas and bathrobe. It partly scared me and it partly fascinated me” (*Catcher* 59). This peculiar fascination with the wounded body can also be seen in his favorite playful act of pretending to be shot. In the episode of his argument with Maurice, the pimp whom Holden meets in a hotel, he does this after being punched: “What I’d do, I’d walk down a few floors—holding onto my guts, blood leaking all over the place” (*Catcher* 136). Although he acknowledges that it was a “stupid business” (*Catcher* 195), Holden cannot help but repeat this act when he gets drunk at a bar: “I was the only guy at the bar with a bullet in his guts. I kept putting my hand under my jacket, on my stomach and all, to keep the blood from dripping all over the place” (*Catcher* 195). In this way, Holden persistently foregrounds the fact that his body can be wounded. Considering that Holden keeps playing a parody of Christ’s miraculous acts, what is presented through his narrative is Jesus with a vulnerable body.

The image of Jesus with a vulnerable body may seem unusual on its own because Christianity is often considered to prioritize the mind over the body. As Ossenburger’s image of a disembodied Jesus as well as the son of the Virgin Mary suggests, what traditionally characterizes Christianity seems to be the rejection of the body. Contrary to this popular image, Atsushi Okada argues that the body actually lies at the core of this religion. According to Okada, as the event of the crucifixion can be seen as one of the highlights of Christianity, the figure of Jesus is fundamentally

characterized by his wounded body. Certainly, while there have been numerous religious works that try to represent him with an emphasis on the spiritual side, there has also been an opposing belief that foregrounds the wounded body of Jesus. For example, Okada introduces the argument for the importance of physicality in Christianity by Giovanni Andrea Gilio, who criticizes the abundance of beautiful naked bodies with no wounds in Michelangelo's fresco titled *The Last Judgment*: "A painter would show the power of the art much better if he represented Christ afflicted, bloody, covered with spittle, flayed, wounded, deformed, livid, and ugly, to such an extent that he did not have the appearance of a man" (Gilio 134). When Holden emphasizes his own wounded body while playing Jesus, it evokes this often-hidden image of the vulnerable body of Jesus.

This image of Jesus with a wounded body is more strongly linked to the question of the presence of the dead, when viewed through the lens of the episode called *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* in the Gospel of John. In Chapter 20 of the Gospel of John, Saint Thomas misses one of Jesus's appearances to the Apostles after his resurrection. Doubting whether Jesus truly rose from the dead, he states what would make him believe: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). A week later, Jesus appears before Thomas and tells him to touch the wound on his side inflicted during the crucifixion: "Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). This series of episodes indicates that the wounds on Jesus's body confirm the presence

of the dead.

The presence of the dead through a wounded body can also be read from Holden's misunderstanding of Robert Burns' poem "Comin' Thro' the Rye," which drives Holden to become the catcher in the rye. While wandering New York, Holden hears a boy of about six walking on the curb singing a line of Burns' poem, misunderstanding the original line "If a body meet a body coming through the rye" as "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." Taking this line as the boy mistakenly sang it, Holden later expresses his wish to be the catcher in the rye to his sister Phoebe. What is important about this misunderstanding is that it replaces the verb "meet" with "catch," which sheds a strong light on the vulnerable side of the "body" in the line. When the body is the subject to "catch," it introduces the possibility of being wounded because the verb "catch" implies that the body can "fall." In fact, the body of the boy who sings the misunderstood line is depicted as being in danger, on the verge of falling: "The cars zoomed by, brakes screeched all over the place, his parents paid no attention to him, and he kept on walking next to the curb and singing 'If a body catch a body coming through the rye'" (*Catcher* 150). For Holden, the event of falling and the body is tightly connected, especially through his memory of his classmate James Castle, whom Holden could not "catch" when he committed suicide by jumping out the window. When Phoebe asks Holden to name something he likes, Holden recalls James with a vivid description of his wounded body: "He was dead, and his teeth, and blood, were all over the place" (*Catcher* 221). Holden's confession, "I was in the shower and all, and even I could hear him land outside" (*Catcher* 221),

implies that he could not “catch” James’ body when it fell. With the image of the body and the possibility of falling, Holden’s misunderstanding of the poem is thus inseparable from the presence of the body of the dead.

The Ontology of the Dead

One may argue that Holden remains vulnerable even as he continually evokes the presence of the dead, as this act can never change the simple fact that the dead are no longer present. Since Holden was unable to catch James as he fell, it is clear that he is vulnerable when it comes to the dead. However, what is most significant about his care for the dead is that this vulnerability reveals a distinctive ontology of the dead. Holden’s vulnerable parody serves as a constant reminder of the painful fact that the dead are absent from the world of the living. Paradoxically, the stronger this impression of absence becomes for Holden, the stronger the presence of what is not present also becomes. Holden’s vulnerable parody calls forth this distinctive ontology of the dead.

To reconsider exposed vulnerability as the ontology of the dead, Takeuchi and Shunki Boku’s discussion of the word “meet”—the original expression in the song—within the novel provides a significant reference point. At first glance, the exposure of the vulnerable body through the misunderstanding of “meet” as “catch” appears to be Holden’s definitive failure to become a “catcher,” despite his dream of becoming a “catcher in the rye.” While many critics complain about the ambiguity regarding whether Holden is truly a catcher or not, Takeuchi argues that what characterizes Holden’s act of catching is precisely a subversion of such

binary oppositions. Takeuchi identifies a paradoxical identity in Holden's act of catching—an identity between the subject who catches and the object who is caught. While Holden dreams of being the subject of catching, he also presents himself as the object of being caught, most explicitly seen in his identification with James, who kills himself by falling. This identification is evident in the fact that James wears Holden's sweater at the very moment of his fall, as well as in the similar way James and Holden are cared for by their common teacher, Mr. Antolini, who once picked up the fallen James and expresses his concern for Holden by comparing his current situation to "a terrible, terrible fall" (*Catcher* 242).⁷² As Takeuchi and Boku argue, this subversion of binary opposition opens up a unique meaning of the original expression "meet" in the song. The act of "meeting," obscured by Holden's mistaken understanding of "catching," becomes an event in which the distinction between the catcher and the caught dissolves—where the living can, in a literal sense, "meet" the dead.⁷³

This study explores this "meeting" between the living and the dead as the ontology of the dead through Holden's vulnerable parody. In this context, it is noteworthy that Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard identifies what can be called the ontology of the dead in the biblical episode of Lazarus.⁷⁴ In *The Sickness Unto Death*, which draws from the episode of Lazarus, Kierkegaard sheds light on Jesus's words, "This sickness is not unto death" (Kierkegaard 11). He focuses on the seemingly paradoxical situation in which "Lazarus is dead, and yet this sickness is not unto death" (Kierkegaard 11). For Kierkegaard, the episode of Lazarus

cannot be reduced to the question of whether he is physically alive or dead. What matters to Kierkegaard is that “the fact that Christ exists means that this sickness is not unto death” (Kierkegaard 12):

And what help would it have been to Lazarus to be awakened from the dead, if the thing must end after all with his dying—how would that have helped Lazarus, if He did not live who is the resurrection and the life for everyone who believes in Him? No, it is not because Lazarus was awakened from the dead, not for this can one say that *this* sickness is not unto death; but because He lives, therefore this sickness is not unto death.

(Kierkegaard 12)

From this logic, Kierkegaard deduces the thesis that “death is by no means the last thing of all” (Kierkegaard 12) as long as Jesus is with Lazarus. Beyond the question of whether Jesus literally resurrects the dead, the episode of Lazarus is inseparable from the ontology of the dead.

Kierkegaard’s interpretation of the episode of Lazarus resonates with Holden’s attitude toward Allie. While Holden provides the specific date of Allie’s death—July 17, 1946—others treat him as absent. A typical example of this is Phoebe’s attitude toward Allie. When Phoebe learns that Holden dropped out of school, she angrily tells him, “You don’t like *anything* that’s happening” (*Catcher* 220), to which he responds, “I like Allie” (*Catcher* 222). Phoebe immediately rejects this response because, for her, Allie is not present: “Allie’s *dead*—you always say that! If somebody’s dead and everything, and in *Heaven*, then it isn’t really—” (*Catcher* 222). As the words “in *Heaven*” in italics demonstrate, Phoebe considers Allie to be in a

different place, not the world of the living. It is this conventional attitude toward the dead that Holden challenges. Despite acknowledging the fact that Allie is dead, Holden resists Phoebe's way of dealing with the dead with a Kierkegaardian attitude that "death is not the last thing of all": "I know he's dead! Don't you think I know that? I can still like him, though, can't I? Just because somebody's dead, you don't just stop liking them, for God's sake—especially if they were about a thousand times nicer than the people you know that're *alive* and all" (*Catcher* 222-23). Holden is not different from Phoebe in that he cannot deny that Allie is no longer present. What distinguishes Holden from Phoebe is that he is with Allie, similar to Kierkegaard's interpretation of Jesus with Lazarus.

Holden's attitude of being with the dead is vividly portrayed in the scene where he visits Allie's grave. When Holden visits Allie's grave with his relatives, they are suddenly caught in the rain. All the visitors hurriedly run to their cars to escape from the rain, which is what Holden finds unbearable: "All the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars. That's what nearly drove me crazy. All the visitors could get in their cars and turn on their radios and all and then go someplace nice for dinner—everybody except Allie" (*Catcher* 202). While others can easily leave the dead, Holden cannot. For Holden, the dead are present as those who are not present.

What is significant here is that Holden's attitude of being with the dead is not merely a matter of physical proximity to the grave. For Holden, it means that he keeps evoking the presence of the dead as what is not present. This attitude toward the dead can be observed in what Takeuchi

argues as Holden's desire for transformation to Allie. Noting characteristics of Allie, such as red hair, left-handedness, and a baseball mitt, Takeuchi argues that Holden secretly imitates them. Holden wears a red hunting cap, making his hair appear red; he confesses that he injured his right hand on the day Allie died, forcing him to rely solely on his left hand; he prefers to wear the cap with the brim backward, resembling a catcher in baseball.⁷⁵ This desire for transformation to Allie can also be interpreted as his act of calling up the dead because it is inseparable from the reminder of the fact that Allie is not present. What Holden continually upholds is this presence of the absence of the dead.

One might argue that even if Holden tries to believe that he is with Allie, the simple fact remains that he cannot do anything for the dead. Indeed, Holden himself acknowledges his vulnerability regarding the dead. However, what is significant is that through this vulnerability, he reinforces the sense of the presence of the dead. In the scene of visiting Allie's grave, Holden admits that Allie is not truly there: "I know it's only his body and all that's in the cemetery, and his soul's in Heaven and all that crap" (*Catcher* 202). In stark contrast to Jesus in the biblical episode, Holden simply exposes his vulnerability regarding the dead. Nevertheless, Holden quickly adds, "but I couldn't stand it anyway" (*Catcher* 202). The use of the word "anyway" suggests that he cannot articulate what he should do in clear terms. While he recognizes that Allie is not there, he cannot leave either. This ambiguity highlights the presence of the absence of the dead. Regarding this contradictory ontology of the dead, Eisuke Wakamatsu offers a useful perspective: "When the dead approach us, our souls tremble with

sorrow. Sorrow is a sign of the dead's arrival. Although it is an experience of grief, it is also a comforting experience to know the presence of the dead who are with us" (Wakamatsu; my trans.; 8). For Wakamatsu, the experience of sorrow is an experience of being with the dead. It embodies a poignant paradox: the more intense the sorrow, the stronger the presence of the dead becomes. Holden's contradictory act of trying to stay close to Allie while acknowledging his absence conveys this presence of what is not present.

The paradoxical ontology of the dead is eloquently expressed in Holden's vulnerable narrative about them. When Holden talks about the dead, he continually exposes his lack of ability to articulate his thoughts about them effectively. A typical example is his essay in his history exam paper, where he writes about how the Egyptians dealt with the dead:

The Egyptians are extremely interesting to us today for various reasons. Modern science would still like to know what the secret ingredients were that the Egyptians used when they wrapped up dead people so that their faces would not rot for innumerable centuries. This interesting riddle is still quite a challenge to modern science in the twentieth century. (*Catcher* 16)

As Spencer began to get angry, this seemingly poor answer gave the impression of mocking the Egyptian custom of preserving the physical remains of the dead. This impression aligns with Holden's inability to articulate his feeling during his visit to Allie's grave. Holden himself understands the futility of keeping physical relics, as he believes that the soul resides elsewhere, not inside the tomb. Therefore, he lacks the eloquent vocabulary needed to explain the Egyptian mummy. What is

important is that despite this vulnerable narrative about the dead, he continues to demonstrate care for them. The episode involving the mummy display in the museum also shows this constant care for the dead through his vulnerable narrative. Holden takes children there, recounting what he wrote in his history exam paper. Even after the children run away from the display, Holden is left alone, feeling somewhat peaceful: “I was the only one left in the tomb then. I sort of liked it, in a way. It was so nice and peaceful” (*Catcher* 264). Here again, as phrases like “sort of” and “in a way” suggest, Holden cannot articulate his feelings clearly. It is this impossibility to articulate that rather eloquently illustrates that he is with the dead.

Holden’s limited vocabulary when speaking about the dead is inseparable from his role as a listener toward them. He never portrays Allie’s voice in his own words. Allie remains silent, making Holden merely a listener to that silent voice. This attitude of listening is important in his narrative because it initially begins by presenting the thesis that the presence of “I” is supported by the presence of “you” as a listener. Thus, as long as it involves listening to the silent voice of the dead, Holden’s vulnerable narrative actually evokes the presence of the dead.

The Reversible Relationship in Care between the Living and the Dead

While Holden’s narrative resonates with the episode of Lazarus in terms of the ontology of the dead, it introduces a unique aspect that is not present in the latter: the reversible relationship of care between the living

and the dead. In the episode of Lazarus, Jesus calls up the dead Lazarus, but the dead Lazarus does nothing for Jesus. In Holden's narrative, however, Allie can also be a beginning of care for Holden, just as Holden cares for Allie. Holden's vulnerable narrative presents this characteristic reversible relationship of care between the living and the dead.

Care from the dead for the living is depicted when Holden walks down Fifth Avenue, suddenly feeling as if he might disappear at any moment: "Then all of a sudden, something very spooky started happening. Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again" (*Catcher* 256). Again, Holden exposes his vulnerability as the "I" that cannot be present alone. What is significant here is that Holden is saved from this ontological danger through the presence of the dead Allie: "Then I started doing something else. Every time I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, don't let me disappear, Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie." And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd *thank* him" (*Catcher* 256-57). While Holden calls up the presence of Allie by listening to his silent voice, here it is Allie who calls up Holden by listening to Holden's voice. Not only does the narrative depict care for the dead from the living, but it also presents care for the living from the dead.

The reversible relationship of care between the living and the dead is evident in Takeuchi's analysis of the subversion of the binary opposition in

Holden's act of "catching. As Holden's assumption that he may step off the curb with the expression "go down, down, down" (*Catcher* 256) illustrates, Holden's ontological anxiety is inseparable from the image of the falling body. In this sense, when Holden is saved from his anxiety about the disappearance of his presence, it means that the dead Allie literally "catches" the body of the living Holden. This role of catching the falling body is precisely what Holden wishes to embody from the misunderstood line "If a body catch a body." It is noteworthy that the expression "a body" is repeated twice because it emphasizes that the subject who catches and the object being caught can be reversible. Allie's "catch" of Holden's body exactly embodies this reversible relationship between the living and the dead, where they "meet" through their vulnerability.

The concluding sentences of Holden's entire narrative highlight the reversible relationship with the ontology of the dead. He ends his narrative by referring to what is not present: "About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It's funny. Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (*Catcher* 277). As the verb "miss" in italics signifies to "notice the absence or loss of" ("Miss"), what Holden ultimately cares for is what is not present. In this sense, when Holden warns, "Don't ever tell anybody anything" (*Catcher* 277), it paradoxically calls up the presence of what is not present. What is crucial is that, while he uses the subject "I" in the first part, the last sentence replaces "I" with the subject "you." This replacement of the subject makes Holden's "I" what is not present, demonstrating that care for what is not

present can always be reversible. Certainly, this concluding passage does not explicitly mention the dead Allie as part of what is absent. However, if everything Holden tells is titled *The Catcher in the Rye*, then it is the dead Allie who embodies this “you” as he not only plays the role of the catcher but also represents the one who “don’t ever tell anybody anything” as the dead.

Conclusion

While Jesus in the biblical episode resurrects the dead Lazarus as a miraculous act, what Holden can do is merely a parodic act of waking up sleeping people, exposing his vulnerability to the dead, especially to the dead Allie. It is through this vulnerability that Holden presents the presence of the dead with the image of Jesus with a body. This leads him to a unique ontology of the dead, in which the more his vulnerability exposes the fact that the dead are not present, the stronger the presence of what is not present becomes. Holden thus calls up the ontology of the dead with the reversible relationship in care between the living and the dead.

Sharing a thematic connection with the other modernist writers in this study—Fitzgerald, Chandler, and Miller—Salinger expands the question of care beyond the realm of “this world” and “life” to the realm of the dead. This thematic expansion is significant within the context of new modernist studies. As long as modernism is viewed as focusing on the “just now,” separated from the past, the question of the individual, which conventional modernist studies highlight as a major theme, naturally excludes the presence of the dead. This exclusion is understandable, as the dead

represent what is “not present,” making them entirely incompatible with an emphasis on the present moment. While Holden, as a school dropout, initially seems to reinforce this conventional image of modernism, his narrative radically subverts it through the paradoxical relationship between what is present and what is not present. In this way, Salinger can be reinterpreted as a male modernist writer who explores vulnerability as the beginning of care, extending it even into the realm of death.

Conclusion

“Now” as Vulnerable Time

This study reveals modernist literature’s rich engagement with vulnerability as the beginning of care. Discussions of vulnerability and care have often centered on feminism, minorities, and welfare. The works of four modernist writers—F. Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, Henry Miller, and J.D. Salinger—appear to frame vulnerability as a negative condition to be overcome. Their characteristic motifs—the self-made man, the private detective, the autobiographical figure, and the dropout figure—seem to oppose the themes of vulnerability and care. However, despite this appearance, these works suggest an alternative possibility: vulnerability as the beginning of care. In line with the emergence of new modernist studies, this analysis challenges the conventional assumption that modernist literature, particularly that of male writers, is characterized by an invulnerable individual who only cares for himself.

The study begins with Fitzgerald, whose *The Great Gatsby* introduces vulnerability as the beginning of care through its explicit use of the word “vulnerable” and the narrator’s ambiguous attitude toward what he calls “careless people.” This perspective reframes the novel, which is typically seen as the tragic failure of a self-made man, as a narrative of care rooted in vulnerability.

Fitzgerald’s two medical-themed short stories, “An Alcoholic Case” and “Family in the Wind,” further articulate this theme. They emphasize that when care is rooted in vulnerability, it must be a responsibility to singularity rather than a mechanical response to generalized cases.

Chandler's hard-boiled fiction shares this theme with a distinct concern for "the world." He expands upon the sense of "within and without" from *The Great Gatsby*, embedding it within the genre of hard-boiled fiction. He critiques the transcendental position of the armchair detective who views the world from a distance. As a private detective, Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep* embodies this problematic engagement with the world—he cannot remain an external observer but becomes deeply entangled in the lives of others. Consequently, his identity as a private detective becomes unstable; he cannot maintain his position as his own boss. Far from the idealized figure of an autonomous individual, Marlowe instead enacts a form of care for the vulnerable, particularly those who are conventionally excluded from concern in traditional detective fiction.

What is unique about the Philip Marlowe series is that it directly confronts the simple fact of aging with the inevitability of death. *The Long Goodbye* addresses this temporal vulnerability, as Marlowe is forced to acknowledge that aging undermines his assumption that a private detective must remain tough. While the novel suggests the necessity of a home as a site of care, Marlowe does not present it as a resolution to temporal vulnerability. Rather, as a private detective, his concern lies in a realm distinct not only from the public sphere but also from domestic space. As a man without a home, Marlowe's investigations direct his care toward those who are temporally vulnerable but fall outside the boundaries of conventional domestic care.

Vulnerability is exposed precisely when one tries to be invulnerable, forcefully making one open to others. Miller explores this paradox through

his obsession with the question of life. *Tropic of Cancer*, which Miller calls an autobiographical novel, exemplifies this theme. The word “autobiography” etymologically means “writing the life of oneself,” as seen in Benjamin Franklin’s *The Autobiography*, where Franklin presents his life as a model to be reproduced for future generations. In contrast, Miller presents his own life as irreducibly vulnerable, particularly through his failure to become a father. Resisting Franklinian reproductive futurism, Miller’s narrative intertwines with other lives in opposition to production, demonstrating what the Care Collective calls promiscuous care.

In *Sexus*, Miller further develops the question of life as a question of ability, emphasizing vulnerability as a form of ability. While critics often accuse Miller’s protagonists of passivity, their apparent lack of agency can be reconsidered in light of Giorgio Agamben’s concept of impotentiality—the possibility of life that cannot be reduced to the mere actualization of abilities. In *Sexus*, the protagonist’s vulnerability places him in a state of passion, making him open to others, particularly those who share a lack of abilities. Beneath its autobiographical guise, Miller’s care is not centered on the self but on openness to others in their passions, demonstrating care as com-passion.

Salinger engages with the same theme of care in relation to what is not present, just as Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* suggests Nick’s care for the deceased Gatsby. In “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor,” which deals with PTSD, the story foregrounds a fundamental fact about time—that one cannot live in the same present as another. From this vulnerability, the story reveals that time itself, as a relation with the other, can generate a

more sincere form of care. Through the act of prayer, which seeks to be with what is not present, the story articulates care as an engagement with what is beyond the present.

Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* further explores this care for what is not present in the relationship between the living and the dead. Through his connection with the dead, the protagonist exposes his vulnerability—he can do nothing but acknowledge that the dead are no longer present. Paradoxically, this very vulnerability intensifies the presence of the dead, suggesting what might be described as the ontology of the dead. The novel ultimately suggests that care for what is not present can also evoke care for what is present, revealing the possibility that the living and the dead may, in some sense, reverse roles.

Beginning with Fitzgerald, these readings of four male modernist writers illuminate the theme of vulnerability as the beginning of care in its many dimensions. By challenging the traditional image of the modernist subject as an invulnerable individual who cares only for himself, these works open new possibilities for understanding care within male-authored modernist literature. While this study shares the trajectory of new modernist studies, it also resonates with our contemporary moment—"now" as a vulnerable time. In the wake of the pandemic of the 2020s, vulnerability has emerged as a fundamental condition of human existence, underscoring the necessity of care. This study thus holds contemporary significance in confronting this vulnerability for each one of "us."

Notes

Introduction

1. See Saint-Amour, “Weak Theory, Weak Modernism.”
2. See Rodríguez-Salas, Martín-Salván, and López, “Introduction: Who’s Afraid of the Modernist Community?”
3. See Lutes and Travis, *Gender* 3.
4. See Chouliaraki, *Wronged*.
5. See Travis, *Wounded* 19.
6. See Irwin, *Unless* 31-68.

Chapter One

7. This chapter is based on Ide Tatsuro’s “Kea no hajimari toshite no kizutsukiyasusa: F. Sukotto Fittsujerarudo ‘Gureto Gyatsubi’ ni okeru kizu kara no tsunagari (Vulnerability as the Beginning of Care: The Bond of Nick in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*), *Tohoku Studies in American Literature*, vol. 40, 2017, pp.17-29, with additions and modifications.
8. See Tredell, *Fitzgerald’s* 101-2.
9. See Cartwright “Nick Carraway as an Unreliable Narrator.”
10. See Noma, *Gureto* 94-96.
11. See Suwabe, “Nodo to judo no hazama de: ‘Gureto Gyatsubi’ ni okeru katarite no yuragi (Between Activity and Passivity: The Narrative Ambiguity in *The Great Gatsby*)” 26-29.
12. See Takeuchi, “Norimono.” According to Takeuchi, cars function as definitive spaces where characters form relationships as partners, such as

Myrtle and Tom, Daisy and Gatsby, and Jordan and Nick. Since cars cannot maintain their mobility indefinitely, all of these relationships ultimately collapse. In contrast, despite their emotional discord, the Buchanans and the Wilsons maintain their official marital relationships, as they are never depicted sharing the same vehicle.

13. As for the role of Myrtle's corpse, Fetterley argues that Myrtle initially contrasts with the mythologized Daisy, with an emphasis on her physicality, being "fully bodied in her 'surplus and sensuous' flesh" (Fetterley 91); then, her death in the accident reverses this relationship, as Myrtle becomes idealized with "the mythic connotations implied in her name" (Fetterley 91).

14. See Takeuchi, "Norimono" 42-46.

Chapter Two

15. This chapter is based on Ide Tatsuro's "Sakkaron toshite no 'kea no hajimari toshite no kizutsukiyasa': 'Arukōru izonsho no kanja' to 'Kazoku wa kaze no naka' ni okeru kobetsuna mono eno oto" (Vulnerability as the Beginning of Care in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Works: Responsibility to the Singularity of the Vulnerable in "An Alcoholic Case" and "Family in the Wind"), *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review of Japan*, no. 5, 2022, pp. 24-43, with additions and modifications.

16. See Watanabe, "Sensojyoutai ni sarasareru iryokouisyatachi" 41.

17. See Fujiki, "Fitsujerarudo to arukoru" 46.

18. See Monteiro, "Fitzgerald vs. Fitzgerald: 'An Alcoholic Case'" 112.

19. After they break the glass bottle during the physical struggle in the

opening scene, the nurse carefully tries to clean up the pieces to prevent the patient from being cut. When she thinks she is finished, she notices that the number of fragments is less than she expected: “. . . she realized that the glass, in its fragments, was less than a window through which they had seen each other for a moment” (“Alcoholic” 25).

20. While Ishizuka concludes that the patient does commits suicide, emphasizing the importance of the nurse’s words, “All right, drink your fool self to death” (“Alcoholic” 23), he also acknowledges that there are ambiguous elements in the story, noting that Fitzgerald’s works in the 1930s are filled with inconsistencies and contradictions. See Ishizuka, *Iryo* 338-41.

21. In the same vein, Arthur Waldhorn argues that, while the nurse has some aspects that can be censured in her treatment of the patient, it is also true that she has ambiguous feelings toward him, including compassion for him. He concludes that they are among the characters whom Fitzgerald believes deserve “both censure and compassion” (Waldhorn 252).

22. See Ishizuka, *Iryo* 359.

23. Solnit also raises the question of family in disasters. Referring to a report by Mary Austin about the 1906 earthquake centered in San Francisco, she writes, “the people of San Francisco became houseless, but not homeless” (Solnit 23). Solnit’s expression with the distinction between “house” and “home” gives a useful perspective for the situation of the “family” of Forrest and Helen after the tornadoes.

24. What Tsutomu Uchida identifies as a “paradoxical truth” in the story resonates with the ambiguity of vulnerability in this study: “It is true that

the stronger protect the weaker. However, this story depicts how the wounded cat gives Helen the courage to walk miles during the disaster, and how Helen gives the alcoholic middle-aged man the hope to live his life and the determination to give up drinking. In the end, it reveals a paradoxical truth: the weaker protect and support the stronger” (Uchida; my trans.; 251).

25. See Butler *Precarious*; Kokubun and Kumagai *Sekinin*; Murakami *Kea*.

Chapter Three

26. This chapter is based on a part of Tatsuro Ide’s Ide Tatsuro’s “Sekai no naka ni aru koto: Modanizumu bungaku ni okeru tantei, gaka, katarite to ‘riaru na mono’ omeguru toporoji (Being in the World: Detective, Painter, and Narrator in Modernist Literature and the Topology of ‘Real Thing’),” *Journal of Institute for Research in English Language and Literature of Tohoku Gakuin University*, vol. 40, 2015, pp.1-22 with additions and modifications.

27. See Chandler, *Raymond* 140.

28. See Anderson, “Gatsby’s Long Shadow: Influence and Endurance” 21.

29. See Corrigan, *So* 129. Nick’s description of the painting Corrigan refers to is as follows: “I never saw this great-uncle but I’m supposed to look like him—with special reference to the rather hard-boiled painting that hangs in Father’s office” (*Gatsby* 6).

30. See Irwin, *Unless* 31-68.

31. For Chandler’s biological background, see Williams, *Mysterious*.

32. “There were many reasons why Ray drank: the memory of the war,

though never explicitly mentioned, must have been difficult to deal with; there was the pressure of work; but, in the end, alcohol was simply so much part of the warp and weft of his life that dependence was inevitable.”

(William 123)

33. See Uchida, *Tantei* 31.

34. See Suwabe, *Maruta* 49.

35. See Nicol, *Private* 81.

36. See Scaggs, “Romance Narratives, Blackmail, and the Prince of Knowledge in the Novels of Raymond Chandler” 173.

37. See Chandler, “Trouble.”

Chapter Four

38. Chandler’s Philip Marlowe series include *The Big Sleep* (1939), *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), *The High Window* (1942), *The Lady in the Lake* (1943), *The Little Sister* (1949), *The Long Goodbye* (1953), and *Playback* (1958). Although Chandler was unable to finish the work following *Playback*, it was completed by Robert B. Parker and published in 1989 as *Poodle Springs*.

39. The sense of lacking a home is also suggested when Daisy is invited to Gatsby’s mansion. Upon seeing the house, Daisy says, “I love it” (*Gatsby* 60) and immediately adds, “I don’t see how you live here all alone” (*Gatsby* 60). Gatsby replies, “I keep it always full of interesting people, night and day” (*Gatsby* 60). This denial of living alone, being surrounded by “interesting people,” ironically emphasizes the absence of his family members in his mansion.

40. Nick's narrative includes Gatsby's "GENERAL RESOLVES" exactly "Jay Gatz" wrote them, complete with typos and indecipherable parts, which emphasizes that they are little more than a parody of Franklin's self-improvement schedule, contrary to Gatz's father's expectations.

No wasting time at Shafers or [a name, indecipherable]

No more smokeing or chewing

Bath every other day

Read one improving book or magazine per week

Save \$5.00 [crossed out] \$3.00 per week

Be better to parents (*Gatsby* 112)

41. Tom Williams states that it is uncertain whether Chandler knew Cissy's real age when they were married, but he did when she passed away: "By now, Ray was thirty-five, and we have to wonder whether he knew how old Cissy really was. Years later, in an act of generosity, he would echo her action at their wedding, changing the year of her birth on her death certificate to maintain the lie." (Williams 108).

42. See Williams, *Mysterious* 391.

43. See Irwin, *Unless* 52.

44. Marlowe hints at the deaths of Roger and Eileen without revealing their names in his confession at the very beginning of his narrative: "He [Lennox] would have told me the story of his life if I had asked him. But I never even asked him how he got his face smashed. If I had, and he told me, it just possibly might have saved a couple of lives. Just possibly, no more" (*Long* 435). This confession confirms that his entire narrative is retrospective, serving as evidence of his continued care for Lennox even

after their friendship ended.

Chapter Five

45. This chapter is based on a part of Tatsuro Ide's "Han-seisansha no tsunagari ni mukete: Henri Mira "Kita kaikisen" ni okeru jiden, kazoku, shihonshugi eno toi (Toward the Community of Anti-production: The Questions of Autobiography, Family, and Capitalism in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*).," *Delta: Studies on Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, and Lawrence Durrell*, 2019, vol. 11, 76-89, and a part of Tatsuro Ide's "Nagare no ba toshite no toshi to shintai: Henri Mira "Kita kaikisen" ga egaku sei no arikata (The City and the Body as a Place of Flow: The Question of Life in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*)," *Hokkaido American Literature*, vol. 28, 36-48, with additions and modifications.

46. For the critical reception of *Tropic of Cancer*, see Masuga, *Secret* 14-28. Masuga categorizes the reception into three themes: "Surrealism," "Obscenity and Pornography," and "The Confession."

47. The 2022 Norton Critical Edition of *The Great Gatsby* includes a portion of Franklin's *The Autobiography* as one of its contents, noting, "Gatsby's schedule mimics, or parodies, Benjamin Franklin's self-improvising 'scheme of order' drawn up in Part Two of his *Autobiography* (1791)." (*Gatsby* 112).

48. See note 35 in Chapter Four.

49. "*The Autobiography* is Franklin's longest work, and yet it is only a fragment. The first part, written as a letter to his son, William Franklin, was not intended for publication; and the composition is more informal and

the narrative more personal than in the second part, from 1730 on, which was written with a view to publication” (Pine xvi).

50. See Honda, *Kita* 22-25.

51. See Washida, *Matsu* 17-19.

52. “Miller’s texts are ripe with human bodies, which take on literal forms as well as incredibly surreal and abstract forms” (Masuga 79).

53. For the relationship between the letter mentioned here with Miller’s process of writing *Tropic of Cancer*, see Honda, *Kita* 30-32.

Chapter Six

54. For the difficulty in finding a coherent theme in Miller’s works, see Männiste, *Henry* xi. Männiste refers to John Parkin’s words: “To attempt to pin Miller down to a coherent system of thought is clearly a waste of time,” and Anaïs Nin’s words: “You don’t have a philosophy. You have feelings.” (Männiste xi)

55. For the process of writing *Sexus*, see Honda, “Kaisetsu” 573-74.

56. *Tropic of Capricorn* contains a similar episode. The narrator is hired as the employment manager in a telegraph company, but his entirely random hiring decisions cause great confusion in the company’s operations. The narrator enjoys the confusion in the network system: “I laughed all day long thinking what a fine stinking mess I was making of it. Complaints were pouring in from all parts of the city. The service was crippled, constipated, strangulated. A mule could have gotten there faster than some of the idiots I put into harness” (*Capricorn* 18).

57. See, Honda, “Kaisetsu” 579.

Chapter Seven

58. This chapter is based on Tatsuro Ide's "Okureta tegami, kowareta tokei: J. D. Sarinja "Ezume ni: ai to hisan o komete" ni okeru inori no jikansei (Belated Letter, Broken Watch: The Nature of Time of Prayer in J. D. Salinger's "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor," *Tohoku Gakuin University Review: Essays and Studies in English Language and Literature*, 2014, vol. 98, pp. 1-18, with additions and modifications.

59. Although the story includes a fictional city named "Gaufurt" in Bavaria, the narrator/Sergeant X shares Salinger's real personal experiences in World War II. For the autobiographical background of the story, see Alsen "New Light on the Nervous Breakdowns of Salinger's Sergeant X and Seymour Glass."

60. The references to war-related events are as follows: "I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and a little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War" (*Gatsby* 6); "In the Argonne Forest I took two machine-gun detachments so far forward that there was a half mile gap on either side of us where the infantry couldn't advance" (*Gatsby* 45).

61. See Noma, *Senso* 116-44.

62. See Osawa, *Kyoko* 89-116.

63. See Noma, *Senso* 222-49.

Chapter Eight

64. This chapter is based on a part of Tatsuro Ide's "Shisha o okosu: J.D.

Sarinja Kyaccha in za rai ni okeru razaro no episodio no parodi to shisha no sonzairon (Calling the Dead Up : The Parody of the Biblical Episode of Lazarus and the Ontology of the Dead in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*)," *Journal of Institute for Research in English Language and Literature of Tohoku Gakuin University*, vol. 38, 2013, pp.37-57 with additions and modifications.

65. See Takeuchi, *Raimugibatake*, 84–91. Takeuchi interprets this act as evidence of Holden's unique relationship to time, which radically unsettles the dichotomy between Holden as the living and Allie as the dead. Building on Takeuchi's discussion, this study explores a new dimension of the act, interpreting it as a parody of the biblical episode while engaging with the interrelated themes of vulnerability and care.

66. See Takeuchi, *Sarinja* 11-19.

67. See Takeuchi, *Raimugibatake* 28-72.

68. This chapter quotes English translations of the Bible from the American Standard Version (ASV) for the following reason: Although the King James Version (KJV) has long been popular in America, the ASV was also readily available when Salinger was writing *The Catcher in the Rye*, as it was first published in 1901. While there are many references to the Bible in Salinger's works, it is difficult to identify which version of the Bible he read, as there are few direct quotations. One exception is "A Young Girl in 1941 with No Waist at All" (1947), one of Salinger's uncollected stories. In the story, a character named Mrs. Woodruff directly quotes from Song of Solomon 8:4 as follow: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the roes, and by the hinds of the field, That ye stir not up, nor awaken love,

Until it please” (“Young” 96). Her choice of words, including the capitalizations, is more similar to the ASV. While the KJV writes, “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please” (Solomon 8:8; KJV), the ASV reads, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, That ye stir not up, nor awake my love, Until he please” (Solomon 8:8; ASV). Although this single similarity between the quotation and the ASV passage cannot be definitive proof that Salinger read the ASV, it at least suggests that he was familiar with it.

69. The ASV writes the same passage as follows: “And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43).

70. See Murakami, *Kyatcha* 360.

71. See Takeuchi, “Burning” 322-23 and 330.

72. See Takeuchi, “Burning” 322-26.

73. See Takeuchi and Boku, *Nazotoki* 153-235.

74. The clear intertextuality between Salinger and Kierkegaard can be observed in the fact that *Seymour: An Introduction* opens with a quotation from Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death*, along with a diary entry by Franz Kafka.

75. See Takeuchi, *Sarinja* 47-60 and *Raimugibatake* 100-33.

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