

Despair in Asian Literature: Exploring Dazai Osamu's *No Longer Human* in the Light of Existentialism, Absurdism & Critical Disability Theory

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in English

The Department of English and Humanities
Brac University
May 2022

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this to the Tofa of today. I do not know what the future holds for me, but this will remain as one of my biggest achievements. It has been far more difficult than I imagined; and looking back, I want to be happy and smile at the younger version of me.

To my Subha, my Spriha and my Syfan:

My hope, happiness and light.

Ammu, this is yours

Acknowledgement

I want to express my utmost gratitude to Almighty Allah for my life has been full of blessing. Despite the numerous ups and downs, Allah has, like always, put everything in place. I am grateful for this life and what my journey has led me to. Nothing would have been possible if by chance, coincidence in life as per Allah's planning did not place me where I am now, with the people who love me endlessly.

I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Sayeed Noman from the bottom of my heart. These few words would never suffice for he has been my guiding stone since first semester. He has been my justification, my hope and the best guide in the face of everything that has doubted my decision to pursue this degree. It brings me immense joy for it is an honor to be able to begin and finish this journey with him and his guidance.

My sincere gratitude is towards all the faculty members who have guided and nourished me to become the better version of myself.

I also want to thank my family for without their constant support I could have never come this far. My family has been an inseparable part of this journey: struggling with me, smiling with me at my success, and having my back at all times. Ammu and Abbu, thank you for loving me for who I am, for never giving in to the social stigmas and letting me grow up. I can never repay an ounce of what your selfless sacrifices. Borapu and Subha, you are the best set of siblings anyone could ask for. Thank you so very much for helping in any and all ways accessible to you both throughout every step of this journey. Thank you Spriha for being there for me always, in all ways. Thank you Syfan for being my sunshine. To my entire nanubari, you all have been nothing short of blessings.

To my dearest and closest friends, thank you all for cheering me on and understanding me, loving me, and taking care of me.

Abstract

Despair is common to the human experience regardless of any facet of one's identity. In the course of studying literature in English, we often have little exposure to Asian literature despite Asian literature also exhibiting these themes such as an existential crisis and despair. This paper attempts to make an effort in addressing the huge gap between Western and Asian literature by exploring the protagonist's despair from the famous modern Japanese I-novel *No Longer Human* (人間失格). In an attempt to provide more dimensions to further the purpose of this paper, Yozo's character and despair is also compared to Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov and Underground man, Camus' Sisyphus and Meursault, and lastly Murakami's Kafka Tamura and Toru Watanabe. Viewed under the lens of Sartre's Existentialism, Camus' Absurdism and Critical Disability Theory, the paper aims to analyze Yozo's despair and find the ways the individual self interacted with modern Japanese society.

Keywords: Asian Literature; Modern Japanese Literature; Dazai Osamu; Existentialism; Absurdism; Despair

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Introduction

Literature is believed to be the reflection of the human experience- this entails our society, history, philosophies, personal and collective experiences, and almost all other facets of human life. The capacity of representation in literature, therefore, should be, and is limitless and extremely diverse. However, more often than not, we are faced with an unequal representation when it comes to the producers of said literature. With Western literature occupying the main focus and research attention of the scholarly community for ages, Asian literature or rather Oriental literature as a whole has been shrouded in shadows, away from the grandeur of Western literary canon, and hence, lacking adequate representation. With the developments in communication, translations and globalization, we see openings through streams of study such as Comparative literature, World Literature, Cross-cultural studies, and so on. Through translations into English Language, literature from around the world has gained a wider international readership.

Although, as of now, Asian literature has gained a significant proportion of international or Anglophone readership, it is still (as most often the case) reviewed, analyzed, and studied from Western perspectives and ideas. This often leads to misinterpretations and misjudgments of the literary piece being examined. Another important aspect to consider is the history of colonization and Imperial exploitation of Asia. The experience and history of colonization in Asia is different for each community in each different region; however, the subjugated communities share a common experience of their indigenous cultures (although in varying degrees and mechanisms) being mutilated, demeaned and encroached upon by colonial exploitation that has left a permanent scar. Hence, (de)colonization or imperial oppression is a common theme in Asian literature; and likewise, most of the literature, besides pre-colonial ones, is approached from a postcolonial standpoint.

However, not all of Asian literature is focused on one aspect of their history. Instead, like literature from any part of the globe, Asian literature also reflects and focuses on representing the everyday experiences in different Asian societies- and this universality of human experience in Asian literature is specifically the part that requires representation and readership. Asia at large is extremely diverse, and cannot be categorized easily as a collective group. Nevertheless, Asian literature exhibits universally applicable themes such as inner turmoil, identity-crisis, moral dilemmas, and so on. An interesting approach to literature from any part of the globe is from an existentialist standpoint. Although the philosophy of existentialism originates from the West (and hence, appears to be countering the purpose of the argument), it is universally applicable as it revolves around the experience of common man in their everyday-day life, aspects of our life that we experience being humans- just being human, no other labels attached. As humans living in societies and being part of different communities, we are always expected to abide by certain social standards, norms and values. The process of internalizing these socially-constructed concepts that dictate our lives begins at birth. Hence, more often than not, we tend not to be true to ourselves and try to abide by the set social expectations (of family and society). This tormenting experience is common to human life, and existentialism, amongst many other aspects explores this problem and suggests possible solutions. Interestingly, modernization has amplified the case for existentialism. Being a double-edged source, modernization has improved life and threatened it at the same time- this created fertile grounds for the existential philosophy to become extremely relevant to the individual in modern society; and hence is often consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, portrayed in modern literature.

Osamu Dazai is one of the most celebrated writers of modern Japan. Although Dazai is not as well acknowledged elsewhere as he is in Japan, his literary works provide substantial material to explore existentialism and the tortured human psyche in the individual's struggle to fit in

society. One of the most common themes in Dazai's works is the 'self' set against the world- the family and the society; and Dazai's works being extremely interpersonal and autobiographical creates ample ground to explore the human experience under the lens of existentialism. The very fact that Dazai is regarded highly in his native society but faces much criticism elsewhere is an interesting thing to consider as it provides the opportunity to examine Dazai's literary works in contrast to the established mechanism of the literary canon. The main objective of this paper is to explore Dazai's most famous novel *No Longer Human* (*Ningen Shikkaku* / 人間失格) from an existential approach to illuminate the agonizing existential crisis and Absurdity faced by the self in modern Japanese society- and for the 'self' that cannot fit in and is stranded and outcasted, I believe viewing this facet of experience from a standpoint of critical disability theory would give the analysis a sense of completeness. Exploring Dazai also entails looking at other authors such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, and Haruki Murakami who share similar themes and have earned significant recognition amongst readers.

Chapter 1: Asian Literature and the Canon: Dazai in Context:

The streams of 'World Literature' or 'Comparative Literature' to explore literary pieces outside of one's nation are a relatively new approach. It is generally accepted that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe first mentioned the term 'Weltliteratur', German for World Literature, in the late 1820s, and 'Comparative' literature "finds an inaugural moment in Madame de Staël's resolutely nationalizing *De la Littérature* (1800), with its differentiation of the literatures" from the German, English, French and Italian (Cooppan 18). Goethe understood World Literature to be more than a genre that consisted of the most remarkable works of different nations. Rather, he thought "not that the nations shall think alike, but that they shall learn how to understand each other, and, if they do not care to love one another, at least that they will learn to tolerate one another" (Goethe 8). Comparative literature differs from world literature by taking into account different aspects of the language and context of the native origin of the piece. Despite the differences, the two streams opened ways for people to read and be acquainted with literature from other nations. However, the perception of 'other nations' was confined to Europe, and much later America, for decades.

As difficult as it was for American literature to have a distinct identity as 'American', much to Emerson's efforts, it took decades for American Literature to be canonized and viewed with the same regards as English Literature. The case is quite similar for literature from Asia, and unlike American literature, it has yet to be fully welcomed and incorporated in the literary canon. Moreover, compared to the progress made by translation of other European literature, the case for Asia is relatively more recent- much of it is affected by the importance of learning certain foreign languages over the other. Serrano-Munoz explains that it has only been around fifty years since the increase and improvement in translations "to a degree that has permanently changed the landscape of literary phenomena" (340). "The US literary

market has traditionally granted little room to non-Western works in translation and has conventionally left their circulation to small publishers with little reach in terms of audience”; and with the Western literature predominantly occupying the canonical spaces, it becomes harder for Asian literature (or any non-Western literature) to be incorporated (Serrano-Munoz 346).

However, the understanding of the literary canon in Asia was much different before the ages of Imperial invasions across the globe as nations. As much as national literature was prioritized, different literary canons existed for different regions and each composed of literature from nations that they were primarily in connection with. In the case of Japan, China has always been a major influence. The Japanese language itself is based on Kanji characters which are phonetic characters used in the Chinese language. Having knowledge on Chinese canon, encompassing not only literature, but also art, philosophy and music, was a symbol of elitism. However, with the American Occupation of Japan and modernization, Classical Chinese “became irrelevant to the attainment of worldly success”; and the elitism broke down leaving literature and arts to become “fields of production and consumption in a capitalist society” (Sakaki 144). The gradual disappearance of spontaneous use of classical Chinese created new barriers in communication across East Asia and hence, “the only way to overcome the obstacle was to master a European language (English or French), the language of an imperialist nation-state” (Sakaki 144).

The imperialist invasion caused much more changes to nations it came in contact with: Whether nations were formally colonized or not colonized at all, the global invasion by imperialist nations have undoubtedly set the sense of European supremacy through their very Eurocentric ideas and ideologies that they injected strategically in their non-Western counterparts. The invasion was not fueled by only the desire to acquire more resources and

wealth, but also in creating the European identity. Borrowing from Foucault's ideas of the process of creating identity discursively, Edward Said explains the construction of the European identity in his book *Orientalism*. The Orient is referred to as anything that is not the Occident. He explains that Orient is not only "the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, [but also] the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 1). Because the process of identity formation is discursive and based on differences (meaning that the self is what the Other is not), "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 3). The superior European identity stands on the centuries-long discourse on the Orient filled with misrepresentations.

This has also affected the representation and perception of literature from the Orient. As part of the process, Imperial languages (as mentioned above) became integral aspects of 'modernizing' Asian nations. Language and Literature are extremely intertwined with culture- the imperial invasion that has disfigured cultures had also impacted the literature.

"The genre of the novel is a product of nationalism, diffused by European imperialism, and it became almost synonymous with literature in modern Japan" (Sakaki 145). The sense of a superior identity has also created myths that "have led to the constructs of three types: that of the Hierarchy, Canonicity, and Iconicity. There are ardent believers and promoters- of these myths in practically all Anglophone countries, and Asia is no exception to that ... These myths further create a negativism that overlooks the sociolinguistic realities about the function of world Englishes" (Kachru 24).

The problematic aspect of canonicity is that there are no set standards to follow- this makes the term quite ambiguous and prone to be probed. While some people view it to be the greatest pieces produced, others prioritize reputation based on social and political context and

commercial interests (Ndandara 2). However, what exactly makes a literary work the greatest- what are the set standards? There are not any; and that makes it even more difficult to make space for non-Western literature. Moreover, in most cases when measuring the literary success of any piece of literature, it is examined from a Eurocentric perspective. The difficulty lies herein that one party would want an 'authentic' representation of Asian society, while another may deem European qualities to be more worthy.

The Western Influence in Modern Japanese Literature: Osamu Dazai

Such has been the case for Osamu Dazai, whose writings have come under harsh criticism but also much praise. Being Japan's one of the most highly regarded authors, where is Dazai positioned in the literary canon? Dazai is often criticized for the Western elements in his novels that make it appear an amalgam imitation of certain Western artists. Donald Keene, known to have produced the most remarkable translations of *No Longer Human*, writes in the translator's note:

[Dazai] from his childhood days was familiar with European literature, American movies, reproductions of modern paintings and sculpture and much else of our civilization. These became such important parts of his own experience that he could not help being influenced by them, he mentioned them quite as freely as any author in Europe or America. In reading his works, however, we are sometimes made aware that Dazai's understanding or use of these elements of the West is not always the same as ours. It is easy to conclude from this that Dazai had half-digested them, or even that the Japanese as a whole have somehow misappropriated our culture. (Dazai and Keene 1958)

Having this stated about Dazai's works from the very moment one starts to read the novel automatically creates an impression of his 'half-digestion'. However, Keene is not wrong

about Japanese society misappropriating Western culture to an extent. It is difficult for one culture to completely understand or assimilate another culture- rather we adapt and adjust per our needs. During that time, Japanese society had quite the exposure to Western arts and culture. Japan, although previously a very secluded nation, became open to foreign (especially Western ideas) during the Meiji Era in the late 19th century. “The dominant foreign model for Japanese aesthetics in the Showa era was European, both avant-garde and traditional. Japanese arts remained strong, but their significance fluctuated greatly as the nation experienced periods of nationalism, war, and defeat” (Rimer 265). Japanese universities were largely based on German models and therefore students closely studied the works of German scholars such as Nietzsche, Kant, Hegel and many more. The exposure and study of Western culture became more accentuated with the American Occupation of Japan after her defeat in the war- so much so that translated works were not restricted to university textbooks, but available in local newspapers such as Asahi Newspaper and available for public consumption. Dazai, belonging from an aristocratic family from the northern town, had more access; and this is why, as Keene mentioned, he could not help but be influenced by Western ideas.

However, for the artists, the “psychic distance, in both form and ideal, between Western imported ideas and the older traditional ideologies and methodologies was often simply too great to permit the development of the sort of flexible attitudes adequate to undertake all the shifts involved” (Rimer 268). This was the case for many writers including Dazai who had a hard time assimilating and representing European knowledge the way one would see in Europe. While many people may criticize Dazai for his use of Western elements the way he did, this was not limited to Dazai as an individual author- it was the case for many of his fellow writers during that time. As mentioned before, universities offered courses based on Western models, and authors, being products of that time, studied Western concepts that

ultimately had an impact on their novels even if it was not a governing force. Authors such as Shohei Ooka, and Hiroshi Noma alongside Dazai studied French Literature as undergraduate students; and for them it acted “prototypic, taking form as an Occidentalism of a sometimes academic nature, and yet serving as a means of expression for the larger issues of a present Japanese existence” (Baird 483). Rather than focusing on the Japanese fixation on Western styles of art, a new approach should be taken to view the ways these elements have become “vital instruments for a modern Japanese view of existence” (Baird 487). An important aspect to consider before inspecting Western influences on Japanese writers is that exposure had caused “an emotional attachment to the West”, a superior position to the Caucasian race and native speaker that ultimately damaged the “images of the Japanese ‘self and society’” (Kachru 24). The reason why I believe that the main focus of examining Dazai’s works should not be in scrutinizing his borrowing/ use from European artists is because the genre of modern Japanese literature is heavily based on Western constructs- such as the novel itself. Phyllis Lyons is one of the few scholars who have extensively written on Dazai, and she elaborates that “the whole of modern Japanese fiction is, after all, written with a knowledge of Western fiction” (Lyons 97). Dazai, or any author being read under Western perspectives, needs an understanding of modern Japanese literature as a whole to be able to look at the redeemable qualities that makes Dazai (and others) remarkable writers admired by the Japanese society.

Fitting in the Canon: Studying from a Eurocentric Perspective

One of the major issues in fitting Asian literature in the canon is that it does not seem to fit the standards, which are often set from Western understanding of literature and society. Sharalyn Orbaugh examines Alan Wolfe’s thorough work on Dazai to outline that “the development of the Japanese novel has often been figured in terms of a scale of value based

on the development of European fiction in the 19th and 20th centuries, a scale by which the Japanese novel is inevitably judged as flawed” and finds this to be “guilty of an Orientalist approach” (Orbaugh 186). Specific to Dazai, we can examine the Dazai Osamu by O'Brien, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu* by Phyllis Lyons, and Alan Wolfe's *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu*. In each case, the writers make an effort to reduce the gap between Western and Eastern literature and highlight the problems with canonicity, lack of exposure to Japanese literature, and the splendor of Dazai as a writer. However, in each case they have, at one point or the other, subjected Dazai to criticism from a western context. O'Brien deserves commendation for presenting the complete range of Dazai's literature to the world. However, an audience with no prior knowledge of the Japanese language will be directed to understand Dazai and his style solely based on O'Brien's understanding- this leaves no room for newer or an addition of a personal analysis to Dazai's texts. Wolfe attempted to explore Dazai's from a poststructuralist and deconstructive approach, but throughout his book there was only one single paragraph dedicated to the deconstruction of Dazai's use of language- an extremely important aspect of his writing. “Wolfe triumphantly reveals the errors of others, only to perform the same flawed operations himself, is his crusade against Orientalism” (Orbaugh 195). Mr. Pollack, in response to Wolfe's analysis, points out that “Dazai and his work seem in the end to disappear into a sort of deconstructive nothingness” (Pollack 114). Phyllis Lyons, though ardently in favor of Dazai, suggests the readers in her book to have an understanding of Dazai's personal life and go through critical analyses of his works to help truly understand his works- this suggestion is quite concerning as it implies Dazai's literature lacks intrinsic value and cannot be understood by western audience. This seems counterproductive to the aims of her book. Although Mr. O'Brien also suggests having a familiarity with Dazai's biography for a better understanding, in response to Lyon's book, he wrote that her emphasis on critical analysis “plays down certain aspects of

Dazai's style"; and her translation focusing too much on accuracy feels like a transcription (281).

The central issue lies in the fact that Japanese novels in content and purpose are fundamentally different from European novels. "Japanese literature is expressed in a language reflecting a belief in the ultimate superiority of instinct or intuition over logic ... This profound divergence in view-this dichotomy between logic and intuition-has affected and continues to affect the American (and British) critical interpretation of modern Japanese fiction" (Ryan 52-53). Mr. Ryan further explains that the critics and translators find the difficulty in working with and accepting what they have been trained to reject. In asking one of his fellow Japanese classmates about how long it took him to read novels by Kawabata, he received the response: "We don't read a text like this; we inhale it" (Ryan 54). This points out the critical flaw in approaching Japanese literature as for Japanese society literature is an experience, and less about critical analysis. This is why most approaches of critical analysis do not generate expected output. "Unable to speak of the language of the text, and therefore of its very soul, the Western critic tries to find structure, symbols, arrangements of themes, even "ideas" which simply are not there, or if they are there, do not matter to anything like the degree his writing about them makes it appear" (Ryan 55). However, certain approaches such as examining the text from a nihilistic point of view, or that of existentialism works better- it allows us to work with the experience instead.

Redeeming Dazai: The Case for Murakami

In our attempts to explore the Eurocentric grounds of the literary canon that makes it difficult for Japanese literature to be incorporated, the case of Haruki Murakami is bound to manifest. How come Murakami, a well regarded Japanese writer writing Japanese novels that sustain the fundamental substances of Japanese literature, be celebrated globally if the literary canon

did not make space for such? Murakami is an extraordinary writer who captures the multidimensional perspective of an adolescent in a Japanese society struggling to make sense of life. His works exhibit magic realism and fantastical elements that he utilizes at his disposal to construct the plots and characters as well as their relationship to society. Reading Murakami does feel like an experience, and oftentimes the endings leave us without a proper sense of closure- a major characteristic of Japanese novels in opposition to traditional Western novels. Murakami also borrows heavily from Western authors such as Kafka, Dostoevsky, and others; and this is evident from the Intertextuality present in his works. However, his adoption of Western ideas and merging them is much different from any writer from writers before him such as Dazai. I find the difference in timeline between Dazai, Soseki, Mishima (modern Japanese writers popular in Japan) and Murakami to be an important factor as it was crucial in determining the extent of exposure one had to Western culture. While Dazai understood Western arts when it just spread across Japan and in its elementary phase, Murakami had the opportunity to receive more advanced education, move to the United States, and even teach at Princeton University in 1991 while Dazai had met the end of his life in 1948. Murakami had the chance to understand the western arts, society and culture firsthand- this is probably why his works do not appear to be a 'misappropriation'. His convergence of Western literary ideas (such as magic realism) and his own native Japanese literary characteristics, thus, creates a common ground that is enjoyed by people across the globe. His literature reflects his Japan, while Dazai's reflect the one Dazai was brought up in. It is also interesting to notice that Dazai's works, *No Longer Human* in this case, focuses heavily on the psychological experience of Yozo in relation to himself and society- as an 'I-novelist' (Shi-shousetsuka / 私小説家), his writings focused on exhibiting his personal experience, which makes his writings autobiographical. Dazai's works, to a large extent, were confessional. Although, like any other artist, he wanted to be taken seriously by

the world; he also never explicitly wrote for others. Much like Franz Kafka, reading through Dazai's works feels as if he is reconciling with himself through his writing (Lyons 121). The case is completely different from that of Murakami. Moreover, Murakami's works have been produced in an age of rapid globalization that has enhanced translations- and most of his works have been translated to English followed by the success of his *A Wild Sheep Chase*, "his first publication aimed at the American market" (Buchanan). However, for Dazai and other modern Japanese writers, finding a translation that would properly relay the content is difficult as many aspects such as dialects, tone and others are lost in the process. Moreover, because only *The Setting Sun* and *No Longer Human* have been translated duly, "Dazai is often pigeonholed under some not particularly exalted label such as 'postwar decadent'" even though he has produced an array of works that focus on different aspects of his experience (Cohn 546). Moreover, they had limited access to publishers and translators during their lifetime through which they could gain wider readership with better translations and adaptations. This leads us to another significant factor behind Murakami's canonization, which is his access to America and American publishing.

The United States still exerts a strong cultural influence over the Western world, while hosting the most significant amount of Japan-related literature outside of Japan. Moreover, it has had an important role in the global canonization of Murakami, especially during the first half of his career in translation ... By material means, Murakami reached other Western markets ready to be canonized, stewarded by some of the best editors and translators and covered by the media ... While some publishing houses in Europe followed the criteria established in the US, hence enhancing its canonization powers, others decided to approach Murakami using their own standards. This division revealed in turn the dimension of translation practices in the process of canonization. Translations into English have been heavily edited in terms

of language and even content, with entire passages of some of his novels cut out. The reasoning behind these decisions (made by both Kodansha International and Knopf, and suggested or agreed upon by Murakami's different translators) is that it would make his novels more appealing in terms of familiarity and especially the pacing of the narration for Western readers. (Serrano-Munoz 342 and 348)

It is undeniably true that Dazai's works in comparison to Murakami today appear less mature and developed. However Dazai as an author has many qualities that make him redeemable. There is also no defending his weakness in constructing a fictional world for he heavily resorted to his own tragic life, and borrowing from works of both Western and Japanese authors. However, I believe his weaving together different works along with his own life experience is commendable as he created a style of his own albeit the clutter. The most important aspect to consider is to not isolate an author from his context. However, looking solely at the text, reading Dazai makes us develop a sense of attachment to him, making his characters a part of our experience. Dazai's writing was unique from his fellow I-novel practitioners such as "Naoya Shiga who is known for being an exemplary author of the shi-shosetsu that was regarded as "serious, sincere literature in Japan" However, Dazai, although writing shi-shosetsu, differed from Shiga as he accommodated "certain salient parts" that he "selected to develop the central themes of his varied creations"- all of this made it difficult to readily fit his writings in the plethora of others (Morris 501). Reading Dazai in bulk and not solely focusing on his post-war novels of despair "takes us beyond the received image of a one-dimensional, self-pitying Dazai, perpetually confessing all" (Brown 241). As much as Dazai referred to Western artists, he referred to himself and other Japanese authors just as freely- a fact that comes to light when reading many of his works together. I find Dazai's literature to be an assemblage of rhizomes, of his different aspects of his life experiences- his adoption of Western art, his fragment sense of identity and all else.

Chapter 2: Research Question, Rationale for Research, Theories and Methods,

Literature Review

Research Question:

How has the self and the agonizing existential crisis associated with it been explored in Dazai's *No Longer Human*- How does it compare to Japanese authors such as Murakami, and Western author such as Dostoevsky and Camus whose selected works exhibit similar experiences of the human self?

Rationale:

This research takes into account the evident gap in exploring Western literature and its Eastern counterpart. In an attempt to address the gap, the paper has focused on Asian literature, specifically Japanese literature in hopes to analyze the universally applicable themes such as despair from an existential crisis and the self's struggle against society. In narrowing down the focus to *No Longer Human* by Dazai Osamu, one of the most prominent authors of modern Japanese literature, it has been observed that most of the works surrounding Dazai is focused on connecting his biography to his writings. Recently, some research has been done on *No Longer Human* from a nihilist standpoint. However, there is a noticeable lack of looking at the text from an existentialist and Absurdist standpoint to explore the root of despair. The theories of existentialism and Absurdism are not only universally applicable to the human life while transcending the Euro-centric experiences, but they also help explore the everyday experiences and concerns of a regular person. By analyzing the text from an Existentialist and Absurdist standpoint, as well as using critical disability theory, I intent to address the gaps in exploring this specific texts by adding more dimensions to its interpretation, and as a result addressing the larger gap in the world literary cannon in regards to Asian literature.

Theories and Methods:

The paper draws on a number of secondary resources consisting of mainly peer-reviewed journal articles and books. This not only helped structure the paper and support the arguments made, but also allowed for a gap to be discovered and addressed. A close textual reading has been used to analyze and explore the relevant themes in order to answer the research questions. In this paper, a few philosophical ideas and literary theory have been used to examine the primary text followed by a comparative analysis.

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of Existentialism and Albert Camus philosophy of the Absurd play a key role in exploring Yozo's existential crisis. The text also refers to critical disability theory and ideas of confinement and the 'medical gaze' by Michele Foucault.

Review of Literature:

In the section titled 'Canonicity, Diversity and Asian Englishes' from Part I of the book *Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon*, the author ventures into legitimacy and attitude towards the canon followed by the canonicity, marginalization, and hierarchy that entails "established or hegemonizing canon, loose cannons, and canons under cannons" (Kachru 22). He outlines that the label 'canons under cannons' is not limited to just Asia, Africa or African-American writers, it applies to anything beyond the established canon- such as the works of Scottish dialect or even the case of American literature in comparison to English literature 50 years prior. With the misconceptions around canonicity and hierarchy that has held Anglophone literature on a pedestal above literature of other languages, we are faced with a case of mythology surrounding the position of literature- Asia, of course, does not remain unscathed. "These myths further create a negativism that overlooks the sociolinguistic realities about the function of world Englishes" (Kachru 24). This further prevents securing a favorable position and accommodating Asian literature in the canon.

In order to put the Eurocentric literary canon and the global transition to canonize this, it would be lacking not to bring in Edward Said's extensive research that produced one of his most influential works *Orientalism*. In this book Said explains his detailed and intricate methodology and the vast expanse of his research- this has created a strong ground for the text that introduced the world with ideas very different from the centuries-old Eurocentric discourse. Drawing from Foucault's idea of the self, Said explains that behind the construction and perception of our identity lies a discursive process- we identify through differences; the self versus the other. The centuries-old discourse of Orientalism set forth by the Occident has created and circulated a complete misrepresentation of the Orient and this allowed the "European culture [to gain] strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 3). This argument applies to the Eurocentric literary canon as mentioned by Atsuko Sakaki in her book *Obsessions with the Sino-Japanese Polarity in Japanese Literature* where she explains that in Japan (until the contact with European Imperialism), "The mastery of the Chinese literary canon ... [was what] allowed [women] admission on the basis of their merits to the intellectual society of their times" (Sakaki 144). The Chinese Classics was the canon for East Asia, especially Japan. However, as seen from Sakaki's tracing of the historical transition of canonicity, we find that upon contact with European Imperialism, a rapidly modernizing Japan abandoned the previously elitist Chinese Classical language and "the acquisition of one or more European languages ... became imperative" (Sakaki 144).

In the article titled "Justification of The Asian Literary Canon", author Alfriani Ndandara mentions that the literary canon has always been under constant investigation and research as the term 'canon' has become "a term in question over time because it is considered incapable of answering a certainty about the criteria used in classifying literary works" (1). The paper focuses on research suggesting four distinct criteria that must be fulfilled for Asian literature

to be incorporated in the literary canon- and these criteria revolve around the cultural, social, moral, ideological, or historical Asian values the text offers to represent. Ann Sherif in the article titled “The Canon with a Critical Difference” reviews two pieces of literature:

Complicit Fictions: The Subject in the Modern Japanese Prose Narrative by James A. Fujii, and *Reading against Culture: Ideology and Narrative in the Japanese Novel* by David Pollack. The author focuses on the use of “post-structuralist and reconstructionist theory” by both Fujii and Pollack in positioning Japanese literature in the canon.

Serrano-Munoz explores “the relationship between the reproduction of hegemonic discourses of national representation in the reception of literature in translation and processes of canonization” in his article “Canon Breeds Canon: Murakami Haruki, World Literature, and the Hegemonic Representation of Japan in the United States” (339). In the article, the author identifies a number of factors that have shaped the course of Murakami’s reputation and accommodation in the canon- both in terms of the logistical and hegemonic ways the canon works, as well as the unique traits of Murakami’s novels. He further argues “that the reproduction of hegemonic discourses of national representation from the reception of literature—particularly bestselling authors such as Murakami Haruki—fits right into the dynamics of canonization within a World Literature paradigm” (Serrano-Munoz 341). The article titled “Who You’re Reading When You Read Haruki Murakami” explains the process involved in the translation of Murakami’s works based on the book *Who We’re Reading When We’re Reading Murakami* by David Karashima. “Murakami has said he is more influenced by American fiction than Japanese” and this opens us to speculation of his original writing in comparison to the translated versions to better understand his literature fitting in the literary canon (Buchanan).

James O'Brien is one of the few scholars who have broadly studied Dazai Osamu and his works. In his book *Dazai Osamu* published in 1975, he explores many of Dazai's novels and short stories in relation to his life. The book is prominently divided into five distinct chronological timelines, each reflecting a certain stage of Dazai's growth as a writer. The section from 1909 to 1930 covers his ascend from childhood to adolescence while comparing some of his early writings. From 1930-1935, his years at university; 1935-1941, his turbulent life: succumbing to drug addiction, depression, breaking apart from his family, and more; 1941-1945 where the experience of war drastically changed his writing. The last section looks at 1946-1948 that saw his postwar depression followed by his suicide and the publication of his most popular novels *The Setting Sun* and *No Longer Human*. A matter of concern is that Mr. O'Brien has placed much emphasis on the autobiographical nature of Dazai's writings especially focusing on the chronology of his life events. This often reduces Dazai's works to being only autobiographical and leaves out many other significant aspects of his writing that makes it unique.

Phyllis Lyons, one of the other scholars writing on Dazai other than Alan Wolfe, reviewed O'Brien's book. In her review she supports his suggestion of the "interconnections that produce the distinctive qualities of his art" (Lyons 119). Although she acknowledges Mr. O'Brien's "service by presenting the full range of Dazai's work to a Western audience", she urges "readers both familiar and unfamiliar with Japanese would be advised to accept Mr. O'Brien's guidance with caution, and to be prepared to supplement his criticism with their own interpretation" (Lyons 121). Ivan Morris also reviewed this book and pointed out that O'Brien's work has been "derived from a doctoral dissertation. This is not invariably the most auspicious source of literary productions, yet ... [it] is not only accurate, well-documented, and thoughtful, but eminently readable" (500). This review is extremely detailed and offers his own analyses of Dazai's works in general. He outlines the differences in

Dazai's literature that makes it difficult to categorize him with other I-novelists and modern Japanese writers, but at the same time he shares many qualities with them. He further explains that despite "universality of [Dazai's] human themes and the apparent simplicity of his language, Dazai's works are surprisingly resistant to translation" (Morris 501). This has been a crucial factor in weaving the opinions and understanding non-Japanese readers have regarding Dazai. Sydney Brown adds to this discourse through his review by explaining that O'Brien's works may connect [and] support Miyoshi Masao's suggestion that "I" novelists arrive at a dead-end when their life experiences have been completely exposed "leaving no alternative but suicide"- and that for Dazai, "writing had a therapeutic effect, possibly prolonging [his] precarious existence" (241).

David Brudnoy analyzes the interconnectivity of several works by Dazai and makes a critical analysis of each one as he progresses. Dazai's works "may be seen as a portrait of his own tortured consciousness as it developed with frightening acuity, twisted in upon total confession of his real and imagined wickedness, and finally collapsed and absolute negativism deriving from his realization of the impotence to the world" (Brudnoy 457-8). His article has delved into the works of different Japanese scholars who have worked on Dazai as well as a few Western ones. He finds Dazai to be "arrested in a state of immaturity of disposition out of which his personality did not evolve" (Brudnoy 459). He asserts that *The Setting sun* and *No Longer Human* are "controlled, tightly-knit summations of the Dazaiesque literature of despair" (Brudnoy 469). While making through criticism of Dazai, he manages to balance the shortcomings and his potential.

Van Ames, having explored an array of Japanese scholars' works on aesthetics of the Japanese Novel, writes about modern Japanese literature and its connection to the West. Her article "Aesthetics in Recent Japanese Novels" also explores the influence of postwar

conditions on literature such as that of Natsume Soseki and Dazai Osamu, while connecting Zen and Existential philosophies to specific novels such as *The Ballad of Narayama* by Shichirō Fukazawa. James Baird in his article titled “Contemporary Japanese Fiction” reviews a number of Japanese texts including *No Longer Human*. He finds that “the deeper the penetration of Japan by post-war America, or the heavier the assumption by Japanese intellectuals of the burden of the individual in the modern world, the more like Americans the Japanese become” although it does not suggest complete Americanization (Baird 478). He underlines the exposure of Western arts in Japan that was crucial for the ‘modernization’ of Japan and is inevitably a major influence on modern Japanese literature. As for Dazai, he finds the most remarkable aspect of his narrative to be “its total freedom from sentimentality ... In his indifference to the past Dazai proposes a contemporary Japanese approach to existence which implies not one inheritance from tradition. Only time and desire for identity remain” (Baird 494).

Alan Wolfe, author of *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The case of Dazai Osamu*, provides an extensive and substantial material to work with in terms of positioning Dazai in the suicidal narratives of the nation. His book is divided into three parts, each consisting of several chapters. The first part examines suicide in the Japanese narrative from Seppuku to Jisatsu followed by the impact of cross-cultural complexities on the narratives of suicide. The second part titled ‘Suicidal Autobiography’ looks at the I-novel and suicide keeping much focus on making a critical analysis of both Dazai’s personal life and literature. The third section explores suicidal narratives with regards to the political conditions such postwar Japan, modernization, and Ressentiment.

Rey Chow reviews Wolfe’s text to point out that the paradigm of individualism has been “used as a way to measure success with which non-Western cultures like the Japanese

achieve modernity” (Chow 297). He raises a case of an epistemic concern as many Japanese artists exhibited the tendency to prefer suicide as a mode of death. According to him, “Wolfe presents the problem of Japan's modernity through the materiality of the text. By examining Dazai's stories and novels as writing rather than simply as documents that "reflect" an outer reality, and by refusing to give in to the more facile practices in so-called East-West studies” (Chow 298). To this Orbaugh adds that Wolfe explore the modernization of Japan as a metanarrative that connects to suicide and advanced forms of capitalism in society (186-9). Mr. Pollack also reviews Wolfe's book. In regards to Dazai's specific case, he adds that the Wolfe extracted the “general self-destructiveness of Dazai and his literary texts, of evidence of the author and his work embodying the very stuff of authentic destruction, a 'suicidal narrative' capable of destroying itself even as it is written” (Pollack 112).

Phyllis Lyons, amongst many of her other works concerning Dazai, wrote the book *The Saga Of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations*. The book covers Dazai's life and literature in three parts. The first part covers his personal life, the second looks at the projection of his personal life into fiction; and the last part, the saga, consists of her translations of five short-stories written by Dazai. Mr. O'Brien reviews the work and commends her effort as he states that a thorough “critical study of a modern Japanese author requires some daring as well as hard work” (O'Brien 280). In regards to her analysis of Dazai's art maturing with time, he writes “this is partly a matter of the author's achieving a greater understanding of himself, of implementing his "curriculum of love" more fully from work to work in the Saga” (O'Brien 281). However, he points out that her critical analysis reduces all of Dazai's work and puts them in the general “context of the search for individuality in modern Japanese culture” (O'Brien 282). Moreover, he also critiques her translations that concentrate a little too much on accuracy, which dismisses many aspects of Dazai's writing. Another critique adds that “study confers on Dazai's lifelong artistic struggle

the resilient label of saga. She delves into Dazai's early years where his inability to discover "mother" serves as a major touchstone that allows entrance into those multiple complexities in Dazai that led to four unsuccessful suicide attempts" (Goldstein 862). Mr. Heinrich identifies a primary issue in working with Dazai. He writes that "so much of it based on the events in his own life, is coping with the distinction between the facts concerning those events and the truth of them as Dazai saw it over the years" (Heinrich 438). Miss Lyons understands Dazai's lifelong work to be a saga and his characters to be his fictional autobiographical persona with different names. "Lyons's thesis that Dazai had completed his Osamu saga with *No Longer Human* and could finally die is also debatable. It is based, ultimately, on the assumption that the earlier suicide attempts were, consciously or not, deliberately unsuccessful, and that only with the last did he mean business" (Heinrich 439). When reviewing this work, James Morita highlights that Miss Lyons provides the readers with new insights on the reasons we should continue reading Dazai. "She understands Dazai as an artist who, creating apparently separate characters, in fact pursued the perfection of a lonely soul with which he was helplessly in love" (Morito 658).

In her article titled "'Art Is Me': Dazai Osamu's Narrative Voice as a Permeable Self", through the analysis of Dazai's works and writing style, Lyons attempts to bridge "the gap not just between East and West, but more universally, between writer, reader, and the written page" (Lyons 94). She explores the contrast of Western perceptions of character developments and that of Japan in context. For I-novels in Japan, "the question of the "self" of characters in the novel is intimately tied in with the issue of narrative voice: who it is, whom it addresses, what it says, and what significance that has for the effectiveness of the work as a whole" (Lyons 94). She explains that the interpersonal voice is significant in Japanese literature, even if the text is not autobiographical. Another important insight her article offers is that Dazai's lack of a sense of belonging had ultimately helped him "dissect

the rituals of social expression, and create in his own mind a stage where others could act out emotions felt but perhaps unacknowledged” (Lyons 102).

Mariam Kingsberg in “Methamphetamine Solution: Drugs and the Reconstruction of Nation in Postwar Japan” explores the hiropon (methamphetamine) crisis (1952—1956) in Japan, and what it symbolized for postwar Japan. In her research, she found that the process of overcoming this addiction crisis (that was an epidemic for postwar Japan) was also a vital force in creating a new identity for the Japanese. A part of her research involved looking at famous people in addiction, which included Osamu Dazai. “Novelist Dazai Osamu, a lifelong drug user who committed suicide several years before the peak of the hiropon age, furnished perhaps the most enduring representation of this ‘sickness of the spirit’” (Kingsberg 147).

Although her article focuses on the hiropon crisis (mass addiction to methamphetamine in Japan) and not on Dazai or his literature, it provides ample information to explore the impact of postwar defeat that may have accentuated the existential crisis in Japanese society at large.

In the article “A Reconsideration of the Culture of Shame”, the authors explore the concept of ‘shame’ and its use by society as a tool to set behavioral standards, while examining the case of Osamu Dazai in the context of a culture of shame. “In the case of Japanese society, shame produces a desire to avoid being ridiculed by foreigners, and this is a trait common to all Japanese, and is one of the motives for modernization” (Sakuta, et al. 37). In analyzing Dazai, they believe that “A consciousness of shame was the keynote of his life” and Dazai identified himself with “the ‘ruined people’ who have inevitably been expelled from the realm of achievement-oriented competition. And he rebelled against the circumstances which assigned him the role of underdog, not by actively extricating himself from them, but by exposing the wounds which they had inflicted on him” (Sakuta, et al. 37). Dazai’s decision to identify with the social outcasts and indulge in his pain creates more room for existentialist themes in his

work. The fear of shame that crippled Japanese society from celebrating their individuality is quite noticeable in most of Dazai's works. It is through his acute awareness of despair of the outcasts that he has been able to include these themes and talk about the unspoken parts of life as a young person in modern Japan.

The article titled "High Culture in the Showa Period" examines the social and literary cultures in the Showa Period. "The Showa period, which began in 1926, an arbitrary moment at which to begin an examination of Japanese ideas, ideal" (Rimer 265). The article focuses on the entrance and exposure of Western influence in 'modern' Japan and the ways it has impacted the reception of Japanese literature across the Western world. This has been extremely helpful in understanding the position of Japanese literature in the canon and the inherent differences in understanding and examining literature that has made it difficult for Japanese literature to fit in.

Marleigh Ryan in her article "Translating Modern Japanese Literature" makes a case for the various troubles a Western critic and translator faces when they work with Japanese texts that are fundamentally different in content and context from what they are used to. She shares an experience of one of her brightest undergraduate students expressing her opinion on Tanizaki's *Machioka Sisters*- that she found the text boring. This appalled Ryan and from therein she faced the plight in explaining to the student (representing the case of the western reception) that "Japanese civilization, even then clearly on its way to spectacular fiscal success, was nevertheless predicated on silence and inaction, and that the cruelties the people in the novel visited upon each other were as much a condition of their inability to speak and act as they were of their will"; and that the uniqueness of modern Japanese literature "lies in its ability to create flavor or tone ... Most commonly, the fiction expresses itself in the voice of one person, a man remarkably akin to if not identical with the author" (Ryan 50 and 55).

Janet Walker reviewed the books: *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel* by Kinya Tsuruta and Thomas E. Swann, and *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature* by Makoto Ueda. In the review Walker outlines that “The period from 1868 to 1968, were originally written for a Japanese audience, though they have been available in translation since the late 1960s” (Walker 353). He also notes that the editors of the book *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel* have worked with the text to “provide various methods of analysis that will help to orient students toward and to increase their enjoyment and understanding of Japanese literature” (Walker 354). Although it is helpful to familiarize Japanese literary culture to unfamiliar audiences, the book serving as a manual to understand Japanese literature appears to be concerning as it undermines Japanese literature in the sense that it suggests that readers unfamiliar with Japan may not find intrinsic value in it. Walker also brings O’Brien’s assertion of being familiar with Dazai’s personal life before reading his work. This raises a similar question- why not read Dazai’s works in isolation and examine it with regards to aspects other than the autobiographical nature?

In “Mishima Yukio and His Suicide” Hisaaki Yamanouchi critically analyzes Mishima’s writing and associates it with his suicide. He also identifies the similarities and differences Mishima and Dazai had in the process. Mishima could not accept that “Dazai indulged in sentimentality and self-commiseration, ... the almost deliberate morbidity in Dazai's real life” and despite sharing a number of similarities such as physical frailty and a nihilistic attitude towards the world, “Mishima differed from Dazai in that he was a man of extraordinary stoicism who continually transformed his own self into its opposite” (Yamanouchi 4).

In his review of “Self Portraits: Tales from the Life of Japan’s Great Decadent Romantic, Osamu Dazai., by R. F. McCarthy”, author Joel Cohn argues against one of the widely held beliefs regarding Dazai’s works, that is, his works are a derivation of his biography. “Dazai's

autobiographical fiction accounts for about a third of his total output. But many of the other works are just as firmly grounded in the complex of qualities and events that was Tsushima Shuiji / Dazai Osamu as were any of the more overtly 'autobiographical' stories, if not more so" (Cohn 548). This is a necessary intervention as it allows us readers and researchers to look beyond Dazai's life events, and look at his literature for its own worth.

The dissertation titled "Dazai Osamu and the problematics of context in Japanese artistic consciousness" focuses on the "gap between the nature of a critical tradition which has grown up about Dazai, and the under-analyzed revolutionary potential of Dazai's work itself" (Dillon 8). Dillon also explores the "socially-enforced interpretations of attr, the artist and the Self" that confines the potential of an artist (8). Her work brings a fresh perspective to the table by shifting our focus off the many unflattering aspects of his personal life, and to the text itself. She argues that if "Dazai was no more than a pathetic, selfish, drunken, histrionic playboy, unable to live a proper life, and thereby done in by the stresses of war ... then he hardly deserves to be read, let alone credited" but he is widely celebrated all over Japan (Dillon 4). She outlines that it has become a common belief that the reason behind Dazai's suicide is that he no longer had anything to say. She argues against these claims and compares Dazai's works to many other celebrated authors who apparently "do not 'embarrass' us because, even at their most peculiar, they do not really push against the limits of what we [the West] expect from Japanese writers"; and most of these authors "rarely if ever cry out, Who am I? What am I? Their popularity is largely attributed to the aesthetic skill with which they repeat, I am this, I am this!" (Dillon 6-7).

In her paper titled "Crime and Punishment: The Subjectivity of the Modern Morality and Its Manifestation in the Meiji Man", Autumn Smith makes a comparative analysis of Soseki's *Kokoro* and Dazai's *No Longer Human*. She identifies the way both novels "show that the

lines that are crossed are less easily defined and less easily categorized into crime or otherwise” (Smith 2). I find this to be an interesting parallel to Dostoevsky’s preachings in *Crime and Punishment* as the novel also questions society’s categorizing process and labels of right and wrong. The paper primarily goes over identifying similarities in their despair and differences in their understanding of similar life events; but the most interesting claim is that both protagonists suffer from their inability to forgive themselves. Although the paper makes no references to Absurdism, I find many interesting aspects that point out how Yozo’s despair is inevitably connected to the Absurdity of life. For example, she mentions “both men swallowed up by the struggle of the modern man—attempting to live up to an expectation, an ideal, which in reality doesn’t actually exist” (Smith 6). Here, we see that a facet of pain arises from the juxtaposition of contrary ideas.

Andrian Pradana in their BA thesis titled “Self Identity establishment of the Main character in *No Longer Human*” examines Yozo’s character as he journeys to adulthood from being a child. The paper focuses on using theories such as ‘self-identity theory’, ‘theory of personality development’, and such from the field of psychology to understand Yozo’s character. Hence, the ultimate focus remains on outlining certain traits of Yozo’s character in reference to the novel; and lacks a critical analysis of his despair that builds up his character. In their thesis titled “The Significance Of The Freeter Label Towards The Anthropophobia Experienced By The Main Character As Seen In Osamu Dazai’s *No Longer Human*”, Aditya Putra explores how the freeter label, a term used to label young men without full-time jobs and is often scorned upon, causes Yozo to suffer from anthropophobia, the fear of humans. The paper explores Yozo’s anthropophobia as a mental disease and analyzes it in the light of different theories of psychological illness such as ‘theory of anxiety’, ‘theory of suicide’ and others while connecting the cause Yozo’s suffering to the impact of using derogatory labels

in Japanese society such as the freeter on the outcasts of society. Although a very interesting approach to study the novel, the paper does not look at the roots of his mental disorders.

Stacy Lee, like many others, believe that “for Sôseki and Dazai, history, biography and their art reflect each other in a myriad of ways” (Lee 8). In her MA thesis, she explores the protagonists’ struggles with “self-identity crisis, alienation, loneliness and isolation” and attempts to portray “how the authors and their protagonists sought to resolve the conflict between traditional values and the Western value of personal freedom” (Lee 8).

In her paper “Nihilism and (Non)Humanity in Dostoevsky’s *Demons* and Dazai’s *No Longer Human*”, Miss Printziou does an excellent work at exploring the differences in the nihilist attitude of both protagonists. She connects nihilism to non-humanity and illustrates the ways Dazai’s protagonist tends to project it inwards, while Dostoevsky’s ones project it outwards (Printziou 2). She explains in reference to the novel that boredom in one way or the other was associated with the characters’ nihilism. She argues that “Dazai presents Yozo as being overly sensitive throughout the novel and this is the primary reason for his suffering and despair” ; and unlike many nihilist characters, Yozo “loved humans” (Printziou 7).

Stefan Bolea examines the character Yozo in the light of E. M. Cioran’s ideas of ‘Not human’ and in contrast to Nietzsche’s idea of ‘Over human’. He “understands “the not-man is no longer human” and these people in terms of their psychology have “a spiritual mutation” (Bolea 34). In the article titled “Wars, Words, and Identities in ‘No Longer Human’ by Osamu Dazai, and ‘Steppenwolf’ by Hermann Hesse”, the authors make a Cross-cultural study of identity and self-alienation in the novels. They explain that “Like many others, Dazai’s works “arose out of the intensely felt need to overcome the tense psychological gap that consequently came into existence” (Khurana, et al. 502). The article associates Dazai’s condemnation towards the world with the “intellectual isolation” experienced by artists of his

time (Khurana, et al. 508). On the other hand, Mei Fung Woo in their PhD dissertation explores the creative approaches by authors in writing about despair and suicide. Woo argues that “Dazai and his influence on Modernist Japanese literature resonates with [the] project locating ‘I’ as a singular mutating force that brings ‘illumination’ to the darker parts of [our] existence” (11).

Ecem Yucel in their paper identifies identity-crisis to be one of the most recurring and crucial themes of *Kafka on the Shore* by Murakami. Throughout the paper, the author explores each character and their form of suffering resulting from an identity crisis. I find the most interesting part to be his analysis of the resolution reached by the characters, which was an unlikely case in Murakami’s earlier novels.

Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the most widely known scholars in the field of Existentialism. In *Existentialism Is A Humanism*, Sartre defends Existentialism against accusations made by mainly Christians and the communist, while asserting that the Existentialism doctrine is "makes human life possible and also affirms that every truth and every action imply an environment and a human subjectivity" (Sartre 18). He defines what the philosophy of Existentialism is to him, and differentiates Christian Existentialism from his Aesthetic version. For Sartre, our existence precedes our essence. This means we come to exist first and then define ourselves the way we want to. The choice, however, is not only for the individual project. Rather, "When [Sartre says] that man chooses himself, not only do [he means] that each of us must choose himself, but also that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men" (Sartre 24). The realization of this freedom of choice and the condition of 'subjectivity' lead to Anguish, Abandonment and Despair. Anguish resulting from realizing the responsibility associated with the choices often makes people not accept their situation and avoid it- Sartre calls this living in 'Bad Faith' (Sartre 25-26). Because God does not exist for him, he believes

humans have been abandoned as they "cannot find anything to rely on- neither within nor without" (Sartre 29). Despair accompanies this case as people must forsake any hopes of miracles or divine interventions helping them out in any point of their life. In order to overcome this, one must come to terms with his despair and take full responsibility of their actions and live, not in bad faith, but true to themselves.

In the book *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, author Jonathan Webber presents Sartrean Existentialism focusing on Sartre's text *Being and Nothingness*. The book concentrates on his notions of 'character'. The author explains that character is essentially "a set of stable dispositions to experience, think and feel in certain kinds of ways" (25). The paper looks at chapter 4 of the book titled "Anguish, Bad Faith and Freedom" where the author explains these terms with references to *Being and Nothingness*. He muses that an interesting claim Sartre makes in the text is that "we are aware to some extent of our freedom and the responsibility that comes with it, but we try to hide this from ourselves" (Webber 74). This, Webber explains, is an example of what Sartre calls Bad Faith as the acceptance of this responsibility causes anguish. In the chapter, Jonathan Webber raises an interesting question- "It is this aspect of bad faith in general that raises the puzzle of self-deception: how can people persuade themselves of something that they are aware is not the case?" (77).

In *Modern French Philosophy: From Existentialism to Postmodernism* author Robert Wicks explores Sartre's Existentialism and Camus' philosophy of the Absurd in two distinct chapters amongst many other ideas in other chapters. In regards to Sartre, he explains that the human condition is as if "Human beings are thrown into the world, in other words, with a dominating question mark inscribed into their being" (Wicks 40). In the process of our constant questioning, we realize the temporary and fickle nature of everything that surrounds us. In realizing the limitless freedom, Sartre finds us to be condemned- to which Mr. Wicks

adds that it “refers to the condition of self-deception and avoidance of freedom as a condition of ‘bad faith’ ... and to be free is to be fundamentally free-floating and non-secured” (Wicks 41). This lack of a sense of security is observed in Yozo throughout the novel as soon as he comes to realize that his choices could have been, or in fact, are his own and were unlimited. Mr. Wicks also looks at Sartre’s analysis of human interaction. According to Sartre, “we are either looking at others or we are being looked at ... [and] the other person’s look is fundamentally negative” that often is intimidating and imposing (Wicks 48). In regards to Camus’ philosophy of the Absurd, he notes that the “absurdity of life is perceivable everywhere, if one were only to look closely and honestly at the world ... But when the feeling arrives, it is a shock: daily life takes on a mechanical and pointless quality, and one becomes alienated and disengaged from the ordinary, meaning-filled way of interpreting the world” (Wicks 60). He stresses Camus’s assertion on prolonging life at all costs while discussing the three choices Camus outlines: suicide, leap of faith and rebellion.

In *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* Walter Kaufman explains that “Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy”; and while they differ from one another, “it becomes plain that one essential feature shared by all these men is their perfervid individualism” (Kaufmann 11). According to him, when our lens zooms in on a human being’s anxieties, sentiments and decisions, the outer context blurs away. This has been an essential idea in exploring many existentialist texts as it involves making a thorough observation of the human experiences regardless of external circumstances.

Chapter 3: The Human in Dostoevsky, Dazai, Camus and Murakami

The human experience of tackling one's pain of existence and the struggle of the self to find a place in the 'society' is common to all of us regardless of the varying intensities and awareness. Likewise, many authors across the world such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, and others have built their characters central to these themes. Due to the universality of these themes, as we look at Yozo's experience of being human and gradually becoming disqualified from being human, it becomes interesting to trace a comparison of similar issues faced and portrayed by other characters. This section of the paper briefly makes a critical comparison of Dazai's Yozo with that of Dostoevsky's Underground Man from *Notes from the Underground* and Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment*, Camus' Sisyphus from *The Myth of Sisyphus* and Meursault from *The Stranger*, and Murakami's Kafka from *Kafka on the Shore* and Toru Watanabe from *Norwegian Woods*.

Dostoevsky and Dazai

Dostoevsky's works are known to invoke a dialogue with our inner selves as they handle issues such as a man's struggle in a modern and 'rational' society and our psychological experiences. The most prominent features of the Underground Man from *Notes from the Underground* are his irrationality, unreasonableness and extreme spite. The novella not only attacks but forces us to question the progressiveness of society and our rationality. The novella opens with the Underground Man declaring himself diseased but he insists on not consulting a doctor out of spite; and this immediately makes us question the sense of logic and rationality of this character. The Underground Man is so full of spite that he hates not only the world but also himself; and he constantly gets into conflict in his attempts to make everyone feel the same extent of suffering as his. He is, what many would call, an active nihilist who seek "destruction in order to assuage his inner turmoil and so he projects his

nihilism outwards” (Printziou 3). However, his nihilist character is not the most significant feature, it is rather his behavior through which Dostoevsky portrays the constant common experience of the human condition of misery- as Dostoevsky notes “Man is sometimes extraordinarily, passionately, in love with suffering, and that is a fact” (Dostoevsky 53). The Human in Dostoevsky works to assert the constancy of pain as a permanent and inseparable part of human existence no matter how ‘advanced and better’ the world may have become: he breaks our delusion of believing that changing something may rid us of suffering. Unlike the Underground Man, Yozo is a passive nihilist who “resembles a dead person, loathing action and projecting his nihilism inwards” (Printziou 3). Yozo is also not spiteful and brave enough to engage in conflict with others for he fears humans tremendously. However, both characters attest to the constant suffering brought on by existence. Yozo depicts the way our deluded selves constantly try to do this or that in order to become free from the suffering but can never do so; we see him taking up art classes as he desired (albeit in secrecy), his relationships with women, resorting to substance abuse and alcoholism, but none of that ever freed him from the suffering accompanying his existence for all they did was blur it for a moment. Like the Human in *Notes from the Underground*, a significant aspect contributing to Yozo’s psychological turmoil apart from his existence, is the modern society. Modernity suddenly brought in too much freedom, “freedom which they were not accustomed to before and which resulted in fear and people becoming more and more inconsiderate towards one another, ensuing in their dehumanization” (Printziou 11).

Interestingly through Raskolnikov, we find a new light to view our understanding of our ‘self’ and its relation to the world. Raskolnikov, an educated and intelligent man, believed himself to be like Napoleon and such warriors capable of action as needed and ordained by rationality. In believing so, he grotesquely murders not only the old pawn-broker, but also her pregnant sister- because it only seemed rational for someone like Raskolnikov to have

enough fortune to live by instead of the rude old woman. However, immediately afterwards, we find the novel taking a darker turn as we see the protagonist becoming overwhelmed with guilt and regret- he was not Napoleon after all. Despite his brutal actions and his crimes, readers find themselves sympathizing with Raskolnikov for he was not just a monster; he was capable of love and virtue. Similarly, Yozo throughout his life perceived himself to be a non-human despised by society, his account was filled with all the 'crimes' and lamentable courses of action taken in his lifetime- so much so that he believed he ceased to become human. However, like Raskolnikov, this was all his faulty and over-sensitive perception of his 'self' in relation to the world. He thought he was despicable, we as readers would also find him to be until the very conclusion of the novel as the old woman calls Yozo an angel. It is interesting to note that, we as humans are the active agents in prolonging our suffering. While Dostoevsky suggested turning to God, Dazai could rely neither on God, nor on authenticity or rebellion.

Albert Camus and Dazai

The case of rebellion in the face of the Absurd brings us to Sisyphus and Meursault, Albert Camus's absurd heroes. Sisyphus, one of the most celebrated and frowned upon mythical figures, was punished by the gods to roll a massive boulder up a steep hill; but each time he reached the top, it would roll back down, condemning Sisyphus to repeat the same grueling task for eternity. Even though it appears absolutely mortifying, Camus concludes his essay by writing "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 111). The Absurd hero faces the Absurd head on and his realization of the Absurd liberates him- he may never find any meaning for it all would be nullified by death, but he rebels against the absurd by finding happiness in what he does. Meursault, on the other hand, had been a stoic individual who remained unfazed at the death

of his mother. This was a major reason behind the people blurring facts and fiction that eventually earned him a death sentence for the death of his mother, in which he had no participation. Near the end of the novel, when Meursault was pressurized by the priests to accept God, he “As if that blind rage had washed [him] clean, rid [him] of hope; for the first time, in that night alive with signs and stars, [he] opened [himself] to the gentle indifference of the world ... [he] felt that [he] had been happy and that [he] was happy again” (Camus 122-123).

Unlike both the characters in Camus’ works, Yozo could never embrace the Absurd. He could never accept it or rebel. Yozo’s experiences as a child along with the realization of his very different perception of the world had completely scarred him. Dazai’s characters portray the sheer suffering, both emotional and psychological, from one’s own existence. Dazai, as many people complain, does not have a solution to offer. His characters are projections of himself to an extent wanting to come to terms with his life. We do not see the psychological distress as vividly in Camus, as his Human is rebellious and overcomes the crisis: they are his personifications to relay his philosophy. Camus’ absurd heroes portray the best of humans and glorify the human being. However, the Human in Dazai is his vehicle of painting the despair of our existence, and just that. Dazai’s characters make the experience relatable for everyone, even the outcast- among which is the group of people who cannot overcome their troubles. Not everyone can overcome the Absurd or any form of existential crisis and despair. While that does not make anyone any less, the suffering remains a common experience for all.

Murakami and Dazai:

With regards to existence and suffering, one of the most common and recurring themes in Murakami’s novels is the search for identity and one’s suffering stemming from an identity-

crisis. Toru Watanabe from *Norwegian Wood* (ノルウェイの森) and Kafka from *Kafka on the shore* (海辺のカフカ) both are extremely alienated from society and keep to themselves. They are also portrayed as quite different from characters around their age. Toru in search for reconciliation with the lost part of his identity, the death of his best friend Kizuki, he looks for his lost sense of identity in Midori, Kizuki's former lover. In an attempt to find meaning and make sense of the world, he follows his college friend and this leads him to delve into alcohol, and engages in a number of meaningless relationships with women- none of which gets him any closer to his search. As the novel ends, we see that even after years, Toru has not been able to recover from the trauma. The case of Toru resonates with that of Yozo: both are adolescents in a modernized Japanese society who can neither cope up nor find a way out. It is also interesting to note that alcoholism, sex, women, skipping college, and a friend with a bad influence are common parallels in both the novels. I find it interesting because *Norwegian Wood* was published in 1987 and depicted the Japanese society of that time.

However by the 2000s, Japanese culture and society radically changed from that of the 1980s and 1990s as communication and globalization became widespread. *Kafka on the Shore* published in 2002, looks at Kafka Tamura whose identity-crisis and resolution is completely different from that of Toru Watanabe or Yozo Oba. Kafka was never influenced by any outside forces besides his own voice and the curse placed by his father; and he also manages to conquer the storm and overcome the crisis. However, in doing so, we find many elements of magic realism at work, which were completely missing in Dazai and more or less absent in *Norwegian Wood*. The Human in Murakami has evolved over the course of 40 years of writing- from the aimless soul wandering in a modern Japanese society to the 'toughest' 15 year old conquering his identity crisis.

Chapter 4: Existence, Identity and Society (Sartre, Camus, Dazai)

Concerns and questions regarding our existence, identity and the position of our individual self against society are common to the human experience- it applies, with varying extents, to everyone although the experience of questioning or perceiving is unique to each individual. Hence, philosophies or movements such as that of Existentialism and Absurdism are relevant to the life of all humans. This is a specific point where Existentialism opposes traditional philosophies that involve lofty ideas and subjects not relevant to the everyday experience of common men. More often than not, we go through painful experiences in attempting to navigate through the journey of our lives. It happens in making trivial decisions of whether or not to attend a specific party involving a particular group of people, or crucial decisions such as choosing one's major at college. In most cases, the experience of decision making becomes 'painful' simply because we are forced to consider a number of factors, namely socio-cultural standards, values and norms, that inevitably dictate our perceptions of 'right' and 'wrong'. Amidst this, we find the distinct struggle of the individual in a society.

Although existentialists differ greatly from one another, they share a common template- one aspect of which includes prioritizing the individual's subjectivity and honesty to one's self. This is also the reason behind many existentialists refusing to adhere to any labels, even that of being 'an existentialist'. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 - 1980), one of the most prominent figures in existential philosophy, has published several texts where he discusses his version of Existentialism. Borrowing from Heidegger, Sartre explains that our existence manifests before our essence, an individual's unique sense of identity that sets them apart from others. According to him, "man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself ... The effect of existentialism is to make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence" and this

responsibility is not limited to himself, but entails the rest of the world (Sartre 22 and 23). In emphasizing one's active agency involved in becoming what they chose to be, Sartre holds us responsible for not choosing to do what we genuinely desire. This is living in 'Bad Faith'. It also involves not accepting, and hence running away from, the freedom of choices that we truly have as, according to him, the realization of this unbound freedom creates anguish (Webber 77). Albert Camus (1913 - 1960), on the other hand, believed that the pain of an existential crisis results from realizing the absurdity of the world. The Absurd "is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus and O'Brien 32). In other words, it is the juxtaposition of two very contradictory concepts- the search for answers in a universe that is silent. Each of these aspects, despite their differences, appears to be a constant part of our existence and experience. As literature is the mirror of the human experience and society, many literary works portray these existential crises and the struggle of the individual to find meaning, in an attempt to capture and paint our lives onto paper. This applies to literature produced from different regions across the world, even before Existentialism or Absurdism was formally introduced, as these ideas reflect on the daily experiences of the common men. Although Osamu Dazai (1909-1948) may not have had much exposure to the formal study of Existentialism, and is also not labeled as an existentialist writer, his novels being highly autobiographical provide us ample opportunity to delve into the experience of the Absurd and an existential crisis as Dazai was known to be a man depicting his life-long suffering and coming to terms with it through his writing. This section of the thesis looks at the portrayal of the self in an existential crisis from living with bad faith and inauthenticity in Dazai's *No Longer Human* (*Ningen Shikkaku* / 人間失格). With regards to the expanse of works produced in analyzing the connection of Dazai's personal life and his literature, this section focuses mostly on the protagonist Yozo in attempts to make a critical analysis of *No Longer Human* as an existentialist literary piece on

its own regardless of the author's personal life. The section will firstly provide a brief overview of the plot-line followed by exploring the causes of Yozo's existential crisis and the Absurdism in his life, his response to it, and lastly, an evaluation of his response.

Brief Overview

The novel is divided into five parts: a prologue followed by three notebook entries, and an epilogue. The unknown narrator in the epilogue describes the inexplicable feeling incited in him by looking at three photographs of the notebook author taken during his childhood, adolescent and middle age, who we later find is the protagonist Oba Yozo. With his "nauseating impulse" he declares the child in the photograph to be a monkey for "no human can smile with his fists doubled like that ... what a wizened, hideous little boy!" (Dazai and Keene 14-15). His reaction to the other photos isn't any better. The notebooks appear to be a form of confessional writing by Yozo as the starting sentence ("Mine has been a life of shame. I can't even guess what it must be to live the life of a human being") makes us feel he is letting out all that he has done wrong in his life (Dazai and Keene 18). The notebook entries take us on a journey to see fragments of Yozo's life from his perspective- exactly the way he perceived each and every event. We come to know that Yozo is extremely isolated and alienated from the world- including his family and friends. His different perception of experiences that do not fall under the 'normal' label further alienates him, resulting in him resorting to 'clowning' to prevent others from finding out his true nature. His classmate Takeichi, however, sees through him and calls him out- to which Yozo responds with an internal anxious breakdown. We later skip to his adolescence and adulthood that is full of despair brought on by bad decisions, lack of self-agency, substance abuse and his relationship with different women- all of which were introduced to him by his 'friend' Hiroki. We see his suicide attempts, his admission to an asylum and shift to the epilogue, again narrated by the

unknown narrator who received the notebooks and photographs from the bar hostess Yozo knew.

Existential Crisis and the Absurd

According to Camus, the Absurd “can suddenly come upon a person ‘at any street-corner,’ and he believes that the absurdity of life is perceivable everywhere, if one were only to look closely and honestly at the world ... But when the feeling arrives, it is a shock: daily life takes on a mechanical and pointless quality” and this often alienates the person from the way he previously experienced and perceived life (Wicks 60). For Yozo, this came at a very young age when he came to realize that the station bridge was only “a utilitarian device” and served no purpose to please (Dazai and Keene 22). He constantly tried to make sense of objects in ways that those objects were never made to make sense. Whenever he came across the practical use of objects and deconstructed their inherent meaninglessness, he progressively spiraled down in an abyss of alienation, to the extent that even the concept of ‘hunger’ or having family dinners ceased to make sense to him. Yozo throughout the novel always complained in agony that he could never understand- or how could he, as Camus would put it, understand a world that never made sense to begin with? Yozo’s psychological suffering began with this first layer of Absurdity he experienced as a child and continued on to the rest of his miserable life.

As an observant person, Yozo grew up noticing the hypocrisy in people’s everyday actions that often arise from their efforts to maintain and abide by the socio-cultural standards. He recounts the way his father’s acquaintances did not find his father’s speech amusing, yet went ahead to flatter him with lies; his cousin not being fond of the friend she deems a ‘close friend’. For Yozo, who suffered in trying to understand the world around him, this added another layer of absurdity. As he resorted to clowning and creating a strong facade, Yozo

faced absurdity again when he realized that the young ladies surrounding him “mocked and tortured [him] when others were around, only to embrace [him] with passion as soon as everyone had left” (Dazai and Keene 48-49). The absurdity not only lied in his pursuit to understand the female mind that he never could, being a male, but also in the fact that these women were in reality attracted to something that was to be rejected, Yozo’s behavior that was never considered ‘normal’. He once again came across absurdity when he encountered Hiroki in Tokyo years later “where the members divide their lives so sharply between what they do at home and what they do on the outside” and he was “filled with dismay at these signs that [he], a fool [was] rendered incapable” (Dazai and Keene 111). The Japanese society in particular try to maintain a sense of uniformity that entails having to put up a ‘tatemae’ (建前, an exterior obliging to society) opposed to the ‘honno’ (本音, their interior true self). The absurdity arises when Yozo desperately wants to find meaning in people’s actions that are considered normal, that have been the standards by which he finds himself to be disqualified, when these actions and standards do not have any intrinsic meaning to gratify him.

The juxtaposition of contrary ideas creating the Absurd continues to torment Yozo as we progress through the novel. With his fear of humans being explicitly pointed out numerous times, we see the recurrence of absurdity in his desire to be accepted in human society- he wants to be a part of something he abhors and fears greatly from within. While he wanted to be accepted and liked, Yozo mentioned that “the more [he] feared people the more [he] was liked, and the more [he] was liked the more [he] feared them—a process which eventually compelled [him] to run away from everybody” (Dazai and Keene 117). Not only that, but another layer to his pain resulting from experiencing the Absurd came from his desire to please everyone (for he was afraid of others) when such a thing is impossible- he could have

never pleased all the people he met as being true to himself would disappoint his family and the world.

Moreover, Yozo was in pain from his search for honesty in a world that ran on deception- his world centered on deceiving others by never showing his true self to any one person. Each and every one of Yozo's psychological pursuits portrayed in the novel results in his facing the Absurd; and on realizing, he succumbs to the psychological torment. An interesting aspect of the absurdity involved is to look at his relationship with women as an adult with regards to Freud's notions of the phallic phase. During the phallic phase, children come to terms with their desire for their mother and learn that they cannot project their desire onto the mother figure anymore; and as Freud suggests, this later creates a complicity when they try to make love to their partner- their object of desire and love, when they were previously trained to do the opposite. Likewise, Yozo was quite distanced from his mother since childhood and apprehended his father. In the long run, he seemed to have no difficulty making love to other women, but it became increasingly difficult for him to do the same to both his first wife, and Yoshiko (even before their fallout).

As if the multiple layers of absurdity were not enough suffering for Yozo, Dazai introduces us to the other facets of his existential crisis resulting from his consciousness of the others, and realizing the unbound freedom and choices he has had. "Sartre describes the initial apprehension of other people ('the Other') in a negative way: other people are beings who undermine and threaten the stability of the world one has constructed for oneself" (Wicks 46). Yozo has always been extremely conscious of other people and the ways they view him. His apprehension to be exposed by Takeichi made him hope for Takeichi's death so no one else ever finds out his true self. In regards to human interaction, Sartre believed that "we are either looking at others or we are being looked at ... for we are either dominating them with

our look and thereby taking away their freedom by objectifying them, or we are submitting ourselves to their look and allowing our own freedom to be taken away by being objectified” (Wicks 48). For Yozo, the experience was being looked at, being objectified. He was too self-aware all the time about how others perceived him, and decided to live a life that would take away his freedom. For instance, when his father asked the children what they wanted for a present, each child asked but Yozo asked for what they really wanted. He “had not the faintest wish for a lion mask. In fact, [he] would actually have preferred a book. But it was obvious that Father wanted to buy [him] a mask, and [his] frantic desire to cater to his wishes and restore his good humor had emboldened [him] to sneak into the parlor in the dead of night” (Dazai and Keene 31). Yozo felt that he had no choice but to live by the expectations of others as he feared human beings as much as he wanted to be understood and accepted by them.

However, as he grows closer to Takeichi and opens up slightly, he begins expressing some of his genuine desires- such as his dream to become a painter. Despite finding his paintings remarkable, he was too afraid to show this to anyone but Takeichi as he felt the world would not take him seriously: his ‘ghostly’ paintings reflecting his own sentiments and authenticity would be perceived as just another extent of his clowning, his facade. His freedom was already taken the moment he became aware of the Others’ view. Interestingly, his despair took another turn for the worse as he grew up to realize that he has had many choices, and he was the one who could make the choice. Having realized that not only does he have the choice, but also that he had plenty of choices threw him into another abyss of misery. As an adult, he realized he did not have to become a civil servant as his father wanted him to, he did not have to study at the university his father imposed on him; rather he can join an art class, become an artist, and be happy. The thought of not having the opportunity to explore every option, to truly be able to find what he loves the most and have the society accept it was

another source of his pain from his existence. Sartre's notions of "absolute freedom implies that human beings have no excuse for any self-deception they might bring upon themselves, and it implies that they are fully responsible for what they do"; and this realization brings one anguish (Wicks 55). This was the case for Yozo. Even though the text appears to be an account of his painful existence, Yozo's narrative always focuses on his guilt, his shame that stemmed from knowing at his heart that he did not rebel and succumbed to societal pressure when he had the chance to do otherwise. Yozo knew he pushed people away who genuinely cared for him and may have accepted his true self.

Yozo's Response to the Absurd and His Existential Crisis: Living in Bad Faith & No Rebellion

In spite of the different ways Sartre and Camus understand and manage the pain of existence, a common theme that runs between their ideas is being honest with oneself. Yozo prolonged his painful existence by never being genuine. Sartre explains that 'bad faith' is the denial and avoidance of the responsibility that accompanies the realization of one's unbound freedom; and he notes that "In all cases of bad faith, Sartre observes that there is an avoidance of personal responsibility as one hides behind a facade of false consistency" (Wicks 42). Even after knowing that he is free, or rather cursed to be free, Yozo ran away: he was too afraid to accept this and move forward. Yozo's bad faith was profound- so much so that he completely allowed the world to dominate his existence. He let his father, the most dominating figure in his life, to impose his choices of entertainment, and even his career. "When [Yozo] hated something, [he] could not pronounce the words, 'I don't like it.' When [he] liked something [he] tasted it hesitantly, furtively, as though it were extremely bitter. In either case [he] was torn by unspeakable fear" (Dazai and Keene 30). Even for such elementary expressions, Yozo never expressed his authentic self, even as a child. His facade had morphed into an

inseparable part of his existence and persona. Yozo felt that “the greatest actor in the world would be quite paralyzed in a room where all his family and relatives were gathered to watch him” but Yozo could fully deceive his family without any difficulty (Dazai and Keene 42). This reflects the acute extent of his inauthenticity through the deception towards himself and his family.

In the final stages of his life, at the peak of his despair, Yozo settled to write a letter confessing everything to his family “with the exception ... of [his] relations with women” even though this was a huge factor in channeling his depression (Dazai and Keene 164). Even at his attempt at being true to himself and the world, he cowered and chose to hide again. Perhaps the only actions of authenticity he has displayed is one expressing his true desire albeit meekly, and the other being a rebellion even if it appears trivial. The first case is observed when he says that he would become an artist to Takeichi but it comes out more as a whisper than a declaration. The last is when he declined the hypodermic needle from Yoshiko and firmly said “No ... I won’t need it anymore”; and Yozo himself recounts that “it was a rare event ... [It will not be] an exaggeration to say that it was the one and only time in my life that I refused something offered to me” (Dazai and Keene 166). For Yozo, this was the only act of rebellion, at the best despite its apparent lack of significance to us. As Camus said, to win over the existential crisis, one can do either of three things: to commit suicide (though Camus believes it defeats the purpose), or take a leap of faith (committing philosophical suicide by choosing to adopt a way of life randomly), or choose to revolt, which is the “an authentic solution ... To revolt is to maintain a defiant and confrontational attitude toward the world’s absurdity” (Wicks 65). Hence, this was probably the only moment of Yozo experiencing the liberty of self-agency. He comes to realize that his “unhappiness was the unhappiness of a person who could not say no” (Dazai and Keene 166). I believe that is what truly made him see himself as disqualified from being human, 人間失格, for being human is to

embrace one's authenticity, one's true self that one has the freedom to build as he chooses- to decorate the blank slate of existence to create one's unique essence that will either give him a purpose (as Sartre would observe) or guide him to rebel and find happiness in this struggle of living in an Absurd world (as Camus would argue).

Chapter 5: *Ningen Shikkaku*: Critical Disability Theory

The title of the novel 人間失格 itself steals attention. Although translated roughly to ‘No Longer Human’ or ‘Human Lost’ in most cases, it is interesting to look at the Kanji composition of the title. “人間” means ‘human’ but not as human as in Homo Sapiens. The kanji 人 means person in general and 間 means time interval, space, or gate in general terms. Put together, 人間 (nin-gen) refers to the state of being human, our perception of us as being human instead of biologically meaning ‘human’. 失格 translates to ‘failure’, ‘incapacity’, or ‘disqualification’. The character 失 primarily denotes ‘mistake’, ‘to lose’ or failure; and 格 denotes to ‘state’ as in condition. Put together, 失格 means the ‘state of being a failure’.

Although Donald Keene has done a marvelous job at translating the title, the raw essence given off by the original title and its meaning gets distorted in translation. Quite literally 人間失格 would translate to ‘Human being failure’ but in the context of Japanese language, it exhibits the ‘state of becoming a mistake, a failure for a human being, or simply ceasing ‘being human’. Dazai’s specific use of these Kanji characters for the title, thus, brings our attention to the focal theme of the novel- the process of Yozo ceasing to be human. Unlike Gregor Samsa from *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, Yozo never becomes non-human biologically; the entire element of disqualification is in his experience of his ‘self’, and of that in relation to the society. This makes the novel primarily be about disability amongst other themes. It is evident from the novel that Yozo was alienated from society because of his difference that has been perceived as a form of disability which is not physical. Hence, the novel opens up grounds for an analysis through the lens of critical disability theory. I find it remarkable because the novel adds more weight to Dazai’s works and understanding of life as he wrote about the experience of a ‘disabled’ and mad man, an outcast, in an age and society

where speaking of such issues would have been extremely difficult. This section of the paper aims to explore Yozo's experience as being 'disabled' and the ways the ableist society treats him to understand the ways *No Longer Human* portrays the experience of disabled people in a uniformist modern Japanese society.

More often than not we associate a form of physical disability with the word 'disability' in general. However, disability can be of various kinds but the sole thing common to them is prejudice and often discrimination. *No Longer Human* being a novel centering Yozo's psychological experience of his tragic existence, shows us a different form of disability (although I am against calling the difference a disability as will be explored below). The nature of Yozo's disability that makes him alienated is more of a difference in perception (not cognitive) that elapsed into mental illnesses such as a severe case of anxiety and suicidal depression. Yozo states from an encounter at an early age that he still had "no understanding of what makes human beings tick. [His] apprehension on discovering that my concept of happiness seemed to be completely at variance with that of everyone else was so great as to make [him] toss sleeplessly and groan night after night in [him] bed. It drove [him] indeed to the brink of lunacy" (Dazai and Keene 24-25). Even as a child, Yozo picked up on the fact that being different in a way that deviates from what society deems normal would lead to something fearful. As an individual, he knew there awaited something terrifying on society's discovery of this anomaly. This could have been Yozo's fear of humans. He recounts that "As long as I can make them laugh, it doesn't matter how, I'll be alright. If I succeed in that, the human beings probably won't mind it too much if I remain outside their lives. The one thing I must avoid is becoming offensive in their eyes: I shall be nothing, the wind, the sky" (Dazai and Keene 28-29).

The fearful consequence he dreaded was confinement as Michel Foucault would put it. "By a strange act of force, the classical age was to reduce to silence the madness whose voice the

Renaissance had just liberated, but whose violence it had already tamed” (Foucault 38).

Foucault explains that previously madness or eccentricity, a deviation from the normal, was celebrated- the ‘mad’ people were free to mingle in society as individuals with full autonomy and not deemed inferior by others. Rather, they were intriguing in different ways as they came to represent the limits of ‘reason’. However as society ‘progressed’ into the classical age, the Age of Reason and became ‘modern’, social standards and perception along with people’s treatment of mad people came to change. In this society, people with obvious differences are highlighted in a negative light- as for people deemed mad for their differences in perceiving the world, they are confined, uprooted and removed from society, taken away from the accompany of their families and locked up in the ‘care’ of specialists. Moreover, in confinement these people are viewed under the “medical gaze” that is a dehumanizing point of view of the specialist- from the medical gaze, the person is nothing more than a system of organs (Foucault 89). The medical gaze thus renders a person such as Yozo to be seen as a system of organs with a defect in the cognitive sectors. Instead of accepting people’s diversity of perception or simply their differences and abilities to question society’s norms and values, they are sent to facilities that take away their agency, one of the most crucial facets of the experience and state of being human. Likewise, when a certain faction of Yozo’s true self is revealed to his family, he is sent to the asylum. Yozo laments:

Weeping helplessly, I obeyed whatever the two of them decreed, like a man bereft of all will, decision and everything else. I was no longer a criminal—I was a lunatic. But no, I was definitely not mad. I have never been mad for even an instant. They say, I know, that most lunatics tics claim the same thing. What it amounts to is that people who get put into this asylum are crazy, and those who don't are normal. ... I had gotten into the car that took me here. And now I have become a madman. Even if released, I would be forever branded on the forehead with the word "madman," or

perhaps, "reject." Disqualified as a human being. I had now ceased utterly to be a human being. (Dazai and Keene 166-167)

What truly devastates the reader from viewing society's ill treatment of Yozo for being different is when the novel exposes the sheer desire of the 'disabled' or man to be 'human', to be accepted by society, to be viewed as a person before anything else. Yozo's narrative is filled with his guilt and shame stemming from his actions that were hardly an authentic expression of himself- and while this aligns with Sartre's notions of an existential crisis and Bad Faith, and Camus' ideas as well, can we really blame him completely for his inauthenticity? Many may criticize Dazai for his lack of philosophical maturity in the sense that he has nothing to offer in mitigating the pain of existence, but I find his work redeemable because it shows us just the raw experience of pain an individual can go through. Not everyone can overcome and this is also just part of being human- although the idea of being able to overcome this and win has always been glorified. This is probably why many adolescents in Japanese society hold Dazai's works so dear to them. The most heartbreaking aspect of the novel sets in when Yozo cries saying "God, I ask you, is non-resistance a sin?" (Dazai and Keene 167). With this statement, Dazai opens up another door for us to debate and prod at Sartre's ideas of cowardice and Camus' virtue in rebellion. But we must also consider, in a society that labeled Yozo a lunatic and disqualified him from being human, was he always a non-human to the world? In accordance with Sartre's ideas and to an extent that of Camus', is Yozo's existence and life meaningless and devoid of virtue? Even though Yozo narrates his life and actions to paint a despicable human being, what he feels is the true version of himself; the world of the reader comes crashing down at the end of the novel when the old bar-hostess says "The Yozo we knew was so easy-going and amusing, and if only he hadn't drunk—no, even though he did drink—he was a good boy, an angel!" (Dazai and Keene 174).

Conclusion:

An existential crisis and the human experience of psychological suffering from existence are universal themes reflected by literature across the globe. While we find ourselves preoccupied with canonized Western literature, we often become a victim of the hegemonic Orientalism at play. We tend to overlook writers native to Asia and other non-European nations. When making readings of Existentialism and Nihilism, we come across a number of interpretations and analysis on works of primarily Western authors. However, for such a humanistic approach to literature, one would expect to see works on authors from various nations. Although quite lamentable, it is at the same time, a great opportunity for scholars to find new grounds to explore thanks to the approaches of comparative and world literature.

Osamu Dazai, one of the many prominent Japanese authors of the early 20th century, remains as an extremely underrated figure. His works taking inspiration from his own melancholic life have produced literature unlike any of his time. *No Longer Human*, despite being labeled as a post-war depressive novel, has so much more to offer: It explores the psychological experience of an individual struggling to fit in the modern uniformist society. However, as this paper explored, the existential reading of the novel is not all that makes it impressive; for a very conservative society such as that of Japan, a text portraying the perspective of a neuro-divergent individual with very different perception of the world and human life was quite radical. Dazai's novels speak of the unspoken experience of Japanese people, which makes him still revered today.

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