

# Repackaging Dazai Osamu and the Process of Branding “Ningen Shikkaku”

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## 1 Introduction

Following a relatively quiet debut with the short story “The Train”<sup>1</sup> in 1933, Dazai Osamu (太宰治, 1909–1948) drew attention with “The Transformation”<sup>2</sup> and “Reminiscences,”<sup>3</sup> released in the same year, marking the beginning of a fifteen-year career. Dazai continued writing until his death in 1948. Dazai’s works are widely read and there are many research papers, books, and projects related to Dazai. However, a field of research that remains relatively untouched is how Dazai Osamu is presented and interpreted in print and other media.

Dazai’s first book, a collection of fifteen stories called *Bannen*, or *The Final Years*,<sup>4</sup> was published in June of 1936 and this would begin the publishing of around sixty books in a span of fifteen years.<sup>5</sup> However, in the many reviews written about Dazai and his writings during his life, only a handful of reviews mention the physical copy of the book the reviewer handled. Dazai’s fourth collection of writings, called *Ai to Bi ni tsuite*, or *On Love and Beauty*,<sup>6</sup> is a good example of this. Even though there were a handful of reviews written shortly after its publication, there is no mention of the physical copy of the first edition. The reviewers had to have read this edition because it was published as a collection of five previously unreleased works. Another example of the lack of attention to the presentation of Dazai’s works is an article based on a lecture in which the instructor showed a physical copy Dazai’s collection of works called *Fugaku Hyakkei*, or *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*,<sup>7</sup> and talked about the cover, price, publisher, table of contents,

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1 “Ressha” 列車, in *Sandē Tōō* サンデー東奥, February 1933.

2 “Gyofukuki” 魚服記, in *Kaihyō* 海豹, vol. 1, March 1933.

3 “Omoide” 思ひ出, in *Kaihyō* 海豹, vol. 2–4, April, June, and July 1933.

4 *Bannen* 晩年, Sunagoya Shobō 砂子屋書房, June 1936.

5 Sixty is a debatable number because there are multiple editions of certain volumes. Also, depending on how certain books are counted, this number can differ. For example, in Yamanouchi Shōshi’s research the number of books published during Dazai’s life is given as fifty-five (see Yamanouchi Shōshi 山内祥史, *Jinbutsu Shoshi Taikei 7 Dazai Osamu* 人物書誌大系 7 太宰治, Nichigai Ashoshiētsu 日外アソシエーツ, 1983).

6 *Ai to Bi ni tsuite* 愛と美について, Takemura Shobō 竹村書房, May 1948.

7 *Fugaku Hyakkei* 富嶽百景, Shinchō-sha 新潮社, January 1943.

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frontispiece, cover page, “Introduction,” and “Explanation.” The instructor then goes on to say that all of these paratextual items can be ignored, especially the “Explanation,” because they are not worth reading into.<sup>8</sup>

Among the sixty published volumes of Dazai’s works, there are some that have distinct cover designs. For example, the aforementioned *The Final Years* has a very plain design with only the book title handwritten in the middle of a white front cover. The author’s name also does not appear on the cover; instead, it can be found on the back cover in a similar handwritten style. This cover design was inspired by the Japanese translation of Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu: Tome 1 Du côté de chez Swann*, or *In Search of Lost Time: Volume One Swann’s Way*.<sup>9</sup> Another good example of a distinct book cover is *On Love and Beauty*, which has a white box ordained with flowers and branches in the shape of a heart. This box cover was suggested by Dazai by means of a book filled with embroidery designs.<sup>10</sup> Compared to the cover designs of the three postwar editions of *On Love and Beauty* and to more contemporary publications of Dazai’s works, the first edition of *On Love and Beauty* has a unique design that deviates from the dark, cynical image of Dazai Osamu.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is important to note that other than a handful of studies, there are few studies that investigate how Dazai’s works in print have been interpreted. This includes both antemortem and postmortem publications. Looking beyond the content of the so-called “texts” of these books, there are paratextual features that support the creation of an image of the author and the works. These paratextual features are not present only in the books printed while Dazai was alive or even after his death; they extend to a contemporary presentation of Dazai in various forms of media.

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8 Arai Masato 荒正人, “Kōza: Nani o, ika ni Yomu ka: Dazai Osamu no Hashire Merosu” 講座 なにを・いかによむか 太宰治の『走れメロス』, *Warera no Kagaku われらの科学*, vol. 1, no. 3, June 1946.

9 Yodono Ryūzō and Satō Masaaki trans. 淀野隆三・佐藤正彰訳, *Ushinaishi Toki o Motomete Dai-ikkan Suwan-ke no Hō 失ひし時を求めて 第一巻 スワン家の方*, Musashino Shobō 武蔵野書房, 1931. For more information, see Yamanouchi Shōshi 山内祥史, *Dazai Osamu no Bannen: Seiritsu to Shuppan 太宰治の『晩年』——成立と出版*, Shūmei Shuppan-kai 秀明出版会, 2015.

10 See Tsushima Michiko 津島美美子, “Kōki” 後記, *Dazai Osamu Zenshū 太宰治全集*, vol. 4, Sōgeisha 創芸社, 1953.

11 For a more in-depth analysis of this collection of works, see Jake Odagiri, “The Changing Faces and Paratext of a Work Collection: A Case Study of Dazai Osamu’s *Ai to Bi ni tsuite*,” *Osaka Daigaku Daigakuin Bungaku Kenkyūka Gurōbaru Nihon Kenkyū Kurasuū Hōkoku-sho 大阪大学大学院文学研究科グローバル日本研究クラスター報告書*, vol. 2, 2018, pp. 71–85.

### 2 From Print to Paratext

In order to analyze the paratextual features that create and support an author in print, first we should investigate a fundamental question: What is literature? On the surface, this question is very simple and seems easy to answer. However, as we can see in Peter Lamarque's answer in the following passage, defining "literature" may not be such a simple task.

There is, then, a generic conception of literature, relevant to aesthetics, which encompasses "fine writing" wherever it occurs. Literature as "belles lettres" (beautiful letters) looks like a specific application of the wider category of "beaux arts" (beautiful arts). Written works of any kind – philosophy, history, theology, personal memoirs, diaries, biographies, essays – that are well written, finely crafted, and with eloquent phrasing, could count as "literary" under this conception. [...] Literary qualities are also manifest in mere parts of works – individual passages or sentences – even where the works themselves might not be classified as literature (pieces of journalism, for example, even government reports). No doubt there is room for debate about criteria for judging aesthetic merit in writing (or speaking); the criteria are likely to be relativized to different discursive aims, they might be historically and culturally viable, and might to a certain degree be subjective.<sup>12</sup>

Applying a rigid definition to literature is very problematic because of the existence of different types of literature. According to this passage, anything that is "beautifully" or "finely" written can be considered, at least to some extent, "literary." *The Diary of Anne Frank* (sometimes translated as *The Diary of a Young Girl*) is an excellent example of how a personal diary can be read from a historical perspective or as a piece of literature or even as a combination of both. Lamarque goes on to discuss the "essence" of literature by investigating the "literary" and "artistic" nature of written works. After looking into a definition regarding poetry, Lamarque writes that although it is possible to give poetry a technical definition, "whether the same can be said for 'literature' generally is much more controversial."<sup>13</sup>

Pinning down an exact definition of "literature" may be difficult. Nevertheless, if we accept Lamarque's argument and the general understanding that literature is something "beautifully" or

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

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“finely” written, literature can be interpreted from many angles. There is, however, something that does not change: how the readers interact with, or consume, a work of literature. A work of literature cannot be read in a vacuum. There has to be some sort of medium, typically a book, that readers use in order to interact with a work of literature. Of course, in recent years the popularity of digital media has grown and there is much room left to investigate digital media and its relationship to works of literature. For the purposes of this essay, books and other kinds of physical and visual media will be considered the media through which literature is consumed. Going back to the question posed at the beginning of this section, the existential/ontological question can be asked about books, as well. What is a book? Or, taken one step further: What are books?

Although there may not be a specific volume dedicated to the philosophy of books, interesting takes on the philosophy of books can be found in volumes written by book designers. For example, some book designers who have written about books and, to some extent, the philosophy of books include, but are not limited to, Suzuki Hitoshi,<sup>14</sup> Sobue Shin,<sup>15</sup> Kikuchi Nobuyoshi,<sup>16</sup> and Kida Jun'ichirō.<sup>17</sup> One common feature of the ideas presented by these book designers is that *books themselves are works of art*. Regarding the power in the cover of a book, Kikuchi states that “somebody’s eyes will focus on the cover, it grabs their attention, they will take the book in their hands, and they start reading to uncover the reason.”<sup>18</sup> The reader is already being affected by the physical features of a book before they start reading the content. Exploring the influence of physical features of a book in relation to the interpretation of the content is paratextual research.

The term “paratext” was coined by the literary theorist Gérard Genette, who argued that “the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers, and more generally to the public.”<sup>19</sup> Some paratextual features that lie within the entryway or “vestibule” to a work of literature are the cover (front, spine, back), title page, introduction, and table of contents. Paratextual messages are included in the physical copy of the book or in other locations outside of

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14 Suzuki Hitoshi 鈴木一誌, *Pēji to Chikara: Tewaza, soshite Dejitaru Dezain* ページと力——手わざ、そしてデジタル・デザイン, Seidosha 青土社, 2018.

15 Sobue Shin 祖父江慎, *Sobue Shin + Kozufishu* 祖父江慎+コズフィッシュ, PIE Intānashonaru パイインターナショナル, 2016.

16 Kikuchi Nobuyoshi 菊地信義, *Shin-Sōtei Dangi* 新・装幀談義, Hakusuisha 白水社, 2008.

17 Kida Jun'ichirō 木田順一郎, *Shomotsu, Jōhō, Dokusho* 書物・情報・読書, Shuppan Nyūsu-sha 出版ニュース社, 1972.

18 Kikuchi, op. cit., p. 29. The original reads 人は装幀に目が止まり、心惹かれ、その理由を探すように手に取り、読みはじめる。

19 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts*, Jane E. Lewin trans., Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 1.

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the book.<sup>20</sup> Regarding paratext, Valerie Pellatt states that “(p)aratext is the text that surrounds and supports the core text, like layers of packaging that initially protect and gradually reveal the essence of the packaged item.”<sup>21</sup> Pellatt goes on to state that “(p)aratext is not necessarily written or verbal material. [...] (N)on-verbal material is a powerful shaper of reactions and attitudes. The range of paratext is vast, encompassing authorial comment and external comment and explanatory material.”<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, paratext is a vast field to research and the definition, like literature itself, is difficult to tie down rigorously. However, by looking closely at some actual examples, we can understand how printed literature can become paratext and how paratext can reshape the interpretation of a work of literature.

### 3 Dazai in Print

Although Dazai is a well-known and widely read author, it is important to be aware that Dazai Osamu’s works are not only so-called “texts.” Dazai’s works have been accessible via printed material since 1933 and via the printed book since 1936. This section will introduce a small sample of Dazai in printed books and how these books, as a medium to access Dazai’s works, have changed over time.

As stated, Dazai debuted in 1933 and became an author with a physical book in June of 1936 with his first collection of works, *Bannen*. By the time of Dazai’s death in 1948, *Bannen* had been published four times. The first edition was printed in 1936, the second edition in 1937, the third edition in 1941, and the fourth edition in 1947. There also is another collection named *Bannen*, but it does not contain the same works as the other editions.<sup>23</sup> The first three editions of *Bannen* were all published by the same publisher; although changes were made between these editions, the changes were mainly to the cover and the layout of the pages, in other words physical changes, and there were no changes made to the actual content of the collection.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 4–5. Genette refers to paratextual features inside the book as *epitext* and features outside the book, such as interviews, as *peritext*. However, Genette also states “peritext and epitext completely and entirely share the spatial field of the paratext,” or in other words: “*paratext* = *peritext* + *epitext*.”

<sup>21</sup> Valerie Pellatt, “Introduction,” in Valerie Pellatt ed., *Text, Extratext, Metatext, and Paratext in Translation*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Pellatt, *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> This is the Yōtokusha (養徳社) version, published in 1946, and more research is needed on its existence as a varying edition, or *ihon* 異本, of *Bannen*.

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Of the four editions of *Bannen* published during Dazai's life, one is of particular importance: the fourth, a *bunko*, or paperback, version of *Bannen* published in December of 1947. The *bunko* edition is important because there are two different versions that can be found in current bookstores throughout Japan. One is published by Shinchō-bunko and the other is published by Kadokawa-bunko.<sup>24</sup> Due to the smaller size of the *bunko* version, it is easily accessible to a wide readership. Also, these *bunko* versions contain explanatory notes written by literary critics and authors which can be appealing to readers who want assistance with interpreting the works. Here, the Shinchō-bunko edition will be the focus both because it was the first *bunko* edition of *Bannen* published and because of its longevity as Dazai's representative collection of works.

The first *bunko* edition of *Bannen* was published by Shinchō-bunko in December of 1947. The cover has a simple design with the title of the collection, name of the author, and an indication that it belongs to the Shinchō-bunko collection. The second *bunko* edition, published in 1968, has a jacket, or cover, added which is an abstract black and white design that is not specific to *Bannen* but was on every *bunko* edition of Dazai's books until the mid-1980s. Aside from the addition of a jacket, this edition remains very similar to the first edition. The third edition, published in 2005, was almost completely redesigned. The jacket design was changed to a yellow and blue collection of seemingly random pictures. Also, major changes were made to the layout of the content, particularly the size and spacing of the font. Until this version, all of Dazai's *bunko* books used a fairly small font with tight spacing between the lines. What are some of the changes made to Dazai's *bunko* books?

In 2009, the Shinchō-bunko eighteen-book collection of Dazai Osamu was completed to include all works written by Dazai. However, the publisher has never publicly stated that this is a complete set of Dazai's works. The final volume *Chizu* (地図) was published in 2009, the same year as Dazai's one-hundredth birthday. This year was marked by many celebratory events and publications. To celebrate this commemorative year, the final few works of Dazai were added to *Chizu*, a collection of twenty-eight works, and this completed an unofficial version of the complete works of Dazai Osamu. It is interesting to note that in 1983, a collection of works called *Roman Dōrō* was published by Shinchō-bunko and in the "Explanation," Okuno Takeo states "with this seventeenth volume, almost all of Dazai Osamu's works and essays have been included" which

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<sup>24</sup> There have been other versions of *Bannen* released by other publishers including Kōdansha-bunko, but these are out of print. Currently, only Shinchō-bunko and Kadokawa-bunko publish the *bunko* version of *Bannen*.

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(almost) “completes the Shinchō-bunko Complete Collection of Dazai Osamu.”<sup>25</sup> With the exception of four works, this 1983 statement by Okuno is true. Then, in the late 2000s, all of the Shinchō-bunko books of Dazai were redesigned with a unified style by Tojinbara Norihisa (唐仁原教久) into a colorfully designed eighteen-book set.

There are other publishers that have released *bunko* versions of Dazai’s works, including *Bannen*. For example, Kadokawa-bunko, Iwanami-bunko, and Shūeisha-bunko also have a few volumes in circulation with cover designs made by famous artists. Even though there are a variety of *bunko* editions in circulation, Shinchō-bunko is the only publisher to have released an entire, albeit unofficial, collection of Dazai’s works in this format.

However, when it comes to the official version of Dazai’s complete works, Chikuma Shobō (筑摩書房) has held the title of *Dazai Osamu Zenshū* (太宰治全集) tightly since 1955. When Dazai was still alive, he worked with a publisher called Yakumo Shoten (八雲書店) to plan his complete works. One volume was released before his death and thirteen more volumes were printed postmortem, ending in an unfinished publishing of the *Complete Works of Dazai Osamu* by Yakumo Shoten. Another complete work collection was published by Sōgeisha (創芸社) under the direction of Dazai’s wife, Tsushima Michiko (津島美知子), with a total of sixteen volumes published from 1953 to 1955. Then, in 1955 Chikuma Shobō gained the rights to Dazai’s works and it has published eleven different versions of Dazai’s complete works from 1955 to 1999, including a *bunko* version completed in 1992.<sup>26</sup>

This is a small sample of Dazai in print. However, the point of this section is to understand that Dazai Osamu’s works are not only so-called “texts.” Dazai has been accessible via the printed book since 1936. It is interesting, though, to understand that Dazai is not regularly looked at as an author tied to the books that deliver his works. Another way to look at the relation between the author and their works is in how they are repackaged into other media.

### 4 Repackaging Dazai in Print and Other Media

Repackaging is a phenomenon best explored by looking at literature as merchandise. In other

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<sup>25</sup> Okuno Takeo 奥野健男, “Kaisetsu” 解説, in *Roman Dōrō* ろまん燈籠, Shinchō-bunko 新潮文庫, 1983, p. 321.

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive study on Dazai’s popularity and these complete collections see Takiguchi Akihiro 滝口明祥, *Dazai Osamu Būmu no Keifu* 太宰治ブームの系譜, Hitsuji Shobō ひつじ書房, 2016.

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words, the publisher is a company and the readers are consumers. In this section, the repackaging of Dazai will be looked at from two perspectives: through print and through other media.

One notable repackaging of Dazai involves the changing *bunko* covers of Dazai's works. A rather controversial cover was the 2008 edition of Shūeisha-bunko's *Ningen Shikkaku*.<sup>27</sup> The cover shows a high school-aged boy in a uniform, in a sitting pose, with a smirking glare on his face. This character was created by Obata Takeshi (小畑健) who is widely known for his work on the manga series *Death Note*.<sup>28</sup> Although the boy on the cover is never referred to as a character from *Ningen Shikkaku* itself, readers may associate the drawing with the main character, Oba Yōzō (大庭葉蔵), who is regularly read as an autobiographical representation of the author by critics, researchers, and other readers.<sup>29</sup>

Another representative repackaging of Dazai's work is the unified style of cover design for the Shinchō-bunko series. These kinds of cover design changes have an influence on how the work is read by the reader by priming them with information included within the paratextual features of the work before the reader reaches the content of the work. For example, on the back cover of *Bannen* there is a blurb that says it was “written with the intention to be a suicide note.”<sup>30</sup> This portion of the blurb reinforces the presentation of Dazai's dark and suicidal image.

This repackaging of Dazai's works in different designs echoes Pellatt's statement that “(p)aratext is the text that surrounds and supports the core text, like layers of packaging that initially protect and gradually reveal the essence of the packaged item.”<sup>31</sup> However, it is worth noting that this packaging or repackaging does not always “reveal the essence of the packaged item” in that the paratextual features of the printed medium can also be deceiving. English translations of Dazai's works can serve to illustrate this point. A good example of major changes in the English translation of Dazai's works can be seen in how *Tsugaru*<sup>32</sup> was repackaged as *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp* when it was translated by James Westerhoven and published by Kodansha International in 1985.<sup>33</sup> Another example is one of the most well-known translations of

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27 *Ningen Shikkaku* 人間失格, originally published in *Tenbō* 展望, June, July, and August 1948 issues.

28 *DEATH NOTE*, Shūeisha 集英社, 2003–2006.

29 For a more in-depth analysis of this cover see Saitō Masao 齋藤理生, “60-nen-me no *Ningen Shikkaku*: Paratekusuto kara Tekusuto e” 60年目の『人間失格』——パラテキストからテキストへ, in *iichiko*, vol. 108, 2010.

30 In Japanese it reads “*jisatsu o zentei ni isho no tsumori de kakitsuzutta*” 自殺を前提に遺書のつもりで書き綴った. See back cover of *Bannen* 晩年, Shinchō-bunko 新潮文庫, 2013 printing.

31 Pellatt, op. cit., p. 1.

32 *Tsugaru* 津軽, Oyama Shoten 小山書店, 1944.

33 For a more in-depth analysis of the English translation of *Tsugaru* see Jake Odagiri, “Reading Dazai in



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*Ningen Shikkaku*, translated by Donald Keene as *No Longer Human* and published by New Directions in 1958. Furthermore, *Ningen Shikkaku* was retranslated by Mark Gibeau as *A Shameful Life* with the subtitle *Ningen Shikkaku* on the cover and published by Stone Bridge Press in 2018. Not only has the title been changed, but the original title was romanized and added as a subtitle on the cover of the book. Before the release of this additional translation, there was only Keene's *No Longer Human*. However, with Gibeau's *A Shameful Life*, not only are readers able to compare the translations to get a better idea of what the original is like, but they can also compare the ways that *Ningen Shikkaku* has been packaged for English readership. For example, in Keene's *No Longer Human*, there is a "Translator's Introduction," a preface which comes before the content of the work and subtly suggests that the main character Oba Yōzō and Dazai are parallels of each other; in other other words, Dazai based Oba Yōzō's character on his own experiences. However, in Gibeau's *A Shameful Life*, the notes by the translator, "Translator's Afterword" and "Note on the Current Translation," are located after the work as a postface. In "Translator's Afterword," the reader is urged to first read the content of the work in order to avoid any "preconceptions." Although the reader is free to choose to read the afterword first, it is interesting to see how there is an awareness of the effect of reading this kind of content prior to the work because it can prime the reader with "preconceptions." Also, these English translations can give insight into how the original has been interpreted by the translators. For example, the part in which Oba Yōzō declares himself "*ningen shikkaku*" is translated as "I had now ceased utterly to be a human being" by Keene and as "I had, utterly and completely, ceased to be human" by Gibeau. The latter echoes the choppy, fragmented feeling of the original "*Mohaya, jibun wa, kanzen ni, ningen de naku narimashita*,"<sup>34</sup> compared to Keene's translation which has a more polished feeling to it.

Dazai's works have also been repackaged in other media adaptations, including film adaptations. The films made around 2009 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Dazai's birth will be the focus here because this was a time of heavy attention given to Dazai, his works, and his life. Four movies were made and released during this time: *Shayō* (斜陽, *The Setting Sun*),<sup>35</sup> *Viyon no Tsuma* (ヴィヨンの妻, *Villon's Wife*),<sup>36</sup> *Pandora no Hako* (パンドラの匣, *Pandora's*

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Translation: A Paratextual View of *Tsugaru*," *Osaka Daigaku Daigakuin Bungaku Kenkyūka Gurōbaru Nihon Kenkyū Kurasutā Hōkoku-sho* 大阪大学大学院文学研究科グローバル日本研究クラスター報告書, vol. 1, 2017, pp. 132–147.

34 In Japanese, もはや、自分は、完全に、人間で無くなりました。

35 Released 9 May 2009; directed by Akihara Masatoshi and distributed by KAERUCAFE カエルカフェ.

36 Released 10 October 2009 as *Viyon no Tsuma: Ōtō to Tanpopo* ヴィヨンの妻～桜桃とタンポポ～;

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Box),<sup>37</sup> and *Ningen Shikkaku* (人間失格, *No Longer Human*).<sup>38</sup> All were met with mixed reviews; however, out of these four, the most controversial title was *Ningen Shikkaku*, based on what is considered to be Dazai's masterpiece of the same name. Although relatively faithful to the original work, the portrayal of the main character Oba Yōzō's decadent life, attempted suicides, drug use, and womanizing not only reflected on the original work itself, but on the original author, Dazai, as well. As is well known, *Ningen Shikkaku* has been considered to be autobiographical in nature and has even been advertised in this manner. The movie, however, did not have the same attention given to it in advertising.<sup>39</sup> Even though the autobiographical nature of the original was not mentioned in the advertising, audiences familiar with Dazai and his works might approach this adaptation with a priming that the story is based on Dazai's own experiences. Also, similar to how the English translations can be treated as interpretations, the movie adaptation of *Ningen Shikkaku* can give insight into how the creators interpreted the original work. For example, Oba Yōzō, played by Ikuta Toma (生田斗真), wears clothing similar to what Dazai wore and advertising shows Oba in a pose where he is resting his chin in his hand, a pose that Dazai made in a famous photo that was taken while he was writing *Ningen Shikkaku*.

Many more adaptations of Dazai's works, especially *Ningen Shikkaku*, have been made over the years, including manga versions, animated television shows, and parodies. This only touches the surface of the vast world of Dazai in adapted media. Within this constellation of media, there is one final topic that will be discussed: the branding of *Ningen Shikkaku*.

### 5 “Ningen Shikkaku” as a Brand

In recent years, *Ningen Shikkaku* has not only been adapted into film and other media, but it has essentially become a brand in its own right. This section will discuss how a work of literature can transcend the pages of a book and become a brand representing something other than the work or the author. An emphasis will be given to non-literature products, merchandise, and movie adaptations to explore how a representative work of literature can become a point of interest

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directed by Nemoto Yoshitarō and distributed by Tōhō 東宝.

37 Released 10 October 2009; directed by Tominaga Masanori and distributed by Tōkyō Teatoru 東京テアトル.

38 Released 20 February 2010; directed by Arato Genjiro and distributed by Kadokawa Eiga 角川映画.

39 See Kadokawa Eiga's official page for more information on the introduction and presentation of the movie adaptation of *Ningen Shikkaku*: [https://www.kadokawa-pictures.jp/official/ningen\\_sikkaku/](https://www.kadokawa-pictures.jp/official/ningen_sikkaku/) (last accessed 5 March 2020).

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beyond the written content.

It is difficult to pinpoint when the “Ningen Shikkaku brand” was established. There are even goods sold using “Ningen Shikkaku” as a catchphrase such as buttons that read “人間失格中” (*ningen shikkaku-chū*) and are not directly connected with Dazai or his works. On the other hand, there are also goods that are sold using “Ningen Shikkaku” in direct connection to Dazai and the work. For example, there are scarves printed with the opening lines of the work, T-shirts printed to look like the Shinchō-bunko version of the book, handbags printed with “人間失格 No Longer Human,” and pencils etched with lines from the work. In this manner, it can be observed that “Ningen Shikkaku” has transcended the literary world and has become a product, merchandise that is available to consumers.<sup>40</sup>

It is worthy of note that it was “Ningen Shikkaku” and not “Dazai Osamu” that was transformed into a brand. However, it is important to be aware that in the case of “Ningen Shikkaku,” even though it may not carry the name of the author directly on all of the merchandise, there is an understanding that “Ningen Shikkaku” belongs to Dazai.<sup>41</sup> Is the popularity because of an attraction to the anti-hero nature of the protagonist, Oba Yōzō, or something tied closer to the nuanced name of the work itself? This repackaging of Dazai’s works as a brand raises questions about whether the interest in “Ningen Shikkaku” is representative of not literary achievement, but rather the direct embrace of a term that literally means “human disqualification” or “a disqualified human.”<sup>42</sup>

A recent example of this embrace of “Ningen Shikkaku” can be seen in the 2019 animated science fiction movie *HUMAN LOST Ningen Shikkaku*.<sup>43</sup> The story follows a young man named “Oba Yōzō,” a “dark hero” in a time when illness and death have been conquered. Oba is also portrayed as a “young man who cannot find meaning in living” as he fights against “the system” in a dystopian society. On the official homepage for this animated movie, in the “Story” section, it

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40 There was an influx of merchandise using the phrase “Ningen Shikkaku” that came after the expiration of copyright in 1998. However, the phrase was widely used before the creation of these goods. For example, the controversial TV show *Ningen-Shikkaku: Tatoeba Boku ga Shindara* 人間・失格～たとえぼくが死んだら, which has no direct connection to Dazai’s work, aired from July to September in 1994.

41 In comparison, when something is “Kafkaesque,” it draws upon the oppressive or nightmarish nature of Franz Kafka’s works, but the author’s name is used directly instead of the title of one of his works. However, this association between an author or the works by that author with something outside of the literary world is shared by Kafka and Dazai.

42 See Gibeau, “Translator’s Afterword,” in *A Shameful Life*, Stone Bridge Press, 2018, p. 128. In Keene’s translation, the phrase “Ningen, shikkaku 人間、失格” is expressed as “Disqualified as a human being.” In Gibeau’s translation it is expressed as “A human, failed.”

43 *HUMAN LOST 人間失格*; directed by Kizaki Fuminori and distributed by Tōhō Eizō 東宝映像.

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opens with “Mine has been a life of much shame”<sup>44</sup> and sketches the general storyline; furthermore, in the first few lines of the “Introduction” section, Dazai Osamu and *Ningen Shikkaku* as a “monumental” literary work are clearly mentioned.<sup>45</sup> However, unlike the 2009 movie discussed in the previous section, this is not an adaptation of *Ningen Shikkaku*. It is a “dynamically re-envisioned” version of the original work of literature, only retaining the atmosphere of the anti-hero, which is a feature that has made *Ningen Shikkaku* popular for so many years.

Another interesting point about *HUMAN LOST Ningen Shikkaku* is the title itself. *Ningen Shikkaku* is the title of Dazai Osamu’s work and it has been translated by Keene as *No Longer Human* and by Gibeau as *A Shameful Life*; however, *Ningen Shikkaku* has never been translated into English as “HUMAN LOST.” This part of the animated movie title is probably referring to a fragmental and experimental work published by Dazai in 1937 called *HUMAN LOST*.<sup>46</sup> It is a diary-styled work of a patient in a hospital who is writing as a kind of “therapy” as recommended by the doctor. This work is not widely known and is not considered to be a representative work of Dazai probably because of the difficulty of interpreting its heavily fragmented content. To a spectator not familiar with Dazai’s works, “HUMAN LOST” may appear to be an English translation of *Ningen Shikkaku*. On the other hand, to a spectator familiar with Dazai’s works, there is a clear distinction between “HUMAN LOST,” as an independent work, and *Ningen Shikkaku*.

The branding of “Ningen Shikkaku” and its tie to merchandise outside of literature goes beyond what has been discussed in this section. For example, another type of repackaging and branding has been introduced in the form of a fictional character named Dazai Osamu in the manga and anime *Bungo Stray Dogs*.<sup>47</sup> This character possesses a “power” called *ningen shikkaku* which he uses to battle with other characters. However, this fictionalized version of Dazai and its tie to the “Ningen Shikkaku” brand will need to be explored further in a future paper.

## 6 Conclusion

This essay has covered a variety of repackagings of Dazai Osamu and the state of “Ningen Shikkaku” as a brand. This style of research has been gaining traction in recent years and strives

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44 “*Haji no ôi shôgai o okutte kimashita*” 恥の多い生涯を送ってきました。

45 See <https://human-lost.jp>; last accessed 5 March 2019.

46 First published in *Shinchô* 新潮, April 1937 issue.

47 *Bungô Sutorei-doggusu* 文豪ストレイドッグス, original story/concept by Asagiri Kafuka, drawn by Harukawa Sango, KADOKAWA, 2012–.

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to understand how literature extends beyond the pages of a book when it is transferred to a different medium. For example, the March 2019 issue of *Yokomitsu Riichi Kenkyū* had a themed feature focusing on “literature as contents/cultural resources” and covered some of the topics discussed in this essay, such as the interpretation of fictionalized versions of an author in popular media.<sup>48</sup> Another study essential to understanding the connection between an author or a specific work to the media is Hibi Yoshitaka’s research which discusses literature, the space in which it is consumed, and its connection to other media.<sup>49</sup>

This essay is a first attempt at applying a similar approach to research on how Dazai Osamu has been represented in print and other media forms. Previously, paratextual research has concentrated on other media mainly in order to determine how a work of literature is represented and how that media has an effect on the work itself. For example, essays by the author, interviews, and criticism by others, although statements made outside of the work, have a direct connection to the work. However, other versions of the work, such as translations or movie adaptations, have not been considered in the paratextual sense as interpretations that ultimately connect directly to the written work and how it is interpreted.

Of course, this kind of paratextual repackaging is not only limited to Dazai, but is shared with many authors across the world. Movie adaptations, English translations, and fictionalization of the author as a character into manga are all examples of interpretations of works and of the author. Mapping the transformation of a work from a written piece of literature to a film adaptation, for example, can demonstrate how this constellation of media is ultimately connected. Even dynamic interpretations of a work or the author can give important insight into how they have been interpreted and how these interpretations tie into the original work.

\*This essay is based on a lecture given by the author at Osaka University. The lecture was requested by Kishimoto Emi, Associate Professor in the Japanese Historical Linguistic Department, and was given to students in the OUSSEP program.

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48 See *Yokomitsu Riichi Kenkyū* 横光利一研究, vol. 17, March 2019.

49 See Hibi Yoshitaka 日比嘉高, *Bungaku no Rekishi o dō Kakinaosu no ka: 20-seiki Nihon no Shōsetsu, Kūkan, Media* 文学の歴史をどう書き直すのか——二〇世紀日本の小説・空間・メディア, Kasama Shoin 笠間書院, 2016.

Title	Repackaging Dazai Osamu and the Process of Branding “Ningen Shikkaku”
Author(s)	Odagiri, Jake
Citation	越境文化研究イニシアティブ論集. 3 P.77-P.89
Issue Date	2020-03-31
Text Version	publisher
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/11094/75563">http://hdl.handle.net/11094/75563</a>
DOI	
rights	
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