



No Longer Human

Osamu Dazai , Donald Keene (Translator)

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Mine has been a life of much shame. I can't even guess myself what it must be to live the life of a human being.

Portraying himself as a failure, the protagonist of Osamu Dazai's *No Longer Human* narrates a seemingly normal life even while he feels himself incapable of understanding human beings. Oba Yozo's attempts to reconcile himself to the world around him begin in early childhood, continue through high school, where he becomes a "clown" to mask his alienation, and eventually lead to a failed suicide attempt as an adult. Without sentimentality, he records the casual cruelties of life and its fleeting moments of human connection and tenderness.

Semi-autobiographical, *No Longer Human* is the final completed work of one of Japan's most important writers, Osamu Dazai (1909-1948). The novel has come to "echo the sentiments of youth" (Hiroshi Ando, *The Mainichi Daily News*) from post-war Japan to the postmodern society of technology. Still one of the ten bestselling books in Japan, *No Longer Human* is a powerful exploration of an individual's alienation from society.

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From Reader Review No Longer Human for online ebook

||Swaroop|| says

No Longer Human by Osamu Dazai is deep, painful, real and *so very human*. This book, which was first published in 1948, is a raw portrayal of the human thinking, feelings and emotions. It specifically captures the isolated, troubled, disturbed and confused thought process of a young man named Yozo.

This well-written book though depressing and pessimistic is, in a way, a **required reading for everyone**, as it is important for each one of us to understand and feel what a fellow human being is going through, when they are feeling depressed, lonely and emotionally low.

No Longer Human is for all humans who have a heart that feels, and are compassionate and empathetic.

Thank you, Osamu Dazai for this remarkable book!

Ben Loory says

the opening of this book, which is a description of three photographs taken of a man over the course of his life, is one of the most best and disturbing things i've ever read. just an absolutely thrilling beginning. the rest of the book doesn't quite live up to it, although it often comes close. it feels a lot like The Stranger or Notes from Underground. i only wish it built more instead of kind of petering out.

Szplug says

At the very beginning of *No Longer Human*, Dazai lays out his narrator's plight in clear, stark terms:

Although I had a mortal dread of human beings I seemed quite unable to renounce their society. I managed to maintain on the surface a smile which never deserted my lips; this was the accommodation I offered to others, a most precarious achievement performed by me only at the cost of excruciating efforts within.

The narrator, Yozo, born into a wealthy political family in rural northeastern Japan, has left behind three notebooks - with three photographs to accompany them - as a means of explicating his life of complete and utter failure. The journals trace his alienated, terrified, and miserable meandering through an Imperial Japan that was made schizoid by the rushed and forceful collision between traditional Japanese culture and Western modernization, from his earliest memories as a bewildered, wary child to his final days as a Tokyo exile, a wizened, prematurely gray young man showing the full effect of the bruising and buffets that an inimical and omnipresent life ceaselessly dealt out. Unable to connect to his family because he can't understand them; friendless because he is incapable of either trusting others or being trusted; scornful of women even as he squeezes every cent out of his broken lovers; irresponsible in every expectation of a regimented society - Yozo's only recourse to allay the anxiety and terror that daily waylay and murder his soul is in rivers of booze, pills, and flight. His agonizing inability to connect with the mysterious entities that have filled the world and constantly press against him forces him to assume the mask of a "clown" - cheap laughs and comical routines are what he believes appeases the hostility and hatred of humans, who otherwise would tire

of his eccentricity and eliminate him from their presence.

Dazai has written a bleak and beautiful look at the anguish of the loner, the misfit, forever forced to look at himself in the mirror and spot nothing but his defects and disfigurements - yet at the same time, the reader also sees quite clearly that Yozo is narcissistic to the extreme, too lazy and resigned to make the slightest effort to help himself, terribly misogynistic to the parade of women who make sacrifices to save him, only to face the inevitable abandonment - even during a death pledge. Thus, compassion and contempt struggle as the book proceeds, each one alternately coming out on top. This dual-view is an integral part of *No Longer Human*: while Yozo sees himself as a fraud, a clown-caper performing his way through a midnight world, his few friends and family never abandon him, and several women fall deeply for him - they see him as a bright, cheerful, and funny young man, incredibly handsome and full of bright life. Which view is correct? Self-perception versus the perception of others is always a fascinating enigma, the crux of the grand theatre that comprises human life. Each individual presents a *mask* to the world - but he cannot control how others see that mask.

Donald Keene provides an elegant, succinctly expressive translation. Dazai's brisk, clipped sentences are replete with the wiry tension of his story; and in the midst of a page honed to a keen edge of melancholy, a wry, matter-of-fact humour will slyly insinuate itself into the sadness and lift the reader out of Yozo's despairing depths. Personal truths made universal are the glorious kernel of literature, and Dazai's truths for some, like myself, may cut so *close* to the bone that it hurts. Yet these truths also heal, and this dichotomy of pain and relief is what makes *No Longer Human* deeply human in every way.

Khashayar Mohammadi says

I couldn't stop thinking about Yukio Mishima while reading this book. A strange and eerily atmospheric book that sucked me in from the very first chapter. Although the whole dissociation with humans was a bit overtly explicit for my taste, I enjoyed reading it very much.

Mariel says

No Longer Human... Yozo believes halfheartedly (it doesn't beat strongly enough to be whole) himself to be an outcast. He feels nothing in himself to connect himself to himself, let alone others. I have to say that I didn't feel he was different from other people. All along I was disregarding the not being human parts. It wasn't different to feel behind blank walls, a gravity for numbness and not having to think. I kinda think (aha!) one has to know themselves a bit before they can begin expanding that inner mental world into other worlds (brief as those glimpses are). It was frustrating that Yozo did not try to know anyone else, worse still his talking in circles of what wasn't true. He could have known. It was out there... Because he was terrified? So I throw away the outsideness because it is too inside. I KNOW it isn't true that he's unlike anyone else. What really got me? The painful stuff? The inability to trust. That's where I feel separated and wonder if I've got some inhuman quality in me. I wonder if other people feel this way... If other people go through life doing stuff because what else can you do, not because they really think in their heart of hearts that opening up is going to go anywhere. I cannot believe that there will be anyone there for me (books don't know I'm there).

He did have his painters... "There are some people whose dread of human beings is so morbid that they reach a point where they yearn to see with their own eyes monsters of ever more horrible shapes. And the more

nervous they are- the quicker to take fright- the more violent they pray that every storm will be... Painters who have had this mentality, after repeated wounds and intimidations at the hands of the apparitions called human beings, have often come to believe in phantasms- they plainly saw monsters in broad daylight, in the midst of nature. And they did not fob people off with clowning; they did their best to depict these monsters just as they had appeared. Takeichi was right: they had dared to paint pictures of devils. These, I thought, would be my friends in the future. I was so excited I could have wept."

But where were the monsters? Yozo's monster was himself. He's the person who hates themselves and yet can only spend time with themselves. (Just say narcissist, Mariel!) So the monster wasn't really as it appeared... Just what he's afraid for it to appear as. I do know the pain of not doing the all or nothing. He feels the shame yet cannot just go all the way and be HONEST. He only walks the plank of being caught, turning back just in time. That's kinda hell. I wish all the time that I could either stop being so honest about my embarrassing shit, or just stop feeling feeling bad about it (knowing all too well the pain of coming up against "friends" who despise depression in others). It sucks to live in half.

"People talk of social outcasts. The words apparently denote the miserable losers of the world, the vicious ones, but I feel as though I have been a "social outcast" from the moment I was born. If I ever met someone society has designated as an outcast, I invariably feel affection for him, an emotion which carries me away in melting tenderness."

Yozo, you'd never recognize them in time.

"There is no disputing the accurate, scientific fact that millions of germs are floating, swimming, wriggling everywhere. At the same time, however, if you ignore them completely they lose all possible connection with yourself, and at once become nothing more than vanishing "ghosts of science." This too I came to understand. I had been so terrorized by scientific statistics."

I liked Yozo a lot for this (also all of the following lines about those statistics about wasting three rice grains and how everybody's three rice grains build up. How these scientific facts are useless and beat you. I also worry about this shit like Yozo).

I found myself wishing that I could talk with Osamu Dazai instead of with his photographs of Yozo the bozo, and all of his other unfinished costumes. Someone who would see a little further behind the walls. To the angels. It is there in No Longer Human. It is kinda hard when you don't trust people either, when you're also afraid of people sometimes. I like to think about other people, try to understand them and how they feel or dream (even if they die in their sleep). But I also feel so depressed sometimes like no one would ever do the same for me. I wish Yozo had tried AT ALL to do something for someone else. I don't even know why I think he should have... Except I guess I would have for him. Dazai did.

P.s. There's stuff in translator Donald Keene's forward about the modernization of Japan and influence of American culture. I thought of one thing: suicide. This might be the only Japanese novel I've read with suicide where it was seen as taboo. I don't know if there is even anything to that. It just seemed weird that it was after Kawabata's The Sound of the Mountain with its natural suicides. In my family the suicidal urges became routine or as a lever to pull in others. Nothing natural about it. Death seems like a shadow you couldn't rip out but that? A big ass ugly building erected in front of your bedroom window.

Praj says

Behind ballads of an orphaned heart,
Lay poetic trance of a love's facade.

Dreads the ghostly art within hazy shades,
Human shame in comic masquerades.
Inebriated words coughing in notebooks
Empty sake bottles in curls of smoke,
Vice or virtue, the gullible spirit brags
Diabolical tales of a death mask.
“Everything passes”, cried the blue cradle
Slept, the wings of a fallen angel.

A solitary word blissfully prances from the anxious mind, fears the disintegration of its syllables; the distorted enunciation of its vowels, as it cautiously reaches at the tip of the tongue. The blooming word panicked by the stuttering mouth, bit by bit retreats in to the gloomy interiors of the mind where it will forever be sheltered, far from being judged by bullies and societal predators. A soft smile then becomes the sole redeemer of communication; a polite garb of inner festering trepidation. Alienation juxtaposes human “normalcy” and societal chaos in a silent sanctuary of individuality. Confrontations between personal wraith and societal norms arise, begging to fit in the human world. Human beings are a daunting race walking on a tight rope of the “survival of fittest” cryptogram amalgamating the belligerence of existence in the ugliness of societal wasteland where basic human depravity tumbles in the depths of existential despair.

“My life has been a life of much shame. I can’t even guess myself what it must be to live a life of a human being...”

To live a life of a human being; what is it may I ask? The vision to live through one’s eyes or the obligation to exist through borrowed dreams? Is it to ideally march along with hypocrisy, duplicity, deception and the staunch societal dogma veiled behind a multifaceted mask conceding to the guidelines of human race. ? Does life become a shameless ruffian when one questions the truth behind the worldly sentiments? The clueless boy in the pictures failed to grasp the intricacies of human life. Horror and alienation that ran from through his childhood into the complexities of adulthood peeked through his clowning masquerades. A smile he thought would wipe all his trepidation and give him a homely asylum in a world that was bizarre and hellish. The “ghost pictures” screamed through the tinted strokes, rebelled the obligatory academia of a civil servant; a premonition of its owner’s potential caricature. The prostitutes that serenaded him at night were a respite from the vulgarity of love. **“To fall” or “to be fallen”**, were farcical words in the sense of morality and loyalty for love and yet complacent as an appendage of detached relationships. The suicidal waves of the soundless ocean were a home away from home. ***“Love flies out the window when poverty comes in the door”***, he would proudly say as he sketched cartoons on a sheets of paper , unearthing moments of human warmth from alienation and despair ; the three lonely copper coins stiffening in his palm trying to apprehend the impoverished surroundings spiralling into tragic dissolution. **“The dream of going on bicycles to see a waterfall framed in summer leaves”** floated in the alcoholic fortification and in the defiled remains of Yoshiko’s trustfulness. Yozo was searching for the beauty that had somehow nastily escaped from the compassion of human connection. The veracity of the ‘ghostly’ art that had once saved his adolescence, the flamboyant imagination of the very art had crippled his adulthood

“People talk of “social outcasts.” The words apparently denote the miserable losers of the world, the vicious ones, but I feel as though I have been a “social outcast” from the moment I was born.....”

“Social outcasts” is a preposterous terminology. Who decides its legitimacy? Who rewrites and deciphers the codes of classification? The word “outcast” is highly subjective in its entirety. If you ask ‘irrationality’ it

would pinpoint 'rationality' as an outcast. To an illegitimate child, the legitimate one is a pariah; to insanity it is the realms of sanity; to the traces of dishonesty it is the advent of honesty; to trustfulness, betrayal is a sin; to imperfection it is perfection that is a recluse and to the morphine filled syringe, the glistening wine bottles are a social outcast. It is a game of endless antonyms. If one views the bigger picture, the world is full of social pariahs. In a superficial world crammed with recreational performers donning masks of assorted sizes and colours; Yozo's acceptance of himself belonging to the socially recluse class struck a chord in my heart. I could finally comprehend the friendliness displayed by Yozo to the comparably designated populace. Each and every person that touched the core of Yozo's life was a social pariah in their own struggling ways. Every one of them, be it Takeichi, Horiki, Yoshiko, Tsuneko, the lady at the bar, the prostitutes or the peculiar Flatfish, all were battling various oddities and societal consciousness to be qualified as a noteworthy human being. After all, we all are outsiders to a few others in some or the other way. Even God is a social pariah to an atheist, isn't it?

“The incomprehensibility of society is the incomprehensibility of the individual. The ocean is not society; it is the individual.”

In this melancholic metaphorical quest of 'what it takes to be termed as disqualified human'; the elegant *Shishu?setsu* literary piece is a semi-biographical sketch painting the undertones of existentialism in a portrait of alienation and societal crippling in the pursuit to achieve the solidarity of human subsistence. The greyish brush strokes of Yozo's "ghost pictures" highlights Dazai's life predicament with the incomprehensibility of the Japanese society and his personal familial position. Japan at large, along with his populace was standing on the brink of old and new cultural transformations. The state of affairs was stuck in between two diverse worlds where the country's populace was adjusting in the cultural and personage pandemonium of adhering to the societal standards, yet finding ways to defy an unsympathetic societal doctrine. The individual becomes a society where in order to survive; one must adhere to the means of trickery and amateur dramatics shuffling between the societal chaos and normalization of basic humanity. It is known that sometimes lunacy is the only path to redeeming honesty, but with lunacy came the crime of rejection and abnormality. The weak are dispersed through suicidal suffrage in an impenetrable societal wilderness where child-like simplicity becomes a vice and livelihood becomes a sin punishable by the boisterousness of survival. The numerous societal boffins may critique the confounded life of Yozo comparing the inadequacies to the disposal tendencies of lethargy of an addict immersed in drug laced alcoholic trenches dangling on suicidal optimism as the ultimate salvage. Nevertheless, Yozo to me was a lost angel who could not find a path to walk along with the superficiality and convoluted nuances of humankind. Through all literary embellishment of euphemistic idioms and the utilitarian rationalities used to conciliate Yozo's conundrum, Oba Yozo was worthy of love even with all his shortcomings. Reading, Dazai's sombre yet gratifying prose consumed my sensibilities into scrutinizing Yozo and the world around him. How and when does a human being reach a stage where not only does the essence of his individuality vanishes amongst the darkest terrains of societal dogmas, but is terrified of its very own species? The definitive truth of human race, eventually **"everything passes"**, and so do the societal ghosts extant in self-punishing madness.

Gertrude & Victoria says

I consider this book to be the bible for the disaffected artist. *No Longer Human* was the final novel written by

Dazai Osamu. It is also his magnum opus and a true-to-life representation of the restless and tormented spirit that Dazai was. This work could be taken, at least to a certain extent, as an autobiographical account of the writer himself.

Oba the main character recognizes, from early childhood, his place in the world, which is no place, neither here nor there. He feels pangs of alienation from family as well as society in general. He is able to find some solace, at least temporarily, in drink and women. However, he is never able to remain at peace with himself for very long. He exists within a whirl of anxiety and agitation that pushes him over the edge.

This is a dark story of one man's life, beleaguered by an eternal emptiness, from which there is no escape - a poignant testament of a troubled soul, who also happened to be, a brilliant writer. I can't recommend this work enough.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

Those days where you wake up with your head in a fog and your body feeling like it's covered in bricks that you have to dig your way out of, and your leg is asleep so you trip getting out of bed, and you're late for work so of course the traffic's bad leading you to road-rage across lanes accelerating then braking back and forth again while muttering to yourself about how stupid everyone is and you're so glad it's Sunday in *their* fucking world because all the drivers are 90 years old and frail with their noses practically pressed against their front windshields as they zip down the highway at 50 mph in a line across all 3 lanes, and you didn't have time or money to eat so your stomach gnaws at you all day as you try to focus on your work, but you're buried to your neck in it, and you just can't seem to stop making that same stupid mistake over and over again even though you've completely attuned yourself to your workflow on a normal day, and the shift drags on for an eternity and everyone's in a bitchy mood and you finally make it home and drink yourself forgetful, all the while staring at a wall and grinding your teeth before finally making your way to the bathroom to brush your teeth, but instead you fall asleep on the floor with the faucet running and have nightmares about spiders eating your eyelids and spinning your fingers into webs so that you have to use your hands like clubs for the rest of your life, and then you wake up fully clothed including your shoes and you feel really weird about everything that happened.

The narrator of this book lives this sort of day every single day, his presumably short lifetime nothing but disappointment and dejection, and he tells us about it *exhaustively* on every page. He uses a lot more punctuation than I did, but it's every bit as tiresome. Booze, sex, women, breaking up, booze, women, booze, suicide attempts, booze, breaking up, booze, women, breaking up, and everybody sucks but especially me, booze, suicide attempts, breaking up, morphine (Woo hoo! Life rules!), too much morphine, suicide attempts, breaking up, etc. Maybe that's your thing, I don't know. I wasn't in the mood, being that I haven't had a shit enough day to act pathetically and irritatingly cynical in a while, so the whole time I was reading this I just kind of wanted to flick the narrator in the nose for reminding me just how much I can "me me me" suck sometimes.

Recommended for sadists, masochists, and whiny little shits. It's pretty good, though. Question: Would you like some cheese with that whine?

Additional thought: I just wanted to jump back in here for a little troll patrol: I understand from the blurb that this book is supposed to be about internal struggles of the Japanese concerning the infiltration of Western ideals, cultures clashing, confused identity, you know the drill. I want to assure you that was not lost on me,

as it was one of the primary reasons I chose to purchase this book in the first place. I find such transitional periods and the ensuing struggles with definitions of self to be very fascinating. Here comes the "however": However, I really didn't see that here. I think it would be rather ethnocentric to assume that overly-critical self-analysis, apathy, depression, defeat, insanity, and substance abuse are specifically western imports. Did we introduce the Japanese to booze? Not as I understand it. Did we stumble upon a happy-go-lucky paradise of Huxley-an automatons when west met east, only to spoil/enlighten them with our savage knowledge of the depths of human depravity, of the Sisyphean nature of living? Nope. There is simply not enough culture-specific material in this novel for me to even begin to make some argument about cultural hybridity w/r/t this character and his particular struggles. For the most part, this book could have been written in any number of languages without reshaping its skeleton. No, I didn't read it in Japanese, so maybe I'm missing something in the translation, but if that's the case then the translator himself needs to start working on his resume, because he has completely botched this effort. However, I really don't think that's the case.

Jeremy says

What is it with young men in so much Japanese literature? Whether it's Murakami, Mishima, Soseki, or Dezaï they always come across as either lonely, shut-off or damaged (or some combination of the three). Yozo feels about as radically alienated from the world as any character could be. Even bitchy little Holden Caulfield never carried half as much angst as the main character in No Longer Human seems to have. And the loneliness he feels is all the more painful because of how deeply internalized it is, and how total his inability to communicate with others has become. Glum though it is, this book does do a really good job of showing how vast the chasm can be between what other people think about you, and what you think about yourself.

Supreeth says

I guess, lost, alienated, young men are my favorite people when it comes to literature; Holden Caulfield, Clay, Tyler Durden, and now Yozo. Yozo's detached from the rest of the world, he's pretty convinced that he's not just another Human being. This reminds me so much of Catcher in the Rye; while the prose is nothing like Catcher in the rye, it still seems like Japanese CITER to me. No Longer Human is the loneliest piece of fiction I've ever read. It was painful to read about Yozo, isolated from rest of the world, I don't think there's another literary character as alienated as him; an outcast, having hard time to understand humans, homo-*fucking*-sapiens.

Clark says

I spent like three years just crazy depressed. Grim thoughts all the time, super self destructive, at once alienating and distributing "cries for help" or whatever you wanna call it... sheesh, man. It was so fucked. I'm really glad I got out of that frame of mind and I hope I never go back. No Longer Human was something I read toward the end of that phase. I probably would have been okay anyway, but this shit helped a ton. Dazai totally nails the impossibly bummed out mindset without being corny or melodramatic, and when you're basically just being a little sad black cloud all walking around, you're super cynical and things like this book are almost impossible to find 'cause your first reaction to everything is just to tear it apart and say it sucks... which is hella corny and melodramatic anyway, but if you know what it's like, like, being unbearably,

unstoppably sad, and trying to put some sort of normal-ish face on it in your day to day life (between intermittent private and regrettable public freakouts probably), then well, this book pretty much covers all that really, really perfectly.

Oh, also I was loaned the book by this really cute girl who prefaced it by saying "This book reminds me of you." and once I read and finished it and had a grip on what the whole thing was actually about, I realized that that was one of the nicest things anyone had ever said to me. Shit man, I kinda well up a little when I think about it. Really.

Hadrian says

This is a remarkable book. Loneliness and suicide, but with a new look. Sparse and moving words.

Alex V. says

No Longer Human is brutal, and about as accurate a portrait of the skewing effects the twin corrupters of narcissism and depression can have on a life. The narrator, based closely on Dazai's own life, is insufferable, not only to those around him but to himself and yet like a corrosive fog, he consumes everyone and everything with whom he comes in contact.

Anyone blessed enough to not have depression in them will likely not find much to like in this book, but for the rest of us, Dazai is brave/horrible enough to look straight into the mirror and report what is there. Just as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* is relentless in depicting a dead exterior world, Dazai's blunt unfeeling narrator depicts that lifeless interior. Both books are all the more alarming because they eschew hyperbole when traipsing these barren landscapes; the truth is much more sobering than any fiction could be.

One of the things I appreciated about *No Longer Human* is that it bypassed redemption for persistence; the narrator does not give it up a bit, even up to the end. The problems here are not the kind you exactly fix.

Frankly, this book isn't a whole lot of fun, but if you want to lift the hood and see the squirming engine of self-loathing in action, if the characters in Bukowski's *Tales of Ordinary Madness* or David Thewlis' character in Mike Leigh's film *Naked* unfortunately strike a chord with you, this might just do it for you.

I would suggest reading the Wikipedia article on Dazai before venturing into this thing, it will give you an idea with whom and what you are dealing.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osamu_Dazai

Horace Derwent says

this book, is just another motherfucker for me when i crusade in the holyland on one certain day

i can see why most of the japanese parents don't want their kids to read this book

here's some parts of my review (i don't know how i cud write this, maybe i was possessed by something at

the time):

i am sorry for being a human

i need booze, i need drugs, i need vaginas, but i can quit them all at any time when i just need death

i don't need love, i don't need pride, i don't need duty, but it seems i am them all, cuz these are simply the evidence of living a life

however, what is a man, a humankind? it's merely a combination.

as for a single person, and all humanbeings, what are they for?

being a human is horrible because of its existence

they toil to make their stomachs filled up, to build subways to get things go quicker, to invent a pillow in order to have a nice sleep

...

cuz only the usefulness exists!

only a goal that creates powers to move forward!

only the things which have meanings that those can be understood

...

as to be consoled, console; to be loved, love

a man like me, who can't figure out the goal of finding the meaning of living or being a human. so am i qualified to live or to be a human?

...

when i cover my face to hide my wails, in laughs you say that i'm hypocritical

when i cough blood for having the consumption, you say that i'm pretentious and asking for it

so would you give me a mask to hide myself so that i can be as crude and brutal as you are?

or showing me with it to the world in means that i am a human who is just like you?

...

i'm not sure if you are a human or not and i really don't give a cuss to that

I AM NO MORE HUMAN

RK-isme says

No Longer Human - a book with which I was not comfortable - a book which constantly frustrated me. Was that why I read it in a day - to be done with it - to be able to put it back on the shelf? But still, four solid stars - recommended to those who suffer - i.e. humans

A story of a man with a lifelong depression - a depression which leaves him incapable of maintaining any kind of positive human relationship. I could almost relate to that except that this character, Yozo, never seems to learn hide his feelings. Indeed, he seems to be almost sociopathic. He basically mistrusts others to the point of never being able to empathize with them. In his mind, everyone has an anterior motive for whatever they are saying or doing.

His response to women is either to use them, for sex, for money, for whatever he needs, except trust, never trust. But women are constantly attractive to him. They are always ready to take him into their lives, to care for him. He never understands why.

What Yozo never managed to realize is that he is just a nice guy. Of course, for many of us, even that realization is not enough. We still live with that constant anxiety that we are being judged.

Florencia says

LXXXV

*They say that "time assuages",—
Time never did assuage;
An actual suffering strengthens,
As sinews do, with age.*

*Time is a test of trouble,
But not a remedy.
If such it prove, it prove too
There was no malady.*

Emily Dickinson, Part Four: Time and Eternity, *The Complete Poems*

*

Everything passes. (169)

A gentle breeze brushes the branches of luxuriant trees brimming with cherry blossoms which surround the quaint park bench I chose as my reading spot. A diaphanous cloud softly attached to the sun creates the sensation of being part of a watercolor painting bound to become the antithesis of an actual winter day. Away from the bustle of an anonymous city, from the thoughts that keep accumulating after roaming awkwardly around the mind, trying to repress relentless pangs of sadness. The only sound I would like to hear is the one pages make as they silently turn in order to unfold this heartrending story; one page after the other, reverberating through the Gardens, ensuring the quietude which, by virtue of a book's mere presence, clears my mind completely. If only for a few hours. Or for the briefest minute unable to last sixty wretched seconds.

I wonder if I have actually been happy.

No Longer Human, published in 1948, is a timeless piece of writing that portrays the sense of isolation of Oba Yozo, a confused child who became a troubled man; roughly, a deceitful person unable to show his true

nature to most people, a man *disqualified as a human being*.

The book is mostly composed of three memoranda; the last one is divided into two parts. Dazai interwove significant personal experiences into his writing; it was somewhat striking to identify those autobiographical aspects as I read our tormented protagonist's story.

The first memorandum is about Yozo's childhood. From an early age, he felt overwhelmed by a profound sense of alienation, which was increased by the presence of his overbearing father. In the end, incapable of understanding human beings, confused by their selfishness and artificial personalities, he steps into the world and becomes another unauthentic person, begetting the perception of having a jocose and amusing manner in the eyes of people around him. In his mind, such farce was the only way he could find to face the creatures he feared the most: humans. As these attempts take place, he ends up harboring a feeling many of us are familiar with but, in another display of egotism triggered by human condition, perhaps the limitations of our surroundings, we tend to think we are the only ones feeling that way.

All I feel are the assaults of apprehension and terror at the thought that I am the only who is entirely unlike the rest. It is almost impossible for me to converse with other people. What should I talk about, how should I say it? – I don't know.

I could connect with some of Yozo's reflections, naturally. I am not someone who immediately trusts in people, especially after many close encounters with disappointment. In that sense, I understood completely the character's reasons for keeping his agonies locked in his chest, imbued with a persistent sense of mistrust. Nevertheless, I could never endorse his absolute insincerity towards everybody. It is impossible not to take this book to everyday life; how distressing it must be to interact with someone so irrationally fearful and indecisive, unwilling to respond when another person tries to reach out, incapable of seeing his ability to actually love. Yozo's feigned emotions, which culminated with the perfect *role of the farcical eccentric*, somehow shielded the people who cared about him from his recurrent fears, though the element he chose to protect himself (and them, who knows) was deception.

The second memorandum is mostly about the continuation of Yozo's self-destructive behavior, which by then included excessive drinking, smoking and many encounters with prostitutes (to whom he dedicates some degrading observations). Until he finds a woman who makes him feel, for the first time, as if he *had freed himself from fear and uneasiness*. He didn't feel the need to hide his gloomy disposition. Unfortunately, things rapidly started to go awry.

The weak fear happiness itself.

Even though he had many love affairs, one thing did not change: he was equally cruel to all women who cared about him (view spoiler). The seemingly cogent arguments and plausible excuses to justify his actions are infinite. In any case, the results were indelible wounds and irreparable consequences.

“You look like someone who's had an unhappy childhood. You're so sensitive—more's the pity for you.”

That same memorandum also reflects the conflicts that are present in human relationships in the context of an adverse socio-economic status. At one point, the humiliation of not being able to provide for a woman was insufferable; the last straw that culminated in another mistake.

The third memorandum chronicles the protagonist's late twenties.

Several ambivalent feelings arise from reading about a character such as Yozo. I was able to comprehend some of his fears and his genuine sense of alienation, though other times I saw him as an inconsiderate man who epitomized cruelty and selfishness.

After a life of lying to himself and to others, Yozo chooses to write about his miseries and atrocious acts without a shred of falseness. Without resorting to any sentimentality – in contrast to his entire existence, his notebooks do not try to please anyone – he tells his story without engaging in unavailing circumlocution, elegantly gliding to the brink of brutal honesty as he circumvents every rule of an ostensibly civilized world. Despite the stark writing style which predominated in the novel, Dazai endowed it with not only plentiful profound meditations which may resonate with many readers around the globe, but with an exquisite language reminiscent of wistful fragments of poetry written in some bleak hotel room. There is no rhapsody of praise to nature, no writer simply extolling the virtues of silence. This novel is a one-way ticket to a person's psyche. Indubitably, a memorable journey since Dazai's words might linger in the vicinity of one's mind for far too long.

Unhappiness. There are all kinds of unhappy people in this world. I suppose it would be no exaggeration to say that the world is composed entirely of unhappy people. But those people can fight their unhappiness with society fairly and squarely, and society for its part easily understands and sympathizes with such struggles. My unhappiness stemmed entirely from my own vices, and I had no way of fighting anybody... Am I what they call and egoist? Or am I the opposite, a man of excessively weak spirit? I really don't know myself, but since I seem in either case to be a mass of vices, I drop steadily, inevitably, into unhappiness, and I have no specific plan to stave off my descent.

Selfishness or a weak spirit. I am not in the position to ascertain to which of those personalities Yozo belongs. Recently, I stumbled upon a quote by Jane Austen (which can be found in her novel Mansfield Park) that makes me ponder his situation, since it states the following: "Selfishness must always be forgiven, you know, because there is no hope of a cure." In that context, Austen only refers to selfishness; she is not as bold as one M. de Norpois (I just met him so I still don't know what to think of him) who declared once that for every sin there is forgiveness.

We all carry within us some degree of egoism – in fact, it can be seen as another defense mechanism regarding the protection of one's heart; I should know. But of course, some humans are replete with it. So much so that sometimes they might seem incapable of feeling pain, as they might do everything in their power to avoid it, regardless of the pain they are inflicting on others. To me, Yozo's case is somewhat paradigmatic; he relied on his antics to deceive people – and thereby being able to deal with them – instead of turning to superficially veracious words he never meant to say or a perpetual pusillanimous silence. Either way, Yozo suffers; he is not a pretender who thinks that being unable to fit into society is something that makes him special. It makes him truly unhappy. However, fighting for our existence is certainly not impossible; as a matter of fact, it is a more reasonable plan than sitting comfortably, feeling miserable and just waiting for the world's gaping maw to tear us apart.

I thought, "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."

Unlike Austen, I can't say for sure that there is no hope of a cure. The idealistic within me, breathing optimism and naivety daily, will claim that there is. The cynical within me, a little bruised due to some unpleasant experiences in life, will guarantee that, in reality, there is no remedy for such unfortunate malady. Despite this state of uncertainty, I agree with the first part of Austen's statement; we should forgive. As Dickinson's poem continues to echo in my head, the thought that time alone doesn't heal all wounds resounds just as much; indeed, it is what we do with that time that may alleviate certain symptoms. Forgiveness is an active way to deal with anything that once caused a small cut or unfathomable pain. It is not only part of a process which is essential to avoid hardening one's heart, it is also a humane way to treat others, even those whose actions leave a bittersweet aftertaste. Even if I am not forgiven. Not that the world needs my foolish perspectives in the form of endless paragraphs of little merit, of course, but I for one choose to forgive, and that decision is made taking into consideration, among other things, the possibility that such cure, in fact, does not exist. I wouldn't want to magnify the weight of the cross that some people *have* to carry around, for the absence of said remedy might be already too harsh a punishment.

I turn the last page and the previous luminous scenery metamorphoses into a typical winter day. Storm clouds are already appearing above the horizon; they will soon cover these empty cherry trees, and me. I walk back home, trying not to think about the intense sky's azure, the park bench, the limpid lake I never mentioned, the cherry blossoms, the tragedy of being no longer human. Trying not to think. Indomitable thoughts.

Aug 28, 16

* Also on my blog.

João Carlos says

Osamu Dazai (1909 - 1948)

“**Não-Humano**” é um romance escrito pelo japonês **Osamu Dazai** (1909 - 1948) publicado originalmente em 1948.

O texto da contracapa interior da edição da “Cavalo de Ferro” refere que: “**Osamu Dazai é considerado um dos mais importantes escritores japoneses do século XX. De origens aristocráticas, mas de espírito rebelde, dedicou-se à actividade política, ingressando em movimentos de esquerda, sem nunca porém conseguir integrar-se ou partilhar plenamente dos seus ideais. Atingido por uma profunda crise existencial, abandona os estudos, dedicando-se à escrita e caindo numa dependência sempre crescente de álcool e estupefacientes... Após diversas tentativas de suicídio, morre afogando-se no rio Tamagawa.**”

“**Não-Humano**” é um romance narrado na primeira pessoa por Yozo, que contém vários elementos que indiciam a vertente autobiográfica da narrativa, na forma de Cadernos de Memórias, com um Prólogo e um Epílogo, por um homem perturbado “**A minha vida tem sido vergonhosa. Não consigo sequer imaginar como deve ser viver como um ser humano.**” (Pág. 9), um fracassado, incapaz de compreender os seres humanos - “**Sempre tremi com medo dos humanos. Inapto como era em sentir uma ínfima porção de confiança na minha habilidade para falar e actuar como um ser humano, mantive as minhas agonias encerradas no peito. Conservei a minha melancolia e a agitação cuidadosamente escondidas, com**

medo de que algum traço fosse exposto. Fingia um optimismo inocente; gradualmente, aperfeiçoei-me no papel de cómico excêntrico.” (Pág. 14) – medos e vergonhas que o perseguem na infância e que se vão acentuando com a juventude e a idade adulta.

Yozo “assume” a figura de “palhaço” como forma de estabelecer relações pessoais, tentando desesperadamente mascarar a sua alienação, que se vai transmutando na juventude, com as inúmeras parceiras sexuais, com a dependência do álcool e o vício da morfina, sem nunca conseguir estabelecer relacionamentos emocionais consistentes e duradouros.

”Não-Humano” é um livro cruel, sombrio, sem sentimentalismo, repleto de traumas e memórias dolorosas, assombrado pelo desespero e pela paranóia, revelando a fragilidade das relações humanas, as suas inseguranças e fraquezas...

Yann says

Le titre de ce roman de Osamu Dazai, un auteur japonais de la première moitié du XXème siècle, résume parfaitement son intrigue : celle d’un narrateur qui, quoique issu d’un milieu privilégié, va de Charybde en Scylla, entraîné sur la mauvaise pente par une nature singulièrement pusillanime, résignée, et sous l’empire de stupéfiants de plus en plus violents. Mais il semble que ce roman soit une sorte d’autobiographie, dans la mesure où presque toutes les circonstances relatées dans le roman concordent avec ceux de sa propre vie. Ce roman prend donc à la fois l’aspect d’une confession et d’une introspection, authentique et sincère, qui n’est pas sans rappeler l’œuvre de Dostoïevski.

Le narrateur se signale dès l’enfance par la difficulté de communiquer sincèrement avec autrui, par crainte du conflit, et se réfugie derrière le masque d’une gaîté fausse et affectée, pour apaiser les conflits éventuels. Sa sensibilité le poussait à embrasser une carrière artistique, mais sa famille ne l’entend pas ainsi. Devenu étudiant, il quitte l’école pour fréquenter le monde flottant des artistes, et se retrouver peu à peu attiré par les marges de la société, le communisme, le crime, le monde de la nuit. Sans égard pour les devoirs que l’on attendrait de lui, il dilapide sa fortune, tente de se suicider, et ne vit plus que par la charité de femmes qui le prennent sous son aile cet être à la dérive, comme un bateau ivre, tandis qu’il s’abîme de plus en plus dans les eaux profondes et troubles des paradis artificiels.

Ce roman m’a semblé illustrer l’importance de pouvoir affirmer notre vraie nature sur le monde, y imprimer notre volonté, et non pas toujours nous modeler suivant les circonstances, les impératifs, les déterminismes, la tradition, les désirs de notre entourage. C’est une critique de la société traditionnelle, qui certes protège l’individu en l’inscrivant dans un cadre rassurant, mais aussi l’étouffe et l’exclue s’il ne se conforme pas à ce qu’on attend de lui, en lui refusant estime, confiance et reconnaissance. En effet, en mettant la bride à nos passions, en se conformant à une place déterminée, en niant notre nature authentique et véritable, on perd peu à peu le goût de la vie, puis l’estime de soi, puis le souci de son prochain. Une lecture sombre et poignante, mais aussi un vibrant plaidoyer pour l’individualisme, la liberté et la tolérance.

Sohaib says

I really enjoyed this book. Couldn't put it down today and read most of it in one sitting.

I've come to sympathize with Yozo, the narrator, a twenty-something haunted by his feelings of inadequacy since childhood—or the feelings of being "disqualified as a human being" as the original title in Japanese suggests.

Yozo had an aristocratic upbringing. Servants catered to his every need. Mother and father, naturally, were distant. After being "violated" by the servants, and being unable to tell anyone—the event is largely suppressed in the narrative since Yozo himself mentions it passingly as "that loathsome crime perpetrated on me by the servants"—he develops a crippling fear of people and a staggering inability to voice his wants and needs. He carries this wound into young adulthood where a series of misfortunate relationships and a drinking/drug addiction bring about his psychological demise.

The pinnacle of his descent, in my opinion, is when he writes a letter to his father asking for help. Yozo takes his father's unresponsiveness as a clear-cut evidence of his unworthiness and thus confirming his unconscious childhood belief and shame.

Recommended for people who have hearts.

Magdalen says

This novel was utterly perfect and so masterfully written. The prose is one of the most charming I've come across and I absolutely loved it. It's one of those books which I wish I had a printed copy so that I could smell and underline mostly everything, write comments next to paragraphs etc. Unfortunately, I cannot and that makes me sad.

Hadn't I watched Bungo stray dogs and hadn't I identified as Osamu Dazai and hadn't I loved this character so much I would probably not have read this book soon enough. I actually feel grateful and "safe" that I read it now and not a few months back because I would have been wrecked. I still feel like crying, and my heart still feels heavy, but yeah....

If you can relate to Yozo you're going to love it and if you don't you can appreciate the excellent writing or its awesome quotes...

It's a brilliant novel, that's worthy of your time.
