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**Itō Junji and Dazai Osamu: The Face and the
Tongue of Horror in *Ningen Shikkaku***

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Abstract

The growth in popularity of the horror genre in the past few decades has coincided with the birth and rise of the reader-oriented approach to analyzing literature, allowing the scholars of horror literature to uncover the mechanisms of fear that works of horror employ to affect their readers. This coinciding allows and provides the necessary methodological and theoretical tools for the broadening of the concept of “horror” as defined by the effects various literary pieces have on their readers, rather than purely the preliminary assignment of the genre to certain works of literature. This paper takes advantage of this circumstance and discusses a classic Japanese novel from 1948 by the famous writer Dazai Osamu titled *Ningen Shikkaku* (*No Longer Human*) from the perspective of the reader, identifying and analyzing the horror elements of the novel. The 2017-2018 horror manga (Japanese comic book) adaptation by Itō Junji is also analyzed in comparison to the original novel from the same perspective. No other analyses of *Ningen Shikkaku* as a work of horror with the employment of the reader-centric approach have been previously conducted, and as such this thesis provides a fresh perspective on this classic text and the potential reasons behind its persistent popularity and relevance even in the modern day. The analysis employs the cognitive approach to literary analysis, the theory of abjection by Julia Kristeva and various works on horror theory and history as its theoretical and methodological basis. As a result of the analysis conducted, the following core elements of horror that affect the reader have been identified in the novel: the “adornment” (“framing”) of the novel with its unique perspective shift; the defamiliarization of the reader with the normal world; the performative “buffoonery” of the protagonist of the novel; the dehumanization of humans and himself by the protagonist; the unique attitudes of the protagonist towards women in his life and in general. These elements that we were able to identify within the novel provide a unique perspective on the novel that goes beyond its assigned position as an intellectual classic. The result of the analysis demonstrates the ability of the cognitive reader-centric approach to literary analysis to go beyond the constraints of genre and analyze literature in terms of its effects on the reader, uncovering the reasons behind the popularity and influence of certain literary works. Lastly, the analysis also showcases the versatility and the multi-faceted nature of horror, which can be present both in the popular, more traditional horror fiction, and the classics of “high” literature otherwise not assigned to the horror genre formally.

Introduction

Were it not for fear, death would go unlamented.

Vicar Amelia in Bloodborne (Miyazaki Hidetaka, 2015)

The Horror Begins

The most influential horror mastermind of the 20th century Howard Phillips Lovecraft famously declared fear to be “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind” way back in 1938 (1973, 11). Indeed, the evolution of our species, the *Homo sapiens*, has toiled hard throughout millions of years to make us capable of recognizing danger and protecting our undeniably fragile bodies from whatever might threaten them, be that in a physical or psychological way. From the queer ways the shadows dance on the cave walls and the roar of thunder outside the ancient human’s cave, to the Gothic ghost stories and spiritual séances in the dim candlelight of Victorian mansions, to the spine-chilling dystopian imaginations of the sci-fi future in modern video games, *fear* has always accompanied humankind in infinity of ways.

Such a companion to our psyche could not have just been a silent presence throughout all these innumerable years of uncountable dangers. Just like the feeling of love has had a profound influence on, and, as a result, a persistent presence in all kinds of human art, the ever-strong feeling of fear has left its terrifying imprint on the human culture as well. It comes as no surprise then that fear has brought to life an independent, unique genre of fiction which is built upon and aimed at evoking the feeling of fear – *horror*.

Notoriously hard to be put in an exhaustive definition, horror is best described as an *affectively defined genre* (Clasen 2017, 11). In other words, the main appeal of horror is its ability to scare its audience in one way or another. Here it must be noted that attaching the tag of “genre” to horror in this thesis is nothing more than a tool of convenience: while calling horror an emotion (Winter 1988, cited in Clasen, 2017, 11) or using a different metaphor for the undeniably complex concept of horror is taunting, here the term “genre” helps avoiding ambiguity and lack of precision in terminology. Yet before we proceed, I would like to emphasize that this work agrees with Jess Nevins in that “if reader-response theory has taught us anything, it’s that the reader’s interpretation of a work, and not the author’s intentions in writing the work, are of primary importance”, as well as with Jacques Derrida and Avital Ronell in that “every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging” (2020, 15-16). As such, it is important to keep in mind as we move further that none of the works discussed in this thesis strictly belong *solely* to the horror genre, and nothing else: the horrifying qualities of

these works are what make them adjacent to horror through the *reader's experience with the text*, not the arbitrary ascription of genre.

The present thesis analyzes the famous 1948 novel *Ningen Shikkaku (No Longer Human)* by Dazai Osamu from this very perspective of the reader's experience with it. The focus of the analysis falls specifically on the multifaceted and complex experiences of horror that the reader is likely to experience when reading the text. The 2017-2018 horror manga adaptation of the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel by the horror mangaka Itō Junji is used in comparative analysis with the original text to highlight the variety of horror experiences the reader can have with the same narrative that is presented in different forms, purely textual and visual-textual in our case. The main goal of this analysis is to show on practice how the perspective of the reader and their experience with works of literature can be extremely useful when discussing texts beyond the boundaries of their assigned genres, especially when it comes to highly affective experiences of horror. We discuss the elements of the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel and manga that are effective in invoking horror in the reader and why they have this effect in order to achieve the main goals of the thesis.

This text does not have a very particular reader as its desired audience. Horror is a genre which has seen a truly fascinating rise in popularity ever since the 1970s, and it surrounds all of us even when we are not actively trying to seek it out. I would go even further than that and say that things we do not really call "horror" are quite often no less terrifying than the works brandishing their scariness on the movie posters and book covers. I hope that this thesis finds a way to open something new to anyone who encounters it, be that an avid horror lover, a Japanese literature enthusiast, or someone who decided to give it a read out of idle curiosity. After all, I argue that horror is a thing more widespread and much less niche than we tend to think, and aiming this text at only a few categories of reader would contradict the very core point of my analysis.

The Horrors at Hand

Many ascribe the rise of horror to the so-called Gothic literature, which proliferated during the period from roughly 1790 to 1830 (Clasen 2017, 9) and all the way up to the early 20th century, giving the world such undying classics as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and Edgar Allan Poe's poetry, *The Raven* chief among all his works (1845). However, it would be incorrect to assume that the horror tradition is the monopoly of the Western fiction: ghost stories and terrifying tales of monsters and demons have existed in all

cultures throughout the history and all over the world. Although regionally specific fears exist in different corners of the world and are not shared by members of different climactic and environmental areas, near-universal fears of predatory animals, hostile human beings, dangerous reptiles and insects, losing one's social status and becoming marginalized in one's community, environmental hazards and dangerous weather conditions are shared by all groups of people in the world (Clasen 2017, 35-36).

Needless to say, numerous horror creators of the world have been inspired by the famous Western works of horror, but lots of horror masterpieces that have amassed international fanbases come from countries outside of Europe and the US. Japan has been especially prolific in its horror production, with movies such as *Ring* (Nakata Hideo, 1998) and *Audition* (Miike Takashi, 1999) occupying honorary places in many lists of the scariest movies of all time, and video game series *Silent Hill* (Konami, 1999-2012) and *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996-2021) still not losing their grip on the gamers all over the world. Equally as prominent in the realm of the Japanese *manga* comics is Itō Junji with his iconic creations *Tomie* and *Uzumaki*. *Tomie*, published in 1987, has granted Itō an Umezu Kazuo prize – an artistic prize named after Umezu Kazuo, “the Stephen King of manga” (Nevins 2020, 127). According to Itō himself, the “father of horror” H.P. Lovecraft, who we mentioned before, became one of his primary influences and inspirations. Itō does not shy away from and creates a lot of *body horror*, “almost gleefully showing the ways in which the human body can be distorted or violated” (Nevins 2020, 213). Itō's work has gained popularity among the domestic audiences and all over the world: *Uzumaki* received a film adaptation in 2000, and the making of the anime version in the USA was announced in 2019, with the progress being regularly reported on the anime's official Twitter page¹. In addition to that, Itō created a manga adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for which he became a winner of the Will Eisner Comic Book Awards in 2019 in the category “Best Adaptation From Another Medium”².

In this Master's thesis I am discussing another manga adaptation by Itō: *Ningen Shikkaku* (2017-2018), or *No Longer Human*, originally a novel by one of the most famous 20th-century Japanese authors Dazai Osamu, back-to-back with the original novel itself (1948).

¹ <https://twitter.com/UzumakiAnime1/status/1404876420682186752> (Retrieved 28.12.2021)

² <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lifestyle/arts/2019-eisner-awards-complete-winners-list-1225835/> (Retrieved 29.12.2021)



Fig.1. The front cover of the first volume of Itō Junji's manga adaptation of *Ningen Shikkaku*. Copyright © Shōgakukan, 2017. All rights reserved. Used with the permission of Kabushiki gaisha Shōgakukan.

The choice of the reference material by Itō might seem puzzling at first glance: the novel has nothing to do with the horror genre; it is never mentioned in the lists of Japanese horror classics alongside such horror creators as Edogawa Rampo, Shigeru Mizuki, and Umezumi Kazuo; the novel is without any doubts a part of the “high art” literature (*jun bungaku*, “pure literature”), not horror, which is still to this day commonly considered to be of lesser quality and scholarly interest. However, following my agreement with Mathias Clasen and Jess Nevins in that horror is defined not by the belonging of works of art to a certain genre but by the reaction of the audience, I am arguing that the original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel and its manga adaptation are excellent examples of the manifold nature of horror.

One may say that we need not look any further than the horror conventions to understand what horror is: a haunted house and the unaware new owners, the last survivor in the slasher movies, the so-called “jump-scars” in horror video games. At the first glance, such an explanation might suffice; and yet, as we think broader about all the pieces of media which have been deemed “terrifying”, we often find unexpected examples of what has brought to the audience the emotion that is horror (Winter in Clasen, 1988, 11). I believe that the variety in the universal and near-universal fears of the humanity is the key to understanding the versatility of horror: scary media are not exclusively about monsters and gore, spooky ghosts and serial killers, but can appeal to more complex fears which have to do very often with the ways we are socialized into our societies, as well as the ways we perceive and judge ourselves and the

others. Even in the horror pieces well-known for their quite cliché horror appeals on the purely biological response level, the overall “scariness” is often achieved by combining the primitive bodily and complex higher-cognitive fears. With this understanding of the horror genre in mind, the original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel becomes an example of the unexpected and the unconventional within the horror genre, and the manga adaptation by Itō Junji, in contrast, exemplifies the more conventional side of horror despite being based on the novel.

It is curious to note here – since the present thesis deals with two Japanese texts – that Japanese horror is historically divided into two kinds, *kaiki* (怪奇, grotesque) and *kyōfu* (恐怖, fear), both stemming from the traditional ghost stories, *kaidan* (怪談), and both in a way corresponding to the conventional and unconventional horror directions mentioned earlier. While there is much disagreement as to what exactly each category covers, especially when it comes to J-horror in cinema (Crandol 2021, 30-31), the currently accepted delineation shows us that *kaiki* covers everything we stereotypically associate with horror, such as monsters, demons, and gore, while *kyōfu* “denotes suspense thrillers in the vein of [Hitchcock’s] *Psycho*” (Crandol 2021, 31). In other words, *kaiki* appeals to the fears associated with bodily harm and the supernatural, while *kyōfu* terrifies in more mundane ways, oftentimes playing out plausible real-life scenarios. When it comes to the Japanese *manga*, these two horror categories have been merged by Umezu Kazuo, the most prominent horror *mangaka* of the 1960s (Nevins 2020, 212), and now many contemporary horror manga creators of Japan – Itō Junji chief among them – work within a much broader genre, where the supernatural and the mundane are combined, and where the terrifying disgust of body horror and disfigured monsters goes hand-in-hand with the existential dread, fear for the future, fear of the other, and many, many other forms of culturally and societally conditioned fears. This is, as we will see in the analysis part of this thesis, precisely why for Itō Dazai’s *Ningen Shikkaku* became attractive material for an adaptation: mixing *kaiki* and *kyōfu*, blurring the lines between the two and extending beyond them is becoming more and more common.

In case of this thesis and its goals, it is most profitable to employ what Mathis Clasen calls the *biocultural* way of approaching horror, without ignoring the “biological underpinnings” of this complex genre (Clasen 2017, 13). The principles behind this approach which takes into consideration first and foremost the ways reader (in our case, me as the reader conducting the analysis) experiences works of horror (and literary narratives in general) lay the groundwork for the entirety of the analysis in this thesis. The collection of methodological tools

and theoretical ideas is discussed in the corresponding chapter, where light is shed on their interplay and certain details about them that have been omitted or emphasized.

The Main Goals of the Thesis

By following closely the reader's experience with the texts of the original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel and its manga adaptation and comparing the ways these two works employ elements of horror to evoke fear, I intend to demonstrate how the same narrative presented by two different media affects the readers in their own specific ways based both on the reader's biological reactions and their socio-cultural background. In other words, I wanted to answer the questions of what and how makes the two works *effective as works of horror* – one explicitly belonging to the genre, and the other lying outside of it – from the practical perspective of the reader, which is the most relevant one when it comes to horror. I am also arguing that the horror qualities of the original novel are extremely effective in evoking strong negative emotions associated with horror in the reader, an important characteristic of this text that keeps captivating new readers to this day. By identifying and illustrating with concrete examples from the analyzed texts the core elements of horror that these texts provide to the readers, I intended to showcase both *the flexibility of the horror genre* and its *deeply affective nature*. Additionally, I intended to find a plausible explanation of the persisting popularity of the original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel and Dazai Osamu as its author in contemporary times through the effectiveness of the novel's horror elements.

Following the latest trends in literary research and in horror studies which draw heavily from neuroscience and cognitive psychology, I chose to employ the methods of cognitive literary approach in order to achieve my goal. In the following section, I introduce Dazai and the necessary background about his life and work, as well as the brief overview of the plot of *Ningen Shikkaku*, before I move on to the “how” of this thesis: the specifics of the methods of the biocultural approach, and the necessary theoretical points of consideration and reference in this thesis.

Dazai Osamu: “I Am Sorry for Ever Having Been Born”

Dazai Osamu (born Tsushima Shūji, 1909-1948) was born into an affluent Tsushima family living in the Tsugaru region of the Aomori prefecture. Dazai lived a life full of guilt and conflicting feelings related to his background as a member of a rich family, which led to his involvement with the underground communist movements, illegal in Japan at the time. Dazai's direct affiliation with the upper class of the Japanese society through his family became one of

the central points for the complicated feelings of guilt and shame both in his personal life and his writings. Driven by the guilt for his inborn privilege as a son of a rich family, Dazai participated in illegal communist activities – something that he brings up many times in his works, *Ningen Shikkaku* included.

This important motif in Dazai's works was aptly referred to as “the consciousness of guilt” (*tsumi no ishiki*) by one of the most prominent biographers and researchers of Dazai's life, Okuno Takeo, borrowing Dazai's this expression from Dazai himself (Okuno 1984, 62). This “consciousness of guilt” was processed and reflected upon by Dazai through his writing, giving the author a way to cope with the trauma and difficulties of his life, from finding it nigh on impossible to fit in with the society he belonged to, to the most extreme events such as his multiple suicide attempts.

Due to this tendency for introspection, confessional style of writing and the ever-present desire to self-reflect, Dazai is commonly named among the authors of the *watakushi shōsetsu/shishōsetsu* (私小説) genre, the “I-novel”. This genre, the birth of which is attributed to Tayama Katai and his 1907 novel *Futon*, is used to refer to “stories in which the first-person narrator or the third-person narrative perspective is clearly identifiable with the author” (Lyons 1985, 7). Dazai's writing, be it explicitly autobiographical or more obscurely self-referential, is exactly that – clearly identifiable with Dazai himself.

It comes as no surprise then that Dazai's presence in his writings is simply not possible to dismiss. Itō Hiromi drives this point home in a remarkably astute way in her essay “Dazai Osamu the honorary poet” (*Meiyo-shijin to shite no Dazai Osamu*): she changes the phrase *sansen soumoku shitsuu busshō* (山川草木悉有仏性, “all in the existence around us harbors the Buddha”) to *sansen soumoku shitsuu Dazai Osamu*: “Dazai Osamu is present in everything in existence” when it comes to his works (Itō 2019, 19-20; Dorichenko 2021). These facts about Dazai Osamu are crucial to proceeding with the analysis of *Ningen Shikkaku*, a famously autobiographical novel where Dazai – just like Buddha – is residing within everything and all (Dorichenko 2021).

Okuno Takeo poetically describes *Ningen Shikkaku* by borrowing Dazai's own words: “The last remaining shot of absinthe. This is how this never-ending feeling of loss, impossible to be made up for, quietly took shape in my mind”... [For Dazai] writing *Ningen Shikkaku* meant drinking up this “last remaining shot of absinthe³” (1984, 155). The last and most well-

³ 「飲み残した一杯のアブサン。自分は、その永遠に償い難いような喪失感を、こっそりそう形容していました。（中略）「人間失格」を書くことこそ、彼にとって「飲み残した一杯のアブサン」を飲

known work of Dazai's late period of life (*kōki*, 後期), *Ningen Shikkaku* became the deepest, most introspective work in the author's oeuvre, where Dazai contemplates his endless inability to fit into the world of humans, the feelings of alienation and guilt, the fear before the corruption and filth that surrounds the human existence.

The text of the novel follows Ōba Yōzō, a character already present in Dazai's earlier work *Dōke no hana* (*Flowers of Buffoonery*, 1935). Yōzō's story is presented in the form of his own writings, his diary consisting of three parts (*shuki*, 手記), framed by the preface (*hashigaki*, はしがき) and postscript (*atogaki*, あとがき) which are narrated by a person different to Yōzō. The "framing" is letting the reader in on how the narrator of the preface and postscript came to possess Yōzō's journals and three photos of Yōzō at different points in his life, roughly corresponding to the three parts of the diary. In many ways the novel refers to the events from Dazai's own life, such as his childhood in an affluent household, the difficult relationship with his family, the involvement with the Japanese communist underground and the subsequent feelings of guilt for leaving it, tuberculosis and the consequent morphine addiction, complicated relationship with the Christian faith, as well as multiple suicide attempts with Dazai's female lovers. It is universally agreed among the Dazai scholars that Dazai is present in the novel first and foremost as Yōzō, as well as the narrator of the "adornment" (the introductory and final parts of the novel), providing a uniquely intimate view of one person's inner sufferings and hardships.

Ningen Shikkaku remains the most well-known work by Dazai Osamu to this day and does not lose its appeal even for the younger generations, and Dazai himself has a recurring presence in Japanese popular culture. One of the most striking examples of this presence would be the critically acclaimed manga and anime series *Bungo Stray Dogs* (*Bungō Sutorei Doggusu*, 文豪ストレイドッグス; 2012–) by Asagiri Kafka and Harukawa Sango featuring Dazai as one of the main characters of the story in the role of a detective alongside other famous literary figures, such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Kunikida Doppo, Yosano Akiko, Tanizaki Junichirō, and others. Notably, in this series Dazai is given a supernatural ability promptly titled *Ningen Shikkaku*, and his notorious suicidal tendencies often become a source of comedy both in the

み乾すことであつたのです。(All translations from here on are provided by the author of the thesis, unless specified otherwise.)

series and among the fan community⁴. Both the anime series and the manga are on-going, and a live action movie based on the series is currently in the works⁵.

Bungo Stray Dogs, however popular, is far from being the only presence of Dazai in the contemporary Japanese art world. *Ningen Shikkaku* was adapted as part of the 2009 anime series *Blue Literature Series* (*Aoi Bungaku Shirīzu*, 青い文学シリーズ) alongside one more of Dazai's famous works, *Run, Melos!* (*Hashire Merosu*, 走れメロス, 1940). Dramatic readings of Dazai's works were performed by the Japanese *seiyū* – voice actor – Saitō Sōma in 2018 as part of the collection of the readings of Japanese classics *Three Loves and Three Murders* (*Mittsu no Ai to, Satsujin*, 三つの愛と、殺人⁶). Theatrical performances of Dazai's *Good-bye* (*Guddobai*, グッド・バイ, 1948) were staged by the playwright and director Yamazaki Akira in 2018. Both Saitō and Yamazaki gave interviews sharing their inspirations and experiences with Dazai's works in the memorial collection of interviews and essays dedicated to Dazai's 110th birthday in 2019 titled *The Eternal Dazai Osamu* (*Eien no Dazai Osamu*, 永遠の太宰治). There is no way to deny that Dazai's legacy is very much alive and well till this day, and investigating the reasons for the popularity of *Ningen Shikkaku* in particular became one of the primary goals of the present thesis.

The last thing I would like to mention in this section dedicated to Dazai is related to the way his autobiographical tendencies were treated in the analysis of his work. It is very important to keep in mind that I did not completely dismiss Dazai's presence as an author when it comes to the horror-related effects of his writing, as Jess Nevins proposes it to be the right choice when discussing horror (2020, 15-16), Dazai's presence in *Ningen Shikkaku* is a crucial point of consideration due to the autobiographical character of his writing; moreover, I believe it possible to trace the hints and traces of the intent to invoke fear in the reader within the text of the novel itself. What this means practically for the analysis conducted in this thesis is that it will take into consideration the historical context of the text in the form of the life facts and circumstances of its author which might have influenced his writing choices, opening the possibility for a broader discussion of the works in question without the borders of the reader's body and mind keeping us from straying into the outer world when needed.

⁴ One of the most popular fan creations dedicated to Dazai from *Bungo Stray Dogs* is the so-called “Suicide Song” by the YouTuber Sakisayaka which amassed almost 1,5 million views from 2020: <https://youtu.be/S-RaS6FYOSI>.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/kafkaasagiri/status/1236272348006723584> (Retrieved 02.01.2022)

⁶ <https://theatertainment.jp/japanese-play/14981/> (Retrieved 02.01.2022)

The Terrifying Focus: Theoretical and Methodological Basis

The present Master's thesis is an exercise in applying the approaches offered by these new affect-oriented directions to the works of horror – in its broadest, most flexible form. Let us glance through the collection of methods and theoretical approaches used in concord in this thesis: **the cognitive approach to literary studies, the psychoanalytical theory of abjection by Julia Kristeva, and the cognitive approach to comic books and graphic novels.**

Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection

A purely cultural approach to horror has been governing the horror studies for several decades, going hand in hand with the symptomatic, dissective approach of the critical theory, dismissing the fundamental biological mechanisms behind the brain's response to the scary and the terrifying. Even though Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist social theory have been of immense importance to the evolution of horror studies, the necessity to build the entirety of horror analysis on “an a priori acceptance of a whole string of dubious Freudian assumptions” has significantly undermined the legitimacy of such an approach (Tudor 1997 in Clasen, and Clasen, 2017, 16).

Nevertheless, it would be unwise to deny the importance of consideration of the approaches that now are looked upon by many as obsolete and downright un-scientific. To simply brush off, for example, the stage of Freudian psychoanalysis and its place in the evolution of literary studies would mean to disregard certain points crucial to, among other things, the horror studies, especially when it comes to the horrors of femininity commonly present in horror media, as described by Barbara Creed in her famous work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (2015). In the specific case of this thesis, one of the theories rooted in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis has proven to be particularly useful and interesting in helping to identify the complex nature of a certain kind of human fear: *abjection*, as introduced by the French-Bulgarian feminist and psychoanalytical thinker Julia Kristeva in her 1981 work *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection (Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection)*.

Here, the very concept of the abject itself is what proved useful to the analysis conducted in the present thesis. The abject is something both repulses and attracts at the same time, crossing the boundaries of normality, as such “threatening the order of things” (Kristeva 1982, 1). As an example of the abject Kristeva proposes the corpse (cadaver), which she sees as “the utmost of abjection”, “seen without God and outside of science”, seen as the cadaver is a vessel for death itself, something that humans “thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva 1982, 3-4). The

abject, however, is not the corpse itself, but rather *the experience of the repugnance and transfixion associated with it*, thus making abjection a diachronic performative act rather than a static, synchronic one-time occurrence (Thea Harrington goes as far as to describe the entirety of *Powers of Horror* as a performative text that involves both the author and the reader and requires one to “create/perform” the “ruptures” of which Kristeva’s text speaks in order to engage with it and its theory and language fully (Harrington 1998, 139; Dorichenko 2020)). The primary function of abjection Kristeva views in the bilateral function of endangering the individual and protecting them at the same time (Arya 2017, 50; Dorichenko 2020). Additionally, Julia Kristeva views abjection as an experience which human beings become capable of very early on in their lives. She believes that the “fear and object are linked” from the very start (Kristeva 1982, 32-33), implying that the processes associated with fear, which later on in one’s life lead to the possibility to experience abjection, precede other earliest processes of human psyche’s development in young children, as such occupying an important part in the human life almost from the very beginning. Both the experiential character of abjection and its inherent quality make it fit perfectly into Marco Caracciolo’s *experiential background* of every human being – a concept central to the cognitive approach employed in this thesis, and discussed in detail in the following section of this methodology chapter.

In the present thesis, the concept of abjection is used to describe the very specific process of the reader’s (or, more generally speaking, audience’s) interaction with works of horror: the curious *combination of intense fear and disgust with the morbid curiosity and fascination*. While the concept of abjection itself is undeniably useful in explaining the complex and often seemingly paradoxical ways we feel about horror, it must be noted here that the present thesis does not take the entirety of abjection theory’s psychoanalytical background as pure objective truth. Freud’s psychoanalysis, while undeniably important to the evolution of literary theory in particular, has been proven time and time again to be lacking in many ways, is not accepted at face value in this analysis. Therefore, abjection is only useful in the present analysis as a concept in and of its own, not a part of psychoanalysis. However, the direct ties between abjection and the disgust associated with the feminine have proven very useful to the discussion of Itō Junji’s manga, where the horror of femininity is argued to be one of the primary sources of fear in the entirety of manga.

The Cognitive Approach to Literary Studies

The rise in cognitive science and cognitive psychology has certainly changed not only the direction of the horror research in its niche, but literary studies in general, bringing more

attention to the processes of perception of literature by the readers on the bodily level, as opposed to purely intellectual. When looked upon from the perspective of *the cognitive approach*, the body is “always continuous with the ‘mind’ and *its* ecologies: thoughts and ideas are functions of a biological substratum, not of a computer-like logic” (Cave 2016, 2). This means that we do not merely process the narratives we interact with like machines, running the information through the processor of our mind and leaving no room for instinct, feeling, and reflex, but with all our bodily systems in combination with our intellectual and social backgrounds. And what better way to demonstrate the preciseness of this perspective than with the example of horror fiction, which is aimed first and foremost at evoking fear, “the prototypical negative emotion and a true human universal”? (Brown 1991 and Ekman 2005, cited in Clasen, 2017, 27). When speaking of horror, the point of view of the reader or the viewer and their primal emotional and bodily responses is simply impossible to omit; to do that would mean to dismiss the very reason horror exists in the first place.

As the reader’s experience with and the perception of the texts discussed are ones of the primary foci of the future thesis, I employed the *cognitive approach to literary studies*, particularly in light of its usefulness when illustrating the affective nature of horror. The experiences of the reader connected to the bodily responses to the narratives perceived are discussed with the regard to the idea that we experience literature *both with our minds and our bodies*. Within the theoretical framework of cognitive literary studies, it is possible to trace the patterns in literary texts that are perceived by the human brain in similar ways, creating a sense of “connectedness” for literary works as their hallmark (Cave 2016, 20). According to the cognitive approach, the common processes of cognition are possible to be discussed on several levels for the absolute majority of readers: bodily-perceptual, emotional, higher-order cognitive, socio-cultural (Caracciolo 2014, 70), all in relation to particular texts in question. Marco Caracciolo explains the need for the regard towards these levels of cognition in the cognitive analysis with the fact that “[t]he experience and experientiality of narrative lie in the dynamic relation between the familiar experiences on which it draws and reactions it provokes” (2014, 65). These levels of cognition are called *the experiential background*, and they lay the basis for the way the analysis was done in the present thesis.

The analysis in my thesis was primarily based on the theoretical works by Terence Cave (*Thinking With Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (2016)) and Marco Caracciolo (*The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach* (2014)). Through the employment of the cognitive approach I linked the objects and processes of abjection and disgust to the aforementioned levels of experiential background of the reader, which all play their roles

during the processing of narratives by the reader, especially the highly affective horror-related ones.

Speaking of the method of analysis that is related to the cognitive approach and is used in the present thesis, Terrence Cave describes it as "...slow-motion analysis [that] is something like a classic 'close reading', except it uses a different perspective and a critically different vocabulary" (2016, 40). This kind of analysis "brings into focus details that might otherwise have remained peripheral and draws attention to responses that are usually taken for granted" (Cave 2016, 41), which is of course referring to the corporeal reactions and perceptions of the texts by the reader. Even though we cannot smell the scents, see the images, feel the sensations described in the texts with words, our cognitive abilities and the capabilities for bodily perception allow us to relate to and actively engage with all of these body-related experiences because of their relevance to our experiential backgrounds.

Reading Comics Cognitively: Cognitive Approach to Comic Books

Seeing as the present thesis discusses not only the original text of the novel *Ningen Shikkaku*, but also its manga adaptation, it was necessary to find appropriate theoretical and methodological tools suited to tackle comic books as an artistic medium with its own specific features, for which the purely literature-oriented cognitive approach was not sufficient due to its (understandable) lack of regard towards the visual side of this medium. Still, wanting to stay close to the chosen primary approach in my analysis, I decided to go with the *cognitive approach to studying comics* as proposed mainly by Karin Kukkonen, whose works on cognitive readings of comic books (*Studying Comics and Graphic Novels* (2013) and *Contemporary Comics Storytelling* (2013)) provide the much needed broadening of the cognitivist approach specifically aimed at comic books.

Even though, as the name of the approach suggests, the cognitive approach to comic book and graphic novel analysis greatly builds upon the cognitive approach to analyzing literature, it has certain distinctive features that are important to outline here.

Firstly, I would like to use Karin Kukkonen's own words to demonstrate how the cognitive-oriented way to analyze comic books is different from the semiotic, or sign-oriented, approach that Umberto Eco employed in his works. Seen as the visual medium is commonly analyzed by breaking down and discussing the signs as its core part, the distinction proposed by Kukkonen is crucial to show and understand.

Eco looks for codes, that is, conventionalized signs that we can read because we know, from our cultural context, what they mean. I look for clues, that is, elements on the page that prompt readers to draw particular inferences which, in turn, can be based on our cultural knowledge or psychological capacities. Eco focuses on how this comic (primarily) reproduces and modifies cultural conventions to tell its story. I propose to focus (primarily) on how it engages readers' everyday cognitive capacities for making sense of the world. (2013, 13)

Needless to say, the manga differs from the original novel primarily because it's a piece of visual media, not a purely textual creation. It is therefore important when discussing the manga to take into account the ways in which the visual components are perceived, and how those combine with the textual ones. It follows from Kukkonen's explanation above that she is not interested in the "cultural conventions" that can be uncovered by dissecting the text of a comic book, but rather in how our inborn, natural cognitive abilities help us pick up on the visual clues (more or less) universally recognized by the human brain. This is the kind of approach I employed in my own analysis of Itō Junji's manga.

The depictions of human faces and their expressions, the visual representations of movement and motion (such as the "speed lines" in comics), the implications of the "missing" panels which are then substituted by our brains producing "phantom panels" which tie the events of the comic together (Kukkonen 2013, 21-22) are all specific to comic books (and manga as a part of them) and are very possible to analyze through the cognitive approach discussed above (Dorichenko 2021).

Chapter 1: The "Adornment" of the *Ningen Shikkaku* Novel and Manga as Instruments of Horror

1.1. Chapter Outline

When opening *Ningen Shikkaku* for the first one, the reader encounters a narrator who only stays to tell their short story for a handful of pages, only to return in the very end for an even briefer closing chapter. These two parts that "frame" the main text of the novel are titled *hashigaki* (はしがき) and *atogaki* (あとがき), the preface and the postscript respectively. Andō Hiroshi uses the word *yosooi* (よそおい), *adornment*, to describe these two parts, when discussing their roles and significance in the novel (2012, 368), and in my analysis I have borrowed this particular term when referring to both parts of the novel's "framing" due to its

functional astuteness and metaphorical accuracy. In this chapter, I take a close look at the preface and postscript of *Ningen Shikkaku*, and discuss the ways these two parts of the novel provide completeness of the experience of the text to the reader. Additionally, the introductory part of the first manga volume of Itō's adaptation and the closing chapters of the third volume are analyzed here in light of their functions and significance, all in comparison to the original novel. The *adornment* of both the manga and the novel are also argued to be key components of their respective horror experiences offered to the reader.

This part of my thesis discusses how careful juxtapositions and elaborate structuring of the text of the novel by Dazai immerse the reader into the closed introspective world inside the text, and how this very immersion is achieved in an entirely different way in the manga adaptation by Itō. Here, I argue that the *adornment* of these two works makes them effective in creating a “hook” that captivates the reader with an eerie mystery or a tragic, shocking event, which lay the necessary ground for a smooth experience of the rest of the text, making the introductory and ending parts of the texts ones of the most important instruments of horror in them. Such a “hook” is necessary for creating a safe distance between the reality of the reader and the fictional world of the text, a safe distance that allows the reader to enjoy the horror of the works without having to withdraw in a self-preservation reflex. As Mathias Clason puts it, “[h]umans have an adaptive disposition to find pleasure in make-believe that allows them to experience negative emotions at high levels of intensity within a safe context. And that is what horror offers” (2017, 4). In addition to that, this chapter provides a cognitive analysis of the body-related experiences with the text of the *adornment* of the novel (facial expressions, body language, visual as opposed to textual stimuli), as well as the ones connected to the readers' common societal and cultural experiential backgrounds (such as the notion of privacy).

In terms of the manga, I am arguing that Itō Junji leans heavily on the reader's knowledge of Dazai Osamu's biography (especially the details of his suicide attempts and love life) in order to make the introductory and closing parts of the adaptation effective as horror. I am also arguing that Itō starts building the horror of his adaptation on the tragic events of Yōzō's family and love life by introducing the *monstrous feminine figures* (a term proposed by Barbara Creed in her 1993 work *The Monstrous-Feminine*): female characters that are ostensibly meant to be read as the sources of horror in Yōzō's life. We will come back and discuss the monstrous femininity more in a chapter dedicated to it as one of the main points of horror both in the novel and the manga adaptation.

1.2. The Language of Adornment

Hashigaki (the introduction) opens with a first-person narrator who is describing three photographs of a yet unnamed man he had come to possess – a man we very soon understand to have been Ōba Yōzo, the protagonist and the narrator of the main three parts of the novel, the three *shuki* (手記). The narrator of *hashigaki* is referring to himself with a first-person pronoun *watashi* (私), the most common first-person pronoun in the Japanese language – a small yet striking difference to Yōzō’s writing, in which he refers to himself exclusively as *jibun* (自分) outside of dialogues, a very indirect and self-reflexive first-person pronoun.

Watashi describes seeing three photographs and finding them incredibly uncanny; even the ones where Yōzō is pictured as a child and teenager make the narrator experience discomfort despite Yōzō’s conventionally good looks. Let us go through *watashi*’s experience with the photographs through the following quotes:

...in the photograph [he was] smiling in an ugly way. Ugly? Perhaps someone not especially bright (in other words, someone uninterested in aesthetics) would not even as much as bat an eye at it, and spew some halfhearted flattery: “What an adorable young boy!”⁷ (Dazai 2009, 7)

The more one looks at this kid’s smile, the more a strange eerie feeling creeps in...It is in fact not a smile at all. This boy is not smiling in the slightest. This is only proven by the way he stands with his fists tightly clenched. No human being smiles while clenching their fists⁸. (Dazai 2009, 8)

...just a white blank sheet of paper, and then a smile on it. In other words, everything about him seemed fake...But if you look at him closely, you too will realize how this handsome high school student oozes this creepy feeling, as if he’s from some *kaidan*, a ghost story⁹. (Dazai 2009, 9)

⁷〈前略〉醜く笑っている写真である。醜く？けれども、鈍い人たちに（つまり、美醜に関心を持たぬ人たちは、面白くも何とも無いような顔をして、「可愛い坊ちゃんですね。」といい加減なお世辞を言っても〈後略〉

⁸ まったく、その子の笑顔を見れば見るほど、何とも知れず、イヤな薄気味悪いものが感ぜられて来る。〈中略〉 どだい、それは、笑顔でない。この子は、少しも笑ってはいないのだ。その証拠には、この子は、両方のこぶしを固く握って立っている。人間は、こぶしを固く握りながら笑えるものではないのである。

⁹ 〈前略〉 ただ白紙一枚、そうして、笑っている。つまり、一から十まで造り物の感じなのである。〈中略〉 しかも、よく見ていると、やはりこの美貌の学生にも、どこか怪談じみた気味悪いものが感ぜられて来るのである。

The last photograph is the most uncanny one of them all. To be completely honest, I can't even quite understand how old he is in it...This time, he is not smiling. There is no expression on his face...it leaves no impression. There are no features on it...There's probably more expression and life to the so-called shadow of death on the face of someone close to dying¹⁰. (Dazai 2009, 9-10)

What unites all these descriptions? The language that *watashi* uses primarily emphasizes the *contradictory* and *eerie* appearance of the person in the photographs. It seems as if Yōzō is not quite human – *watashi* mentions that he looks like a monkey, has “a monkey’s smile” and “makes one feel like he is not human at all” despite his “odd beauty” (Dazai 2009, 8-9). *Watashi* uses very particular vocabulary in his descriptions and thoughts about the photographs: *ugly* (minikui, 醜い), *eerie/creepy* (usukimiwarui, 薄気味悪い), *monkey* (saru, 猿), *odd* (kimyō, 奇妙), *sickening* (mukamuka-saseru, ムカムカさせる), *terribly incomplete* (jyūjitsukan wa sukoshi mo nai, 充実感は少しも無い), *creepy like a creature from ghost stories* (kaidan-jimita kimiwarui mono, 怪談じみた気味悪いもの), *weird* (kikai, 奇怪), *expressionless* (hyōjyō ga nai, 表情が無い), *unpleasant* (fuyukai, 不愉快). All these words and expressions create an *uncanny valley effect* as the reader tries to imagine something that appears to be human, but in reality is not. Think of a human-like robot: it might smile and it might imitate human appearance to the last wrinkle on the face, yet there is no fluidity, no natural expression or movement to the way it operates, its expression is blank. There seem to be familiar human features there at first, but at a closer inspection we realize that we are *entirely unfamiliar* with the sort of creature that the man in the photographs is; indeed, *watashi* himself ends his introduction by saying that he “has never seen a man with a face so odd even once in [his] life” (Dazai 2009, 10). It would be more than fitting to say that such an image is inherently *abject* in the sense that Julia Kristeva puts into it: “Essentially different from “uncanniness,” more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory” (1982, 6). Just as *watashi* is bewildered at the sight of Yōzō in the three photographs, so is the reader facing an impostor, a creature masquerading as human, something unfamiliar, something unknown. This technique of *estrangement* between Yōzō’s image and the reader speaks to one of the most visceral, primordial fears of

¹⁰ もう一葉の写真は、最も奇怪なものである。まるでもう、としの頃がわからない。<中略> こんどは笑っていない。どんな表情もない。<中略> 表情が無いばかりか、印象さえ無い。特徴が無いのだ。<中略> 所謂「死相」というものにだって、もっと何か表情なり印象なりがあるものだろう<後略>

humankind promptly described by H.P. Lovecraft as “the fear of the unknown” in his fundamental work on horror *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1938). It is no coincidence here that *watashi* draws a connection to the traditional Japanese Edo-period (1603-1868) ghost stories, *kaidan*, when describing the otherworldly look of Yōzō, seen as supernatural horror is the primary source of the fear of the unknown, since it deals with things inaccessible to the common sense and rational scientific explanations.

1.3. Reading Yōzō’s Face and Body

The image of Yōzō introduced by *watashi* is ostensibly loaded with a certain level of moral judgement as well – a logical consequence of observing a person who has obviously not learned how to *be* a person properly even on such a basic level as facial expressions and body language. The reader might judge Yōzō as an abject person due to the confusion associated with the inability to “read” his face, a process taking place in our brain’s amygdalae, which is also responsible for fear. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that something unrecognizable for our basic corporeal systems of perception would at the very least cause discomfort. *Watashi* emphasizes the oddness of Yōzō’s smile and the way he clenches his fists while smiling, which on purely biological level looks off-putting and unnatural. A “face without any expression” we find to be odd as well. While the way we recognize facial expressions and body language is influenced by the particular cultures we grow up in, it has been extensively proven that many emotions displayed by the human face are universal to *Homo sapiens* (Russell 1994, 129). This means that regardless of where the reader is from and what socio-cultural background they have, it is safe to say that in most cases the off-putting character of Yōzō’s physical expressions of emotion is severely lacking in the eye of the reader, and is very likely to contribute to the overall uneasiness, fear, and disgust associated with Yōzō’s image.

1.4. Reader’s Safe Space and Trespassing

How is it possible to appear attractive and so disgustingly off-putting at the same time? How can everything about a person look fake? What mystery is there behind these three photographs, what dark secrets lurk behind the made-up smiles and the blank face that is forgotten as soon as one closes their eyes? All these questions swirl in the reader’s mind as they are introduced to Yōzō through these photographs. They do not know who this is about just yet, but the narrator of *hashigaki* is building the necessary basis for my perception of Yōzō as they move on to his own writings further. *Watashi* can be considered the voice of reason,

the direct appeal to the reader that invites to build a pre-conception of the person pictured in the three photographs. This is the “hook” between the reader’s reality, the realization that what they are reading is fiction (Andō 2012, 367-368), and the closed-off, introspective world of Yōzō’s diary. This creates the much needed safe space, the safe distance for the reader to experience the unabridged, raw “inner sanctum” of the uncanny creature that is Yōzō – a perfect set-up for a horror experience taking place inside a broken person’s mind. Thanks to *watashi*, a window is open to *anata*, “you”, the reader. A window that is otherwise closed both by the language of Yōzō’s own writings and the nature of diaries in general.

One more effect of *hashigaki* and *atogaki* is connected to a peculiar emotion experienced by the reader as they start reading the text and even more so as they finish it: the feeling of stepping on the forbidden grounds, of doing something that was not supposed to be done – reading a text that was not meant for another person’s eyes. This “break-in” on the part of the reader is born out of the common background in societal manners: we learn as we grow up that there exists such a thing as privacy, that we should not read other people’s diaries without their permission or pry too much into their personal affairs with questions. By engaging with Yōzō’s writing, we break the rules taught to us during our upbringing, albeit fictionally; this way, the mysterious and the unknown of Yōzō’s image is compounded by the adrenaline rush a child experiences as they are hiding under the blanket with a flashlight at night to read a book, aware that at any moment their parents might walk in on them. The addition of the external perspective provided by *watashi* makes this experience more clearly defined, since we as readers understand when moving from *hashigaki* to the diary that we are not reading a text written to be read: it is *watashi* who opens it for us, who lets us in through the backdoor into *jibun*’s inner world. This way, an atmosphere of an uncanny mystery is created, drawing the reader deeper into the experience of the novel.

The choice of first-person pronouns for the parts narrated by *watashi* and Yōzō himself allows us a deeper look into the subtle differences between these parts that push even further the feeling of trespassing experienced by the reader in relation to reading the diary. As was mentioned before, *watashi* is the most common Japanese first-person pronoun: it is used by everyone and can be used in any context, and has *anata*, “you”, as its direct opposition, allowing for another participant in the conversation. On the other hand, Yōzō uses exclusively the pronoun *jibun* when referring to himself in his diary, a much more reflexive, self-referential and indirect first-person pronoun that does not call for an *anata*. While impossible to translate to English with 100% accuracy, for clarity I would propose to translate *watashi* as “I” and *jibun* as “myself/oneself”. This choice of first-person pronouns changes the mode of narration in

hashigaki/atogaki and the diary drastically: *watashi* narrates in the “report mode” (*denbun mōdo*), while *jibun* narrates in the “confession mode” (*kokuhaku mōdo*), the former aimed at relaying the information to the reader, and the latter aimed exclusively at introspection without external perception (Andō 2012, 368). This way, a distinct delineation is drawn between the openness of *watashi*’s narration and the closeness and isolation of *jibun*’s – Yōzō’s own – narration.

1.5. The Role of the Visual

Watashi completes the trespassing experience and cements the grounding in reality for the reader in the *atogaki* by letting the reader in on how he came to possess Yōzō’s writings:

I am not personally acquainted with the madman who wrote this diary. However, I happen to know the madam from the standing bar at Kyōbashi mentioned in it...”You’ve known our dear Yōzō, haven’t you?” she asked. When I replied that I did not know anyone like that, she disappeared into the back of the bar, and then re-emerged with three notebooks and three photographs in her hands. “I think you could use this in your writings”, she said as she was handing me the things she brought¹¹. (Dazai 2009, 145-147)

Here, the reader who has just emerged from the immersion into Yōzō’s inner world is pulled back into the reality by *watashi*, who in *hashigaki* helped gently submerge them by creating the aforementioned safe space and distance before the experience of Yōzō’s tormented mind. The tool employed by *watashi* in order to achieve this is not only this narrator’s pronoun, however, as we understand when reading through *atogaki*. Let us take a look at the following words by *watashi*:

I don’t normally use the materials people just shove into my hands like this in my work, so I was ready to just give it back then and there. I did write about those three photographs and their strange eeriness in my preface [*hashigaki*] already, but I got

¹¹ この手記を書き綴った狂人を、私は、直接には知らない。けれども、この手記に出て来る京橋のスタンド・バアのマダムともおぼしき人物を、私はちょっと知っているのである。〈中略〉あなたは葉ちゃんを知っていたかしら、と言う。それは知らない、と答えると、マダムは、奥へ行って、三冊のノートブックと、三葉の写真を持って来て私に手渡し、「何か、小説の材料になるかも知れませんわ。」と言った。

entranced by them completely and decided to take them and the notes after all¹²...
(Dazai 2009, 147)

In the end, *watashi* comes back to the three photographs he described in detail in the introductory part of the novel, stating that they became the very reason he changed his mind about taking the notebooks from the bar's madam and got interested in the contents of those notebooks. It is no coincidence that those very photographs are what *watashi* introduces Yōzō with to the reader: by referring to a visual medium, to pictures, *watashi* invites the reader to engage in the process of active imagination. *Watashi* gets entranced by something visual first by just giving it a look; it is no secret that it takes a person much less time to process a visual image in their brain than a piece of text, and this is exactly what happens to *watashi*. This is how *watashi* wants to entice the reader with engaging with Yōzō's writing as well: instead of describing the contents of the diary, *watashi* describes to us the very thing that captivated him – the photographs. Needless to say, the reader themselves do not – cannot – experience the photographs visually like *watashi* did, since they are presented with only the textual descriptions of them; however, it is possible for the reader to relate to *watashi*'s fascination with and disgust of something visual, to understand why it was so captivating for him, because the reader as a human being understands the power of the visual on several experiential levels, from purely physiological (we process visual clues faster than textual ones) to personal lived ones (most of us have experienced being captivated by something visual at the first glance – no wonder “love at first sight” is such an immensely popular concept!). The reader does not *see* the photographs, but the reader *understands what it would be like to see* them.

As was demonstrated by the vocabulary used in *hashigaki*, *watashi*'s descriptions focus only on the feelings that the images evoke, not on the physical traits of the person in them. This way, the reader is free to imagine pictures with a high level of flexibility; in other words, the cognitive process of imagining Yōzō's countenance is based on what the reader themselves find to be eerie, otherworldly, ghostly, unpleasant. These precise in emotion yet vague in physical detail descriptions afford the reader many possibilities of interpreting the horror of Yōzō's image based on their personal memories (which are an integral part of the process of imagination (Cave 2016, 73-74)), their experiential background, and cognitive capabilities in general. This pre-conception of Yōzō, the imagining of his abject physical appearance becomes

¹² 私は、ひとから押しつけられた材料でものを書けないたちなので、すぐにその場にかえそうかと思っただが、（三葉の写真、その奇怪さに就いては、はしがきにも書いて置いた）その写真に心をひかれ、とにかくノートをあずかることにして<後略>

the very fundament for the reader's experience with the text further on. Just as in real life our first impression of a person is based on their physical traits, so in the introductory part of *Ningen Shikkaku* is the reader introduced to the impression of Yōzō's appearance. By imitating the process of getting acquainted with someone in real life, Dazai created an experience familiar and accessible to anyone, however uncanny and odd Yōzō's looks. In a way, *hashigaki* with its descriptions of Yōzō's three photographs is an attention-drawing advert meant to captivate and engage the reader's imagination right off the bat, just like the photographs attracted *watashi* when he was handed them by the madam from a Kyōbashi's standing bar.

1.6. The Perspective of the Manga's Introduction and Ending: The Inclusion of Dazai's Figure

So far we have identified and discussed the special features and primary functions of the introductory and closing parts of the original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel. How does the manga adaptation by Junji Itō tackle the *yosooi*? What functions does it have, and how are they similar or different to those of the original novel? What kind of horror does the reader encounter in these two parts of the manga, and how do they experience it? Let us walk through these questions as we are looking at the relevant parts of the manga.

Having opened the first volume of the manga, we immediately realize that in his adaptation Itō stepped away from Dazai's framing with the voice of *watashi* completely. Instead of *watashi* describing the three photographs of Yōzō to us even though this choice of pulling them into the physical visual medium would be the most obvious choice, the first people we encounter in the text of the manga are Dazai himself and his lover, presumably Yamazaki Tomie (who Dazai is calling *Sacchyan* (さっちゃん)), Dazai's last female companion who he committed double suicide with in the Tamagawa Aqueduct in 1948. The scene itself is, in fact, the scene at the Aqueduct right before Dazai and Sacchyan's double suicide by drowning. This fact is confirmed in the very end of the manga's third and last volume with a newspaper entry reporting the death of both Dazai and Yamazaki:

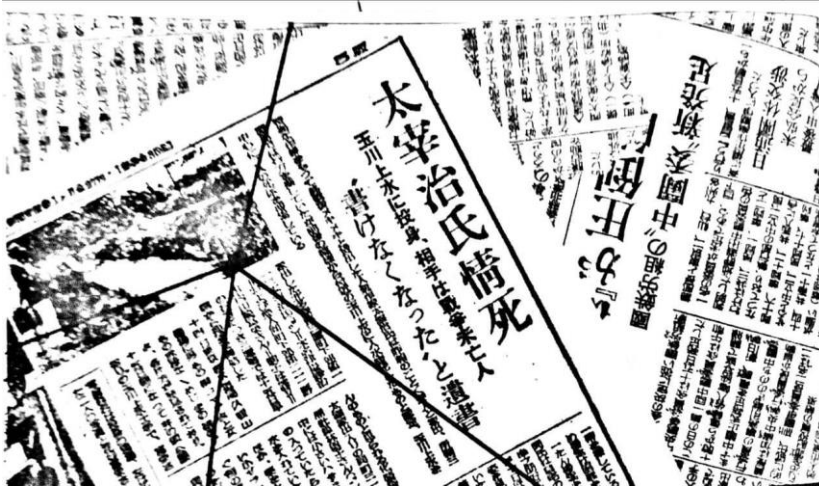


Fig.2. “Dazai Osamu-shi jōshi”, Double love suicide of Dazai Osamu. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 3. Shōgakukan, 2018, p. 203. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

Dazai’s presence is therefore made physical in the manga, with the writer existing in the same literary universe as Ōba Yōzō. This change made by Itō is not as drastic and unexpected as it seems at first glance, however. In order to understand how exactly and why Itō has made the choice to include Dazai as an independent character in his manga, let us briefly go back to the original novel and its ties with Dazai’s life.

Due to the overall autobiographical nature of Dazai’s writing, it has been argued that both the *yosooi*’s *watashi* and Ōba Yōzō are, in fact, both supposed to be direct references to Dazai himself, his way of dealing with and discussing his own self, his experiences and his flaws as a human being. In his fundamental work on Dazai’s life and writings, Dazai’s biographer Okuno Takeo describes *Ningen Shikkaku* in a following way:

One more time, he [Dazai] decided to dig deep into the entirety of his life and closely analyze it. All the way from the middle period of his life – no, the entirety of it – he decided to face directly, to divulge his complexes. He tried to expose this life of his full of ordeals, this human being that is himself – the truth about all of it that he held

– to the society. By doing this, he decidedly protested against all in existence: against the world, against the humanity, against God¹³. (Okuno 1984, 152)

If Dazai's autobiographical tendencies are taken into consideration, *Ningen Shikkaku* becomes in a way a morbid satire directed at Dazai himself, a way for him to become the judge and the defendant at the same time by exposing himself through his introspection in the diaries. This satire is then wrapped in the framing by *watashi*, whose cool-headed, rational tone undermines the sincerity of Yōzō's diary by labeling Yōzō a simple "madman", demonstrating the bitter, self-deprecating attitude of Dazai towards himself. In the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel, both *watashi* and Yōzō are Dazai: the former being the one who dissects and judges, and the latter the one who is on the chopping block of this act of self-exposure. By telling the story of how he came into possession of Yōzō's diaries mentioned earlier (at a bar where Yōzō himself used to go), *watashi* confirms that both of them are from the same universe; yet the realization that both narrators are, in fact, manifestations of Dazai, gives the entirety of the novel a new depth.

With this knowledge in mind, it would be no stretch to say that both in the novel and in the manga Dazai exists in the same world as Yōzō, both from the surface perspective of the story told to us, and from the meta-perspective of Dazai's autobiographic tendencies as an author. However, as we start reading the manga we encounter a deviation in the way these perspectives are implemented. As was demonstrated in our discussion earlier in this chapter, in the case of the original novel the effects of the *hashigaki* and *atogaki*'s functions are *largely independent of the reader's background knowledge* of Dazai's life and his writing. In other words, they manage to affect the readers without relying on what they already know about Dazai. Needless to say, reading the novel with this knowledge has its own effects and influences on how one might perceive the text; for example, the morbidity of Yōzō's confessions might be exaggerated further by the realization that they are essentially an exposé that someone has done on themselves, as such adding an element of self-hatred and self-deprecation to the emotions we perceive from the text. Still, the novel stays flexible to the reader's intellectual experiential background, not demanding intimate knowledge of the author's life yet offering an alternated experience for those who possess it. This could be seen as one of the reasons why it manages to captivate new readers to this day, remaining an

¹³ 彼はもう一度、自己の生涯を、底の底まで掘り下げて検討してみようと思いたったのです。中期以来、いや全生涯、迎えに迎えて来た、コンプレックスを、吐き出して見ようと考えたのです。苦闘の全生涯を、この自己という人間を、その抱いている真実を、あからさまに社会に提出しようとしたのです。それによって世界に、全人類に、神に、真向からプロテストしようとしたのです。

affectively excelling text regardless of the reader’s familiarity with the discourse around and the history behind it.

Itō’s manga, however, takes the autobiographical quality of the novel and enhances it, makes it an unignorable fact, takes away its ambiguity and the flexibility that comes with it by directly inserting Dazai as a character into its volumes. Now Dazai is not the one who replies “no” to the bar madam’s question about whether or not he knew Yōzō (Dazai 2009, 146-147); as we can see in the manga page below, Dazai meets Yōzō personally in the asylum:



Fig.3. “It was...Me...” Yōzō seeing Dazai at the hospital for the first time. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 3. Shōgakukan, 2018, p. 128. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

Upon seeing Dazai for the first time Yōzō immediately identifies with him, going as far as to say: “It was the first time in my life that I had seen a real madman. It was...Me...” (Itō 2018, vol.3, 127-128). Here, Itō decisively separates Dazai and Yōzō from each other, while at the same time directly stating the tight connection between the two. The result of this decision from the perspective of the reader is quite questionable: unless the reader holds the knowledge

of the connection between Dazai and Yōzō, and unless the reader knows of Dazai's autobiographical insertions and references in the original novel, the presence of Dazai in the text of the manga is rendered effectively useless in the shaping of the narrative and the building of the horror experience of the manga. In other words, the manga's *yosooi* which includes Dazai as a separate character *will have little to no impact on the reader unfamiliar with the author's life and previous works*, quite unlike the *yosooi* of the original novel, which we have found to be of great import in the forming of the reader's experience with the text.

To illustrate this point on more real examples from the manga, let us take a look at the following panels:



Fig.4. “All that aside, Ōba, what say you if I write a novel about your life? I’ve chosen the title already: *Ningen Shikkaku*”. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 3. Shōgakukan, 2018, p. 174. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.



Fig.5. "...Ōba, do you remember my promise? I finished it last month...*Ningen Shikkaku*!..It might become my magnum opus." Dazai seeing Yōzō for the last time and trying to give him the first publication of *Ningen Shikkaku*. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 3. Shōgakukan, 2018, p. 190. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

Not only does Yōzō meet Dazai in the manga version of the events, but he also learns of Dazai's plans to write his life story and eventually even witnesses the completion of the writer's plan. This turn of events raises many questions, both for a reader familiar with the original novel and someone without the background knowledge: who told us the entirety of Yōzō's story then, if Dazai in the manga's timeline does not have access to Yōzō's detailed accounts of his life available to him in written form, and we do not get any sort of explanation on how Yōzō could have done it himself? Why does Dazai relate so much to Yōzō that he decides to write his biography? Why does Dazai feel so defeated when he sees Yōzō in his half-dead, demented state, that it is implied that this is what led to his suicide we witnessed in

the beginning (the newspaper clip with Dazai's obituary shown above appears right after Dazai's last visit to Yōzō)? Without the functions of the novel's *yosoi* tying the reading experience of the text together, without them creating the safe space for the deeply unsettling experience of Yōzō's diaries and providing the "hook" between the reality and the world of the diaries for the reader, the manga's structure loses the tools necessary for creating a smooth immersion into its text. In this way, the manga can be described as more of a fan-fiction piece dedicated in equal parts both to the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel and Dazai as a person himself, making the most sense for people who already are familiar with both.

Still, the manga adaptation of *Ningen Shikkaku* is, as we will see clearly demonstrated further on, a more conventional piece of horror media and is quite straightforwardly aimed at being scary, repulsive, and shocking, and as such has its own strategies of instilling the emotional response in the reader. How does it happen in the introductory part of the manga that serves as *hashigaki*? Instead of creating a sense of morbid curiosity through the description of three photographs, Itō chooses instead to shock the reader with the scene of suicide, where the sense of fear is compounded by the regret we see in Dazai's body language before he dies.

The final gesture by Dazai as he nears falling into the water is a crucial physical clue for the reader to notice and pick up: it essentially becomes the last futile attempt at self-preservation, which appeals directly to our very natural and basic instinct to save ourselves in the face of danger. As Dazai is rapidly slowing down the hill to his doom, we feel the desperation of his situation. In this way, the reader is facing two simultaneous stimuli which evoke horror: the profound horror of someone willfully deciding to end their life, as well as the terrifying realization of having reached the point of no return while regretting that decision.



Fig.6. Dazai grasping at the grass before falling into the river. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 1. Shōgakukan, 2017, p. 9. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

Although the fall does not seem to take a long time, the arrangement of the panels on this page with the diagonal slope from right to left instead of straight which mimics the slope of the hill, combined with the speed lines and the direction of the rain, creates a very dynamic sense of inevitability and desperation (Dorichenko 2021). This page succeeds at tying together the reader's bodily reaction to the depiction of speed, the self-preservation instinct at the sight of a grasping hand, and the emotional horror of the inability to save oneself (ibid). This depiction of suicide as an introduction to the manga is decidedly different in its effect from the original novel's *hashigaki*: instead of building up morbid curiosity and eeriness, it immediately aims at *shocking* the reader with an incredibly traumatic event. While this choice of beginning the narrative is aimed at reaching a different goal (read: a different kind of reaction from the reader), it is still an *effective horror strategy*, since as we have established earlier thanks to

Mathias Clasen, horror is affectively defined, and as such can be considered effective if it manages to make its audience afraid in any way.

“Some works aim at producing ephemeral sensations of shock, surprise, and disgust, others leave vivid and lasting impressions of the fragility of the mind and the evanescence of life” (Clasen 2017, 147). The horror genre is a multifaceted and diverse one, and the original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel and its manga adaptation are perfect examples of these qualities: while the former builds on the complex eeriness, “the fragility of the mind and the evanescence of life” and the consequent existential dread, the latter, as we will see even clearer further on, produces the “ephemeral sensations of shock, surprise, and disgust” by appealing to our more primitive embodied mechanisms of fear.

In this chapter, we have discussed in detail the primary functions, special characteristics, and crucial differences between the introductory and closing parts of the original *Ningen Shikkaku* by Dazai Osamu and its manga adaptation by Itō Junji. Despite the relative shortness of these parts of the texts in question, this analysis is crucial to the further discussion of the rest of both texts, as they are indicative of the overall directions they take in terms of the intended effect on the reader. By understanding how these texts work in terms of their narrative structure, we can – with relative ease – create cognitive interpretations of the reader’s experience with them, especially with the focus on their proximity to horror.

Chapter 2. Defamiliarization, Buffoonery, and Masking

2.1. The Unfamiliar Familiar and the “Normal” That Terrifies

The reader is most definitely familiar with the notion of *semantic satiation*, one of the things everyone has experienced yet most likely does not know the name of. We all know how a word starts sounding weird when we repeat it many times in a row because the word loses its connection to the concept it expresses when we say it out of context several times in a row, and this is what the aforementioned term refers to. This happens because our brains start focusing on the form and sound of the word and ceases trying to connect it to its concept. In a way, it could be said that the brain briefly loses its familiarity with the concept expressed by the word uttered, “forgets” what it means, as such making even the most normal, mundane words sound strange and alien.

While this phenomenon is quite common and rather amusing to most than distressing and does not have any ground-breaking implications behind it, it encapsulates an important basic trait of how human brains work: signs around us (such as words, visual symbols, cultural or social clues etc.) each have a certain cognitively recognizable context behind them, and our

brains are capable of connecting the dots between the physical form of these signs and their context. However, *semantic satiation* points at another important thing: this ability of the human brain to perceive the familiar as unfamiliar creates extremely fertile grounds for the creators of art who wish to use this phenomenon in order to achieve certain effects in audience perception.

In literature, the technique of defamiliarization, alienation, estrangement, or *ostranenie* in the original Russian, was first described and analyzed by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his essay “Art as Device” (1917). When describing what *ostranenie* is and what it does, Shklovsky writes:

Ostranenie is seeing the world with different eyes.

<...> What creates good literary language? The correction of the first impression. A person sees something and then he corrects what he sees. He washes the past clean from the usual, he shuns the eternal room, the eternal apartment, even the eternal family—and finally he reaches what is most important. (Shklovsky 2017, 334-335)

Shklovsky’s idea of defamiliarization put a decisive delineation between the “practical” language of the everyday life and the poetic language of literature – language that is meant to fascinate, and then be uncovered, decoded by the reader, even if the things it is telling about are entirely mundane and familiar to every reader. Put simply, *ostranenie* ensures that beauty is found in everything and anything, however superficially familiar it might seem. *Ostranenie* is what makes fiction different from non-fiction: poetic as opposed to practical, prosaic (in the sense of mundane).

In his analysis of Leo Tolstoy Shklovsky uncovered various functions of *ostranenie*, consciousness being one among them (Berlina in Shklovsky 2017, 36), demonstrating that the aforementioned “beauty” of literary language achieved through defamiliarization of the real world has more to it than just aesthetics of the language form. In our analysis of Dazai Osamu’s original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel, we will uncover how *ostranenie* is used in order to achieve a horrifying effect on the reader, going as far as aiming at physical discomfort that becomes the basis for the further development of the horror of the novel. We will in particular discuss how the vicarious experience of one’s existence within a completely estranged world is tied to the fear of the unknown, how it affects the reader during their interaction with Yōzō’s first diary, and how it helps prepare the reader for the increasingly complex process of self-estrangement and self-abjection Yōzō goes through in his second and third diaries.

2.2. The Paralyzing Unfamiliarity of the Human Experience

“I simply cannot comprehend what this thing called ‘human life’ is¹⁴” (Dazai 2009, 10).

This line is the second opening line to the first diary narrated by Ōba Yōzō coming right after the famous “I have lived a life full of shame¹⁵” (ibid). From the very first words we read from Yōzō, the intensity of his experience is as physically palpable in his phrasing as it is confusing and attention-grabbing: what is it about human life that is incomprehensible to him? How can the entirety of human life be incomprehensible to someone who is human himself? These are the questions that will naturally come up in the reader’s mind as the curiosity swells in their minds, since now they are facing the first steps of defamiliarization – but not the one that is meant to mesmerize with its beauty, but rather one that grips with horror in the face of the *unknown*, the strange, the *abject*.

Yōzō proceeds to describe how exactly he perceives the human life – the experience of being human – on examples from the earliest days of his childhood he remembers. Among the many odd experiences he names one stands out the most – hunger (*kūfuku*, 空腹). Yōzō writes:

Besides that, I did not really know what hunger was. No, it was not because I grew up in a family that was never in need; nothing that stupid and simple. I never experienced the feeling of hunger itself, did not know what it’s like. Maybe it will sound odd, but even when I got hungry, I just paid it no mind¹⁶. (Dazai 2009, 11-12)

It is no coincidence that the first thing Yōzō zooms in on is his inability to feel hunger. His story needs to begin with something corporal and basic, essential to any other person, because the more common the experience, the more unnerving and uncanny it is to learn that Yōzō has never had it in his life. With very rare exceptions, any reader encountering this passage and further descriptions of Yōzō’s unfamiliarity with hunger (he repeats himself several times, emphasizing just how alien the very concept of hunger is to him) will be immediately thrown off and uncomfortable. This is because our own experiences with hunger as a primordial mechanism necessary for self-preservation (how do we know to eat if we do not feel hunger?) are met with an experience that is the polar opposite to them. From the very beginning, our experiential background on the bodily level is challenged by Yōzō’s one: he

¹⁴ 自分には、人間の生活というものが、見当つかないのです。

¹⁵ 恥の多い生涯を送って来ました。

¹⁶ また、自分は、空腹という事を知りませんでした。いや、それは、自分が衣食住に困らない家に育ったという意味ではなく、そんな馬鹿な意味ではなく、自分には「空腹」という感覚はどんなものか、さっぱりわからなかったのです。へんな言いかたですが、おなかが空いていても、自分でそれに気がつかないのです。

defamiliarizes the reader with the concept of hunger, presents it as something unknown to him, despite him without a doubt being a living and breathing creature that needs sustenance.

Yōzō continues, moving from the purely corporal experience of hunger to the level of social norms and habits surrounding the act, the ritual of eating.

And so for me, as a child, nothing was more excruciating than the family dinner time¹⁷.
(Dazai 2009, 12)

From here, the unfamiliarity of hunger is coupled with the fear of the need to adhere to social expectations of participating in food consumption with the entirety of the family. While for most people with healthy familial relationships family dinner time as a child can be one of the most comforting, nostalgic memories they hold (as it is, for example, to me as a reader), to Yōzō it is “chilling”: he describes “slowly putting little pieces of food into [his] mouth” while “shivering from the cold” in the “dimly lit hall”, as the rest of his family is “silently chewing on their food, their heads bowing down, as if they are praying to the spirits inhabiting the house” (Dazai 2009, 12-13). The sensation of cold, the dimness of the light in the dining hall bring forth an oppressive, suffocating atmosphere, one that befits a mausoleum more than a place to have food in. Yōzō uses the word *gishiki* (儀式), ceremony or rite, to refer to the way the family dinners would go, a solemn term evoking imagery of temple services, especially in combination with the reference to the “spirits of the house”. Yōzō often uses the word “fear” when referring to his emotions during mundane, everyday experiences of human life, filling every scene he describes with this emotion, making it as overbearing and toxic for the reader as it is for Yōzō himself. In the span of the few dozen pages of the first diary only Yōzō describes “trembling with fear” and being “afraid and sick with anxiety” over 10 times. These self-repetitions are mixed with a style of writing very reminiscent of transcribed oral speech, with punctuation being rather on the arbitrary rather than strictly grammatically correct side; Saitō Sōma (斎藤壮馬), a voice actor who has worked on recitals of Dazai’s works, points out the “lyricism” (リリズム) of Dazai’s prose and the undeniable “poetical genius” of it, stating that in order to “change the rhythm” of the reading appropriately, one has to first “uncover the meaning of the text”, and only then read it out loud (Saitō Sōma in Andō Hiroshi, Itō Hiromi, Keene Donald et al. 2019, 44-45). This lyricism and special rhythm of the writing add to the process of defamiliarization with the text, since here both the form of writing and its content

¹⁷ そうして、子供の頃の自分にとって、最も苦痛な時刻は、実に、自分の家の食事の時間でした。

create an odd, uncanny atmosphere, which draws the reader in, playing with their morbid curiosity.

The description of Yōzō's experiences with hunger and his struggles with the family dinners complements Yōzō's purely corporal experience with hunger with the social aspect of food consumption that necessarily goes together with it; the bodily sensations must be accompanied by the emotional and social plane of experience in order to make them much more palpable, three-dimensional, and nuanced.

2.3. Buffoonery: Performing Normalcy

This will become a pattern in how Yōzō describes the horrors of his life: whatever the “normal”, ordinary experience of an average human being, Yōzō will think of it and perceive it in the exact opposite way, becoming a living *contradiction to the concept of normalcy* itself. This is the very core of Kristeva's abject: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order” (1982, 4). We are going to observe this pattern on the bodily level (as it is with the example of hunger), emotional level, high-order cognitive and socio-cultural levels, alternating between all these levels as we go through Yōzō's memoirs, and ultimately we are going to come to two possible ways of perceiving Yōzō as a reader: one with *Yōzō being the abject*, and the other with *Yōzō's experience constituting the abject and horrifying* of the novel. The main tool that draws the distinction between, and really defines these two viewpoints will be what Yōzō himself calls *o-dōke* (お道化), or *buffoonery*, a concept that will become central to Yōzō's entire life, and the one we encounter for the first time in the first diary.

For the average reader, the moment that cements Yōzō's abject nature is the beginning of his attempts to “mask” his real self, to appear normal to the outside world and the people he interacts with. Let us take a look at how Yōzō introduces us to this idea of his:

All I feel is the overwhelming chokehold of anxiety and fear. I can't really hold a conversation with those around me. I do not know what to say, or how to say it. So I came up with a solution: buffoonery.

This was my very last cordial approach to humans. <...> The buffoonery became the line that managed to at least somehow connect me to them. <...> [I]t was a last-ditch, desperate, soaked in profuse sweat service to human beings. (Dzai 2009, 15)

Yōzō elaborates further on what exactly this buffoonery of his constitutes. He describes the ridiculous performances he would put in front of his family, from making weird faces on

every family photo, to wearing a sweater in the middle of summer and putting his sister's leggings on his arms, to dancing "an Indian dance" and exposing his genitals in the photos (Dazai 2009, 15, 17, 20-21). When in school, he would become the class's *o-chyame* (お茶目), a "clown" entertaining both his classmates and teachers with all kinds of mischief, despite being ostensibly good at studying (ibid, 22-23). Afraid of "being respected", Yōzō chose to change his reputation at school from a diligent student to a jester, since "the very concept of being respected terrified" him, because by being respected the chances of his real self being discovered increased (ibid, 21). Ultimately, for Yōzō the only way to successfully connect to human beings was through *laughter*.

Needless to say, when reading Yōzō's account of his life, with the privilege of both his inner perspective and the outward behavior being visible to us as readers, the violent contrast between these two perspectives draws the ones reading to look at Yōzō as abject. Buffoonery becomes a key element in the process of abjection in the mind of the ordinary reader, because laughter is an integral part of abjection. As Julia Kristeva puts it:

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), *situates* (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter—since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. (1982, 8)

The essence of Yōzō's buffoonery lies within this process of placing abjection in the experience of the reader interacting with the text. To the people surrounding Yōzō who do not manage to see through his act, abjection does not happen; due to their inability to access the information available to the reader, to other people in Yōzō's life he is nothing but a funny, nice guy who just likes to joke and fool around, not a deeply troubled person suffering from severe anxiety and assaulted with fear of other humans. Laughing and jesting while internally dying from crippling fear is a terrifying perspective, since the process of suppressing one's own emotions to such an extent, from the very childhood, every moment of one's life, is excruciatingly exhausting in both a physical and psychological way. This way, Yōzō himself and his entire way of experiencing life and other humans become the main source of horror for the reader *through the conflict with the readers' experiential background* as socially apt and adapted human beings.

2.4. Buffoonery and Autistic Masking: the Horror Reversed

However, this way of seeing the horror in Yōzō's buffoonery is not the only one possible. As a neurodivergent (as opposed to neurotypical) reader, especially one who is on the autism spectrum, has social anxiety issues, and/or has Asperger's syndrome, what Yōzō is doing might not come as a surprise at all, and might not be in contrast to Yōzō's experiences. When reading the text of the novel for the first time as a teenager, I experienced a sense of connection to Yōzō, as opposed to finding him scary; this impression has not changed after many more re-reads of the novel years after, including the ones that were necessary for the creation of this thesis. As a reader myself, I attribute this to my experiential background as a person on the autism spectrum, who is intimately familiar with the need to "hide" one's real self from the others in order to fit in, to appear normal. Let us take a closer look at what a reader like me experiences as horrifying when reading *Ningen Shikkaku*.

In relation to Yōzō's buffoonery, the closest thing from the experience of an autistic reader could be what is called "masking", or "masking behavior":

Masking is a term used by the autistic community to describe the suppression of aspects of self and identity to "fly under the radar" or "appear normal," using conscious (i.e., mimicking facial expressions) or unconscious (i.e., unintentionally suppressing aspects of one's identity) means. (Miller et al. 2021, 331)

Masking is precisely what Yōzō is engaging in from the perspective of a reader familiar with similar behavior. The horror of being in this position is then not a fictional one, as it is for an average reader seeing Yōzō as unfamiliar and abject, but a viscerally realistic one, close to their own experiential background. This way, for the average neurotypical reader the horror lies within Yōzō as an entity alien to their experiential background, while for a neurodivergent reader the experience is the exact opposite, being closely familiar to their experiential background. However, both of these experiences have one thing in common: they provide a distinct sense of horror to the reader, albeit for different reasons.

While this could be seen as an attempt to diagnose Yōzō, this analysis is nothing more but an exploration of the traits that could be perceived as familiar by a reader on the autistic spectrum. It is inconsequential to this analysis if Yōzō was *really* intended to be a neurodivergent person: what matters is how his experiences are *perceived* by a potential neurodivergent reader. Behavioral masking in particular is an important part of the lived experience of autistic people, and Yōzō's buffoonery is heavily reminiscent of this type of behaviour, regardless of whether or not the buffoonery is intended to represent such masking.

Chapter 3. The Monstrous-Human

3.1. The Delights of Dehumanization

The placement of abjection in the reader's experience is the main function of buffoonery as a source of horror in the novel. Understanding it helps us gain insight into the next horror-provoking part of the novel: *the way Yōzō perceives other human beings*. We have already established that Yōzō experiences intense fear related to those around him: he brings up his crippling “fear of humans” numerous times throughout his diaries; however, growing up he does form relationships with other people out of his own volition and seems to lower his guard with certain individuals. Especially Yōzō's interactions and relationships with women play a unique role in the formation of the reader's horror experiences, although very differently in the novel and the manga adaptation. In this chapter, we will discuss the *dehumanization*, or *monstrification*, of human beings in Yōzō's story by Yōzō himself, with the name of the chapter referring to Barbara Creed's 1993 book *The Monstrous-Feminine*, which we do draw from in the following analysis, especially in relation to the female characters of *Ningen Shikkaku*.

First and foremost, let us briefly return to the topic of *buffoonery* from the previous chapter. We get the fullest, most detailed descriptions of Yōzō's buffoonery in his first diary, but his performance does not end there. Further throughout his memoirs Yōzō describes learning when this performance of his is needed and when he can let the mask slip, as well as who is more susceptible to the influence of his rehearsed clownery and who sees through it easier. Let us examine the following passages that illustrate these two points:

Both in the classrooms and the dormitories there was an atmosphere of twisted lust, to the point where everything felt like a waste pit, and in a place like that my nearly perfect buffoonery was pretty much useless¹⁸ (Dazai 2009, 42).

Since I have come to live at this house, I have not really had any reason to engage in buffoonery. All I've been doing is throw myself fully into the Halibut and servant boy's disdain while doing my best to avoid long-winded conversations with Halibut aimed at making me open up, as well as not wishing to pursue him to spill my soul to him¹⁹ (ibid, 79).

¹⁸ 教室も寮も、ゆがめられた性慾の、はきだめみたいな気さえして、自分の完璧に近いお道化も、そこでは何の役にも立ちませんでした。

¹⁹ 自分がこの家へ来てからは、道化を演ずる張合いさえ無く、ただもうヒラメと小僧の蔑視の中に身を横たえ、ヒラメのほうでもまた、自分と打ち解けた長嘯をするのを避けている様子でしたし、自分もそのヒラメを追いかけて何かを訴える気などは起らず<後略>

It seemed to me that women felt much more comfortable with my buffoonery than men. Men wouldn't just endlessly laugh at my performances, and I knew that with men there was always a chance of me going too far and failing at the performance... Women, on the other hand, never knew what moderation means, and would endlessly ask me for more...²⁰ (ibid, 34)

To me, the creatures called prostitutes were not human beings, or women; I saw them as demented or crazy, but lying there on their bosom would strangely put me at ease, and every time I was able to fall deeply asleep²¹ (ibid, 46-47).

At first glance, these pieces of information given to the reader by Yōzō contradict the dire tone of the initial descriptions of Yōzō's experiences with buffoonery: despite claiming to not fit in with other human beings, our protagonist does admit to being able to find those he does not perform around. However, there is a distinct pattern that the descriptions above that tells us more about Yōzō as an abject human, allowing us another glimpse at his horrifying, twisted world.

Yōzō uses language that refers to universally disliked or disgusting things and characteristics of the people and environments he is speaking of: waste pit (*hakidame*, はきだめ) and twisted lust (*yugamerareta seiyoku*, ゆがめられた性慾) become a trigger for a strong olfactory sensation that evokes the stench of rubbish mixed in with the hormonal smell of sex. This description also involves moral judgment on Yōzō's side, since the "lust" he is talking about is likened to a heap of waste, and is quite obviously supposed to be perceived as immoral by the one interacting with Yōzō's writings. Further, when referring to the man he ends up living with after his failed suicide attempt, Yōzō chooses the nickname "Halibut" (*hirame*, ヒラメ) for him, invoking the image of an unsightly flat fish with both eyes on the same side of its body, as such taking away from the man's humanity.

²⁰ 女は、男よりも更に、道化には、くつろぐようでした。自分がお道化を演じ、男はさすがにいつまでもゲラゲラ笑っていませんし、それに自分も男の人に対し、調子に乗ってあまりお道化を演じすぎると失敗するという事を知っていました…女は適度という事を知らず、いつまでもいつまでも、自分にお道化を要求し<後略>

²¹ 自分には、淫売婦というものが、人間でも、女性でもない、白痴か狂人のように見え、そのふところの中で、自分がかえって全く安心して、ぐっすり眠る事が出来ました。



Fig.7. Atlantic Halibut by Marcus Elieser Bloch (1723-1799) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_halibut#/media/File:Hippoglossus_hippoglossus2.jpg)

Yōzō also contemplates the differences between the way his performances of buffoonery are perceived by men and women, claiming that women tend to not see through his clownery and, on the contrary, cannot get enough of it. When speaking of prostitutes, he goes even further: with his words, he essentially strips them of their humanity entirely, and even of their femininity despite the fact that the nature of their occupation is inherently linked to their sexuality.

To the reader, the bodily reactions to the descriptions of waste and a person who looks like a fish, the moral judgments associated with excessive lust and the existence of prostitutes at the fringes of society, and the confusion at the odd love for Yōzō's uncanny buffoonery from women come as naturally negative, constituting at the very least a certain level of disgust. All of these things are *fringe, marginal, abject* to the average person regardless of their socio-cultural experiential background. They are not enough to constitute fears, however: none of these things invoke terror in any person who does not have very specific phobias or negative experiences associated with any of them. From the way Yōzō is speaking of these things, from his choice of words we glimpse what seem to be contempt, disgust, and downright *dehumanization*. “[Dehumanization] is the most striking violation of our belief in a common humanity: our Enlightenment assumption that we are all essentially one and the same” (Haslam and Loughnan 2014, 401), and Yōzō is readily engaging in this violation many times throughout his writings. Earlier, we discussed how Yōzō's experiences with normal human practices such as eating together with family or even the feeling of hunger itself are turned unfamiliar and alien by our troubled protagonist, and his tendency to dehumanize the people he is talking about can be seen as a natural extension of this defamiliarization.

What Yōzō *does with his dehumanization tendency*, however, is what makes it both interesting in regards to the theme of this thesis and effective as another source of horror for the reader. Let us examine the following passages in order to proceed.

...those prostitutes gave me affection, pure, unrestrained affection. That affection without any ulterior motive, affection that was not shoved down my throat like something for sale, affection that I would likely not experience for the second time in my life...Some

nights, I felt like that affection made those demented and crazy prostitutes shine with a holy halo like Mother Mary herself. <...> ...those prostitutes, who were of my ilk, my kind...²² (Dazai 2009, 46-47).

It was because I liked those people [the Marxists from the underground movement]. I really did like them. But it wasn't because we were comrades bound by our dedication to Marxism. Unlawfulness. That was something I secretly enjoyed²³ (ibid, 51).

However, I did not have a pinch of respect for what he [Horiki Masao] was saying. He's an idiot, terrible at painting, but he will do as a companion for having fun, I thought. <...> Still, at first I even saw him as a rare kind of person I liked, and, as you would expect from me with my fear of humans, I completely lowered my guard...²⁴ (ibid, 44-45)

While passing damning judgments on the people he gets involved with, be that personally like with his college friend Horiki or Halibut, or circumstantially like with the prostitutes, Yōzō expresses *undeniable magnetism, strong attraction* that he experiences towards all these people he seemingly disrespects or downright dehumanizes. The way he interacts with the people he finds condemnable for any given feature or action (from Halibut's homely appearance to the Marxists' illegal underground activities) is the very definition of abjection, something that threatens the normal order of things, but also attracts in a morbid way. Incidentally, this is also the very core mechanism behind humans enjoying horror media. "One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on enjouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion. <...> ...many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones" (Kristeva 1982, 9). His judgments of others go hand-in-hand with his view of himself as non-human, alien in the human society: the prostitutes he does not even see as human he calls "of his own ilk" (*jibun to dōrui*, 自分と「同類」), the outlawed underground communists he "gets along with splendidly" (*sono undo no hada ga, jibun ni atta*, その運動の肌が、自分に合った), and Horiki Masao, the very person who introduces Yōzō

²² 自分は、いつも、その淫売婦たちから、窮屈でない程度の自然の好意を示されました。何の打算も無い好意、押し売りでは無い好意、二度と来ないかも知れぬひとへの好意、自分には、その白痴か狂人の淫売婦たちに、マリヤの円光を現実に見た夜もあったのです。

²³ 好きだったからなのです。自分には、その人たちが、気にいっていたからなのです。しかし、それは必ずしも、マルクスに依って結ばれた親愛感では無かったのです。非合法。自分には、それが幽かに楽しかったのです。

²⁴ しかし、自分は、彼の言う事に一向に敬意を感じませんでした。馬鹿なひとだ、絵も下手にちがいない、しかし、遊ぶのには、いい相手かも知れないと考えました。〈中略〉しかし、はじめは、この男を好人物、まれに見る好人物とばかり思い込み、さすが人間恐怖の自分も全く油断をして〈後略〉

to all imaginable vices from cigarettes to alcohol to harlotry, becomes Yōzō's first ever friend. The word “*dōru*” and the expression “*hada ni au*” that Yōzō chooses to speak of those he deems similar to him also hint at the animalistic nature of Yōzō himself and the people around him in his eyes: the kanji symbol “*ru*” (類) has the meaning “genus”, and the expression “*hada ni au*” can be literally translated as “to fit one's skin”. Both of these word choices allude to the corporeal, the biological, that which distinguishes Yōzō, the self-proclaimed “outcast since birth” (*umareta toki kara no hikagemono*, 生まれた時からの日蔭者 (Dazai 2009, 51)) from homo sapiens as a species, alongside those he chooses to have in his life. The incessant dehumanization which creates monsters out of ordinary human beings combined with Yōzō's fascination with the ones who are most monstrous in his view turns the reader's perception of the world upside down, offering a picture of a world distorted by abjection that has consumed its victim entirely.

In the end of his memoirs, Yōzō sums up his own story by words we see in the title of the novel: “A human no longer” (*ningen, shikkaku*, 人間、失格 (Dazai 2009, 142), the final gesture of dehumanization towards his own self. Not seeing himself as human, Yōzō actively seeks out others who are broken, and brings about his moral and social downfall as a deeply depressed, morphine-addicted man with multiple failed suicide attempts, after hurting many people through his abjection of himself and others in his life. The way Yōzō succumbs to the attraction of the abject constitutes a big part of the horror of *Ningen Shikkaku*, since we observe the consequences of self-dehumanization in all the tragedy and even death Yōzō brings into the lives of other humans and his own.

3.2. The Women of Ōba Yōzō: The Unknown and the Unknowable

One of the most well-known parts of Dazai Osamu's short and tragic life is connected to the numerous women he had romantic relationships with. Since *Ningen Shikkaku* and the character of Ōba Yōzō reflect many real-life experiences and stories from Dazai's own life, the women of Yōzō are based on the women Dazai knew in his life. This is important to keep in mind as we proceed further into the discussion of the significance of the female characters in Yōzō's memoirs.

Why focus on women of *Ningen Shikkaku* specifically when speaking of the horror elements of the novel? The tendency for dehumanization we focused on previously undeniably applies to women as a class of people in Yōzō's writings, but we would be remiss not to analyze the complexity of the ways women are perceived by Yōzō, as well as the ways they influence and are influenced by him. While generally dehumanized in various ways, women have

religious significance in Yōzō's tale, oftentimes standing in contrast to the abject and the degenerate that Yōzō is obsessed with, seen as sacred beings offering atonement and salvation to Yōzō the sinner. As such, women are an important presence in Yōzō's life that is deeply tied to his self-abjection, philosophical and religious development, especially when it comes to his beliefs surrounding the concepts of *sin* and *purity*. In the manga adaptation by Itō Junji the female characters are flashed out as the prominent vessels for supernatural and body horror and play a different role when it comes to the horror of the *Ningen Shikkaku* story. In this part of the analysis we will discuss and compare the two representations of Ōba Yōzō's women, as always focusing on what horror affects they offer to the reader. We begin with the way Ōba Yōzō perceives women, what this perception means in terms of the horror the novel affords, and how this perception is translated into the visual medium by Itō Junji.

From a theoretical standpoint, within Julia Kristeva's system of abjection the feminine and the maternal occupy a central spot as the roots of abjection. This is in particular due to the nature of the female body being closely related to blood and excrement through menstruation and birth (Creed 2015, 10-11). "On the one hand there is bloodless flesh (destined for man) and on the other, blood (destined for God). Blood, indicating the impure, takes on the "animal" sense of the previous opposition and inherits the propensity for murder of which man must cleanse himself. But blood, as a vital element, also refers to women, fertility, and the assurance of fecundation. It thus becomes a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection where *death* and *femininity*, *murder* and *procreation*, *cessation of life* and *vitality* all come together" (Kristeva 1982, 96). Femininity therefore exists at the interception of the abject and the sublime, and in the life of Yōzō, who struggles a lot with the Christian faith just like Dazai himself, this duality of women's nature plays a crucial role in Yōzō's abjection of himself and the people around him, as well as his attempts to escape this abjection through acts of faith. In this part, we discuss the abject, "bloody" and as such monstrous side of this female duality, and proceed with the sublime one in the next sub-chapter.

Really, they [women] were almost impossible to comprehend. I was completely clueless, and at times, when I was foolish enough to take the risk of stepping on the proverbial tiger's tail, I would be dealt the most painful of hands. Unlike the hurt I was caused by

men, the women's ways to hurt felt like severe internal bleeding, a wound that was nay on impossible to cure²⁵ (Dazai 2009, 33).

...I had a lot of ideas about women that I had developed ever since I was a child, such as that women lived in order to sleep and so on. However, even though women were supposedly just as human as men, I still had a feeling that they were creatures entirely different to men. And so these incomprehensible, dangerous creatures got strangely drawn to me²⁶ (ibid).

Yōzō's complicated (mis)understanding of women results in dehumanization of all female people around him into a separate category of creatures alien to the rest of humanity. Previously, we saw him paint women as more gullible, more easily fooled and falling for his buffoonery much more eagerly than men; however, he also makes a point about them being unpredictable, any wrong move around them akin to "stepping on a tiger's tail", their aggression being more damaging than that of men's. Yōzō invokes animalistic imagery once again and defamiliarizes the reader with the image of a woman as a human being, conjuring forth an uncanny valley effect wherein these unknown and unknowable creatures parade as humans, yet fail to convince him. The graphic description of the way it feels to be hurt by a woman ("severe internal bleeding", "a wound impossible to heal") further reinforces this image of an alien entity that should be feared, for it is unknowable and as such unpredictable, and evokes a strong bodily reaction in the reader: internal bleeding is especially horrifying because it is unseen yet can be deadly. It would be reasonable to interpret this "internal bleeding" metaphor as one referring to psychological abuse rather than physical one, showing that Yōzō is much more afraid of this unseen but severe damage than straightforward physical one, easily observable and explainable.

In the mythology of Yōzō's world, the woman combines two sides: an angelic one of purity and naïveté, and a devilish one of a dangerous monster. Female creatures that seem harmless but turn out to be monsters – a motif we have seen numerous times in fairy tales and myths: think of forest nymphs, sirens singing to sailors, a witch living in a hut on chicken legs,

²⁵ ほとんど、まるで見当が、つかないのです。五里霧中で、そうして時たま、虎の尾を踏む失敗をして、ひどい痛手を負い、それがまた、男性から受ける笞とちがって、内出血みたいに極度に不快に内攻して、なかなか治癒し難い傷でした。

²⁶ <前略>女は眠るために生きているのではないかしら、その他、女に就いてのさまざまの観察を、すでに自分は、幼年時代から得ていたのですが、同じ人類のようでないながら、男とはまた、全く異った生きもののような感じで、そうしてまた、この不可解で油断のならむ生きものは、奇妙に自分にかまうのでした。

mermaids and fairies. Jess Zimmerman writes in her book *Women and Other Monsters*: “In a society centered on the male citizen, the feminization of monsters served to demonize women,” writes curator Kiki Karoglou <...> The later monsters don’t just look more beautiful and more feminine; they look more human, underscoring the idea that monstrousness is somehow the human woman’s natural condition” (2021, 2). This particular feature of the women of *Ningen Shikkaku* that likens them to mythological female monsters is the one that Itō Junji focuses on and turns into a visual medium in his adaptation. Let us examine the following panels from the manga to demonstrate how Itō translates the monstrous (dehumanized) nature of Yōzō’s women into the realm of the visual.



Fig.8. “In this asylum ward, where not a single woman should have been present, in my room, women were burying me like an avalanche”. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 3. Shōgakukan, 2018, p. 123. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

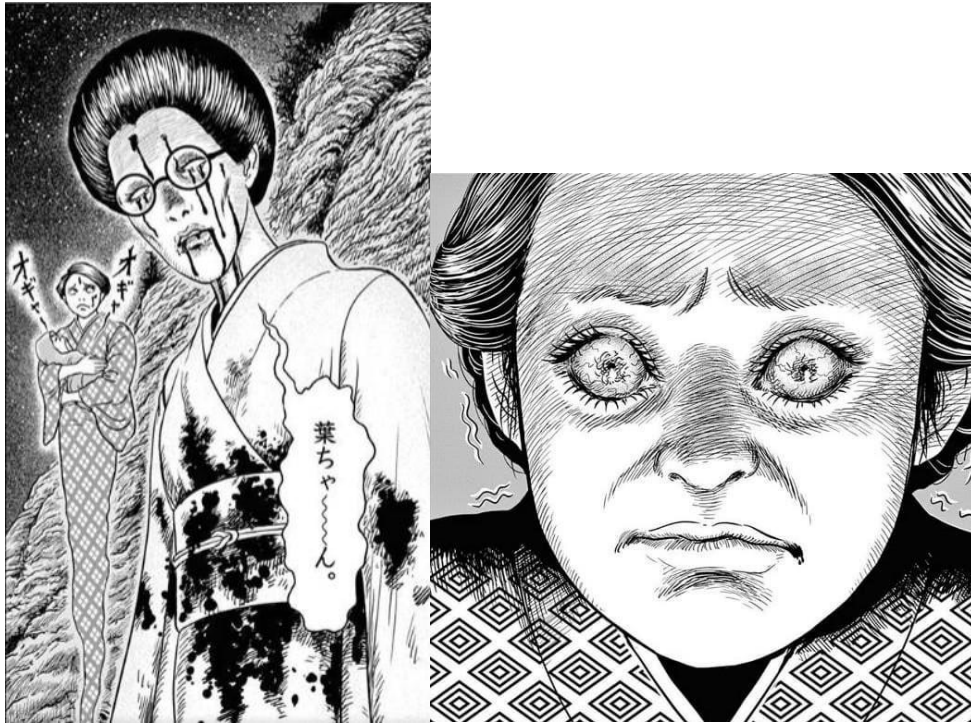


Fig.9 (right). Yōzō’s lover Secchyan discovers him having an affair with another woman, Anesa. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 1. Shōgakukan, 2017, p. 84. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

Fig.10 (left). The ghosts of Secchyan and Anesa, Yōzō’s dead lovers. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 1. Shōgakukan, 2017, p. 185. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

The women portrayed by Itō embody the overall attitude Yōzō has towards women both in the original novel and the manga and correspond with Zimmerman’s characterization of female mythical creatures. Notice how they are drawn as human as possible despite being ghosts in figures 8 and 10: distorted faces and missing irises in their eyes, ghostly glow around their legless bodies as they levitate above ground do betray their monstrous, non-human nature, yet still they have enough human features to not be mistaken for full-blown monsters. It is primarily the eyes that convey these women’s monstrosity to the reader: the absence of irises takes away one of the most expressive features of every human being’s face, the “mirror of the soul”.

In figure 9, Yōzō’s lover Secchyan is not a ghost yet, but her face, however human, leaves an uncanny impression on the reader: her eyes are blood-shot to the point where the irises appear to be torn, “shredded” into strings, the lighting on her face evoking an image from a horror movie where the light from underneath a person’s face creates creepy shadows that seem unnatural for a human’s face, since daylight normally falls down upon us, not comes from

underneath. Secchyan’s face is not simply the face of distress or jealousy, and the reader’s natural ability to read facial expressions is confused by it, because it simply does not relay any naturally perceivable, easily recognizable emotion.

Itō goes even further in his interpretation of the women surrounding Yōzō. In his manga, as we have just seen in the example panels, he takes Yōzō’s perception of women as monstrous and turns them into actual monsters, ghosts, apparitions, haunting presences. In addition to that, female corpses become a special source of horror in Itō’s adaptation. By doing so, he combines two primary sources of abjection: the corpse, since it represents a religious “crossing of the border” as a body without a soul (Creed 2015, 9), and the filth of the female body, which, according to Kristeva, is the first thing all people abject and try to break free from in their lives in order to become independent of their mothers (Kristeva 1982, 13). Itō exaggerates the monstrousness of the women in *Ningen Shikkaku*, even those who in the original novel are the ones Yōzō cares for the most, turning their bodies into one of the core horror elements in the manga. None of these graphic scenes and none of the apparitions appear in the original novel, yet they are quite clearly an extension of Yōzō’s view of women. In a visual medium, the depiction of the abject through visual means as opposed to purely textual means much easier access to the mechanisms of fear in the reader’s psyche. This means a much more direct access to the reader’s experiential background, the bodily level in particular, invoking universal feelings of disgust and fear in face of the supernatural and the cadaver, the purest kind of abjection.



Fig.11. Yōzō’s lover Tsuneko committing suicide next to him. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 1. Shōgakukan, 2017, p. 182. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.



Fig.12. “Tsuneko’s face swelled into a horrifying greenish-blue mess, with not even a vestige left of the face she had when she was alive”. Itō Junji, *Ningen Shikkaku*, volume 1. Shōgakukan, 2017, p. 188. © Used with the permission of Kabushiki-gaisha Shōgakukan. All rights reserved.

In Itō’s depictions of Yōzō’s women the monstrous, devilish, non-human nature of women prevails, overshadowing any other characteristic of these characters. However, in the original novel the portrayal of women proves to be much more nuanced and not nearly as one-sided. The woman in figures 11 and 12, Tsuneko, commits double suicide with Yōzō in the original novel as well, yet no mentions of her swollen, greenish-blue corpse are present, and neither does she choke in agony after taking a lethal dose of medication there. The horror of her death and Yōzō’s survival which mirror Dazai’s own experience with attempted double suicide is contained in the following lines from the novel:

That night we threw ourselves into the sea in Kamakura. The woman untied her obi from her waist and folded in on top of a rock, explaining that she had borrowed it from a friend

at a store. I took off my coat and placed it on the same spot, and then we both jumped into the water. The woman died. Only I survived²⁷ (Dazai 2009, 69).

Notice how here Yōzō does not call his lover by her name, Tsuneko, and refers to her simply as “the woman”, creating a sense of distance between the reader and the characters of Yōzō and Tsuneko who they are clearly meant to be empathizing with here, at their most vulnerable. The cold, matter-of-fact tone of this passage, the careful folding of the clothes on the shore stand in contrast to the horrifying tragedy of the event being described, of two young people deciding to end their lives. No corpses or ghosts invoke fear in the reader, but the unnaturally emotionless stating of the fact that Tsuneko ends up dead, while Yōzō survives. The shortness of the last sentences feels like a bucket of cold water over the reader’s head, a shocking realization of what this implies for Yōzō, who will from now on live with survivor’s guilt, with the knowledge that Tsuneko’s untimely death was partially caused by him. Unlike in Itō’s depiction of this suicide, it is not the bodily level of experiential background that this passage affects, but rather the socio-cultural one, where the reader’s understanding of the complex concepts of guilt and sin reside and dictate the reader’s reactions. Tsuneko here is not just a bloated corpse: she is a symbol of Yōzō’s “consciousness of a criminal” (*hannin-ishiki*, 犯人意識), as he calls it (Dazai 2009, 51), or, more broadly, the concept of “consciousness of guilt” present as a leitmotif in Dazai’s work in general, a concept deeply tied to Dazai’s complex relationship with the Christian faith.

This scene of double suicide is one of the examples of female characters in the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel being more than abject, more than monstrous, signifying the opposite to the disgusting and non-human – martyrdom, sacrifice, innocence, the sublime. In the following part of the analysis, we will look at the “abjection-sacred” dichotomy represented by Ōba Yōzō’s women, which, according to Kristeva, at its interception constitutes the basis of religion (1982, 89). This way, we will examine the other side to the female characters of *Ningen Shikkaku*, the one absent in the manga adaptation, and the one that uncovers the deeply spiritual tragedy of Ōba Yōzō, the one that makes the horror of the novel complete on the most profound level.

²⁷ その夜、自分たちは、鎌倉の海に飛び込みました。女は、この帯はお店のお友達から借りている帯やから、と言って、帯をほどき、畳んで岩の上に置き、自分もマントを脱ぎ、同じ所に置いて、一緒に入水しました。女のひとは、死にました。そうして、自分だけ助かりました。

3.3. The Women of Ōba Yōzō: A Conversation with God through the Feminine

In his memoirs, Yōzō mentions quite a few women who he has different kinds of relationships with: the servants at his family home, the prostitutes, and the lovers. Three women, however, stand out in his diaries, and offer the most insight into our troubled protagonist's relationship with faith and God. These three women are: Tsuneko, the wife of a convict who commits suicide with Yōzō; Shigeko, the daughter of Shizuko, a woman Yōzō attempts to build a family with; Yoshiko, the last of Yōzō's lovers who captivates him with her innocence. In this final part of the analysis, we take a look at all of these women and interpret them as the biggest pieces in the puzzle of Yōzō's spiritual life that represent *the virtue of weakness, salvation through innocence, and purity*. We will also focus on what unites all of these female figures – the horror of the loss of their perceived virtues and its meaning for Yōzō.

“...The idea of being “the friend of the weak and the poor” was quite certainly at the bottom of Dazai's heart”, writes Nōhara Kazuo when discussing the author's deep fascination with the Christian idea of “loving one's neighbor” (*rinjin e no ai*, 隣人への愛) in his 1998 work *Dazai Osamu and the Bible (Dazai Osamu to Seisho, 「太宰治と聖書」)* (127). This idea, among other things, brought into reality Dazai's “consciousness of guilt” stemming from his affluent background, which made him feel immense shame for belonging to a privileged class of his society. This, in its turn, led him to his participation in the underground communist movement, where he was trying to “atone” for his privilege by supporting the proletariat – the people he felt he should have belonged to. This “consciousness of guilt” underlines the choices Ōba Yōzō makes in his life as well, especially when it comes to his choice of romantic partners. Tsuneko is the wife of a criminal, Shizuko a single mother, Yoshiko a simple bar maid, far from Yōzō's aristocratic circles. Of course, there is an element of abjection here that we discussed earlier, the “disgust-attraction” dichotomy he experiences towards the people on the margins of society. However, there is also an element of that philosophy of being “the friend of the weak and the poor” Dazai himself had the affinity for within Christianity, and Yōzō as a reflection of Dazai exhibits this affinity as well, which makes Yōzō choose to be close to women who provide him with spiritual fulfillment.

Here, I am arguing that Yōzō's two-sided view of women as both monstrous and close to God can be explained by the way the Bible subordinates the feminine, the maternal (which is inherently abject due to its affinity to blood and borderline states of life and death through birth) to the Christian order, its moral system. Julia Kristeva explains: “But the biblical test—and therein lies its extraordinary specificity—performs the tremendous forcing that

consists in subordinating maternal power (whether historical or phantasmatic, natural or reproductive) to symbolic order as pure logical order regulating social performance, as divine Law attended to in the Temple” (1982, 91). Thanks to this “forcing” and the subsequent subordination of maternal power, the inherently abject and sinful feminine becomes tamed. Think of the virgin birth of Mother Mary: the oxymoron of a “clean” birth with no bodily contact and exchange of fluids needed for the conception of life represents the ultimate subordination of the sinful, filthy feminine to the sublime order of Christianity. Through the virgin birth of Jesus the blood and filth of Mary’s femininity is cleansed and turns into a sublime act, becoming one of many religious rituals that within Kristeva’s theory are aimed at reversing abjection.

Not unlike the Virgin Mary, the three women important to Yōzō also have certain features about them that reverse their abjection and turn around their dehumanized and monstrous nature, which makes them not only attractive to Yōzō as those “of his kind”, but also attractive as creatures that bring him closer to salvation and God himself. The women Yōzō falls in love with or cares for offer him a way to strengthen his faith by finding something worth protecting, someone weaker than him to be “the friend” for. They offer him various ways to atone for his sin of being lesser than a human being, being the “outsider since birth”, and he readily uses them to get closer to God through the poor, the disadvantaged, the dehumanized. Let us discuss every one of these women and what they represent more closely.

Anguish. <...> She did not actually say the word “anguish”, yet I felt her whole body tremble with the excruciating silent anguish, a thin current of air that enveloped me as soon as I got close to her. This current would melt into the thorny current of my sorrow like withered leaves sticking to the rocks at the bottom of a river, and it felt like my body was able to depart from all the fear and all the anxiety it harbored²⁸ (Dazai 2009, 62).

The passage above describes Yōzō’s feelings about **Tsuneko**, who he spends a total of one night with, after which they attempt a double suicide. This silent “anguish” (*wabishisa*, 侘しさ) that Yōzō revels in stands in contrast to what he calls “women’s awkward small talk” that he has no interest in (ibid), making **Tsuneko** special due to her misery, her mental pain. A leaf on a mossy rock under the water, surrounded by the constant, lulling rhythm of the current

²⁸ 侘しい。<中略>けれども、そのひとは、言葉で「侘しい」とは言いませんでしたが、無言のひどい侘しさを、からだの外郭に、一寸くらいの幅の気流みたいに持っていて、そのひとに寄り添うと、こちらのからだもその気流に包まれ、自分の持っている多少トゲトゲした陰鬱の気流と程よく溶け合い、「水底の岩に落ち附く枯葉」のように、わが身は、恐怖からも不安からも、離れる事が出来るのでした。

that can smooth over any sharp edges, any “thorns” – this mental image gives the reader a sense of calm, of tranquillity. This feeling conjured up by the image of running water and what rests calmly underneath is necessary to then clash with the tragic scene of Tsuneko and Yōzō entering the sea to end their lives, an image emotionless and tranquil as well, yet in a sinister, bone-chilling way. This is the horror of Tsuneko’s fate – a silent, calm kind of horror that sneaks up on the reader after lulling them into a false sense of security.

From Yōzō’s perspective, Tsuneko is the very embodiment of “the weak and the poor”, and this is why he seeks succor from her. “...the “love for one’s neighbor” was a hand of mercy and of sympathy extended to those suffering from poverty and sickness, but also those with their hearts scarred and broken” (Nōhara 1998, 121), and in Yōzō’s mind Tsuneko, the crestfallen wife of a convict, was exactly that “neighbor” worthy of his hand of grace. Her “anguish”, that very “scarred and broken heart” Nōhara is speaking of, cleanses her of her abject nature in Yōzō’s eyes, since in Christian philosophy suffering is not a vice. However, Yōzō fails to extend a helping hand to Tsuneko, and instead of alleviating this suffering, he takes it to its extreme. Feeling unbearable shame due to his lack of money pointed out by Tsuneko, Yōzō succumbs to self-pity from his “humiliation one is unable to live with²⁹” and decides to commit suicide, taking Tsuneko with him (Dazai 2009, 68-69). As such, Yōzō fails at the Christian virtue of helping the weak and instead indirectly causes the death of one who he loves, pushing her to commit the sin of suicide, which in Christianity leads to the sinner losing any chance at going to heaven. Tsuneko becomes a martyr to her love for Yōzō, yet by surviving Yōzō does not reciprocate her sacrifice. This tragic event becomes the first important step towards Yōzō’s complete loss of humanity that haunts him till the very end. Even Yōzō’s abject friend Horiki points out the impact that this had on Yōzō’s virtue as a human way later: “I’m not a sinner like you. I do fool around, but never kill women or force them to give me money³⁰” (Dazai 2009, 121). Each time Yōzō fails at exercising his virtue, he loses a part of his humanity, and sinks deeper into self-abjection. When even Horiki, the “devil” who introduces Yōzō to the vices of alcohol, tobacco and prostitution, views Yōzō as abject, the reader understands the terrifying depths of Yōzō’s moral downfall, and learns more and more to view him as a monster.

The next important female figure in Yōzō’s tale is **Shigeko**, the daughter of Shizuko, Yōzō’s next lover. It is no surprise that a child would embody innocence, absence of guilt and

²⁹ とても生きておられない屈辱

³⁰ 「お前のように、罪人では無いんだから。おれは道楽はしても、女を死なせたり、女から金を巻き上げたりなんかはしねえよ。」

sin – this idea is not unique to Christianity, and a person with any cultural or religious background would immediately assume this to be the case. This is exactly what Shigeko means for Yōzō as well:

In those hard times Shigeko was my secret salvation. At that point she also started calling me “daddy”, entirely on her own³¹ (Dazai 2009, 94).

A child, innocent by their nature, is someone who needs protection and care, and most of all a child of a single mother during the first four decades of the 20th century Japan – still a very patriarchal, rigidly gendered place. Yōzō calls Shigeko his “salvation” (*sukui*, 救い) because he understands her vulnerability, and hopes to redeem himself as a human being through becoming a father figure for her. He perceives her to be his salvation, but only because he believes it to be possible to become hers first.

In the only conversation between Yōzō and Shigeko, they speak of God.

- Daddy, is it true that if you pray to God, he can give you anything you want?

Oh how I wish I could make such a prayer.

O dear God, grant me cool-headed resolve. Let me know the true nature of man. Is it not a sin for people to push each other aside? Grant me a mask for my anger.

- Of course. God would probably do anything for you, Shigeko, but for me there’s no hope anymore³² (Dazai 2009, 94).

Yōzō believes that God would grant any of Shigeko’s wishes precisely because to him she is the definition of innocence, a person clean of sin, the very opposite of him. He says this to her despite him immediately stating that he does not believe in God’s love, only in God’s wrath (ibid, 94-95). The longing with which Yōzō writes the prayer he wants to be granted by God hints at his desire to be close to Shigeko to at least vicariously experience God’s love through her, through someone who still is in God’s good graces. This is why she is his salvation: as an innocent child, she is still close to God.

However, Yōzō’s path to salvation is abruptly interrupted by Shigeko’s words.

³¹ そういう時の自分にとって、幽かな救いは、シゲ子でした。シゲ子は、その頃になって自分の事を、何もこだわらずに「お父ちゃん」と呼んでいました。

³² 「お父ちゃん。お祈りをすると、神様が、何でも下さるって、ほんとう？」

自分こそ、そのお祈りをしたいと思いました。

ああ、われに冷き意志を与え給え。われに、「人間」の本質を知らしめ給え。人が人を押しつけても、罪ならずや。われに、怒りのマスクを与え給え。

「うん、そう。シゲちゃんには何でも下さるだろうけれども、お父ちゃんには、駄目かも知れない」

- Shigeko, what would you like to ask God for? <...>

- Me? I want my real Dad back.

I was startled, to the point of getting dizzy. Enemy. Was I her enemy? Was she mine? In any case, it turned out that here another frightening adult was waiting for me, intimidating me, a stranger, an uncanny stranger, a stranger full of secrets. This is what Shigeko's face suddenly looked like to me.

I thought Shigeko of all people was safe, but she, this person, turned out to be an ox who all of a sudden slaps a helpless fly on its side with its whip of a tail. From then on, I would have to be very careful around that girl³³ (Dazai 2009, 95-96).

The very moment Yōzō encounters an obstacle to his coveted path to salvation, Shigeko turns abject to him. This very conversation between Yōzō and Shigeko uncovers one of the key faults in Yōzō's character: incessant, endless *self-pity that borders on narcissism*. Yōzō strives towards salvation through engaging himself with the disadvantaged, the weak, the ones he as a good Christian would have to be helping, yet his motivation for this is far from innocuous. Shigeko's innocence matters to him insofar as it serves to make him feel better about himself by being her father, but when the girl expresses her desire to meet her biological father, instead of trying to empathize with her, Yōzō perceives this as a personal attack, and withdraws himself from Shigeko completely. In Yōzō's own metaphor, he is the helpless fly getting swatted by the tail of an ox, an enormous giant compared to the fly, yet when the reader realizes that the ox in this case is an innocent child missing her father, and the fly is a destitute alcoholic adult man, this metaphor becomes almost comical in its ridiculousness.

I believe that this is the turning point in the construction of the reader's abjection of Yōzō: while what happened to Tsuneko is undeniably tragic, Yōzō was not directly the cause of her death, yet his choice to deprive Shigeko of another father figure is fully Yōzō's own doing, his own choice. Even with all the religion and faith-related complexities of this situation aside, an adoptive father abandoning his child out of petty jealousy is an act that will cause disgust and an immediate moral condemnation on part of the reader. After the reader

³³ 「シゲちゃんは、いったい、神様に何をおねだりしたいの？」

<中略>

「シゲ子はね、シゲ子の本当のお父ちゃんがほしいの」

ぎょっとして、くらくら目まいしました。敵。自分がシゲ子の敵なのか、シゲ子が自分の敵なのか、とにかく、ここにも自分をおびやかすおそろしい大人がいたのだ、他人、不可解な他人、秘密だらけの他人、シゲ子の顔が、にわかになんかのように見えて来ました。

シゲ子だけは、と思っていたのに、やはり、この者も、あの「不意に虻を叩き殺す牛のしっぽ」を持っていたのでした。自分は、それ以来、シゲ子にさえおどおどしなくなりました。

experiences this moral judgement, the further perception of the novel changes for them: the morbid fascination with Yōzō's strangeness is gradually turned into higher and higher levels of disgust and contempt as he commits more and more things that are not as easy to explain away as simply as Yōzō's inability to fit into his society. The abjection experienced in relation to Yōzō's buffoonery and the abjection towards his demonization of his step-daughter are completely different in their intensity, and the last part of Yōzō's story leads this abjection to its culmination.

This last part encompasses the story of Yōzō's last lover, a bar maid named **Yoshiko** who tries to make him quit drinking. Yoshiko embodies the culmination of everything that Yōzō wishes to see in a woman: he claims that she has a "natural gift of trust" (*shinrai no tensai*, 信頼の天才), something that "her husband yearned for", "the purest of trusting hearts" (Dazai 2009, 125, 127). It is clear here once again why exactly Yōzō is drawn to Yoshiko: innocence and the ability to trust, something that Yōzō himself has never had, he is able to enjoy vicariously through Yoshiko. In addition to emphasizing her unique ability to trust, Yōzō calls Yoshiko a "maiden" (*shojo*, 処女) (ibid, 109), a word which could also mean a virgin, further highlighting her innocent, "clean" nature – something that is valued greatly in a woman within Christianity, hence the need for Mother Mary to be a virgin in order to give birth to Jesus, the son of God who cannot be born out of sin.

Yoshiko, just like Tsuneko, falls to a very tragic fate. Let us look at how Yōzō describes the horrendous event that breaks Yoshiko.

The window on top of my room was open, and I could see the inside of the room from the rooftop. The light was on, and there were two animals inside.

Vertigo overcame me. No, those are humans, those are still humans, I whispered to myself through heavy breaths. I just stood there, next to the ladder, not making a single move to go save Yoshiko³⁴ (Dazai 2009, 124).

In this scene, Yoshiko gets sexually assaulted by a merchant visiting Yōzō's home. It is curious how Yōzō omits calling this a rape right away, and only uncovers what exactly happened later on in his writings. In the moment, however, the focus is entirely on his own feelings associated with what is happening. Notice how the first thing Yōzō does when seeing

³⁴ 自分の部屋の上の小窓があいていて、そこから部屋の中が見えます。電気がついたままで、二匹の動物がいました。

自分は、ぐらぐら目まいしながら、これもまた人間の姿だ、これもまた人間の姿だ、おどろく事は無い、など劇しい呼吸と共に胸の中で呟き、ヨシ子を助ける事も忘れ、階段に立ちつくしていました。

his wife being assaulted is dehumanize both her *and* the attacker: he calls them both “animals” (*nihiki no dōbutsu*, 二匹の動物). He does not rush to help Yoshiko and just stays where he is, ruminating upon his dehumanization of the two people he is observing. In this moment, Yoshiko loses the virtue of pure, innocent trust that was so attractive to Yōzō, and this is what causes her immediate dehumanization by Yōzō. As we have discussed earlier, within the theory of abjection a woman’s filthy, sinful nature is only redeemed through the subordination of the female to the religious order; by losing her innocence, Yoshiko loses her redemption through virtue and is immediately viewed as abject by Yōzō.

Naturally, the reader is most likely to sympathize with Yoshiko here, seen as she is quite clearly the victim in this situation. Although the belief that a rape victim becomes “damaged” and is responsible for the crime being committed against them still can be seen in the modern world, it is perhaps not erroneous to assume that the absolute majority of readers across all kinds of socio-cultural experiential backgrounds would at the very least experience pity towards Yoshiko. What is seen as most abject in this episode by the reader is not Yoshiko’s perceived loss of innocence, but rather the fact that a rape has occurred, and Yōzō’s consequent reaction to it.

I ask God: is trust a sin?

It was not so much Yoshiko herself defiled, but rather her pure trust getting defiled that became the core of the endless, unbearable pain for me.

<...>

Yet this one virtue, the one I as a husband was yearning for, this pure trusting heart of hers awoke unbearable pity in me.

O Lord, is that pure and trusting heart sinful?

Having lost faith in this one virtue I so desired, I felt completely lost, and the only direction for me to follow was to alcohol, and nothing else³⁵ (Dazai 2009, 126-128).

³⁵ 神に問う。信頼は罪なりや。

ヨシ子が汚されたという事よりも、ヨシ子の信頼が汚されたという事が、自分にとってそののち永く、生きておられないほどの苦悩の種になりました。

<中略>

しかも、その美質は、夫のかねてあこがれの、無垢の信頼心というたまらなく可憐なものなのでした。

無垢の信頼心は、罪なりや。

唯一のたのみの美質にさえ、疑惑を抱き、自分は、もはや何もかも、わけがわからなくなり、おもむくところは、ただアルコールだけになりました。

This is the first time in Yōzō's diaries that he addresses God multiple times directly, the only previous time being his prayer in conversation with Shigeko. Yoshiko's perceived loss of virtue severs Yōzō's proximity to God once again, and Yōzō mourns the loss of that sublime link. The "defilement" of her trust he perceives as painful to *himself*, the loss of her trust in other people as reason enough for *himself* to feel lost and broken. Although Yōzō briefly mentions the pity he feels for Yoshiko, the focus of this part of the story is entirely on his feelings and his mental anguish, despite Yoshiko being the victim of a horrible crime, not him. Yōzō even discusses whether or not the wife should be forgiven for her "actions" in such cases, and does not mention the assailant almost at all when speaking of forgiveness (ibid, 126-127). "It was not so much Yoshiko herself defiled", says Yōzō, and within this phrase lies the despicable horror of a man so deep in his self-pity, that he is unable to sympathize with his own wife getting raped in front of his eyes, let alone try to save her.

The tragedy of Yoshiko becomes the last straw for Yōzō, who after another conversation with Halibut decides to depart to "a place with no women" (*onna no inai tokoro*, 女のいないところ) (ibid, 131), which in the end turns out to be a mental asylum. Yōzō's disillusionment with romantic and family relations with women is ultimately caused by his own failure to sustain these relations, as well as his abject tendency to only use women around him in order to feel more like a man of God, and less like a broken, monstrous outsider. Here, at the end of Yōzō's story, we find the final form of the horror of *Ningen Shikkaku*: a person who is so obsessed with seeking only the highest of virtues in others that any fault or imperfection they meet is immediately leading to abjection and dehumanization, a person who calls himself "lower than a cat or a dog", "a toad" (ibid, 101), yet cares only about his own feelings and his own pain.

Conclusion

The portrait of Ōba Yōzō begins as a portrait of a man who is born different through no fault of his own, but gradually develops into the portrait of sheer narcissism. When we as readers watch this portrait morph throughout the diaries, our abjection of Yōzō grows ever stronger, and the pity towards him slowly vanishes. The horror of the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel is deeply psychological and profound, yet its strength is in being undeniably human: after all, we get direct access to the inner life of one human being, and the horrors of his struggles and his shortcomings captivate us just like stories of charming vampires and ruthless serial killers do.

“The horror was this: the others”, writes the author of the most well-known piece of modern vampire horror fiction *Interview with the Vampire*, Ann Rice (2012, 209). For Yōzō, nothing was scarier than the others around him, and for us the readers nothing is scarier than being inside the mind of Yōzō, a terrifying “other”. The complex horror effect of the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel includes the following elements of horror that were identified in our analysis:

- the **“adornment” (yosooi)** of the novel that offers a stark contrast between the two narrators of the novel, the *watashi* and the *jibun*, creating an initial sense of abjection towards Yōzō for the reader;
- the **defamiliarization** of the reader with the normal world by Yōzō himself, distorting the perception of the world in the reader in order to invoke fear and discomfort both towards Yōzō as the abject and the world from his perspective;
- the **performative “buffoonery”** of Yōzō that adds to reader’s abjection of Yōzō and allows for a unique horror experience for autistic readers who engage in masking;
- the **dehumanization** of humans and himself by Yōzō that further deepens the reader’s abjection of Yōzō;
- the **unique attitudes of Yōzō towards women** in his life and in general that combine his dehumanization and proximity to the Christian faith, which uncover Yōzō’s narcissism and ultimate moral downfall, cementing the reader’s process of abjection of Yōzō, as well as finalizing the horror experience of the novel.

When it comes to the manga adaptation by Itō Junji, certain parts of all three volumes were compared to the “adornment” of the novel and the portrayal of women in the novel. As a result of this comparative analysis, we have come to a conclusion that the manga relies more on traditional mechanisms of horror by shocking the reader with traumatic events and images (such as a scene of suicide and graphic depictions of corpses) and supernatural creatures such as ghosts, as opposed to the more subtle, psychological and intellectual instruments of horror employed in the original *Ningen Shikkaku* novel. It is my conclusion that these elements of psychological horror are the key to understanding the persistent popularity of *Ningen Shikkaku*.

All in all, the analysis conducted with the employment of the cognitive approach combined with Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection provided a new perspective on the *Ningen Shikkaku* novel, shining the light on its elements that affect the reader as a work of horror. The multiplicity of such horror elements and their demonstrated effectiveness proves the validity of the chosen approaches and the material analyzed in this thesis. Indeed, the classic text of *Ningen Shikkaku* has proven to be no less terrifying than a traditional work of horror such as

H.P. Lovecraft's stories of Cthulhu or Steven King's masterpieces of modern horror. The cognitive approach to literary analysis has proven extremely relevant and helpful when analyzing the affective nature of horror on practice, and it is my belief that further use of this approach may allow for more unusual and unexpected discoveries in the ways we as readers and scholars interact with literary texts and perceive them with our bodies and minds as one whole entity. While the approach has its limitations due to the difficulty of generalizing experiences of all readers, which are unavoidably very subjective, the extant framework of the approach that includes the theory of experiential background allows for this limitation to be largely alleviated.

It is my hope that in the future of the cognitive approach and horror studies horror as a genre and as a concept will be taken more seriously by scholars of all kinds of media, and that more studies and analyses like this one will be conducted. In the contemporary world of ever-growing ways human beings interact with a myriad of narratives – from traditional literature to the directly interactive narratives of video games – it is my belief that the need to understand the relationship between the audience and the piece of media will continue to become stronger and stronger, and the possibility of seeing the cognitive analysis grow and evolve is more exciting than ever before.

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