Tragic Texts as Tools for Hope:
Processing Trauma and Building Connections Post-Tragedy through Literature

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The speaker of "The Wanderer remarks": "Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rīce; / onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum," (Lines 106-107). I can't help but agree. All of our lives are full of hardship as well as unexpected challenges, but this is not a deficit of human experience but rather an opportunity to create and connect. I am grateful to have so many people to thank for helping me make this paper come to life.

1. Introduction

No matter the time or place, there is a common pattern of communities responding to tragedies such as war or displacement through art and writing. Two examples of written responses to times of trouble are the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon poem "The Wanderer" and the post-WWII Japanese novel *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai. Historically, most scholars have focused on how these texts mark a particular time period or struggle through fiction. However, there is more to learn than just how people react to suffering in these texts.

"The Wanderer" is an Anglo-Saxon elegiac poem from the Exeter Book, written around 970 AD by a single scribe. It follows a survivor of war who has lost both his kinsmen and lord. He travels across the cold sea while reflecting on the mead-hall, community, and loss. He seeks out a new lord who can help him heal from this great exile and isolation. While on this journey, he finds himself also contemplating past Roman civilization as he walks among ruins. He concludes that through God, he will never be alone and can still have a sense of stability and connection amidst the transience of everything.

No Longer Human (Ningen Shikkaku) is a novel by Osamu Dazai[1] that tells the story of a troubled and traumatized protagonist, Yozo Oba, and his desperate attempts to connect with others and himself. Written just after World War II at the beginning of the American occupation, and set in 1930s Japan, it captures ongoing cultural and global shifts caused by both World Wars. This sets up a space to explore alienation, detachment, identity, and purpose throughout the life of the protagonist through three journals that he has written. Influenced by the disillusionment of

[1] The most recent translation by Juliet Winters Carpenter (2023) is the translation of *Ningen Shikkaku* being used for the purposes of this paper.

war and inspired by the Western novel, Dazai develops themes of ongoing and universal human experience of grief at a lack of connection with others.

In a globally uncertain time, it can help to look back to the conflicts and responses of the past, both to prevent tragedy and learn how to heal from the many circumstances that are so often out of our hands. These two texts cannot encompass the reaction humans have to tragedies, even today, but can be reframed as hopeful encouragements of community and mending. Although seemingly disparate, separated by language, culture, and time, Osamu Dazai's *No Longer Human* and "The Wanderer" both examine in content and form the ways that community dissolving in the wake of war can lead to alienation, and how literature can create new communities across time, language, and space to process depression and grief.

2. Theoretical Framework

Ann Cvetkovich, author of *Depression: A Public Feeling*, reintroduces depression through an affect theory and cultural studies lens. She argues that depression is not a pathology or moral failing, but rather a collective experience that is a natural response to tumultuous and even violent political and social environments. Cvetkovich contends that "long-term histories of violence" (Cvetkovich 7) continue to live in the cultural memory of places and therefore affect people's daily lives. She posits that depression is not an overreaction to the trauma that comes from the pervasive effects and ongoing institutions of "genocide, colonization, [and] slavery" (Cvetkovich 7). There is also a lot of discussion about the public sphere, which is typically emotional as well as physical, providing protective barriers to the public from individuals rather than societal traumas. When societal traumas occur, the "state divests itself of responsibility" (Cvetkovich 11) and individuals are expected to manage their personal and societal traumas

without as much support. Cvetkovich also breaks down the assumed legitimacy of our cultural definitions of emotional experience. She cites how “everyday experience is a manifestation of social life” (Cvetkovich 11) and that with different cultures and models, our perceptions and assumptions of emotion in relation to political, social, and spiritual experience shift. This is deliberately brought up to suggest that looking at alternative modes of understanding depression, even if it is not from a scientific perspective, is valid and has happened across history.

The emotional responses of the public and an individual with the turmoil that war and colonization lead to are reframed by Cvetkovich as an expected and “ordinary” (Cvetkovich 11) response to the “felt sensations of the lived environment” (Cvetkovich 11). Particularly in “The Wanderer” but also in *No Longer Human*, the use of the pathetic fallacy directly connects the emotional experience of the speaker to not only the social (or lack of social) environment, but also to the natural environment, which is one of the elements left at the forefront of human awareness when the protections of the social sphere are not in place. When violence and, by consequence, depression become integrated into a culture, it can influence the culture and thereby people’s “‘way of life’” and “‘structure of feeling’” (Cvetkovich 11). This experience leads to the kind of internal turmoil that the speakers of both texts have difficulty expressing. They struggle with processing their negative emotions or tainted positive feelings.

The specific model Cvetkovich utilizes to find a connection between the wider community and government shifting to become more self-serving rather than focused on helping others is exactly what happens during Japan post-World War II, although this shift started after the events of World War I. People become more privatized in their interactions and care due to the scarcity of opportunity and resources and colonization. This shift is reflected in isolation and

how that worsens the negative feelings and behaviors of Yozo in *No Longer Human*. "The Wanderer" has a similar issue from a lack of community, leading to a lack of tools for emotional processing and therefore distress. The speaker knows this and even acknowledges that with a new but familiar hall (representing and literally being his community of peers and friends) and lord, he would have a much easier time addressing his mourning.

Coupled with affect theory, integrating trauma theory is also important to this comparative reading of these two texts. Michelle Balaev, author and scholar of psychoanalytic trauma theory, argues that a view of intergenerational trauma theory that only adheres to the classical model of trauma conceived by traditional psychoanalysts, especially Freud, and is only perpetuated by literary scholars such as Kali Tal and Cathy Caruth is insufficient for an interdisciplinary understanding of trauma and its representations. This Freudian understanding of trauma represents trauma as a shattering of self (or community, if this is a collective trauma) based on a typically devastating event that may be repeated. Balaev criticizes the transhistorical model of trauma within literature as presented by Caruth that declares remembrance of (or even acknowledgement of ongoing) trauma as an infectious and pathological phenomenon rather than one that may be contextually more based on resilience to collective trauma than a re-traumatization or victimization of an in-group. Further, Balaev calls on specific novels such as *Ceremony* by Leslie Silko and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison that tackle collective historical trauma to demonstrate that there is a wide variety of individual responses to a collective trauma and that none of the understandings of these traumas can be separated from the political and sociological treatment of a group of people.

Although the Freudian understanding of trauma may work within most literature, especially for an individual's trauma, it is more beneficial to have a contextual model for trauma that is suggested by Baleav and its representation in literature when looking at collective traumas, which is a huge focus in both *No Longer Human* and "The Wanderer." In *No Longer Human*, there are individual traumas such as the neglect from Yozo Oba's family and sexual assault from the maids in his childhood home; however, the collective trauma drives more of the alienation and loneliness felt by Yozo Oba throughout the novel. Regarding "The Wanderer," there is a lack of individual identity of the speaker, as his experience with isolation is more representative of the collective fear and likely trauma from the war culture of Anglo-Saxons.

3. History and Form

3.1 The Anglo-Saxons and Elegiac Poetry

Compared to the recent World Wars, significantly less is known about the Anglo-Saxons, their cultures, and kingdoms. However, through the literature and artifacts of the past, things can be inferred about the culture and environment that developed "The Wanderer." Anglo-Saxons were primarily descendants of Germanic tribes that conquered much of modern-day England and established kingdoms following the fall of the Roman Empire. They frequently built their towns and cities on top of the ruins of the Romano-British civilization (Morris 24, 38-39; Into the Middle Ages, Room 3). Initially following Pro-Germanic paganism, they slowly adopted Christianity from Irish and Roman missionaries. The Christian faith didn't significantly influence the war culture of the Anglo-Saxons, which led to constant warring for resources and power. Beyond war, the markers of a good life within Anglo-Saxon society were fulfilling one's defined role in society, the "companionship of peers, and the expectation of cheer and reward from one's chieftain," (Frey 294).

The Exeter Book was written very close to the end of the rule the Anglo-Saxons had over England (later colonized by the Normans in 1066). But this downfall of Anglo-Saxon society was long coming and reflected in the literature of the last few hundred years pre-colonization. Around 793, Viking pillagers started becoming a more serious problem as the invaders started attacking and looting coastal monasteries. The Vikings, Norwegian and Danish pirates, had a disregard for Christian places of worship, and they weren't well guarded and had lots of riches. It was particularly aggravating and dangerous to the Anglo-Saxons when the Vikings started settling because that meant they were no longer interested in just pillaging, but in colonizing the British Isles (Morris 175, 181, 219). Both in the oral and written tradition, Anglo-Saxons grappled with being invaded just as hundreds of years prior their ancestors did the same.

Carol Braun Pasternack, a scholar of Old English, argues for a polyphonic and intertextual reading of "The Wanderer" instead of a stagnant one that doesn't consider the oral tradition-informed nature of the text to better understand the Old English literary tradition. Although modern readers will frequently read Old English texts such as "The Wanderer" outside of its original form as a manuscript and with a later determined title that was never part of the original text, to best understand the text, it is beneficial to put it back into the original context as best we can. In this original context, there is no centering of the authorial voice and instead a validity of various voices that may be represented in a single text. Further, due to the construction of a manuscript itself, the boundaries of texts are frequently unclear and sometimes even prescribed by the reader. Due to repetitive themes across the text of "The Wanderer" that resemble many other texts such as "The Seafarer" or "The Wife's Lament," one can conclude that all of these texts take similar themes and structures and are reshuffling them based on the interest and purpose of the composer (similar to oral poetry). This lack of boundaries allows

these themes across poems to be read in context with one another, and Pasternack suggests that this reading in context of themes across many oral and "oral-derived" (Pasternack 107) poems was common and expected within the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

"The Wanderer" is not a stagnant canonical text irrelevant to today's society, but rather an evolving expression through which Anglo-Saxon communities made sense of loss and shared identity; a polyphonic reading emphasizes this. If "The Wanderer" is only read from an author-centered point of view, it dampens the purpose of this text to represent and process the grief from the loss of community in war. Understanding that this is a text that was constantly reinterpreted and enriched by the people that it was written (and likely performed) by and for stresses the collective ownership of the narrative by the Anglo-Saxons. The text is not only significant for a historical understanding of the Anglo-Saxons' values and community but is also resonant of modern concerns of political distress leading to community fracturing and the importance of incorporating many voices and iterations of our community self-narratives.

Keeping in mind the intertextuality, it is also valuable to examine and consider the poetic genre "The Wanderer": elegiac poetry. In his article "Exile and Elegy in Anglo-Saxon Christian Epic Poetry," medievalist and Anglo-Saxon scholar Leonard Frey discusses how Anglo-Saxon Christian epic poetry generally follows the following structure: deprivation leading to a state of exile, reflection and rumination on what is lost, conclusion with seeking comfort and guidance from God. He argues that the Anglo-Saxon elegiac text is often in conversation with predecessor poems of the same genre, and all of them are primarily concerned with religious and cultural reflection. Due to the emphasis on not just a valuable connection with God, but also with one's community, the rumination section of these poems is a "mixture of mundane and spiritual pleasures" (Frey 300) that are now gone. There are both physical and spiritual levels to the

destitution of the speaker in this tradition. Poems, such as “The Wanderer” and “The Seafarer,” don’t consider the different hardships of a speaker’s journey as being equal; they compare the hardships of the physical environment to the more distressing “enforced separation from one's kindred or clan” (Frey 294), prioritizing the mental anguish over the physically unforgiving surroundings.

3.2 Buraiha and the Shi-shōsetsu

The genre in which *No Longer Human* is written, shi-shōsetsu, was defined alongside the cohort of writers in Japan called *Buraiha*, commonly known in English as the Decadent School. Although many of these writers were in community with one another, what primarily defined them was their hedonistic lifestyles and writing that explored the trauma and social identity crisis of WWII and post-WWII Japan. Although the genre was developed earlier (with the prototype of this novel emerging in 1907), this group was made up of figures such as Osamu Dazai, Ango Sakaguchi, and Sakunosuke Oda.

Howard S. Hibbett, translator and Japanese literature scholar, notes that the Japanese cultural importance and rebellion of the 私小説 *shi-shōsetsu* (in English commonly called I-Story or I-Novel), as well as the growing literary identity of authors that appear in their own stories and books, established this period of Japanese writers as classics. The genre was inspired by English, Russian, and German literature that made it to Japan, and it spurred an interest in autobiographical and confessional works. Frequently, the semi-autobiographical nature is both a point of interest and criticism for this genre of novel.

This genre was heavily criticized in Japan even during Hibbett's time of writing (1955) by those who persisted in preferring traditional, less personal, Japanese literary styles and

content. Hibbett notes that at the end of the Taisho Era there was a suppression of this kind of writing, as it often contained themes related to Marxism, communism, and socialism, which did not align with the “social or moral doctrines” (Hibbett 347) of those in power. In contrast, as of 2019, *Ningen Shikkaku* is the second best-selling novel by publishing house Shinchōsha (a popular Japanese publishing company) (読売新聞オンライン, 2019).

Outside of Japan, the genre was getting recognition even after its initial English-translation release by translator Donald Keene, but only as an extension of the pre-existing European novel tradition, rather than as a Japanese cultural phenomenon. However, the *shi-shōsetsu* has slowly become more recognized by Western audiences as distinctly Japanese through influences from medieval Buddhist confessional literature, Meiji naturalism, and various traditions of Japanese literature central to the genre, such as the theme of “*mono-no-aware*" (Hibbett 350). It is important in understanding *No Longer Human* to consider the Japanese literary history behind it. The *shi-shōsetsu* emphasizes affect in an interesting way that is unique to Japanese literary works. Hibbett emphasizes the strengths and history of this genre in a way that incorporates intertextual conversation and the political background of Japanese writers. Osamu Dazai is particularly noted by Hibbett as epitomizing this genre, so this semi-autobiographical genre-bending style must be incorporated into the understanding of the messages of *No Longer Human*.

4. Lacking Attachments

4.1 Exile from Invasion and the Losses of War

"The Wanderer" follows the pre-existing narrative structure, cultural values, and expectations of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The main body of this elegiac poem is an emotional and spiritual contemplation that reflects the societal and individual fears of the Anglo-Saxons. Frey argues that it is important to recognize "The Wanderer" and similar texts as incorporating both religious and sociocultural values of Anglo-Saxon society. His article informed how I am looking at exile as a lack of attachment from both religious and sociocultural perspectives.

The inciting incident to the suffering of the narrator is war, specifically an invasion. Based on the period and location this was written, likely Vikings, but also potentially (though less likely) the war and defense was against the Britons (Dumnonii) in West-Southern Wales (Morris 152, 213-219). This war and invasion directly led to the lack of attachment of the narrator. The issue is not the fact that he is alone, but rather that this is the result of being in exile due to the death of all his kinsmen and the subsequent invasion.

Exiles are presented as painful and absolute. In using the words must (*sceolde*) and *wyrd* in the line "He must travel a path of exile. *Wyrd* is resolute" (Line 5)[2], the narrator evokes the inevitable result of exile. Particularly, this line brings attention to the concept of *wyrd*, meaning fate or destiny. The path of exile is not just the result of personal actions or circumstances, but rather a predetermined destiny. The narrator must approach the discomforts of exile directly. While he is traveling by boat, he must "stir the frost-cold sea with his hands" (Line 4)[3]. This

[2] "wadan wræclāstas. Wyrd bið ful ārǣd." (Line 5)

[3] "hrēran mid hondum hrīmcealde sǣ," (Line 4)

discomfort emphasizes the aloneness of exile and the difficulty in weathering hardship without people to help or a defined purpose.

The winter setting of the exile is described throughout the poem with descriptions of the "frost-cold sea" (Line 4), "Falling frost and snow mixed with hail" (Line 48)[4], and the world "Covered with frost" (Line 77)[5]. Each of these lines includes *hrīm,* meaning frost, to emphasize winter encompassing everything. The Anglo-Saxons would have been very familiar with these descriptions of "windy headlands, chilly seas, and northern winters" (Frey 302) and how these harsh conditions "[provide] the perfect background for human hardship" (Frey 302). The environment is directly connected to the internal emotional state of the Wanderer through the use of pathetic fallacy.

The adjectives used to describe the environment are frequently used metaphorically to describe the emotional state of the Wanderer as well. For example, the line "A frozen heart, not the prosperity of earth" describes the emotional state as represented by the *ferðloca* (meaning heart, or more literally, life-enclosure line number). Later, the connection between the environment and the emotional state is strengthened again through the description of the Wanderer's travel and sorrow as being like winter itself. He says "I, wretched, / Traveled from there sorrowful as winter over freezing waves" (23b-24b)[6].

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[4] "hrēosan hrīm ond snāw, hagle gemenged." (Line 48)
[5] "hrīme bihrorene, hrȳðge þā ederas." (Line 77)
[6]
hrūsan heolstre biwrāh, ond ic hēan þonan
wōd wintercearig ofer waþema gebind, (Lines 23-24)

The Wanderer of this poem has been exiled because of a war or invasion that killed all the speaker's kin. Invocations of loneliness of the exile are always coupled with reminders of the death of his people. For example, at the beginning of the poem, the Wanderer reflects that "Often, at every dawn, alone I must / lament my sorrow. Now, there is no one alive / To whom I would dare openly express my soul" (Lines 7-9)[7]. He is bringing together his previous vulnerability and love for his people with his lamentation, displaying grief for this loss.

The burial memory is the first indication the reader gets that the speaker's most important relationship was with his now dead lord: "Long ago, my gold-lord/ I covered in the darkness of earth, and I, wretched, / Traveled from there sorrowful as winter over freezing waves" (Lines 22-24)[8]. "I, wretched" brings the burial of his lord and people from a more neutral statement to a difficult moment for him (and serves a double purpose of starting the next clause). At this time in Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, lords would commonly be buried with treasures and encased in an underground burial chamber also filled with items related to the person's role in their community (*Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300–1100, Room 41*). The fact that the lord is simply buried directly on the earth suggests that the burial may not have been proper. But the description of the burial using the word *heolstre,* meaning darkness or concealment, and *biwrāh,* meaning covered or hid, implies that this burial is a final dignity that he can give to his lord. In burying his lord, the speaker prevents both desecration from the Vikings and scavengers of war from picking at the

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[7]
wrāþra wælsleahta, winemæga hryre:
Oft ic sceolde āna ūhtna gehwylce
mīne ceare cwīþan. Nis nū cwicra nān (Lines 7-9)

[8] "siþþan geāra iū goldwine mīnne
hrūsan heolstre biwrāh, ond ic hēan þonan
wōd wintercearig ofer waþema gebind," (Lines 22-24)

lord's body. This care even during war shows the importance of the lord to his people and how war rips people from one another.

Much of the later description of war follows the beasts of battle "formula" that is commonly found in Anglo-Saxon literature (Magoun 83). This part of the poem comes after the descriptions of the abandoned buildings that the Wanderer observed as he left for exile. Then the speaker explores what the post-battle world looked like:

> Covered with frost, those dwellings snow-swept.
> The wine-halls decay. The ruler lies.
> Deprived of mirth the army all fell
> Proud by the wall. Battle took some of them away,
> Carried them to death; a bird bore one away
> Over the wretched sea; a hoary wolf
> Dismembered one in death; one sad-faced warrior
> Concealed in an earthen cave. (Lines 77-84)[9]

The absence of people he cares about is the most prominent issue within the poem. The buildings are starting to crumble without maintenance; "The wine-halls decay. The ruler lie" (Line 78). In setting these sentences next to one another, it can be assumed that the ruler lying down, presumably dead at this point, is part of why the community and infrastructure cannot be

[9] "hrīme bihrorene, hrȳðge þā ederas.
Wōriað þā wīnsalo, waldend licgað
drēame bidrorene, duguþ eal gecrong,
80wlonc bi wealle. Sume wīg fornom,
ferede in forðwege: sumne fugel oþbær
ofer hēanne holm, sumne se hāra wulf
dēaðe gedælde, sumne drēorighlēor
in eorðscræfe eorl gehȳdde." (Lines 77-84)

maintained. However, more than the buildings themselves, the speaker focuses much more time on the fall of the army and the following scavengers.

Through “a bird bore one away” (Line 81) and “a hoary wolf / dismembered one in death” (Line 82), the speaker creates gory imagery that contrasts with earlier images. When paired with the earlier line “Deprived of mirth, the army all fell” (Line 79), we get two simultaneous images: joyous army-men and then their separation in death. This line suggests that the army only fell because they were deprived of mirth. In the Anglo-Saxon war culture, continuous battles and the need for war resources meant that there was less opportunity for merriment and connection to others but more treasures and security in the long run (Morris 47, 72). The scavengers taking away the bodies of the soldiers on the battlefield emphasizes just how separated the speaker is from his people, as they are now dead and being eaten by animals.

4.2 Affect as Religious Struggle

Ann Cvetkovich, an affect theory scholar, suggests that language and connotation related to feelings and emotions are specific to culture and time. In the past, especially within the clergy, there were more spiritual and moral associations with emotional experiences. The titular concept of acedia, loosely meaning “carelessness,” is the predecessor of the concept of sloth and laziness. Acedia was thought to be a weakness or lack of faith; in being “idle and useless” (Cvetkovich 86) towards spiritual work and devotion. Negative thoughts and feelings, even beyond acedia, that led to distraction from spiritual work were often thought to be manifestations of “demons or external beings who can tempt the ascetic away from the spiritual path” (Cvetkovich 86).

Our modern medical model and slightly older concept of melancholy (which is often associated with creativity and genius although it is most like our modern deep sadness or

depression) may not neatly align with these older sacred structures for emotion. However, when comparing spiritual despair to other forms of a loss of faith or focus on a collective effort, such as activist work, it is evident that past alternative models of depression are not as archaic a way of framing emotional experiences as some may think. Although we are in a current medical model-based society for emotion, pathologizing even regular responses to abnormal circumstances, it is important to defamiliarize oneself from the default to allow for a wider understanding of emotional and social experiences that may be considered medical, spiritual, physical, etc (Cvetkovich 104).

This framework of emotion having different connotations and meanings across time will be helpful for discussing emotions in both texts. But specifically, the Christian monk's constructs of emotion being spiritual and moral, especially when related to spiritual crisis, are very interesting to incorporate into my understanding of "The Wanderer." It is fascinating that both restlessness and excessive inactivity are recognized as being manifestations of emotions, but are linked to the manifestation of sin. "The Wanderer" is a story of exile and spiritual crisis as the speaker reconciles his social distress with meditation, leading to a deepened relationship with God. This understanding of the wandering the speaker does as a potential moment of emotionally straying from God as a part of the trauma prevents an inadvertent stripping of the spiritual and religious aspect of the emotional experience of the speaker.

4.3 Determinism and God as Tools of Self-Blame

Victor Koschmann, scholar of Japanese history, argues that the debate of subjectivity, or *shutaisei*, that has been at the forefront of postwar Japanese society provides vocabulary and framework for understanding the modern Japanese intellectual consciousness. Across the

twentieth century and two world wars, Japan's political factions fought over phenomenology and determinism (all under the umbrella concept of *shutaisei)*. At the center of this debate was the value of the individual and how much an individual could be representative of the masses. This "psychosocial dislocation" (Koschmann 613) caused an existential backlash in which people who historically valued communalism and deterministic hierarchy started having apathy for public affairs and abandoned "their personal identification with the state" (Koschmann 613). Suddenly, there was less of a question of individuality as people; rather, the focus was on a privatization of values and less community responsibility.

A cultural shift from community responsibility and identity to a more individualistic mindset is particularly present in *No Longer Human*. This widespread abandonment of community leads Yozo Oba to feel like he is exiled and alone even within a country full of people, well-off family members, and many opportunities to better his life. It is notable that this privatization had been in development for a long time but became more pronounced in Japanese society after World War I and definitively intrinsic to Japanese society after World War II. Yozo Oba's experience of isolation and alienation is not specific to him, but rather a collective experience of the Japanese people trying to make sense of things after their state is gone in the wake of World War I and II (although the book takes place before WWII). Contrastingly, in "The Wanderer," the complete annihilation of the community except for the speaker leads to a lingering on the community that has been lost. The speaker does undergo a dislocation from the events of war but holds onto hope and longing for community in a way that Yozo Oba cannot even imagine.

In *No Longer Human* specifically, this debate of determinism and the individual is not complete without incorporating the complex Japanese relationship with both local and Western religion, specifically Christianity. Massimiliano Tomasi, a Japanese Studies scholar, explores the relationship that Dazai and his role models have with Meiji Protestant Christianity in his article "'What Is the Antonym of Sin?': A Study of Dazai Osamu's Confrontation with God." The specific version of Christianity that became popular in Japan during the end of the Meiji era was an offshoot of Calvinism, which combined with Japan's collectivist and shame-centric culture. The famous Osamu scholar Donald Keene believed that Osamu Dazai "failed to give his works the additional depth he sought" (Tomasi 112) through the addition of Christian explorations. Tomasi directly disagrees with Keene, suggesting that Meiji Protestantism is central to the questions posed and contemplated in Osamu Dazai's works, especially *Shayō (The Setting Sun*) and *Ningen Shikkaku (No Longer Human*).

Osamu writes through an ongoing tension between shame, punishment, and forgiveness, which reflects larger cultural conversations about Meiji Christianity's "excessive emphasis on sin" (Tomasi 133). The emotional experience that comes with the expectation of only punishment and never salvation from God is a pivotal part of the third notebook of the novel. The protagonist struggles with a seemingly predetermined fate of sin and pain, seemingly impossible to escape, bringing this aspect of the novel to the forefront.

It is frequently through the reminder of God that Yozo re-solidifies his own self-hatred and fear of others, which are the basis of his worldview. Although he grew up in a family following Shinto, "household gods" (Dazai 26) were mentioned as a fixture of his childhood; Yozo uses the Christian God to make sense of his own feelings of suffering. In Notebook Three:

Part One, during a conversation with a five-year-old girl named Shigeko, whom Yozo had become like a father to, he falls into fear of others yet again through perceived rejection by a child and God. Shigeko asks Yozo whether she can ask God for anything, and he responds that she can and he cannot. Her response to what she wants is her “real Daddy” (Dazai 105). In evoking God and then rejecting Yozo as her real father after referring to Yozo as her “Daddy” throughout the conversation, Shigeko becomes as much an “enemy” as any other "stranger” to Yozo.

> "I was afraid even of God, unable to believe in divine love, able only to believe in divine punishment. Faith. To, that meant simply facing God’s judgement seat with head bowed, prepared to accept his chastisement. I could believe in hell, but not in the existence of heaven.
>
> 'Why not you, Daddy?'
>
> 'Because I disobeyed my father.'
>
> 'You did? But everybody says you’re nice.'
>
> That’s because I had them all fooled.” (Dazai 105)

In this scene, Shigeko leads Yozo to reexamine his relationship with faith and shame through her questions about God and prayer. One of the questions Shigeko asks is why Yozo believes he won’t have his prayers answered by God, and he responds that it is because “[He] disobeyed [his] father” (105). Yozo is incredibly deterministic and believes that he is predetermined to be damned and simultaneously holds onto the shame that it is all his fault. In the impossibility of “the existence of heaven,” Yozo is withholding care and attachment (“divine

love") from himself to protect himself from rejection that he has been experiencing since he was a child. Despite this, he attempts to reach out to Shigeko to understand the child's understanding of faith and cannot handle her innocent response, which doesn't suit his hope for their father-daughter-like relationship, so much so that the "shock made [him] dizzy" (105).

The shift from community responsibility and identity to a more individualistic mindset is also present in *No Longer Human*. This widespread abandonment of community leads Yozo Oba to feel like he is exiled and alone even within a country full of people. It is notable that this privatization had been in development for a long time and was definitely intrinsic by the time Osamu Dazai was writing this novel. Yozo Oba's experience of isolation and alienation is not specific to him, but rather a collective experience of the Japanese people trying to make sense of things after their state is gone in the wake of World War II.

5. Reaching for Connection

5.1 Memories and Sensorimotor Projections

Although the exile is devastating for the Wanderer, he makes many attempts to tap into the previous connections that he has with his kinsmen, especially through his memories, dreams, and developing relationship with God. These memories and dreams are difficult for the Wanderer to process. But they do help him process his grief and become closer to God, which makes him feel closer to his departed community.

Antonia Harbus' "Deceptive Dreams in 'The Wanderer'" suggests that "The Wanderer" is a text particularly concerned with the emotional journey of the mind, and how the dreams within the text are literally and metaphorically representative of the speaker's journey through excess

emotion due to grief and sorrow. She clarifies this claim by saying that the journey is a "psychologically, not divinely, initiated [one]" (Harbus 168) despite the shift later in the poem presenting a spiritual solution. Although prophetic dreams are more common than retrospective dreams in Old English poetry, the dreams presented in this poem are "backward-looking" (Harbus 170), meaning that they have a different purpose than the more common revelatory dreams in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Harbus points to the connections between dreams, sorrow, and sin that scholars of Old English identify in the poetic canon, connections which are more "casually" (Harbus 168) explored in "The Wanderer" than in other poems. The narrator of "The Wanderer" includes those connections in the poem and presupposes the audience's familiarity with these tropes in Old English poetry. What the poem more explicitly explores, instead, is how the dreams only plague the speaker due to his lack of a lord. The boundaries between dream and waking for the speaker are unclear and highly debated by scholars, partially due to the dreams themselves, and the setting of reality within the poem functions as a reflection of the "mental circumstances of the dreamer" (Harbus 169). Due to the ever-changing nature of both the speaker's retrospective dreams and the reality of loss and change that he is presented with, life itself is presented as dream-like and ephemeral.

Amidst his half-dreaming, half-awake state, the Wanderer says: "When the memory of kinsmen passes through the mind; / he greets joyfully, eager to survey / his hall companions, they swim away again in a wave" (Lines 51-53)[10]. The "memory of kinsmen" and "joyfully" show

[10] "þonne māga gemynd mōd geondhweorfeð;
grēteð glīwstafum, georne geondscēawað
secga geseldan. Swimmað eft on weg." (Lines 51-53)

that the Wanderer is not suppressing his care that still lingers for his people. Rather, joy turns into grief and suffering when he remembers that they are all gone. “His hall companions, they swim away again in a wave” brings attention to the instability that the speaker is feeling without a permanent home, physically and emotionally. The wave metaphor also explores the way that the memories are attached to and evoked by sensory experiences related to possible past community seafaring.

Previously held in Crediton before being brought to the Exeter Cathedral, the Exeter Book very likely was written and compiled by a person from South-West England. Part of the common daily labor and focus would have been on the ports and sailors, as much of the economy was built around the River Exe and other coastal cities of that area (*Into the Middle Ages, Room 3*). Therefore, the waves and water itself as representative of community and prosperity wouldn’t have been something a reader of this text could have overlooked. However, now without a community, these sensory experiences, sometimes called “sensorimotor projections” (Colm 142), only evoke grief.

It is through strong attachments, such as familial ones, that grief emerges through loss or separation. Grief presents itself in various ways through an individual attempting to do what Hogan Patrick Colm in his book *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion* calls “mood repair” (Colm 113). Mood repair is when a person does various things to attempt to suppress or work through the negative feelings that come from grief. This can be very difficult because one of the attributes that defines grief, especially grief from the death of a loved one, is that there are “no possible actionable outcomes” (Colm 111) to go back to how things were. Instead, people will do

anything from changing their sadness to anger, performing religious or spiritual rituals, or engaging in forms of art to process their feelings.

5.2 Attempts at Interpersonal Connections

Grief is more than just handling mourning. For Yozo Obo in *No Longer Human*, although he does experience loss, that is not the main source from which his grief occurs. His grief mostly emerges from the imagination of wanting attachment to others but the denial of having that experience for himself. He either hasn't or won't make an attachment, but sees it happen in a seemingly easy way for others, causing his grief over what he doesn't have. He has the deterministic view that he will never find true attachment, and so instead he grieves for what he cannot have.

One of Yozo Oba's closest connections in *No Longer Human* occurs unintentionally through a fleeting friendship in middle and high school with a boy named Takeichi who had the ability to look through the fake, jovial personality Yozo put forth to the world. Unfamiliar with the vulnerability of being seen by another person, initially Yozo hates Takeichi. However, in a moment of affinity. Yozo and Takeichi looked at prints and reproductions of "French Impressionist works" (Dazai 51) together. The two of them both remark on the monstrous look of the figures in the paintings as well as their intentions to be painters in the future. Yozo thinks that "this group of painters, having been wounded and threatened by human monsters, finally believed their fantasies" (Dazai 51). Yozo finally sees himself and his fear of humans in other people, including in these famous painters and Takeichi. Even though it is built on shared pain, he also has an understanding that he is not alone for once.

"[Yozo] had always shown Takeichi [his] vulnerable, and hypersensitive side without hesitation" (Dazai 53) and received unconditional support in return. This safety and healing through painting is a form of mood repair for the trauma and lack of support Yozo experienced in his life until he was able to leave his parents' house and have some control over who he was in community with. This mutual relationship, encouraging each other's healing through painting, continued until Yozo had to leave for university.

Unfortunately, attempts at connection with others, outside expectations from his father, and people continuously taking advantage of Yozo led to no relationship that was as healthy or helpful as the one with Takeichi. Yozo continued framing most people he interacted with as either "terrifying" (Dazai 27) or "pathetic" (Dazai 78) (frequently referring to women as the latter). However, the fear didn't prevent him from continuing the same goal of "asking humans for love" (Dazai 27) that he had since he was a child.

This interest and distrust of humans and community is seen repeatedly in attempts to connect through experiences, such as joining the underground Communist Party and various companionate relationships built on mutual suffering, followed by continuous withdrawal from moments that could form lasting connections. One of the few instances in which Yozo doesn't shy away from an emotional experience with another person is his attempted double suicide at the end of Notebook Two. Possibly, it is because there is no future situation in which Yozo is willing to accept this paradoxical moment of intimacy in removing himself from this society and his suffering.

This scene, where Yozo and his first love, Tsuneko, are preparing to jump into the sea off the coast of Kamakura with the intention of dying, is one of the few instances in the book where

he is not so concerned with how he appears or is acting to another person. “I took off my cloak and laid it in the same place, and we went into the water together” (Dazai 80) is one of the minimal sentences of the short paragraph that describes the suicide attempt of Yozo and the completed suicide of Tsuneko. What is most interesting in this paragraph is the lack of emotional or intellectual commentary by Yozo. In the paragraphs before, he is very focused on his own humiliation and presentation to others when Tsuneko asks if they can get coffee before they complete suicide. All that he focuses on in this paragraph of death preparation is their actions, at first apart and then together as they “went into the water together” (Dazai 80). It is devastating, but also an important moment of bonding for Yozo.

In jail, Yozo mentions to the guard that he misses “the dead girl” (Dazai 81), but it doesn’t appear that he has the tools to grieve her. Instead, Yozo focuses on avoiding persecution for attempted suicide as he is interrogated in a holding cell by using his charisma as best he can. However, it doesn’t appear that he has completely let go of his grief and love for Tsuneko, as after he is released from the prosecutor’s office, Yozo looks up at the sunset and sees that “a seagull was flying in the shape of the kanji character for ‘woman’” (Dazai 86). Through finding associations with someone he has lost in nature, although this is a one-time occurrence, Yozo has been changed by his connection and care for Tsuneko.

6. Resolutions

6.1 Hope Through Religious Connection

The end of “The Wanderer” becomes incredibly religious as the speaker comes to a solution for his suffering. He finds solace through God. This is an example of a person using

religion to find an actionable way to handle grief. Through God and an understanding that everything is transient, the speaker makes peace with his trauma.

> "All is full of hardship in the earth's kingdom;
> Destiny overturns man's fate in the world under the heavens.
> However, treasure is transitory, here a friend is transitory,
> Here a man is transitory, here a friend is transitory
> All this earth's foundation becomes empty.
> So said the wise man in his mind, he sat apart in council.
> It is good for him who keeps his faith; never shall he too quickly
> Reveal his suffering, provided that he knows the remedy beforehand,
> a nobleman with zeal. Well is he who seeks prosperity,
> help from our Father in heaven, where all our safety will exist." (Lines 106-115)[11]

The fact that everything is transient is emphasized significantly through "friend" (Lines 108-109), "man" (Line 109), and "treasure" (Line 108) being described as transitory across two lines before reiterating through describing earth itself as ever-changing. Following the great focus on worldly sensations and memories, the Wanderer realizes that because everything is continuously changing on earth, "this earth's foundation becomes empty" (Line 110). The word specifically used for earth's foundation is "*īdel*" which also means vain, useless, or void. With the connection to God, Earth is newly irrelevant to the happiness and healing of the speaker. The

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[11] Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rīce;
onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
Hēr bið feoh læne, hēr bið frēond læne,
hēr bið mon læne, hēr bið mæg læne,
eal þis eorþan gesteal īdel weorþeð.
Swā cwæð snottor on mōde; gesæt him sundor æt rūne.
Til biþ se þe his trēowe gehealdeþ; ne sceal næfre his torn tō rycene
beorn of his brēostum ācȳþan, nemþe hē ær þā bōte cunne
eorl mid elne gefremman. Wel bið þām þe him āre sēceð,
frōfre tō Fæder on heofonum, þær ūs eal sēo fæstnung stondeð.

speaker doesn't write off the earthly "hardship" he has had to endure but rather chooses to find help and hope in heaven instead of dwelling too much on this hardship.

The language used in the last two lines also points to the speaker connecting with the audience and others like him on religion and the struggle of being a person going through the struggles that come alongside living on Earth. "our Father in heaven" (Line 115) claims the audience as being in the same group as him using "our" and simultaneously alludes to the Lord's Prayer. In iterating the importance of getting "help" and gaining "safety" through God, the speaker brings to the forefront not just healing but also comfort in religion together. The last line that focuses on how, through God, "all our safety will exist" (Line 115) is particularly impactful in healing, as it is a message connecting the speaker to those he has lost by suggesting that even though they are dead, they are now safe. At the same time, through this line, the speaker makes a bridge to the audience using the word "all." The audience has gone through this hardship alongside him and now gets to take part in their own healing alongside him through his invitation to seek out God.

6.2 Nirvana or Numbness; It's Irrelevant

At the end of the Third Notebook, Yozo is placed in assisted living alone with a caretaker who "violates" (Dazai 150) him. The audience is left with Yozos's last contributions to the book:

> "Now I am neither happy nor unhappy.
>
> Everything passes.
>
> This is the one truth I have gleaned from human society, where I have lived as in a hell of screaming agony.

Everything passes." (Dazai 150-151)

Yozo is neither happy nor unhappy, just living on, which can be read as either a neutral or negative ending to Yozo's story. The neutrality Yozo speaks of in being "neither happy nor unhappy" is reminiscent of the goal of Buddhism to not linger on emotions such as these, which will lead to nirvana or the discontinuation of rebirth (samsara). Although Buddhism is sparsely discussed in the novel, it is a widely practiced alternative religion and way of life that may have been a solution to Yozo's distress that he tied up with his Christian beliefs (Ama 18). The repetition of "Everything passes" also reads as a mantra for Yozo to commit to achieving the non-self of Buddhism.

However, due to Yozo's position as an unreliable narrator, it is difficult to take this conclusion at face value. It is also very possible that Yozo has become numb through all the "hell of screaming agony." Possibly what is more important than the end of Yozo's recollection in the journals is how the novel can be framed as not a complete tragedy, whether Yozo gained peace and understanding in a world of humans or not. Donald Keene, Japanese scholar and translator, notes that the Epilogue written from the perspective of a nameless person who reads Yozo's notebooks emphasizes how "the cowardly acts and moments of abject collapse do not tell the whole story" (Keene 7).

The last words of the novel reframe Yozo by his best qualities, as an old woman who knew him tells the nameless narrator "nonchalantly" that Yozo "was a dear boy. An angel" (Dazai 159). Despite even the nameless narrator referring to Yozo as a "madman" (Dazai 155) at the beginning of the Epilogue, the novel ends with hope. The old woman saying "nonchalantly" that Yozo is "an angel" shows that this is not a difficult conclusion for her to come to and that

even if Yozo had many flaws and was a distressed man, he made an impact through his kindness to others. Despite Yozo's own inability to imagine going to heaven, he is likened to an agent of virtue in the world as he is reframed as an "angel" to the audience.

It is not his desperation for love from humans that led him to adopt the "clown persona," nor is it his worst addiction that people remember and care about him for. Even if the audience rarely got to see the positives of Yozo's life, it is impactful to those who feel alone and alienated that he was valued and created connections even after his presumed death. Dazai provides an opportunity for those who feel ostracized and isolation not just to feel seen in their fears and anxieties about society, but also that they have hope for that love that they seek.

7. Conclusion

Both "The Wanderer" and *No Longer Human* are very melancholic and upsetting for readers for many reasons. Collective and individual trauma manifested through death, war, invasion, political turmoil, isolation, alienation, exile, abuse, and addiction are central to these texts. It is all too easy to get lost in the real historical tragedies that were fashioned into these stories instead of looking for a deeper connection or purpose beyond the documentation of suffering and history.

The world, the same in many ways as it was over one thousand years ago or 78 years ago (when mere months after Osamu Dazai's suicide, *Ningen Shikkaku* was published posthumously), is full of people in distress and frequently oppressed. However, even in the common strife of being human or the collective trauma that spans generations and whole diasporas of people, we continue to seek healing, love, and connections. Readers are not just

encouraged to empathize and create a bond with the speakers, but also to learn from the efforts of these speakers to have more fulfilling attachments with others and hold gratitude despite how temporary all these attachments are.

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