No Longer Dazai:
The Re-Authoring and “Character-ification” of Literary Celebrity
in Contemporary Japanese Popular Culture

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Abstract

Dazai Osamu (1909–1948) is a celebrated Japanese author who is most known for his postwar novels of despair and decadence, such as *The Setting Sun* (1947) and *No Longer Human* (1948). He is recognized as one of the literary greats by the academy and his work has been praised by scholars and critics. However, his star image also has a familiar presence in mass culture and his texts have been labelled as popular literature for anomic youth who are struggling to define themselves. While Dazai’s place in canonical literature is well established, I argue that it is Dazai’s multi-faceted, mutable image as a decadent anomic figure that has been mobilized by popular culture networks to expand his star text, adapt it to new mediums, and generate interest among youths in the historical “original.”

I first contextualize Dazai’s literary celebrity in his historical moment of early twentieth-century Japan to highlight how the author self-fashioned himself as a social outcast vis-à-vis the literary establishment, and how the details of his life and death have been “re-authored” by publishers and readers to intensify his image as an anomic figure. Specifically, I engage in paratextual analysis to see how reprints of *No Longer Human* emphasize narratives of autobiography, suicide, and youth literature; and how this, in turn, has led to Dazai’s star text becoming synonymous with the novel and its protagonist, Ōba Yōzō.

Then, through a close reading of the multimedia series *Bungō Stray Dogs* (2013–) and *Bungō and Alchemist* (2016–), I explore how Dazai’s “character-ification” has embodied the author’s abstract image in the collective imagination and brought it into in the world of manga, anime, and video games. Because the author-characters are constructed from biographical details with new elements added on top, there is still room for audiences to translate the semiotic signs assigned to each character. This has made Dazai visually “knowable” to audiences and
encouraged many fans to seek out the original author. In this fashion, popular culture adaptations of literary star texts have played a significant role in revitalizing youth interest in modern Japanese literature and its authors.
Lay Summary

Dazai Osamu is a Japanese author who is popular among youth and who is also celebrated by scholars and critics alike. By investigating the origins of Dazai’s popularity and how contemporary reprints of his books describe his person, life, and death, I bring attention to the constructed nature of his authorial image. His most famous novel *No Longer Human*, for instance, has been advertised by publishers as Dazai’s suicide note. This has reinforced Dazai’s association with suicide, as exemplified by Dazai’s fictional counterparts in the multimedia series *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist*. In my thesis, I argue that the inclusion of literary references in these series are designed to encourage audiences to learn more about the historical author and gain a deeper appreciation for his character. In doing so, I shed light on the link between literary canonization and popular culture in modern and contemporary Japan.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Jaylene Laturnas.
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Dedication

To all the young people whose lives were put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The ecstasy and terror
Of having been chosen—
Both are within me.
—Paul Verlaine\(^1\)

Ever since the celebrated Japanese author Dazai Osamu (太宰治) died in 1948 in a lover’s suicide with Yamazaki Tomie (山崎富栄)—a beautician and war widow—countless fans have continued to gather at Zenrinji temple in Mitaka, Tokyo for Ōtōki (桜桃忌), an annual celebration of the author’s life and death.\(^2\) Ōtōki takes place not on the couple’s death date, June 13, but six days later on June 19, Dazai’s birth anniversary and, coincidentally, the anniversary of when Dazai and Tomie’s remains were recovered from the Tamagawa Aqueduct. Last year’s Ōtōki (2022) was a beautiful sunny Sunday that followed a long period of COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdowns and marked the official end of the rainy season. This led to an even larger turnout than usual. Before noon, offerings already covered the base of Dazai’s headstone and began to spill out onto the pavement in front. By the end of the day, the entire Tsushima family grave was overflowing with offerings, so much so that no one could stand directly in front of it anymore. Among the offerings of flowers were Dazai’s favourite things: boxes of Japanese cherries, MSG, apples, cigarettes, beer, and Suntory whiskey, among others. The graveyard was filled with the silent thoughts and prayers of Dazai fans who politely lined up to take their turn paying respects—myself one of them. This large-scale event that has continued for over seventy

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\(^1\) As quoted in Phyllis I. Lyons, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations* (Stanford University Press, 1985), 54. Dazai included this line from Verlaine’s *Sagesse* at the front of *The Twilight Years* (晩年 Bannen, 1936), his first short story collection.

\(^2\) The name Ōtōki (lit. “cherry death anniversary”) was chosen by Kon Kan’ichi (今官一), a fellow author and friend of Dazai’s. It derives its name from the title of one of Dazai’s short stories, “Cherries” (桜桃 Ōtō, 1948).
years, even in the midst of a global pandemic, is a testament both to Dazai’s undying popularity and the celebrity status held by many of Japan’s literary greats (bungō).

However, what is most interesting to me is the demographics of those who visit Dazai’s grave. That is, Ōtōki continues to attract hundreds of Japanese teens and young adults from across the country, even seventy years after Dazai’s passing. Not only that, but there has also been a noticeable increase in the number of foreign and local visitors who have been motivated to visit Dazai’s grave in Zenrinji temple due to previous encounters with Dazai’s work or persona in popular culture. For example, in early June 2018, the newspaper *Yomiuri Shinbun* (読売新聞) interviewed a female exchange student (26) from Hubei Province, China who had visited Mitaka with a friend to pay respects at Dazai’s grave for the first time. She described Dazai as someone “who lived life troubled by the disconnect between ideals and reality,” and explained how she became an ardent fan after viewing the 2010 film adaptation of Dazai’s 1948 novel *No Longer Human* (人間失格 Ningen shikkaku) starring Johnny’s idol Ikuta Tōma (生田斗真) via online streaming. She was immediately attracted to protagonist Ōba Yōzō’s vastly different way of life and purchased Chinese versions of Dazai’s work shortly after. Furthermore, she recalled how, when she was still in China, Dazai was one of the most well-known authors in China, alongside Lu Xun (魯迅), the “father of modern Chinese literature,” and there was no shortage of Dazai fans around her.4

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As suggested by the testimony above, Dazai’s charisma and literary celebrity have transcended language barriers and international borders. This has largely been made possible via transnationally circulated popular culture texts such as the manga *Bungō Stray Dogs* (文豪ストレイドッグス Bungō sutorei doggusu, 2013–) and the simulator game *Bungō and Alchemist* (文豪とアルケミスト Bungō to arukemisuto, 2016–). Drawing on theory from literature, media, star, and fan studies, I engage with the author “Dazai Osamu” as a literary star text that was at first self-fashioned by the historical person and has since been “re-authored” by publishers and audiences. Of particular importance to Dazai’s contemporary star text is how visual and textual representations of the author in contemporary publications of his work and popular culture series such as *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist* have reworked an image and understanding of the author for contemporaneous youth demographics. By analyzing the main texts that inform the “Dazai Osamu” image, I aim to bring attention to the constructed nature of literary celebrity in Japan, the interconnected role of “high” and “low” culture in the dissemination of author images, and how both create Dazai’s significant presence in contemporary popular culture.

While Dazai’s place in canonical literature is well established, I argue that it is Dazai’s multifaceted, mutable image as a decadent anomic figure that has been mobilized by popular culture networks to expand his star text, adapt it to new mediums, and generate interest among youths in the historical “original.” As David Boyd notes, it is also important to remember that there is “a wide range of possible configurations between writer and text, text and reader, writer and reader.”5 In this thesis I ask, who is “Dazai Osamu” and what can we learn from the relationship between his texts and readers?

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1.1 Dazai Osamu and Tsushima Shūji

Dazai Osamu (birth name Tsushima Shūji 津島修治) was born on June 19, 1909, to a wealthy family in the village of Kanagi in the Tōhoku (northeastern) region of Japan. He was the eighth surviving child of Tsushima Gen’emon (津島源右衛門, formerly Matsuki Eizaburō 松木永三郎), one of the most prominent landowners in Aomori Prefecture who served as a member of the Imperial Diet from 1912 until his death in 1923. That same year, Dazai entered Aomori Junior High School and was introduced to Ibuse Masuji’s (井伏鱒二) earliest literary work “Confinement” (幽閉 Yūhei, 1923) by his older brother Keiji. Before long, Dazai found himself immersed in the works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (芥川龍之介) and other writers, and he even began to publish his own original short stories, plays, and essays in school magazines and family journals in early 1925 at the young age of fifteen. Despite a life full of ups and downs—including bouts with drug addiction, multiple suicide attempts, ex-communication from his family, and affairs with other women—Dazai kept writing for the next twenty-three years with relatively few periods of inactivity. From 1933, when he first published under the pseudonym “Dazai Osamu” with “The Train” (列車 Ressha) in the Northeastern Daily News (東奥日報 Tōō Nippō), to his last, unfinished serialized novel Goodbye (グッド・バイ Guddo bai) in 1948, Dazai left behind enough assorted writings for an eleven-volume series of collected works.7

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7 Referencing Chikuma Shobō’s The Complete Works of Dazai Osamu (太宰治全集 Dazai Osamu zenshū) circa 1999. Volume 12-13 contain Dazai’s written correspondence and original manuscripts, so I have not included them in this count.
Dazai’s career is typically divided into three periods: early, middle, and late. His early period (1933–1937) marked the beginning of his professional career and entrance into the Tokyo literary scene as the writer “Dazai Osamu.” The turbulent lifestyle of his early years eventually led to a disillusionment with the literary establishment as well as physical and mental collapse. This ended with a month as an in-patient at a psychiatric hospital in Musashino. By contrast, Dazai’s middle period (1938–1945) was a time of recovery and stability in which he produced most of his literary work. Comfortably settled into married life with Ishihara Michiko (石原美知子), a schoolteacher from the Kōfu region of Japan, Dazai wrote with new vitality. However, Dazai’s light-hearted, entertaining short fiction of his mid-career soon gave way to the postwar novels of decadence and despair that he is most associated with today, such as *The Setting Sun* (斜陽 Shayō, 1947) and *No Longer Human* (人間失格 Ningen shikkaku, 1948). *The Setting Sun* is a novel based on the diary of Ōta Shizuko (太田静子) that depicts the material, physical and psychological after-effects of the war via the postwar decline of protagonist Kazuko’s formerly aristocratic family. Kazuko’s final rebellion against “the old morality” through bearing a child out of wedlock is also emblematic of a society in flux.\(^8\) *No Longer Human* follows the story of Ōba Yōzō, a young man from a rich family in northeastern Japan who feels alienated from society and resorts to clowning as a last, desperate act of love towards humankind. However, his attempt to live a life without deceit eventually ends in a descent into depravity and his admission to a psychiatric hospital—at which point he declares himself to be “no longer human” (*ningen shikkaku*).

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1.2 Theoretical Approaches to Literary Celebrity

As someone whose initial exposure to Dazai (outside of popular culture) was Donald Keene’s English translation of No Longer Human (1958) and a Japanese literature class at Waseda University (Spring 2018) that primarily focused on narratives of ill health, loss, and suicide, I was pleasantly surprised when I visited the Mitaka Art Gallery for its Dazai Osamu 70th Death Anniversary Exhibition and saw photos of the author happily smiling alongside his family and friends. As I began to read more and to interact with Japanese Dazai fans, I began to realize that what was represented in Keene’s translation and in my literature class was but one aspect of Dazai’s multi-faceted image and that his postwar works were but a small part of his fifteen-year career. Why, then, do scholars and educators emphasize the final three years of Dazai’s life and literary career? How did Dazai’s dark and gloomy image come to overshadow his lighter, humorous side? Who is “the author Dazai Osamu” more broadly in the public imagination? These questions became the starting point of my Master’s thesis and investigation into the constructed nature of literary celebrity.

To explore these questions, I draw upon scholarship that frames stars (celebrities) as texts as defined in Richard Dyer’s critical study Stars (1998). Drawing upon the fields of semiotics and sociology to analyze and demystify the historical, ideological, and aesthetic significance of Hollywood film stars, Dyer argues that stars are only significant because they are in film and that films are only significant because they have stars in them. At the core his work is the idea that because stars exist within a socially constructed “reality” and are, as such, a social phenomenon, we can never know them directly as real people. Stares are images and significations that come

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9 Mitaka-shi bijutsu gyarā 三鷹市美術ギャラリー, (Tokubetsuten) Dazai Osamu Mitaka to tomoni: Dazai Osamu botsugo 70-nen (特別展) 太宰治 三鷹とともに: 太宰治没後 70年, Mitaka, Japan, June 16-July 16, 2018.
alive in and across media texts such as films, newspaper articles, television programs, and advertisements. Of course, stars and authors exist independently of their “fictional” appearances but, according to Dyer, this fact merely disguises that they are “just as much produced images [and] constructed personalities as ‘characters’ are.”¹⁰ Furthermore, like characters, stars are particular and interesting (e.g., have stage or pen names), autonomous (e.g., they appear to have a “life of their own”), and they emphasize consistency crafted for audience recognition and identification.¹¹

Behind the pen name “Dazai Osamu” is the historical person of Tsushima Shūji. Tsushima Shūji’s existence independent of his fiction leads us to believe that “Dazai Osamu” is more real than a character or persona. Upon reading memoirs written by those who knew the author personally, “Dazai’s” constructed nature becomes apparent. Tsushima Shūji had a lighthearted and upbeat personality; he was usually at the center of conversation at social gatherings.¹² Meanwhile, “Dazai Osamu” was, and has been, continuously been depicted as “self-conscious” (jiishiki), introverted, and gloomy.¹³ In this thesis, I engage with Tsushima Shūji in terms of his author-persona (Dazai) and its star signification—what Dazai, as a character, represents and means.

By analyzing stars as images or characters that exist in and are made up of various paratexts, we can acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings they embody. Therefore, I look at how different “high” and “low” culture texts have presented Dazai’s star image over time, and

¹³ Unlike the English “self-conscious,” *jiishiki* refers to the desire for recognition from others and a concern over how people perceive you. By persona, I am referring to the voice or, in this case, image, chosen by the author for a particular artistic purpose.
then address questions of who and what “Dazai Osamu” might be or mean within the context of these selected texts. My observations are not necessarily how all people understand Dazai’s star text, but how publishers and networks of popular culture distribution have shaped it for everyday readers—and how popular culture adaptations of literary star texts have then played a significant role in revitalizing youth interest in modern Japanese literature and its authors. In doing so, I hope to engage and amplify other modes of reading, such as what his particular star text can mean for non-dominant and often marginalized readers, spectators, and consumers.

Literary stars, like Hollywood stars, are products of media industries and consumer practices. Literary celebrity, however, is not directly equivalent to American studio-era movie star celebrity. Therefore, to consider Dazai’s star text in terms of literary celebrity, I predominantly refer to Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings’ *Idolizing Authorship* (2020) and how they frame the construction of what we might call “star authors” in broad, multinational contexts. As Franssen and Honings argue, although readers have idolized writers for centuries, literary celebrity as a concept is far from obvious due to three main fields of tension between: 1) modern forms of renown and traditional forms of fame; 2) “official” narratives (i.e., canons and critics) and mass “celebrity” culture; and 3) “self-fashioning” attempts by the author and “public perception.”

Firstly, contemporary literary celebrity (supported by mass media hype) is not directly equivalent to literary fame in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Secondly, literary prestige

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and celebrity are “two different, irreconcilable phenomena,” as literary prestige is informed by literary scholarship and has long been associated with high culture (e.g., intellectual pleasures, cultural capital, and elitist refinement), whereas celebrity is linked to mass culture (e.g., popular entertainment, commerciality, and mass production). Thirdly, an author’s stature is created “within a complex tension field of power relations where different parties claim authority [and] have a share…in determining the values and meaning of the work and the public image of literary authors.” As such, authors are forced to either reject commercial success to retain some legitimacy of “authorship” or embrace popularity and all the media attention that comes with it—a process of navigation they refer to as “self-fashioning.” However, as Franssen and Honings stress, no author has the last word:

Readers, critics, admirers, and other actors appropriate the author’s work and image: they reframe, reinterpret and revisualize the author’s words, looks, body, and life. In doing so, they ensure the prolonged success of the author, even long after the death of their idol, but at the same time they re-author, in a sense, the author’s image and oeuvre. It is these concepts of “self-fashioning” and “re-authoring” that are the basis of my analysis of Dazai’s contemporary star image. I first investigate how Dazai has historically self-fashioned his star text via his own writing, physical representations of his work, and author portraits, which corresponds with a notion of literary celebrity. I then expand my analysis to consider how Dazai’s life, death, literature, and person have since been re-authored by audiences in popular culture and subsequent reprints of his work to create a transmedia character.

In thinking about the creation of character across and through texts, I draw on Gérard Genette’s Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation (1997) and Linda Hutcheon’s A Theory of

16 Franssen and Honings, Idolizing Authorship, 17.
17 Franssen and Honings, Idolizing Authorship, 17.
18 Franssen and Honings, Idolizing Authorship, 17.
Adaptation (2012). Genette defines paratexts as “liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader,” including titles, the author’s name, forewords, afterwords, and publishers’ jacket copies. Such elements simultaneously “ensure the text’s presence in the world”—i.e., its reception and consumption in the form of a physical (or digital) book—and serve as a threshold between the text and the outside world. Most importantly, they are an undefined space that contains the potential to influence or change public reception and interpretation of a text. Therefore, paratextual analysis of contemporary editions of Dazai’s work, especially No Longer Human, helps reveal the narratives that publishers have conveyed to readers and the role that paratexts play in the re-authoring of his literary celebrity as a transmedia character or star.

Hutcheon adds to this a framework that considers adaptations as a formal entity or product; a process of creation; and a process of reception. Audiences are not passive recipients of textual meaning but active contributors to the aesthetic process who work with the text to decode signs and create meaning; they have certain expectations and demands, and they can disrupt priority and authority by experiencing the adaptation before encountering more “official” interpretations. This would include, for example, audiences who are familiar with the original text and bring different expectations and intertextual knowledge to its adaptation that, in turn, influences how they receive it. Meanwhile, unfamiliar audiences may rely on cultural memory to

21 Genette, Paratexts, 1-2.
22 Genette, Paratexts, 2.
experience the adaptation via its paratexts. In Dazai’s case, many Japanese people already possess basic knowledge of Dazai’s life and works from junior and senior high school literature classes. Thus, as Japanese audiences consume adaptations of Dazai’s star text they may unconsciously form connections between the “original” and adaptation—an important site of re-authoring.

In Chapter Two, I introduce Franssen and Honing’s theories of literary celebrity—namely, the interaction between author (self-fashioning) and audience (re-authoring)—to my discussion and analysis of Dazai’s star text. I discuss how Dazai’s star text and literature fit into the early-twentieth century star system of the bundan, or literary establishment, with attention to the historical circumstances that contributed to the formation of the “Dazai Osamu” celebrity figure, while also identifying how the author practiced self-fashioning via his writing in an attempt to retain authority over his own image. Among the texts I examine are Dazai’s writings, author portraits, and historic newspaper articles surrounding his and Tomie’s death, as well as Japanese textbooks, book covers, and publisher’s copies that disseminate his image to new generations of readers. These texts inform the constructed nature of the “Dazai Osamu” figure and direct attention to how audiences and publishers have generated new narratives—e.g., fact-vs-fiction and Dazai-vs-Yōzō—through appropriation of the historic “facts” of Dazai’s life.

In Chapter Three, I shift my focus from historical circumstance and literary paratexts to popular culture and a contemporary re-authoring of Dazai; namely, the transformation of his historical personage and star text into a character that exists in “source texts” that are subject to adaptation. I first examine Shūeisha’s 2007 collaboration cover edition of No Longer Human to

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highlight how intertextuality has made Dazai visually “knowable” to young audiences, contributed certain traits to his character in the collective imagination, and set the stage for later kyarakutā-ka, or “character-ification,” of the author. Character-ification refers to the act of turning anything from living beings to inanimate objects and abstract concepts into characters via anthropomorphism and personification (gijinka) or caricature (deforume). In series such as Bungō Stray Dogs and Bungō and Alchemist, character-ification borrows elements from literary history to reimagine authors as characters with manga-like attributes.26 Bungō Stray Dogs and Bungō and Alchemist have two very different approaches to literary celebrity that I summarize as “authors-as-characters” and “authors-as-authors,” respectively. As reimaginings and physical manifestations of Dazai’s star text, Dazai’s “character-ifications” in these series offer valuable insight into how contemporary publishers and audiences have interpreted, constructed, and circulated the author’s celebrity or star image as a character. My close reading of Dazai’s character-ifications in Bungō Stray Dogs and Bungō and Alchemist reveals how the world-building and character construction of each series uses iconography associated with Dazai’s star text to encourage audiences to look into the historical author and his respective literary works. I also suggest how transcultural fan practices related to this search for knowledge have influenced Dazai’s contemporary reception.

Finally, in my conclusion, I revisit the relationship between “high” and “low” culture, sacred author and popular character, to discuss prevailing audience hesitancy toward the experimentation with authorial figures and the subversive potential of adaptation. However, as I argue, popular culture series like Bungō Stray Dogs and Bungō and Alchemist are not secondary

26 Shortened as kyara-ka. I have opted to translate kyara-ka as “character-ification” to focus on the act of turning into a character, rather than have it be confused with characterization (development of an existing character’s personality).
or culturally inferior to the “original.” They are direct challenges to pre-existing notions of priority and authority that have demonstrated the potential for character-ification to revive youth interest in modern Japanese literature by successfully encouraging audience engagement with and independent research into classic authors and literary works—an activity that we as scholars should facilitate by making literary scholarship and works more accessible to inquisitive minds who want to learn more.
Chapter 2: (Re-)Authoring the “Dazai Osamu” Figure

“In the long life I led […], only two things were not complete lies—
that I lived, and that I died.”
—Dazai Osamu, “Retrogression” (逆行 Gyakkō, 1935)¹

Literary stars, like Hollywood stars, are products of media industries and consumer practices.² Literary celebrity, however, is not directly equivalent to American studio-era movie star celebrity. This is because authors can use their own writing as a platform for what Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings refer to as “self-fashioning.”³ Self-fashioning typically takes one of two forms: distancing oneself from the celebrity industry to retain creative control over one’s work, or embracing popularity—and all of the media attention that comes with it—as a form of “self-celebrification.”⁴ For the first section of this chapter, I will investigate the historic circumstances that contributed to the formation of the “Dazai Osamu” (太宰治) literary celebrity figure, while also identifying how the author practiced self-fashioning in an attempt to retain authority over his own image. In doing so, I bring attention to the construction of Dazai’s star text, as well as how it is always the reader, not the author, that has the last word.

In early twentieth-century Japan, literary stars were produced and circulated intertextually through the inner mechanisms of the bundan.⁵ Emphasizing the parallels between literary and movie stars, David Boyd defines the bundan as “a ‘world’ of literary

⁴ Franssen and Honings, Idolizing Authorship, 17.
⁵ It is difficult to translate or define the bundan due to its varying connotations and historical uses. Lyons refers to the bundan as “a self-contained institution that produces, supports, and controls both writers and their publishing opportunities, and even makes moral judgements about its ‘members.’” Phyllis I. Lyons, The Saga of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations (Stanford University Press, 1985), 6.
personalities”—a highly collaborative, tight-knit network of authors that shared structural similarities with the celebrity network of Hollywood. Ōsawa Satoshi has also suggested that the culture role of the bundan’s authors was similar to present-day geinōjin, or “TV personalities,” in Japan. That is, the Japanese literary world and its personalities, like geinōjin, were a source of entertainment, gossip, and scandal for contemporaneous audiences. As Itō Sei explains, scandals such as Shimazaki Tōson’s (島崎藤村) incestual relations, Arishima Takeo’s (有島武郎) double suicide, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s (芥川龍之介) suicide, were all big “events” (jiken) that attracted the curiosity of general audiences who purchased books not as literary works, but as a means of learning more about the incident. This reader behaviour was facilitated by new, rapidly changing forms of publication that publishers and writers could use to self-fashion and circulate literary star images on a greater scale.

As the Meiji period (1868–1912) came to an end, the Japanese literary market saw significant expansion due to Japan’s new industrial consumer economy. Publishers founded non-coterie literary magazines, general-interest magazines, popular magazines, women’s magazines, and smaller coterie journals, selling them to a new mass readership. General-interest magazines like the Central Review (中央公論 Chūō kōron, 1899–) also brought literature (and authors) to a much wider audience beyond the bundan and related magazines. New publishing avenues, a growing demand for works of fiction, better pay, and increasing social recognition, also allowed many authors to write professionally for a living. Positive market trends created an environment

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8 This behaviour also shaped the public reception of Dazai’s double suicide. ITÔ Sei 伊藤整, “Shôsetsu no hôhô 小説の方法,” in ITÔ Sei zenshû 伊藤整全集 13 (Tokyo: Kawade Shobô 河出書房, 1956), 48.
suitable for the production of literary celebrity by publishers, media outlets, critics, audiences, and writers themselves. For example, publishers began to issue collections such as the *Library of New Writers* (新進作家総書 Shinshin sakka sōsho, 1917–1925) that commodified authors as new products. Investment in these products was seen as investment in future texts that could “keep the attention of the public, once the author’s brand was established.”\(^9\) Shinchōsha, for example, began to “aggressively market young unknown authors” like Shimada Seijirō (島田清次郎), making him into a best-seller overnight with *The Earth* (地上 Chijō, 1919).\(^10\) Magazines and newspapers also published content focused on the public and private personas of authors; writers were “the object of interviews (danwa), transcribed conversations (taidan), questionnaires (ankēto) about the most mundane questions…and reportage-like features on their houses and family life.”\(^11\) Combined with widespread use of author photos, such editorial features provided writers with a platform through which they could market themselves to readers—something that became increasingly important as authors started to compete for limited spots in top literary magazines. By amplifying the image of the author for the readers’ gaze by means of intertextual circulation, publishers could increase the value of the author’s brand and generate the illusion of intimacy between author and audience.\(^12\) As such, young authors no longer had to rely on traditional routes of sponsorship to become established writers.

Literary-focused magazines like *Writing Club* (文章倶楽部 Bunshō kurabu, 1916–1929) and the early *New Tide* (新潮 Shinchō, 1904—) are perfect examples of how authors’ star texts

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\(^12\) Gabriella Lukacs, *Scripted Affects, Branded Selves: Television, Subjectivity and Capitalism in 1990s Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 45-48. In reference to Japanese *tarento*, or “talents.” Authors, like talents, were image commodities and brands that gained value in the process of their intertextual circulation by publishers.
were formed and circulated by print media in early twentieth-century Japan. While *New Tide* was intended for a more general readership, *Writing Club*’s main audience was literary youth who aspired to become established authors. Both produced “overtly authorcentric content” and captured “writers in private settings, providing…readers with a clear sense of proximity to their idols.”

Descriptions and sketches of authors’ homes, reproduction of handwritten manuscripts, author photos, interviews with authors’ wives, and “gossip” that gave readers more direct access to the “private life” of the author were all regular content. By presenting the “real” (e.g., the author’s photo) alongside the “fictional” (e.g., the author’s literature), the immediate (e.g., the author’s handwriting) alongside the mediated (e.g., the typeface), and the private (e.g., descriptions of family life) alongside the public (e.g., accounts of feuds between authors), publishers turned public interest in authors’ lives into forms of literary celebrity. Authors were no longer faceless names behind a text, but public, media-generated figures, image commodities, and personalities to be consumed and constructed by readers.

### 2.1 Methods of Self-Fashioning: Images of Anomie

Dazai’s relationship to this literary star system was complex. He often expressed dislike toward the bundan; yet, he still operated within, and was influenced by, its mechanisms. Dazai, like his colleagues, was a public, media-generated figure produced by publishers, media outlets, critics, readers, and himself. He paid careful attention to physical representations of his work, curated his author photos to convey certain narratives, and contributed non-literary works to

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14 Boyd, “Literary Celebrity,” 103-12. As Boyd notes, this “gossip” was closer to author-related trivia as most of it was reported with the writer’s knowledge and consent.
magazines focused on his private and public personae. Even so, Dazai was never really a
member of the bundan per se, and consciously distanced himself from its authority throughout
his career. In fact, Dazai’s rocky personal life and attempts to distance himself from the bundan
through his writing would later be highlighted by critics and fans to intensify Dazai’s image as
the anomic “rebel” type.

Dazai was no different than his contemporaries in that his entrance to the Tokyo literary
scene was through sponsorship by established writers. Ibuse Masuji (井伏鱒二) and Satō Haruo
(佐藤春夫) were sponsors and mentors of Dazai throughout the various stages of his career, and
Kon Kan’ichi (今官一) introduced Dazai to the circle of young writers behind the literary journal
Seal (海豹 Kaihyō, 1933). It was in this journal that Dazai published short stories like
“Metamorphosis” (魚服記 Gyofukuki, 1933) and “Recollections” (思い出 Omoide, 1933) that
attracted attention from the public and other literary magazines. While Dazai’s bold
experimentation with narrative voices and fictional techniques in these early works earned him a
small, passionate following of readers and the respect of his peers, he also alienated many critics
due to his disregard for conventional literary form. In this early period (1933–1937), Dazai’s
lifestyle and literary work were highly influenced by Romantic-inspired dandyism as

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16 As Dazai recalled in “Fifteen Years,” he had walked at a completely different pace than the rest of the literary
17 As Dyer explains, “people are said to feel ‘anomic’ because they do not fit in with prevailing norms and/or
because they see the latter’s pointlessness.” This type’s emphasis on youth and the “notion of the ‘passing phase,’
the ‘inevitable,’ ‘natural’ rebellion,” are widely associated with Dazai’s work. Nearly every study on Dazai in my
bibliography, both in English and Japanese, discuss how Dazai’s literature is for youth who are still figuring things
out, not for adults who have come to face the reality of adulthood. Orrin E. Klapp, Heroes, Villains and Fools
Institute, 1998), 52-53.
exemplified by the French poet Charles Baudelaire. Dazai was “someone with a spirit of resistance against society at large, [who attempted] to conjoin art and life by aestheticizing his everyday life”—whether it be through his sartorial tastes, decadent lifestyle, or non-conformity. Everything he did, no matter how shameful or foolish, was for the sake of his literature. However, this lifestyle eventually resulted in mental and physical collapse, and—to Dazai’s chagrin—moral scrutiny.

Despite new publishing avenues and routes to literary fame (exemplified by Shimada’s The Earth), scandal and opposition from prominent authors could still ruin any writer’s career. In February 1935, Dazai published “Retrogression” (逆行 Gyakkō) in Literary Arts (文芸 Bungei, 1933–), his first work in a non-coterie literary magazine. Encouraged by his colleagues’ positive feedback, Dazai submitted this and “Flowers of Buffoonery” (道化の華 Dōke no hana, 1935) to the first Akutagawa Prize (now one of Japan’s most prestigious literary awards), but did not win—not because of his lack of talent, according to the jury, but because of his lack of “virtue.”

Kawabata Yasunari (川端康成), one of the Japanese literary world’s most prestigious...
authors at the time and a member of the Akutagawa Prize committee, published the following comment in *Literary Seasons* (文藝春秋 Bungei shunjū, 1923–):

“Indeed, [Dazai’s writing] is filled with the author’s views on life and literature, but as I see it, there is an unfortunate cloud over his life at present, which regrettably prevents his talent from emerging straightforwardly.”

Dazai’s unstable personal life at the time, according to Kawabata, prevented the upcoming writer from reaching his full potential. Dazai, who saw this as an act of moral censure that ignored his artistic efforts, publicly responded to Kawabata’s criticism with “To Kawabata Yasunari” (川端康成へ Kawabata Yasunari e, 1935) in *Literary Bulletin* (文藝通信 Bungei tsūshin, 1933–1937): “According to this, one might think that you alone decide the Akutagawa Prize…To spend your time raising birds and going to dance concerts—is this such a splendid life?” In later works such as “Fifteen Years” (十五年間 Jūgo nenkan, 1946) and “Thus Have I Heard” (如是我聞 Nyoze gamon, 1948), Dazai continued to express his animosity towards the bundan, its hypocrisy—or “salon art/thought (saron geijutsu/shisō),” as he called it—and the rigid power structures that silenced new, emerging literary voices. These works of criticism were also an important site of self-fashioning as, through them, Dazai presented his outlook on literature and positionality vis-à-vis the literary establishment to an imagined reader.

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26 From March to April of 1935, Dazai dropped out of Tokyo Imperial University, failed the entrance examination for the Capital News (都新聞 Miyako Shinbun), attempted to hang himself in Kamakura, contracted peritonitis following an emergency appendectomy, became addicted to painkillers, and begged his family, friends, and mentors for money to support his new habit.
28 Lyons, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu*, 131. In “Thus Have I Heard,” Dazai relates trying to make it in the literary world to attempting to climb a mountain when the people at the top are shouting insults and kicking stones down at you. Then, as you fall, your seniors keep smoking cigarettes and playing mah-jong as if nothing had happened.
“Thus Have I Heard,” Dazai’s response to offhanded criticism from Shiga Naoya (志賀直哉)—another well-respected figure of the bundan—is especially worth a closer look. In it, Dazai highlighted the difference between himself and Shiga in life, literature, and prestige, to confront power structures that favoured the established author over the newcomer and the cultural center over the periphery. Shiga, Dazai described, was a “man of the home” (kateijin), with affluence, a wonderful wife, and healthy children, who lived in a beautiful environment, had not experienced the devastation of war, wore hand-woven silk, and did not suffer from lung disease. All of his visitors were equally refined and admired him greatly, moved by his words. Meanwhile, Dazai emphasized, his own efforts to write a popular novel in the midst of poor health were subject to scorn. He had three sickly children, never shared a genuine laugh with his wife, rented a cheap house that was in serious disrepair, and could no longer wear kimono due to material loss caused by the destruction of war. Instead, he wore ill-fitting pants and wooden clogs as he helped run errands for his wife who was busy taking care of their children. As Dazai saw it, he was a poor man from the countryside and a literary underdog, while Shiga was a prestigious author, born and raised in Tokyo, with old wealth and a pleasant home life—the source of his egoism.

Concerning Shiga’s literary views and authorial image, Dazai urged Shiga to “become a little weaker. Be weak, if you are a man of letters. Be more flexible. Try to understand people who are different from you; try to understand their agonies.” For Shiga, a writer had to be a

29 Dazai, “Nyoze gamon 如是我聞,” in DOZ 10.
30 In a conversation with Donald Keene, Michiko (Dazai’s wife) mentioned Dazai’s tendency to exaggerate in his literary work and clarified that they never were so poor that they had to worry about whether or not they could afford their next meal. Donald Keene and TSUSHIMA Michiko 津島美知子, “Dazai Osamu bungaku no shūhen 太宰治文学の周辺,” in Nihon no bungaku 65: Dazai Osamu 日本の文学 65: 太宰治 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha 中央公論社, 1963), 9.
moral human being, and literature a moral endeavour; thus, his author-persona was that of the “author-sage,” and he was seen—and depicted himself—as a noble “god of novels” (shōsetsu no kamisama).\textsuperscript{32} People praised Shiga’s work for its meticulous depictions of the author’s own experience but, as Dazai saw it, this was precisely its limitation—the author had no interest in anything outside of his own experience, nor showed any signs of weakness.\textsuperscript{33} For Dazai, a writer had “to be a friend of the weak,” and aware of his own depravity.\textsuperscript{34} Likewise, Dazai believed that literature was meant to depict the beauty of human weakness and console one’s readers. Therefore, his author-persona was that of the “social outcast,” and he was seen—and depicted himself—as a rebel against social conventions and morality. Shiga’s and Dazai’s personal lives appeared to support and authenticate the value of their author-image and literature—a result of each author’s self-fashioning. “Thus Have I Heard,” itself is a key example of this, as Dazai’s discussion of his own life, identity, and literary values vis-à-vis Shiga’s noble and lofty author-persona reinforces his ideal image of “Dazai Osamu” as an author of the weak.

In a similar vein, Phyllis Lyons has described Dazai’s individual style and author-persona as that of the “observant scapegoat,” a symbolic outsider whose intersectional identity—namely, his Tsugaru origins and upbringing, family’s status as prominent landowners, and marginal existence as the sixth eldest son\textsuperscript{35}—and consciousness of not belonging, made it possible for him to publish texts that dissected the rituals of social expression.\textsuperscript{36} Dazai’s identity as someone from


\textsuperscript{33} Shiga Naoya has been criticized for using his literature as a “demonstration of his moral integrity” and not being able to stray from his own experiences in his writing. Fowler, “The Hero as Sage,” 189.

\textsuperscript{34} Ueda, \textit{Modern Japanese Writers}, 152.

\textsuperscript{35} These are three key factors that Okuno Takeo identifies as essential to understanding Dazai’s life and literature. As the sixth eldest son of the Tsushima family, Dazai’s existence and actions had relatively little effect on the family’s heritage and continuance compared to his elder brother(s). OKUNO Takeo 奥野健男, “Dazai Osamu no hito to bungaku 太宰治の人と文学,” in \textit{Ningen shikkaku} 人間失格 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha 新潮社, 1952), 156-167.

\textsuperscript{36} Phyllis I. Lyons, “‘Art is Me’: Dazai Osamu’s Narrative Voice as a Permeable Self,” \textit{Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies} 41, no. 1 (June 1981), 102.
the periphery became an especially prominent theme in his literature following his return to the region of his birth to write the travelogue *Tsugaru* (津軽) in 1944. Dazai described this mental and literary shift in “Fifteen Years” as follows:

I returned to Tokyo [from Tsugaru] feeling something akin to confidence in the pure Tsugaru character that flowed in my blood. In other words, it was rejuvenating to discover that in Tsugaru there was no such thing as “culture,” and accordingly,” I, a Tsugaru man, was not in the slightest a “man of culture.” My work after that seemed to change somewhat.\(^{37}\)

Having grown up in Tsugaru, a smaller subregion of Tōhoku (northeastern) Japan, Dazai was a native speaker of its local dialect. However, Tōhoku’s cultural and geographic distance from Tokyo, as well as the unintelligibility of Tsugaru dialect to speakers of standardized Japanese, made Dazai’s transition to life in Tokyo a difficult and self-conscious one.\(^{38}\) Even if Dazai adopted the language and customs of centralize Tokyo culture, Tokyoites still laughed at his accent and accused him of not being able to write because of his “lack of pride” (*hana ga hikui*) and “unfamiliarity with the language of Tokyo.”\(^{39}\) Dazai’s early writings in “crude Tsugaru dialect,” as Dazai referred to it in “Eight Views of Tokyo” (*東京八景* Tokyo hakkei, 1941), also required careful revision by his mentor.\(^{40}\)

However, in writing *Tsugaru*, Dazai came to realize that he was not a “man of culture,” nor could he pass as one. He was not born into a family of high-pedigree and old wealth; rather, Dazai stressed, he was a descendant of “poor, ignorant, subsistence farmers” in northeastern Japan.

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37 As quoted in Lyons, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu*, 149. “Fifteen Years” is a recollection of the fifteen years Dazai had spent in Tokyo, away from his birthplace, and the various developments in his life since he wrote “Eight Views of Tokyo” (*東京八景* Tokyo hakkei, 1941).

38 In “On Clothing” (服装に就いて *Fukusō ni tsuite*, 1941), “Dazai” writes about his failed attempts to hide his Tsugaru dialect and dress in a way that he will not stand out.


40 Ibuse suggested that the penname “Dazai Osamu” had been carefully selected to hide the author’s Tsugaru accent, which came out whenever he used his birth name “Tsushima Shūji.” IBUSE Masuji 井伏鱒二, “Kaisetsu (Dazai Osamu Shūjī) 解説（太宰治集上）,” in *Dazai Osamu 太宰治* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha 中央公論新社, 2018). Kindle.
Japan, who had only recently acquired wealth and prominence as landowners.⁴¹ People may have considered his family “one of the most genteel families in the Tsugaru region,” but there had not been a single scholar, artist, or government official in his family lineage.⁴² He did not need to force himself to adopt the refined life of an intellectual in Tokyo’s literary salon; it was not in his blood. Therefore, Dazai entered his late career (1945–1948) with new confidence in his “outsider” identity, and began to publish the postwar literary works that he is most known for today, such as *The Setting Sun* (斜陽 Shayō, 1947) and *No Longer Human* (人間失格 Ningen shikkaku, 1948). These novels of decadence and despair marked a stark change in the themes and tone of Dazai’s writing as his middle period (1938–1945), in which most of his work was produced, had been characterized by light-hearted, entertaining short fiction.

Fluctuations in Dazai’s identity, literature, and star text can also be seen in his author portraits—another site of image construction. Author photos, as mentioned earlier, contribute value to an author’s brand through circulation and generate reader interest in the person behind the text; they also can be used to convey a certain image of the author to the reader. For example, Dazai’s eerie portrait in *The Twilight Years* (晩年 Bannen, 1936), his first collection of short stories, was meant to be “a portrait of the artist in his final years,” as Dazai originally intended to commit suicide upon the volume’s completion.⁴³ Dan Kazuo (檀一雄), a fellow author and close friend of Dazai’s, in discussing this portrait, describes it as a picture not of a living human being, but a ghost of the departed.⁴⁴ Whereas the portraits in Dazai’s mid-career, the period in which

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⁴⁴ Dazai’s facial features were obscured in shadow due to harsh lighting and gave the impression that his eye sockets had caved in. DAN Kazuo 檀一雄, “Shōsetsu Dazai Osamu honpen,” in *Shōsetsu Dazai Osamu 小説太宰治* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan 小学館 P+D BOOKS, 2019).
found peace in marriage and domesticity, are much more subdued and intimate; they depict the author with a smile on his face or near his home in Mitaka. Dazai’s late portraits (1945–1948), on the other hand, are quite solemn, giving off an austere and dignified impression befitting an established author. Dazai’s most famous portraits are from this period, nearly all of which were photographed by Tamura Shigeru (田村茂), a photographer who lived in Mitaka and was Dazai’s drinking companion.

Dazai’s rising postwar popularity allowed him to make a deal with Yagumo Shoten in late 1947 to publish The Complete Works of Dazai Osamu (太宰治全集 Dazai Osamu zenshū). Despite increasing demand for his work, Dazai was personally involved in the curation and production of this collection, down to the most minute of details. Entrusted with the momentous task of deciding how he wished his own literature and image to be preserved for future generations, Dazai requested Tamura’s help in taking a new set of author portraits for the collection. On February 23, 1948, Tamura and Dazai, who was dressed in Japanese-style kimono (by this point in time, Dazai typically wore Western-style clothing in his everyday life due to the lingering effects of the war) and his favourite Inverness coat, visited various locations in and around Mitaka. Dazai’s solemn expression and demeanour as he posed for Tamura’s camera is reminiscent of an actor getting into character—in this case, the decadent author “Dazai Osamu.”

Tamura’s portraits of Dazai taken during this session played, and continue to play, an essential role of the creation and dissemination of Dazai’s anomic image. For example, Dazai’s most famous portrait, with his chin rested on one hand, eyes downcast, and a morose expression

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45 Dazai oversaw revisions and edits of the text, including the table of contents, timeline of his career, and literary commentary. He also collected and decided what photos to include inside, the publishing order of each volume, as well as what paper and binding to use. Its first volume had the Tsushima family crest embossed on its cover with the title in gold per his request. Mitaka Arts News, “Dazai Osamu bungaku saron kikaku tenji: Dazai Osamu no zenshū sōsaku 太宰治文学サロン企画展示: 太宰治の全集創作,” http://mitaka.jpn.org/ticket/160607d/.
on his face as he sits at his writing desk, was taken during this photo session and selected as the frontispiece for his collected works. It has since become a nationally-advertised trademark with “tangible features [that] can be advertised and marketed,”\(^\text{46}\) and is used not only on the cover of books about Dazai, or as the author’s portrait in contemporary reprints of his books, but also for Dazai-related merchandise, food products such as Dazai-shaped *ningyō-yaki* (sponge cake filled with sweet red bean paste), marketing campaigns, logos, and key visuals for popular culture adaptations of his literary works. Dazai’s eldest daughter, Sonoko, even expressed her gratitude to Tamura for “creating Dazai’s image” with these portraits.\(^\text{47}\)

2.2 Re-Authoring the Author in Postwar Japan

Although Dazai played a proactive role in the construction of his authorial image via his writing, identity, and likeness as discussed above, it is important to remember that he did not possess exclusive control over his literary star text. No matter how hard Dazai tried to combat rumours and public criticism, he could never have the final say in how people received his persona or literature. Star texts, like literary texts, are attributed meaning not by the author, but by the reader and the act of reading—to which we bring our own intersectional identities and outside knowledge.\(^\text{48}\) Everyone who comes into contact with Dazai’s star text—readers, critics, fans and publishers—reframes, reinterprets, and revisualizes his “words, looks, body and life” in a process that Franssen and Honings refer to as “re-authoring.”\(^\text{49}\) Re-authoring has also ensured Dazai’s continued success even after his death. How have publishers and readers appropriated


and publicized the historic circumstances of Dazai’s life to generate new narratives? To address this question, first we must consider what these historic circumstances were, and the role they played in the creation of Dazai’s literary celebrity.

Dazai’s contemporary image is situated in postwar Japan, a moment of flux, freedom, and openness, as well as widespread confusion and psychological exhaustion (kyodatsu)—which Dazai, through his life, literature, and eventual suicide, would come to represent. On August 15, 1945 at noon, Emperor Shōwa’s radio broadcast announced Japan’s unconditional surrender and acceptance of the terms of Potsdam Declaration, which included the occupation of Japan by the Allied Forces. As Sharalyn Orbaugh notes, such an abrupt end to the war was a source of surprise and grief for some, and astonished joy for others; but no one could imagine what the next few weeks, months, or years would bring. What would the Occupation be like? How long would it last? Could Japan recover from its current state of collapse? Many Japanese people began to eagerly support “new ideals of peace and democracy” and denounce the wartime regime they had previously supported. Yet, despite change on the surface of Japanese society, state apparatuses—such as censorship bureaus—continued under the supervision of SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) for the duration of the U.S.-Allied Occupation. Was Japan born anew, or were its previous structures hidden beneath the surface?

Dazai, who saw the people around him begin to deny previous contributions to the war effort, took the opposite stance and professed himself a conversative whose loyalties lay with

50 For more information on kyodatsu and the larger historical context of postwar Japan, see John W. Dower, Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999).


52 13,240,000 people were out of work and as many as 15 million people (around 30% of the population) were left homeless by the air raids. Orbaugh, Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation, 31.


Japan.\(^{55}\) He saw the hasty adoption of new “isms” in postwar Japan, such as socialism and libertarianism, as a form of “bandwagon thinking” (binjō shisō) or “bandwagonism” (binjō shūgi), and refused to align himself with it.\(^{56}\) In another essay, Dazai proclaimed himself a rebel and libertine: “I’m a libertine (buraiha). I rebel against restraints. I jeer at the opportunists.”\(^{57}\)

Contrary to Dazai’s expectations, however, he soon became a mouthpiece for the “prevailing mood of disillusionment and despair of the immediate postwar years” due to his decadence and disdain for all forms of convention.\(^{58}\)

However, Dazai did not officially enter the literary spotlight until the popular—as opposed to critical—success of *The Setting Sun* in 1947. *The Setting Sun* is a novel based on the diary of Ōta Shizuko (太田静子) and follows the moral and economic decline of protagonist Kazuko and her formerly aristocratic family who, like most people in postwar Japan, were impoverished by the war and its subsequent inflation and land reforms.\(^{59}\) The novel ends with Kazuko’s letter to Mr. Uehara, her lover, in which she declares her own moral revolution:

*Victims. Victims of a transitional period of morality. That is what we both certainly are…To give birth to the child of the man I love, and to raise him, will be the accomplishment of my moral revolution…A bastard and its mother. We will live in perpetual struggle with the old morality, like the sun.*\(^{60}\)


\(^{56}\) As Dazai called it in “Pandora no hako パンドラの匣” and “Jūgo nenkan 十五年間,” in DOZ 8.

\(^{57}\) As quoted in Alan Stephen Wolfe, *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 88. Wolfe points out that Dazai’s use of the word buraiha at the time was most likely his rendering of the French word libertin (the ruby is “riberutan”). The word buraiha would later come to signify a postwar anti-establishment literary movement whose key members included Sakaguchi Ango (坂口安吾) and Oda Sakunosuke (織田作之助) as well as Dazai himself. Wolfe, *Suicidal Narrative*, 88-89.

\(^{58}\) Cohn, “Dazai Osamu,” 83.

\(^{59}\) Osamu Dazai, *The Setting Sun*, trans. Donald Keene (Norfolk: New Directions, 1956), xiv. Shizuko was a fan of Dazai’s who described his literature as a source of comfort following the loss of her infant child and subsequent divorce. The two became intimate friends and exchanged written correspondence for several years before bearing a child together, the author Ōta Haruko (太田治子).

\(^{60}\) Dazai, *The Setting Sun*, 173-74.
For Kazuko, a twenty-nine-year-old divorced woman who had lost her child in stillbirth, to pursue an “illicit” relationship with a man who already had a wife and children of his own, was undoubtedly—to contemporary readers—highly scandalous, but also emblematic of a society in flux. The novel’s themes of anomie, decadence, and rebellion against social norms resonated so strongly with its postwar audience that Shayōzoku, or “people of the setting sun,” even became a popular buzzword in reference to Japan’s declining aristocracy.

Dazai’s newfound, commercial success and postwar popularity can be seen in the dramatic difference between Dazai’s early-to-mid career book sales and the initial sales numbers for The Setting Sun. As Takiguchi Akihiro describes, Dazai remained a relatively unknown author with a small following of dedicated fans for most of his career. In fact, his first collection of short stories, The Twilight Years (1936), only sold 1500 copies over the span of five years, or around a copy a day. Moreover, Dazai’s wife, Tsushima Michiko, later revealed that Dazai’s book sales, for most of his career, did not exceed more than a thousand copies per volume; and thus, when the first editions of Righteousness and Smiles (正義と微笑 Seigi to bishō, 1942) and Sanetomo: Minister of the Right (右大臣実朝 Udaijin Sanetomo, 1943) sold ten thousand and fifteen thousand copies respectively, Dazai considered it a “pleasant surprise.” Presumably, this increase in sales was due to the literary recognition Dazai had

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61 Social values and the law changed rapidly during the Occupation. In January 1947, the police targeted the magazine Bizarre (猟奇 Ryōki, 1928–1932) because it contained a short story portraying a military wife who had an adulterous affair. In October of the same year, the laws against adultery were eliminated. The Setting Sun was initially serialized in New Tide (新潮) from July to October of 1947, and was published in novel form in December.


62 “Shayōzoku 斜陽族,” in Digitaru Daijisen デジタル大辞泉, Shōgakukan 小学館.


64 Dazai, ‘‘Bannen’ ni tsuite 「晩年」に就いて,’’ in DOZ 10.

received for “Schoolgirl” (女生徒 Joseito, 1939), his short story that won the fourth annual Kitamura Tōkoku Award a couple years prior in 1940. However, Dazai’s book sales nearly doubled with The Setting Sun’s initial publication in December 1947, which sold thirty thousand copies while he was still alive, and its July 1948 reprint, which sold ninety thousand additional copies in the eight months following his death.66

Noting these numbers, Takiguchi suggests that this burst in sales was the result of the widespread media coverage of Dazai’s and Yamazaki Tomie’s (山崎富栄) disappearance and suicide.67 Not only did this “event,” to borrow Itō Sei’s term, disseminate Dazai’s name outside of the literary world in a similar manner to previous literary scandals, but it also set the stage for the author’s posthumous popularity in the decades to follow. In the historic moment of postwar Japan, a war widow having an affair and committing suicide with another man, who was married with children, was considered scandalous.68 Furthermore, the delay between when Dazai and Tomie were reported missing, and the moment their bodies were discovered, led to the scandal being covered by every news outlet available at the time. For days on end, newspapers and radio broadcasts were filled with coverage on the couple’s disappearance. Even newspapers that were limited to a double-sided page due to paper shortages devoted a quarter of their pages to articles about Dazai, including details of his personal history, representative works, and writing style.69

On June 15, 1948, the newspaper Asahi Shinbun (朝日新聞) reported Dazai and Tomie’s disappearance on the front page. The details provided were as follows: On June 14, 1948, it was reported to police that author Dazai Osamu (real name Tsushima Shūji) and Yamazaki Tomie

66 Takiguchi, Dazai Osamu būmu, 15.
67 Takiguchi, Dazai Osamu būmu, 7.
68 Takiguchi, Dazai Osamu būmu, 21.
69 Takiguchi, Dazai Osamu būmu, 19.
had left behind suicide notes before disappearing altogether. In Dazai’s note to his wife, he wrote “I can no longer write. I want to go to somewhere unknown to man.” In Tomie’s apartment, all of her belongings were packed away except for portraits of her and Dazai, which were placed side-by-side on a table with burning incense.

On June 16, 1948, the *Asahi Shinbun* published a longer article with the eye-catching headline “Mr. Dazai Osamu Commits Lovers’ Suicide/Threw himself into the Tamagawa Aqueduct with a War Widow/His last words ‘I can no longer write.’” This time, it described Dazai as a popular author with a unique writing-style who experienced remarkable postwar sales; and reported that police had confirmed the couple’s death by drowning in the Tamagawa Aqueduct—it had become a search for their remains. Photos of Dazai’s and Tomie’s aforementioned portraits and suicide note in Tomie’s apartment were also published.

Other newspapers, such as the *Yomiuri Shinbun* (読売新聞), started to report the news in a similar fashion, but added additional information about Dazai’s authorial career; Dazai (real name Tsushima Shūji) was the author of “Villon’s Wife,” *The Setting Sun*, and the recent *No Longer Human*, who had a “unique” presence in the bundan due to his writings that contained “the sufferings of the heart” and were “pleasant on the surface,” but masochistic in style. Also featured in the article were quotes from people close to Dazai, such as Ibuse Masuji and Kamei Katsuichirō (亀井勝一郎), who both expressed shock at his death and listed him among other

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70 The article misreported Tomie’s name as Yamazaki Haruko (晴子), which was corrected in all articles to follow.  
popular postwar authors such as Sakaguchi Ango (坂口安吾) and Tamura Taijirō (田村泰次郎). Opinion pieces by other writers and critics were also published in the days to follow.

Outside of the news coverage mentioned above, on-the-street interviews and round-table discussions with Dazai’s friends were also held. This brought the scandal of Dazai’s lover’s suicide with a war widow beyond the circumference of literary circles to become an item of interest to the general public. People who did not know who “Dazai Osamu” was, or perhaps had only heard his name before, soon had an image of the author form in their minds. Many eager readers, determined to learn the reason for the author’s suicide for themselves, began to read Dazai’s literature in search of answers. However, as Dazai’s literature was presented alongside the scandal, discussion of Dazai’s literary merits were contextualized by public criticism of the author’s personal life, discursively shaped by his illicit relations with a woman at the forefront. As a result of widespread media coverage couched in scandal and hype—both positive and negative—No Longer Human (July 25, 1948) and The Setting Sun (reprint) became best sellers overnight with two-hundred thousand and ninety thousand total copies sold, respectively. Even books that had poor initial sales and were stockpiled in Chikuma Shobō’s warehouse, such as “Villon’s Wife” (ヴィヨンの妻 Viyon no tsuma, 1947), sold out almost instantly.

76 Kawasaki, “Dazai Osamu no jōshi hōdō,” as cited in Takiguchi, Dazai Osamu būmu, 20. Critics and scholars, too, have sought answers for Dazai’s death in his literature.
77 Ninety thousand copies of The Setting Sun sold in the span of eight months. There is no specific time span given for No Longer Human’s initial sales. Takiguchi, Dazai Osamu būmu, 7, 15.
As Takiguchi notes, this would lead to a surge in Dazai fans after his death in the mid-1950s to 1960s, as demonstrated by the commercial success of Chikuma Shobō’s *The Complete Works of Dazai Osamu* in 1955. This collection was largely made possible by Chikuma Shobō owner Furuta Akira and editor Nohara Kazuo, both of whom were fans of Dazai. They wished to see his complete works published regardless of sales, marketed to fans. Who else would consider buying an expensive, multi-volume collection of an author’s works? However, to Furuta and Nohara’s surprise, the sales department was flooded with restock requests from distributors. With several reprints issued, Chikuma Shobō sold ten thousand sets in less than a month. In recalling this event, Nohara attributed the collection’s rapid sales to a dramatic increase in Dazai fans in the past four-to-five years, who had been waiting for a full-fledged set of the author’s work. Notably, the release of Chikuma Shobō’s collection also brought with it a flood of Dazai scholarship and other texts related to him. As such, historical circumstances, media outlets, readers, fans, publishers, and researchers all contributed to the formation of Dazai’s star text and ensured Dazai’s enduring success after his death.

2.3 Re-Authoring the Author in Present-Day Japan

Posthumous popularization of Dazai’s star text and his works have continued to contribute to the development and dissemination of Dazai’s decadent and anomic image as publishers and audiences continue to appropriate and highlight aspects of Dazai’s life and death even in present-day. Most Japanese people born after the Pacific War first encounter Dazai’s name, image, and literature in their junior high Japanese textbooks. These textbooks, which

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80 Nohara noted his lack of insight as an editor for not having noticed this trend earlier, but still expressed “insurmountable joy” at the collection’s success. Takiguchi, *Dazai Osamu būmu*, 93.
undergo many edits and revisions to fit the curriculum as administered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), are key sites of government-sanctioned transmission of knowledge. Dazai’s short story “Melos, Run!” (走れメロス Hashire merosu, 1940) was first used in classrooms in 1955, and has been a mainstay in Japanese textbooks since the 1960s. While the selection of his other short stories varies from year to year and textbook to textbook, Dazai continues to be a major literary figure studied by young Japanese people in junior high and high school; his works frequently appearing on university entrance exams. Similarly, Dazai’s author profile—which details his numerous suicide attempts, bouts of drug addiction, and hospitalizations; status as a university dropout; down spiral into decadence; and final suicide with Tomie—can be found in literature study manuals and textbooks across Japan. These publications create familiarity with not only Dazai’s works, but also the historical circumstances in which he lived and wrote.

For some young students, this is an important first encounter with Dazai’s star text that leaves a lasting impression on them and generates interest in the author himself. Oshikiri Moe, a popular Japanese model and lifelong Dazai fan, for example, recalls how her eighth-grade self had butterflies in her stomach when she first read Dazai’s “Melos, Run!” and saw the characters for “lover’s suicide” (心中 shinjū) in his author profile. As of October 2022, *No Longer Human* is still among the top 10 books read by junior and high school girls (#7 and #4 respectively) in Japan despite the novel not being part of the Japanese curriculum. In fact,

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Dazai’s anomic, rebel image and literature are so popular among Japanese youth that it has been likened to the “measles of youth” (seishun no hashika) that everyone experiences at least once in their life.\textsuperscript{84}

Publishing houses, aware of the undying popularity of Dazai’s “brand”—especially among young people—have continued to showcase the person and image of Dazai alongside his work, at almost equal importance. That said, Dazai’s star image is predominantly shaped by three different twenty-first century editions of No Longer Human: Shinchōsha’s 2019 Premium Cover edition, Shūeisha’s 2007 collaboration cover with DEATH NOTE manga artist Obata Takeshi (小畑健) and Kadokawa’s 2016 collaboration cover with the Bungō Stray Dogs (文豪ストレイドッグス Bungō sutorei doggusu) TV Anime.\textsuperscript{85} Though reprints, adaptations, and reimaginings of No Longer Human, the narrative of the novel has become synonymous with the “Dazai Osamu” figure in its reception, common interpretations, and adaptations amongst contemporary audiences—a phenomenon due to the historical circumstances surrounding the novel’s initial publication.

No Longer Human was initially serialized in the general-interest magazine Perspectives (展望 Tenbō, 1946–1978) from June to August 1948 before being collected into a single novel volume by Chikuma Shobō on July 25 of the same year. However, only No Longer Human’s prologue and first two notebooks had been published in the June 1948 edition of Perspectives before the July 1948 edition was published at the height of news coverage surrounding Dazai and Tomie’s disappearance and, as revealed in the days to follow, suicide.\textsuperscript{86} This series of historical

\textsuperscript{84} UKAI Tetsuo 鵜飼哲夫, “Botsugo 70-nen: Sakka, Dazai Osamu o unda ‘mitsu no kūhaku-ki’ 没後 70年: 作家・太宰治を生んだ「三つの空白期’,” \textit{Yomiuri Shinbun} 読売新聞 Online, June 11, 2018.
\textsuperscript{85} Each edition’s initial publishing years were 1952, 1990, and 2007 respectively—collaboration covers etc. notwithstanding.
\textsuperscript{86} Okuno, “Dazai Osamu no hito to bungaku,” 170-171.
events has led many generations of readers to read *No Longer Human* through the lens of Dazai’s suicide, with many wondering if the author had penned the novel with the intent of making it his last will and testimony.\(^{87}\)

Yet, there are many inconsistencies surrounding *No Longer Human* and Dazai’s death itself that prevent such conclusions. For example, the draft for the novel was completed and sent off to the publisher on May 12, 1948, a month before Dazai’s death. The last, unfinished work penned by Dazai was *Goodbye* (グッド・バイ Guddo bai, 1948), a newspaper serial for the *Asahi Shinbun* that is highly comical in nature and follows a newspaper editor who tries to cut ties with all of the women in his life, one of them a beautician and another a war widow—a premise that Donald Keene suggests to have indicated the author’s attempt for a new start.\(^{88}\)*No Longer Human*’s original draft and manuscript also show traces of creative struggle, in which Dazai repeatedly crossed out and reworked the text to emphasize the importance of Takeichi’s prophecy and revise Yōzō’s reasons for his clowning, for instance.\(^{89}\) Furthermore, Dazai had expressed interest in writing a novel titled *No Longer Human* eight years prior in “Worldly Angel” (俗天使 Zoku tenshi):

> Today is November 13. Four years ago on this day, I was permitted to leave a certain unlucky hospital…It was a clear, crisp autumn day, and in the hospital garden some flowers were still blooming. When another five or six years have passed, and I can be more composed, I intend to try writing slowly and carefully about that period. I intend to call it *No Longer Human*.\(^{90}\)

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\(^{87}\) Okuno, “Dazai Osamu no hito to bungaku,” 171.


\(^{89}\) Nihon Kindai Bungakukan 日本近代文学館, *Dazai Osamu sōsaku no butaiura 太宰治創作の舞台裏* (Tokyo: Shunyōdō Shoten 春陽堂書店, 2019), 126-134. Many people began to rethink previously established theories of the novel being the author’s suicide note when the manuscript was first released to the public in the July 1998 edition of *New Tide*.

\(^{90}\) As quoted in Lyons, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu*, 170.
The protagonist of “Flowers of Buffoonery,” published fifteen years before No Longer Human, was also named Ōba Yōzō (大庭葉蔵); the two stories share similarities in content but have completely different literary approaches and no chronological relationship. 91 Despite these inconsistencies, No Longer Human’s reputation as Dazai’s last will and testament is heavily emphasized in the Shūeisha edition of the novel.

In 2007, Shūeisha re-printed their 1990 bunkobon, or “paper pocketbook,” edition of No Longer Human with a new cover illustrated by DEATH NOTE manga artist Obata Takeshi. Its subject is a young Ōba Yōzō, the protagonist of No Longer Human, reminiscent of the second photo introduced by the journalist in the novel’s prologue:

The face in the second snapshot is startlingly unlike the first. He is a student in this picture, although it is not clear whether it dates from high school or college days. At any rate, he is now extraordinarily handsome. But here again the face fails inexplicably to give the impression of belonging to a living human being. He wears a student’s uniform and a white handkerchief peeps from his chest pocket. He sits in a wicker chair with his legs crossed. Again he is smiling, this time not the wizened monkey’s grin but a rather adroit little smile. And yet somehow it is not the smile of a human being; it utterly lacks substance, all of what we might call the “heaviness of blood” or perhaps the “solidity of human life”—it has not even a bird’s weight. It is merely a blank sheet of paper, light as a feather, and it is smiling. The picture produces, in short, a sensation of complete artificiality. Pretense, insincerity, fatuousness—none of these words quite covers it. And of course you couldn’t dismiss it simply as dandyism. In fact, if you look carefully you will begin to feel that there is something strangely unpleasant about this handsome young man. I have never seen a young man whose good looks were so baffling. 92

Similarly, in Obata’s art, Yōzō is drawn in a black gakuran (male student uniform), sitting on the edge of a high-back rattan chair in the middle of a crumbling building, with his upper half leaning forward as he clasps his hands in front of him, an almost sinister looking grin on his face. His dark hair is long, messy, and straight, partially obscuring his eyes.

91 Torii Kunio refers to “Flowers of Buffoonery” as an experimental novel (jikken shōsetsu) that paved the way for No Longer Human and suggests that Dazai’s decision to reuse Yōzō’s name was to highlight the difference in subject matter and literary technique between the two stories. TORII Kunio 鳥居邦朗, “Sakuhin kaisetsu 作品解説,” in Ningen shikkaku (Tokyo: Kadokawa 角川, 2007), 178-179.
A newspaper article from the Yomiuri Shinbun’s “New Views of Dazai” (太宰新風景Dazai shinfūkei, 2008), a twelve-day-long column in celebration of Dazai’s 60th death anniversary, describes the impact of this new cover in full detail. Yōzō’s visual similarities to DEATH NOTE’s protagonist, Yagami Light, Obata’s art, and the eye-catching bright red title text on Shūeisha’s new cover were a tremendous hit. Within a year of the updated cover art, the novel’s rerelease sold over 210,000 copies. These sales are in stark contrast to the 370,000 copies that were sold in the seventeen years between its first edition in 1990 and new cover edition in June 2007.93 Considering that DEATH NOTE had just received a high-profile 37-episode manga-to-anime television adaptation from Madhouse Inc. (October 2006 to June 2007), Obata was the perfect choice to appeal to a large, new youth audience. According to a 2008 Novel Subaru (小説すばる Shōsetsu subaru, 1987–) survey, young readers (predominantly in their twenties and thirties) admitted that they were unconsciously drawn to No Longer Human’s new cover upon seeing it in store, despite not being avid readers.94 In fact, this is one of Shūeisha’s motivations for the cover renewal:

“In hopes of encouraging youth to read, we decided to change its outer packaging… Fewer young readers are motivated to reach for books, which is why books now have to reach for them.”95

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95 NAKAMURA Mariko 中村真理子, “(Ningen shikkaku ni Desu nōto-fuu kabā) Bunkobon mo ‘jakegai’: Wakamono to koten o hashiwatashi 『人間失格』に『デスノート』風カバー）文庫本も「ジャケ買い」: 若者と古典を橋渡し,” Asahi Shinbun 朝日新聞, September 18, 2007.
Itō Akira, the Shūeisha staff member who proposed Obata for the new cover art, explained that *DEATH NOTE* and its “beautiful, destructive atmosphere,” coincided with Dazai’s literary world, and that the second photo in original novel’s prologue reminded him of Obata’s art.

Upon the new cover’s release, Itō visited a bookstore and noticed *No Longer Human* displayed next to copies of the *DEATH NOTE* manga. While surprised at this turn of events, Itō was glad the novel’s new cover, and its low-price tag of 270 yen, made it more accessible to youth: “Today’s youth should also be able to relate to Dazai’s literature. The number of young readers is also on the rise.” It is precisely because Dazai’s relatability and familiarity appeals to youth as a key aspect of his continued popularity that publishers package the Dazai image into an easy to consume form for readers, as well as contribute to and reinforce certain narratives, via literary paratexts of *No Longer Human*.

Shūeisha’s edition described above emphasizes three key points of Dazai’s star text: autobiography (*jiden*), suicide (*jisatsu*), and youth literature (*seishun bungaku*). The advertising materials, slogans, and cover art discussed above appeal to all three of these categories, which are further emphasized by the inner cover, back cover, and supplementary explanations and timelines at the back of the book. Dazai’s profile on the inner cover is as follows:

Dazai Osamu (1909–1948) Born in his childhood home in Aomori Prefecture. He began to pen novels from an early age, directly confronting the anxiety and distress of life in his writing. Precious gems born from a destructive lifestyle of suicide attempts and drug addiction, Dazai’s work continues to be upheld by fervent young readers.

Shūeisha enhances this narrative of Dazai as a personal writer who led a similar, destructive lifestyle to Ōba Yōzō, with a few pages at the front of the novel that contain photos related to

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96 Kira, “Manga-fū hyōshi, bunko hitto.”
97 Kira, “Manga-fū hyōshi, bunko hitto.”
Dazai’s life, person, and literature. For example, Shūeisha directly connects Dazai’s childhood family photo to the novel’s text with the caption: “Taken in the garden of his childhood home. Dazai’s smile brings No Longer Human’s prologue to mind.” Dazai’s smile is evocative of Yōzō’s “grinning monkey-face” in the first, childhood photograph described in the novel’s prologue.99 There are also photos of the first edition cover of No Longer Human, the novel’s original manuscript, and the newspaper article that reported Dazai and Tomie’s death. Even before reading the novel, the reader is visually informed and conditioned as to the general events of Dazai’s life, death, and the historical circumstances behind No Longer Human.

Likewise, the back cover’s publisher’s copy describes No Longer Human as follows:

“Mine has been a life of much shame.” Within the pages of young drug addict’s journal given alongside three, strange photographs, was a miserable life depicted in utmost detail. A childhood of feigned innocence and deception of others. The sight of his frequent involvement with women, and countless suicide attempts while descending into drug addiction. Without a doubt (masani), No Longer Human was both Dazai Osamu’s autobiography (jiden) and last testament (isho). A month after the novel’s completion, he took his own life. Eternal youth literature (eien no seishun bungaku) that transcends time and continues to be read today.100

By referring to the novel as Dazai’s autobiography, Shūeisha suggests that Dazai, like Yōzō, had “a childhood of feigned innocence and deception of others,” and an adulthood of “frequent involvement with women,” “countless suicide attempts,” and “drug addiction,” and encourages readers to connect historic fact with fiction. Furthermore, the original Japanese of the publisher’s copy lacks an explicit subject (i.e., names or pronouns). This transforms a childhood of deception and adulthood of depravity into a shared object between author and protagonist; and thus, naturally flows into Shūeisha’s statement that No Longer Human is both Dazai’s autobiography and last testament to the world. This narrative is further enhanced by playwright Kobayashi

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99 Quote from Keene’s translation of No Longer Human, 14.
100 Translation and emphasis mine. Quote from Keene’s translation of No Longer Human, 21.
Kōichi’s commentary on the novel titled “Dreams of Love and Revolution” (恋と革命を夢みて Koi to kakumei o yumemite) the first part of which concludes that “No Longer Human was not a novel to Dazai, but a suicide note.”\textsuperscript{101} To this extent, Shūeisha uses the historic circumstances surrounding the novel’s original production, namely Dazai’s life and subsequent suicide, to create an easy-to-consume, eye-catching narrative of autobiography and suicide with emotional impact.

Kadokawa’s Bungō Stray Dogs collaboration cover edition of No Longer Human from 2016 is similar in sentiment and aesthetic to Shūeisha’s edition but emphasizes autobiography (jiden) and turning life into art over narratives of suicide and self-destruction. Kadokawa’s website describes the novel as “a representative work of Dazai literature that flawlessly sublimates his own life into art” and “an inward autobiography that depicts Dazai’s own anguish over his degenerate life.”\textsuperscript{102} The publisher’s copy also suggests a direct connection between Dazai and protagonist Ōba Yōzō:

“Mine has been a life of much shame. I can’t even guess what it must be to live the life of a human being.” A fellow (dōyō) son of a prominent landlord and invalid, Dazai borrows the journal of a former-morphine addict Ōba Yōzō, to sublimate his own life into a grand work of art in this representative work of Dazai literature.\textsuperscript{103}

That is, Dazai’s shared identity with Yōzō is a vehicle for Dazai’s own life story-turned-art. Suitably, the literary paratexts of Kadokawa’s edition of No Longer Human heavily focus on the life of Dazai. For instance, the first thing you see upon opening the novel is Dazai’s author photo and a profile “blurb” about his life and literary career that takes up almost the entire length of the front inner dust jacket. It touches on everything from Dazai’s involvement in illegal political

\textsuperscript{101} KOBAYASHI Kōichi 小林公一, “Koi to kakumei o yumemite 恋と革命を夢みて,” in Ningen shikkaku 人間失格 (Tokyo: Shūeisha 集英社, 1990), 179.
\textsuperscript{102} “Ningen shikkaku 人間失格,” Kadokawa. https://www.kadokawa.co.jp/product/200703000052/.
\textsuperscript{103} Translation and emphasis mine. Quote from Keene’s translation of No Longer Human, 21.
movements as a student, nomination for the first Akutagawa Prize, addiction to pain killers, marriage to Michiko through Ibuse’s introduction, works penned in his peaceful middle-period, postwar success with *The Setting Sun*, and his final suicide with *Tomie*. Although it mentions that he died from suicide in the same year as *No Longer Human* was published, it does not make any direct connection between the two, and notes that *Goodbye* was still in the middle of being serialized. Lastly, it mentions that this final suicide attempt was Dazai’s fifth, including individual and double suicide attempts, and that his remains were recovered on what would have been his 39th birthday.

In addition to the original *No Longer Human* text, the Kadokawa version also contains Dazai’s short story “Cherries” (*Ôtô*, 1948), which depicts the anguish of a father who leads his family to ruin. Also included is commentary by Dan Kazuo on Dazai’s personal character and literature; literary analysis of *No Longer Human* and “Cherries” by scholar Torii Kunio; and a timeline of Dazai’s life by Ono Saichirô (小野才八郎), a student of Dazai’s following the war.

Dan’s summary of Dazai’s life in “Dazai Osamu: His Person and Literature” (*Daizai Osamu: Hito to bungaku*) is filled with personal anecdotes that discuss Dazai’s upbringing, personality, sense of humour, various misfortunes, and moment of awakening—providing the reader with what feels like a glimpse of the “real” Dazai. Torii also analyzes Dazai’s the novel through the lens of the author’s life, correlating *No Longer Human*’s story to historical events. Although he does refer to *No Longer Human* as Dazai’s final testament, Torii still emphasizes Dazai’s artistic technique—namely, the skillful incorporation of the author’s life into his literature and previous prototypes of the novel. In this fashion, Kadokawa focuses on the historical person behind the author and the artistry involved in Dazai’s literary process.
Shinchōsha’s edition of No Longer Human, with its original text dating back to 1952, is one of the most authoritative versions of the novel at over 6.5 million copies sold as of July 31, 2014. It is also much more subdued in presentation in comparison to the Shūeisha and Kadokawa editions. On the front inner dust jacket is Dazai’s profile (and portrait in the regular edition), which is similar in content to Kadokawa’s but with reference to his first double suicide attempt in Kamakura and no mention of Goodbye, the day his and Tomie’s bodies were recovered from the Tamagawa aqueduct, or his other previous suicide attempts. On the inner back dust jacket (back cover in the regular edition), the publisher’s copy reads:

“Mine has been a life of much shame,” the man’s journal begins with a frank confession. He lies to himself, deceives others, and makes irreversible mistakes, declaring himself to be a “failure.” But, in his absence, a woman recalls him fondly as “so easy-going and amusing...he was a good boy, an angel.” A thought-provoking work of reckless abandon (sutemi no mondaisaku) by Dazai Osamu that questions what it means to be human and live with humans as another human.104

Notably, this description focuses on the main themes of the work without comparing Dazai’s life experience to Yōzō’s, or vice versa. Nevertheless, Dazai’s personal narrative still serves as the figurative “book end” of the novel, with Dazai’s profile at the front of the text, and commentary on Dazai’s life and work at the back of the text—all of which are written by Dazai scholar Okuno Takeo. In “Dazai Osamu’s Person and Literature” (太宰治の人と文学 Dazai Osamu no hito to bungaku, 1972), Okuno discusses Dazai’s Tsugaru origins and upbringing, family’s status as prominent landowners, and marginal existence as the sixth eldest son, as well as the influence this identity had on Dazai’s literature. This is followed by literary analysis of No Longer Human in the context of Okuno’s identity as a young, contemporary Dazai fan encountering the work amidst the scandal of Dazai and Tomie’s death; and a timeline of Dazai’s life and work.

However, Okuno does refer to No Longer Human as Dazai’s “inner, spiritual autobiography,”

104 Translation and emphasis mine. Quote from Keene’s translation of No Longer Human, 21, 177.
and boldly declares that “Dazai Osamu was an author born solely to write No Longer Human”—similar narratives to other editions of the same work.105

While readers are by no means obligated to consume the literary paratexts analyzed above, each nonetheless contains the potential to change and pre-emptively shape reader interpretations of the novel and Dazai’s star text. Publishers have emphasized and highlighted Dazai’s narratives of autobiography, suicide, and youth literature in a wide variety of printed materials from author profiles in textbooks, to publisher copies advertising his novels to consumers. Therefore, it has become increasingly difficult for Japanese readers to approach Dazai’s literature without pre-existing knowledge of his life, or a general image of him as an author. Mark Gibeau explains this phenomenon to English-language readers as follows:

The ability to approach [No Longer Human] tabula rasa is…an experience that few Japanese readers can enjoy. Even those who are not enthusiastic consumers of literature will know something of Dazai’s life and exploits, for he is nearly as infamous in Japan as he is famous.106

Notably, Gibeau’s statement echoes the concept of unknowing, and knowing, audiences in adaptation studies. Unknowing audiences are said to experience the text “as-is,” or “for itself” without any prior, intertextual knowledge (i.e., tabula rasa)—with the exception of cultural memory. Meanwhile, knowing audiences who are familiar with the original text bring different expectations and intertextual knowledge to its adaptation that influence how it is received.107 For Japanese readers of No Longer Human who possess culture memory and intertextual knowledge of Dazai’s life, the “original” text becomes Dazai’s star text. Thus, as knowing audiences progress through the novel, they unconsciously begin to compare the work they know (Dazai’s

star text) to the one they are experiencing (No Longer Human), forming connections between Yōzō and Dazai that make it difficult to “resist the impulse to try to ‘reverse engineer’ the novel.” As such, the tension between “fact” and “fiction,” “original” and “adaptation,” has become an essential part of No Longer Human and, by extension, Dazai’s image. This is exemplified by the recent transmedia “adaptations” of Dazai’s star text in Bungō Stray Dogs (文豪ストレイドッグス Bungō sutorei doggusu, 2013–) and Bungō and Alchemist (文豪とアルケミスト Bungō to arukemisuto, 2016–). Through embedding familiar iconography associated with the historical author into Dazai’s fictional counterparts, these series directly experiment with the relationship between fact and fiction, original and adaptation, and Dazai and Yōzō, while also encouraging Japanese audiences to use cultural memory and intertextual knowledge in its consumption. The result has been growing interest in the author himself among young, contemporary audiences, and the re-authoring of Dazai’s image.

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108 If audiences are familiar with the original text, adaptation becomes “an ongoing dialogical process…in which we compare the work we know with the one we are experiencing.” Robert Stam, “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation,” in James Naremore, ed., Film Adaptation (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000), as cited in Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Adaptation (New York: Routledge, 2012), 21.

Chapter 3: The Adaptation and “Character-ification” of Literary Star Texts

“In the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception.”
- Linda Hutcheon

Even after death, Dazai star image continues to live on as audiences select, organize, reinterpret, and contribute to its collection of texts over time. As discussed in the previous chapter, educational institutions and publishers in Japan have contributed to narratives of autobiography, suicide, and youth literature in posthumous publications of Dazai’s work. Transnational networks of popular culture distribution have also played a pivotal role in the ongoing construction of his star text, in bringing aspects of Dazai’s persona to audiences outside of the literary world and outside of Japan. Dazai has an equally significant presence in both “high” and “low” culture. On the one hand, he is recognized as one of the “literary greats” (bungō) by the academy and his literary work has been praised by scholars and critics; on the other hand, his star image has a familiar presence in mass culture and his texts have been labelled as popular literature for anomic youth who are struggling to define themselves. While Dazai’s place in canonical literature is well established, I argue that it is precisely Dazai’s multi-faceted, mutable image and resonance with youth culture that has been mobilized by various creators in contemporary industries to expand his star text and literature and adapt it to new mediums. This is why Dazai’s texts are still so prominent today.

Dazai’s star text has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists from the time of his death to the present; with his life, literary work, and authorial image being featured in everything from radio shows, stage plays, movies, TV dramas, documentaries, manga, anime, to

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Motifs, moments, and characters from Dazai’s literature have also inspired countless “light novels,” a form of genre fiction targeted at junior and senior high school students that is “light” in subject matter, short in length, and typically contains manga-style illustrations. From radio shows and stage plays in the 1960s to present-day digital media, Dazai’s star text is deployed for new mediums and changing audience needs, with producers and audiences highlighting or downplaying Dazai’s different characteristics in line with what Franssen and Honings refer to as “re-authoring,” a process of “intensifying or modifying the author’s image” to meet the needs of a specific medium and audience (see Chapter Two). Publishers, as discussed, have intensified Dazai’s tragic, gloomy side, whereas certain fans, such as the Akutagawa Prize winning author Matayoshi Naoki (又吉直樹), have highlighted Dazai’s comedic, lighthearted side. As a result, there is no singular, static image of the author “Dazai Osamu.”

Of the historical shifts in the reception of Dazai’s image, the repackaging of “Dazai Osamu” in the 2000s is the most significant as it solidified his position within early twenty-first century popular culture; a new image for a new century. The 2000s exhibited a noticeable change in youth reading habits from literary fiction to genre fiction, such as mystery and “cell phone novels.” Moreover, as Shūeisha editor Oyamada Kyōko explained, the majority of young

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3 NISIOISIN’s (西尾維新) Kubishime Romanticist: No Longer Human-Zerosaki Hitoshiki クビシメロマンチスト 人間失格, 零崎人識, Nomura Mizuki’s (野村美月) “Bungaku shōjo” to shinitagari no dōke (“piero”) “文学少女”と死にたがりの道化【ピエロ】， and Satō Yūya’s (佐藤友哉) Tensei! Dazai Osamu 転生! 太宰治, are notable examples.
5 Takiguchi, Dazai Osamu būmu, 275.
readers no longer recognized Dazai’s name. It is within this context that Shūeisha released its aforementioned reprint of *No Longer Human* in 2007 as part of its yearly “*natsuichi*” campaign. With a new, attractive illustration of protagonist Ōba Yōzō by *DEATH NOTE* manga artist Obata Takeshi on its cover, Shūeisha’s reprint of the novel enjoyed record sales—75,000 copies in a month and a half, 210,000 in a year—and became the first in a series of future collaborations between Shūeisha and other popular manga artists, including Kubo Tite (久保帯人), Konomi Takeshi (許斐剛), and Araki Hirohiko (荒木飛呂彦). Not only did this collaboration bring *No Longer Human* to the world of manga, but it also brought Dazai’s literature to younger demographics, made Dazai visually “knowable” in the form of Yōzō, and contributed certain traits to his character in the collective imagination.

This chapter explores Dazai’s star text in contemporary Japan through two key works, *Bungō Stray Dogs* (文豪ストレイドッグス *Bungō sutorei doggusu*, 2013–) and *Bungō and Alchemist* (文豪とアルケミスト *Bungō to arukemisuto*, 2016–). *Bungō Stray Dogs* is a manga for young adults (*seinen*) written by Asagiri Kafka (朝霧カフカ) and illustrated by Harukawa Sango (春河 35) that began serialization in the January 2013 edition of *Young Ace* (ヤング・エース) and has since evolved into a global multimedia franchise with a multi-season anime and an animated feature film by bones.inc; a series of light novels, spin-off comics, and stage play adaptations; a live-action movie; and a mobile game. As of December 28, 2022, the original

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7 *Natsuichi* is short for “*natsuyasumi ni issatsu*,” or “one book of summer vacation.” Since 1991, this annual campaign has encouraged junior high students to read during summer vacation (June-September).

8 “‘Raito’ na hyōshi de Dazai ureta Desu nō no Obata-san ga irasuto 「ライト」な表紙で太宰売れた「デスノート」の小畑さんがイラスト,” *Yomiuri Shinbun* 読売新聞, August 18, 2007.
Japanese-language manga officially has 12 million (physical and digital) copies in circulation. Its main story follows the Armed Detective Agency and its clashes with other “skill-user” organizations such as the Port Mafia, the American-based Guild, Russian-based Rats in the House of the Dead, and the Decay of Angels, as each party vies for control over a supernatural book that allows anything the user writes to become reality. All of its main characters are namesakes of famous authors; and each character possesses a supernatural ability, or “skill,” that loosely references the respective author’s literary work. In Dazai’s case, this is “No Longer Human,” an unmatched skill that allows him to nullify other characters’ skills upon physical contact with any part of his body.

*Bungō and Alchemist*, on the other hand, is a browser-based “bungō transmigration simulation game” produced by Taniguchi Kōhei (谷口晃平), supervised by Ishii Jirō (イシイ・ジロウ), and hosted by the major Japanese e-commerce site DMM.com. Officially beginning service in November 2016, the browser game and its subsequent mobile edition for iOS/Android systems have over 1 million registered users as of April 24, 2019. Apart from the game itself, the series also has stage plays, light novels, and an original TV anime by OLM., Inc. *Bungō and Alchemist*’s story takes place in an alternate timeline, one in which Japan’s history “has taken a

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9 In reference to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The House of the Dead* (1860–1862) and Mishima Yukio’s *The Decay of the Angel* (天人五衰 Tenningosui, 1971).

10 “Skill” is what *inōryoku* (異能力) is translated as in official English media.

11 When discussing this skill’s origin, Asagiri notes that it’s a common trope for the strongest, most powerful characters to have a cancelling ability. SAKAMOTO Megumi 坂本恵, “*Bungō sutorei doggusu ikemen bungō no tanjō hiwa o kataru Asagiri Kafuka, Harukawa35 intabyū* 「文豪ストレイドッグス」イケメン文豪の誕生秘話を語る朝霧カフカ, 春河 35 インタビュー,” Comic Natalie ニュースナタリー, April 4, 2013, https://natalie.mu/comic/pp/bungostraydogs.

12 DMM.com is also home to *Tōken Ranbu* (刀剣乱舞, 2015-) and *Kantai Collection* (艦隊これくしょん, 2013-); popular browser games featuring historical Japanese swords anthropomorphized as “sword boys” (*tōken danshi*), and WWII warships anthropomorphized as “fleet girls” (*kanmusu*) respectively. As of 2020, *Bungō and Alchemist* is run by EXNOA LLC, the new company name for DMM GAMES.
s slightly different course.”

In it, a strange phenomenon has begun, and books are being stained black by *shinshokusha* or “Invaders”—mysterious creatures born from negative feelings—before disappearing from people’s memories altogether, as if they had never existed. As a Special Librarian and Alchemist at the Imperial Library, the player character is tasked with the transmigration and maintenance of famous, historical writers, each of whom are able to transform books into weapons and use them to eradicate the Invaders.

As suggested above, *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist* have rearranged historic “facts” to create entertaining characters and storylines for contemporary young consumers—albeit in different ways. *Bungō Stray Dogs* imagines “authors-as-characters”: each character is only loosely connected to their author namesakes with resonant literary “glimmers” of the original personas; most of the characters are not even framed as writers. *Bungō and Alchemist*, however, creates characters that are “authors-as-authors”: each is more tightly associated with their historical personages, relationships, and maintain their status as writers within the fictional world. Nevertheless, *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist* are united in making modern (Japanese) literature and its figures feel more familiar to young audiences via “character-ification” (*kyarakutā-ka*). Character-ification refers to the act of turning anything from living beings to inanimate objects and abstract concepts into characters via anthropomorphism and personification (*gijinka*) or caricature (*deforume*). In the case of *Bungō*

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14 Although there is no perfect translation for *shinshokusha*, I have decided to translate it as “Invaders” since *shinshoku* means to gradually encroach upon or eat away at something. Invade can mean “to spread over or into as if invading,” e.g., “doubts invade his mind,” and “to affect injuriously and progressively.” Permeate is also its synonym, which means “to spread or diffuse through,” e.g., how black ink bleeds through and stains paper (most Invaders are comprised of or attack with ink). In doing so, I aimed to reflect the harm the Invaders inflict on the minds and bodies of the writers, as well as on the library’s physical books. “In invade,” and “Permeate,” Merriam-Webster Online.
*Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist*, character-ification borrows elements from literary history to reimagine authors as characters with manga-like attributes. Dazai’s character-ifications in these texts are provocative case studies that reveal how these series have generated interest in and encouraged audiences to seek out the historical “original” as well as other, related texts. These reader, viewer, and player practices, in turn, have influenced Dazai’s contemporary reception.

### 3.1 Dazai Osamu as a “Suicide Enthusiast” and “Failure of a Human Being”?

*Bungō Stray Dogs* is not focused on historical fact, nor on academic approaches to literature and its authors. Instead, its “detached” or “loose” (*chokkyū de wa nai*) approach to the literary world, as described by creator Asagiri Kafka, makes use of eye-catching, stylish designs and “well-rounded, unforgettable characters” to create an entertaining story.\(^\text{16}\) Inspired by storytelling in media franchises such as the *Fate* series (2004–) by Nasu Kinoko (奈須きのこ), *Bungō Stray Dogs* began with the innovative idea of turning authors into attractive (*ikemen*) characters and making them face off against each other in “supernatural battles” (*inō batoru*)—a popular genre within Japanese media.\(^\text{17}\) Its emphasis on characters, rather than actual authors, is especially evident in Asagiri and Harukawa Sango’s creative process.

In the planning stages of *Bungō Stray Dogs*, Asagiri began with short description of each character’s main traits that he forwarded to Harukawa and became the basis for her initial

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\(^\text{16}\) *Bungō sutorei doggusu seisaku ininkai* 文豪ストレイドッグス製作委員会, *Bungō sutorei doggusu kōshiki gaido bukku kaikaroku* 文豪ストレイドッグス公式ガイドブック 開花録 (Tokyo: Kadokawa 角川, 2016).

\(^\text{17}\) ASAGIRI Kafka 朝霧カフカ and HARUKAWA Sango 春河 35, “Atogaki あとがき,” in *Bungō sutorei doggusu* 文豪ストレイドッグス 1 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Comics A 角川コミックス・エース, 2013). *Ikemen* is a portmanteau of *iketeru* (cool; stylish; good-looking) and *menzu*, from the English “men.” It is typically used to describe men—fictional or otherwise—with charming and attractive features. “Ikemen イケメン,” in *Jitsuyō Nihongo hyōgen jiten* 実用日本語表現辞典 and *Dijitaru daijisen* デジタル大辞泉.
sketches of each character. Asagiri, upon seeing Harukawa’s sketches, would get a general sense of each character’s personality and then build the story around the characters. By prioritizing characters over story writing and world building, Asagiri explained, he could create much more well-rounded characters:

“Normally, I would have proceeded from story writing to character creation but, doing so also poses the risk of writing flat characters due to plot constraints. However, this time, I could look at Harukawa Sango’s designs and then imagine each character’s life (kyarakutā no jinsei), which allowed for more vivid characterization than I would have thought possible.”

As the words “each character’s life” suggests, in writing his characters Asagiri decided to focus on one particular aspect of an author, amplify it, and then imagine that personality walking around town. In Dazai’s case, Asagiri focused on the historical author’s frequent suicide attempts and created the character of “a young suicide enthusiast” (jisatsu mania no seinen). “Of course, the character named ‘Dazai Osamu’ is not the person himself,” Asagiri laughs, “the most important thing was to make [the author-characters] interesting in a manga-like way.”

In another interview, Asagiri discussed his efforts to make Dazai’s character an over-the-top eccentric independent of and even in contrast to Dazai’s established image. Asagiri’s focus is thus less on historical accuracy and more on developing interesting characters that can stand on their own, detached from the original author and from the bindings of “fact.” He has even referred to his characters as “gijinka”—a word meaning both the anthropomorphization and personification of inanimate objects, abstract concepts, and animals—despite each author’s prior

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20 Asagiri and Harukawa, “Bungō de asobō.”
21 Sakamoto, “Ikemen bungō no tanjō hiwa o kataru.”
existence as a living, breathing human. Thus, the Dazai in *Bungō Stray Dogs* is not a characterification of the author himself but of the author’s star text: an abstract representation of “Dazai” and his literature in popular imagination.

Similarly, most characters in the series were designed by Harukawa with each respective author’s most notable work or characters in mind, rather than the authors themselves. For example, Edogawa Ranpo (江戸川乱歩) is the greatest detective in the world who can solve a murder as soon as he lays eyes on the scene, in reference to his famous detective fiction starring *Akechi Kogorō* (明智小五郎) and the *Boys Detective Club* (少年探偵団 Shōnen tanteidan); and Miyazawa Kenji (宮沢賢治) is a pure-hearted country boy with superhuman strength, in reference to his famous poem “Be not Defeated by the Rain” (*Ame ni mo makezu*, 1934). Likewise, Dazai’s character is heavily inspired by *No Longer Human* and its protagonist, Ōba Yōzō, with a few references to the historical author’s life, personality, and preferences. Like Obata’s Yōzō, Harukawa’s Dazai is drawn with features that are mostly delicate, but his eyes are sharp; his expression is calculating yet distant. His hair is dark and bluntly cut, forming unkempt tufts of hair that frame his face. He stands confidently with his hands in his trench coat’s pockets, his shirt tucked into a pair of light-coloured dress pants and a bolo tie hangs under his collar with its ends tucked into a black suit vest. However, Harukawa’s character also has shirt sleeves are rolled up to the elbows to reveal arms wrapped in bandages. Bandages can also be found around Dazai’s neck, stopping just above the collar of his striped dress shirt, and covering his Adam’s apple. These full-body bandages heighten his characterization as a “young suicide enthusiast,” as discussed above.

In addition to choices of visualization, Dazai’s personality and actions also evoke qualities commonly associated with Yōzō’s character and, to a certain extent, his historical
counterpart’s star text. For example, his character profile in the *Bungō Stray Dogs Official Guidebook* for Season One of the anime reads as follows:

An always-smiling suicide enthusiast, who is actually a former mafia executive… A member of the skill-user organization “Armed Detective Agency.” Though his colleagues are eccentrics all around, Dazai is an eccentric above all eccentrics. He is a “suicide enthusiast” always looking for a suitable place to die…He has tried many different methods but fails to die every time due to his strong vitality (*seimeiryoku no tsuyosa*). Although he wants to commit suicide, he hates pain and suffering, so he is looking for a beautiful person who will die alongside him. His neck and arms are wrapped in bandages, but it is unknown if they conceal scars from previous suicide attempts or not… An aloof, elusive, and mysterious man, Dazai’s enigmatic former occupation is one of the “Armed Detective Agency’s Seven Mysteries.”

As suggested by Asagiri’s interview, Harukawa’s design, and the profile above, Dazai’s character revolves heavily around the concept of suicide. Moreover, it is vis-à-vis Dazai’s disillusionment with life and desire for death that other traits, such as his cheerful façade that hides his true character—reminiscent of his original character Yōzō—are highlighted and developed as the story progresses.

Dazai’s character is first introduced to audiences in the *Bungō Stray Dogs* manga, anime and stage plays as a drowning man. However, it is not a tragic scene as one might expect, considering the historical author’s death; instead, we see “Dazai” floating down the river entirely submersed, save for his legs that comically stick straight up out of the water. Saved by Nakajima Atsushi (中島敦), an unfortunate bystander and starving orphan, Dazai regains consciousness and his torso lurches forward off the ground as if he were a corpse being reanimated. After staring blankly into the distance for a few moments, Dazai scowls in disappointment at having

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22 It has since been confirmed that Dazai’s bandages conceal scars from his previous suicide attempts, as well as the injuries he has sustained over the years due to his skill being unable to protect him from physical harm. *Bungō sutorei doggusu seisaku iinkai* 文豪ストレイドッグス製作委員会, *Bungō sutorei doggusu DEAD APPLE kōshiki gaidobukku enmuroku* 文豪ストレイドッグス DEAD APPLE 公式ガイドブック 煙霧録 (Tokyo: Kadokawa 角川, 2018), 88.

his “submersion” interrupted and apologizes for getting someone else involved, as his goal is to commit, in his words, “a noble, clean suicide that won’t cause anyone trouble.” Across the riverbank, an angry Kunikida Doppo (国木田独歩) berates Dazai, his co-worker who he addresses as “blockhead” and “suicidal maniac,” for disrupting his schedule. Ignoring the slew of insults being thrown at him, Dazai cheekily offers to treat Atsushi to a meal on Kunikida’s dime (his own wallet no longer on his person). Kunikida then shouts, “Don’t get generous with other people’s money, Dazai!” It is in this moment that Dazai’s “surname” is first revealed to the audience, and he formally introduces himself to Atsushi as “Dazai Osamu.”

As they read or watch these events unfold, “knowing audiences,” to use Hutcheon’s term, may engage in an “interpretative doubling,” or “a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work [they] know and the work [they] are experiencing.”24 That is, they may mentally cross-reference Dazai’s character design, personality, and actions with the historical author upon experiencing his “adaptation.” Even if the Japanese audience is not well acquainted with modern literature, they will most likely recognize Dazai’s name and are aware of how he died. Thus, when people first see “Dazai” floating down the Tsurumi River, it creates a figurative bridge between Dazai’s “real” life and his “reincarnation” as an anime character. This bridge that informs Dazai’s character-ification in Bungō Stray Dogs draws heavily on the fact of the historical author’s many suicide attempts—information that is frequently included in the author’s profile in Japanese textbooks and literature companions.25 We see this connection amplified in Bungō Stray Dogs in narrative motif: Dazai’s character searches endlessly for a beautiful woman.

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24 Hutcheon, A Theory of Adaptation, 139.
with whom to die as an allusion to the author’s previous double suicide attempts, especially his double suicide attempt in Kamakura with café waitress Tanabe Shimeko (田辺シメ子) that was dramatized in *No Longer Human* and other stories. In this sense, the bridge shapes Dazai the character in contemporary pop culture texts while simultaneously obscuring the star text Dazai sought to control while alive. Indeed, at one point the *Bungō Stray Dogs* light novels blur the distinctions between the historical Dazai, fictional Dazai, and fictional Yōzō when Kunikida’s character refers to Dazai as “a failure of a human being” (*ningen shikkaku*) and “a menace to women everywhere.” In this moment, “Dazai” as a contemporary construct becomes a conflation of history, text, and character.

Seemingly resonant of this blurring of identities, of past and present, of history and fiction, in a 2014 interview, Asagiri remarked that readers can enjoy *Bungō Stray Dogs*, its characters, battles, and story “as manga” without thinking too deeply about its contents, suggesting that *Bungō Stray Dogs*’ story, concept, and characters, were all designed to be accessible to general audiences—without the need for extra research. As an extension of this mode of engagement, in the same interview Asagiri goes on to encourage readers who enjoy *Bungō Stray Dogs* to read the authors’ respective works, as it will “lead to other forms of enjoyment.”

Asagiri’s afterword for the second *Bungō Stray Dogs* light novel, *Dazai Osamu and the Black Period* (太宰治と黒の時代 Dazai Osamu to kuro no jidai, 2014), also mirrors these sentiments:

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27 Asagiri and Harukawa, “Bungō de asobō.”

28 Asagiri and Harukawa, “Bungō de asobō.”

29 Although this novel has been translated into English by Yen Press as *Osamu Dazai and the Dark Era*, 黒の時代 kuro no jidai in the original title is a direct homage to Pablo Picasso’s Blue Period (青の時代 ao no jidai). KAFKA
As you know, the characters in Bungō Stray Dogs don’t share everything in common with their real-life counterparts. There are a number of discrepancies in the series’ setting that contradict historical fact (for example, it was actually Dazai Osamu who looked up to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke [芥川龍之介]). I have no qualms with readers treating these as entities independent from the actual history.

However, my belief is that the faint glimmers these individuals left behind for future generations (such as the lines written in their stories…) are the very nature of a great author. So, to stretch the point a bit, I feel as though this series wouldn’t be able to live up to its name—Bungō—without these glimmers.

Many literature fans may be startled to read Asagiri’s statement; not only does he disregard the sacredness of historical fact, but he also reassures the reader that is okay to consume Bungō Stray Dogs as a work independent from its source text, i.e., historical authors. This is because the main appeal of Bungō Stray Dogs lies not in true-to-life depictions of great writers and modern (Japanese) literature, but in its “detached” or “loose” approach to bungō and select “glimmers” that enrich the series’ world-building and engage knowing audiences.

This is especially evident in the above-mentioned light novel, Dazai Osamu and the Black Period, which is loosely inspired by the historical events surrounding portraits of the Buraiha taken by photographer Hayashi Tadahiko (林忠彦) at Bar Lupin in 1947, shortly before Oda Sakunosuke’s (織田作之助) death. In it, readers learn of Dazai’s past in the Port Mafia, his unconventional friendship with Oda Sakunosuke and Sakaguchi Ango (坂口安吾), the final photos the trio took together at Bar Lupin, and Oda’s dying wish for Dazai to “become a good person,” “save the weak,” and “protect the orphaned.” Dazai’s character, like Yōzō, is not only

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30 In Bungō Stray Dogs, Dazai serves as Akutagawa’s mentor (and object of admiration) in the Port Mafia.
32 Bungō sutorei doggusu seisaku iinkai, Kaikaroku.
33 “Only nine days from when this photograph was taken, Oda Sakunosuke, suffering from tuberculosis, coughed up large amounts of blood and left this world shortly afterwards…In turn, Dazai Osamu, and Sakaguchi Ango, too, left this world; and now, only their pictures endure.” Kafka, “Atogaki,” in Dazai Osamu to kuro no jidai.
34 Kafka, “Chapter IV,” in Osamu Dazai and the Dark Era.
comedic but tragic. He is “so intelligent that others look like alien creatures to [him],” and has always observed life from the perspective of an outsider: a third, non-human party perplexed with the human experience. He has no earthly desires nor a reason to live and has suffered in solitude for most of his life. Thus, he resorts to playing the role of a clown and hiding his true emotions with suicidal antics. However, Dazai’s character has still made significant progress towards the fulfilment of Oda’s wish and uses his inner darkness and past experiences to serve as a guiding light—a “wise sage,” as Asagiri calls him—for others.

Dazai’s role as a guiding light also extends outside of the text, as *Bungō Stray Dogs* uses narrative techniques that encourage readers to empathize with the characters. That is, throughout the series, whenever a skill-user’s life is on the line, they always rely on their own strength and not the supernatural ability in their possession. This, Asagiri explains, is because he wants readers to recognize the courage of each character and discover the same potential hidden inside of them. Thus, by taking sacred historical figures and turning them into memorable characters who feel lost and fight their own battles the same as we do, *Bungō Stray Dogs* transforms abstract literary star texts into something more “human” that audiences can relate to. In fact, Dazai’s character continues to enjoy overwhelming popularity in Japan, and has even become an anomic figure overseas due to his innate sense of loneliness and endless search for a reason to live that contemporary youths can relate to.

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37 Sakamoto, “Ikemen bungō no tanjō hiwa o kataru.”

38 In Japan, Dazai has consistently placed in the top ten ranking for Newtype’s Anime Awards’ male character category every year the main anime has received a new season or animated feature film (2016–2019). Characters can only be nominated if they have been in an anime that has been broadcast, streamed, or screened in the past year.
3.2 Dazai Osamu as…Himself? The Historical “Original” vs. Its Fictional “Image”

Unlike *Bungō Stray Dogs*, character creation in *Bungō and Alchemist* sticks close to the source text, i.e., historical authors. It does so through the narratological device of “Recollections” (i.e., cutscenes) in *Bungō and Alchemist* that draw on historic fact as its main inspiration to familiarize players with the personalities behind modern Japanese literature and encourage them to conduct research inside and outside of the game. As a Special Librarian and Alchemist at the Imperial Library, the player is tasked with completing daily and weekly “Research” missions, such as transmigrating (転生 tenset) writers and sending them on “Book Delves” (潜書 sensho) to purify corrupted books. Furthermore, each Special Librarian receives a monthly salary from the Chief Librarian that is calculated based on how many days the player has “attended work” (i.e., logged into the game) and conducted research in the previous month. As suggested by the title of the game, most of this research is centered around the “literary greats” themselves. For example, the Special Librarian is tasked not only with transmigrating writers, but building their trust via strolls, and learning of their relationships with other writers in various letters, recollections, and limited-time events.

When the game was in its early stages, the development team, directed by Taniguchi and Ishii, discussed what element of literature should be the main focus of the game, such as books, characters within books, or bungō themselves, before settling on the game’s current concept. How to make the game stand out from pre-existing series that had already turned bungō into characters, however, was another challenge. The team’s final decision was thus to highlight “the bungō themselves,” that is Dazai Osamu and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke as authors, and the real-life

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Transmigration is when the soul passes “from one body or being to another” at death. “Transmigrate,” Merriam-Webster Online.
relationships between them, to create a realistic, true-to-life bungō game.\textsuperscript{40} However, the developers still wanted the game to be entertaining in its own right, so there is still a significant presence of fantasy elements in the game’s setting.

\textit{Bungō and Alchemist} takes place in an alternate timeline Japan in which creatures referred to as “Invaders” threaten to erase literature from history. Invaders are psychological in nature and can only be found within the world of books. Thus, the Librarian must use their alchemic powers to transmigrate the souls of great writers from Ensouled Books (有魂書 \textit{yūkonsho}) and send them into Corrupted Books (有碍書 \textit{yūgaisho}) to defeat the Invaders inside and purify the book. Ensouled Books are formed when the ideas (\textit{gainen}) of a book’s world and a writer’s soul connect via widespread circulation of the text. The Librarian (the player) engages with this personification of the classic author, one that is imagined at the intersection of history and popular reception, and sends the author to retrieve the soul of a new writer also imagined as existing within a text. To initiate the process, the Librarian transmigrates the ideas of authors into physical manifestations (\textit{sugata}) derived from the “souls of authors that exist within books.”\textsuperscript{41} However, in the case of “Dazai” in the game, this is not the historic personage Tsushima Shūji reincarnated—although they do share memories—but the author image of “Dazai Osamu” in a new, physical vessel. Similarly, \textit{Bungō and Alchemist} characters are all physical manifestations of—and reinterpretations of—literary star images as found in media texts (i.e., their books) and the popular imagination (i.e., the concept of writers). Dazai’s star image represented in-game is

\textsuperscript{40} Posuto media henshūbu ポストメディア編集部, \textit{Bungō to arukemisuto ofisharu kyarakutā bukku} 文豪とアルケミスト オフィシャルキャラクターブック (Ichijinsha 一迅社, 2017), 84.
\textsuperscript{41} Posuto media henshūbu, \textit{Ofisharu kyarakutā bukku}, 82. Authors are now summoned from Equipment Books (有装書 \textit{yūsōsho}) and Ensouled Books are used to unlock Awakening Stories and Rings.
likewise a representation of how pop culture industries have adapted literary figures and their star texts to create contemporary characters for youth demographics.

Dazai’s character is the main poster boy for *Bungō and Alchemist* alongside Akutagawa, both of whom were among the first characters designed for the game and were used to advertise the game prior to its official release.\(^2\) In the game’s character guidebook, Taniguchi and Ishii note that the designers put great thought and effort into making the characters recognizable at first glance so that the game could stand out among its competitors—in fact, it took almost four months for the team to decide on a final design for Akutagawa’s character.\(^3\) In designing characters, the team primarily focused on incorporating intricate details that represent perceptions of the author’s personality, literary associations, and motifs from their works via patterns, accessories, and personal belongings.

For Dazai, the influence of the author’s motif and position in the literary canon is visualized via a first edition copy of *No Longer Human* that he carries on his person in a similar fashion to his fellow Buraiha authors,\(^4\) and an *inrō* (seal case) with long red tassels that resemble cherries that hangs off his left hip, in reference to “Cherries” (桜桃 Ōtō, 1948).\(^5\) The form a writer’s weapon takes depends on the type of literature most commonly associated with the original author: blade (pure literature), bow (naturalism), gun (poetry and children’s literature), and whip (popular literature). In Dazai’s case, he wields a first-edition copy of *No Longer Human* that transforms into a giant scythe (i.e., a blade) in battle, signifying his

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\(^2\) Posuto media henshūbu, *Ofisharu kyarakutā bukku*, 86.
\(^4\) Dazai, Oda Sakunosuke, Sakaguchi Ango, and Dan Kazuo’s characters all have leather belts that hang off their hips and connect to a matching book-weapon holster.
\(^5\) *Inrō* are small cases made of a stack of tiny, nested boxes connected by cords that were used to carry items such as identity seals and medicines due to the lack of pockets in traditional Japanese garments.
connections to pure literature. Aspects of his star persona or “personality” and interpersonal relationships also influenced the design of his character’s attire—as the dandy of the group, he wears a dress shirt and vest, flashy haori coat, and knee-high lace up boots—as well as behaviour. The author-character’s respective ages at transmigration were also selected to best reflect historical relationships between teachers and students, idols and admirers. For example, Akutagawa and Dazai were designed to complement each other visually: even though Dazai is typically associated with his later works such as No Longer Human and The Setting Sun, Taniguchi felt it would be uncanny for Dazai’s character to be more mature in years than Akutagawa, who was Dazai’s literary idol. Therefore, the developers settled on Dazai as a “cringe-worthy” (itaiko-chan) young adult of around twenty-three (i.e., when he first entered the literary scene and published under his penname), which explains his at times childish behaviour, obsession with Akutagawa and the Akutagawa Prize, excessive jiishiki (self-consciousness) that fluctuates between insecurity and overconfidence, and somewhat flashy but still stylish taste in fashion.

Drawing further on interpretation of star text and intertextual persona, Dazai’s character in the game is described as an attention-seeking narcissist who “behaves differently depending on his audience” and “takes on a sunny personality to entertain those around him” (i.e., he partakes in “clowning” like Yōzō). He places great importance on maintaining his delicate image and dislikes when others point out his faults. He is also extremely fashion-conscious and

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46 You can also “equip” Weapon Rings that change the respective author’s weapon class. Dazai normally wields a blade (pure literature) but can change his weapon to a bow (naturalism) with his ring.
47 When casting Dazai’s character for the stage play, the staff expressed that they envisioned him to be around 23 years old. MATSUMOTO Hiromi 松本裕美, “Butai Bungō to arukemisuto yokeimonono no banka (“ereji”) Dazai Osamu yaku no Hirano Ryō intabyū ‘mou 2.5-jigen no butai ni shutsuen dekiru to omotteinakatta舞台『文豪とアルケミスト余計者の挽歌（エレジー）』太宰治役の平野良インタビュー「もう2.5次元の舞台に出演できると思っていなかった」,” SPICE, December 21, 2018, https://spice.eplus.jp/articles/217861.
48 Posuto media henshūbu, Ofisharu kyarakutā bukku, 8.
fastidious when it comes to his appearance, braiding his hair every morning and impulsively tidying it after it is disheveled in battle. Despite his characteristically energetic, self-proclaimed genius self, Dazai is frequently assaulted by crippling anxiety and enters “depression mode,” becoming sympathetic to thoughts of suicide—something that is meant to express Dazai’s complicated “human nature.” As a result, Dazai’s state of mind is classified as “unstable” in-game and he is more easily influenced by the Invaders’ negative emotions than other authors.

Yet it is the visualization of Dazai’s design, his character-ification, that most significantly reveals how his literary image is constructed for and distributed by contemporary pop culture imagination for a youth demographic. His official game description reads:

He is an attention-seeking, egotistical narcissist pretending to be a cheerful, charismatic person. In spite of his tendency to look down on others, he can quickly change his tune to one of shameless flattery. He refuses to acknowledge anything he finds inconvenient, even when others point it out to him. However, when it comes to his appearance, nothing escapes his discerning eye; he puts effort into unseen details and is satisfied even if the beautiful patterns are hidden beneath the outer layers of his clothing.

Dazai’s narcissism and discerning eye are also reinforced in his character design, which is much more fashionable than is practical. His outfit is a combination of Western and Japanese dress. It consists of a grey collared dress shirt under a black, double-breasted vest with gold trim, a red to blue gradient tie fastened around his bare neck, white jeans, black knee-high lace-up boots and an extravagant red haori coat with cherry blossom patterns draped over his shoulders. His bright-red hair is swept to the right side of his face, with a portion neatly braided and secured behind his left ear with a gold barrette, and an antenna-like ahoge, or “idiot hair,” that sticks straight up in

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49 Posuto media henshūbu, Ofisharu kyarakutā bukku, 86.
50 The more unstable the writer, the more easily they break down when they take damage. Once two writers’ breakdown gages are filled, they perform a powerful dual attack together named sōhitsu shinzui (lit. “the essence of two pens”) in reference to Tsubōchi Shōyō’s influential essay “The Essence of the Novel” (小説神髄 Shōsetsu shinzui, 1885–1886).
the air.\textsuperscript{51} His pose is cool and confident, yet also reflects his excessive jiishiki with his right
index finger proudly resting against his chin and his unnatural, cat-like yellow eyes averted away
from the player.

Notably, Dazai’s character looks nothing like his historical counterpart. However, this is
intentional as he—as a physical manifestation of Dazai’s literary star image—is a collection of
iconography (kigō) associated with the abstract image, often strongly associated with emotional
resonance, of “the author Dazai Osamu” in the public imagination.\textsuperscript{52} For example, Dazai—and
his work, by association—have been described as dark (kurai), gloomy (in’utsu), fastidious
(kimuzukashii), genius (tensai), brilliant (kashikoi), sensitive (shinkeishitsu), cheerful (akarui),
and introverted (uchiki). Dazai’s unstable emotions that swing from extremely cheerful and over-
confident, to dark and despairing, are thus a near-perfect representation of the complexity,
contradictoriness, and polysemy of Dazai’s star image, i.e., “the multiple but finite meanings and
effects that a star image signifies.”\textsuperscript{53}

These significations legible to players, and the underlying emotional connections, are
also integrated into the game design and game play, further highlighting the relationship between
player, the text, and the idea of the author that is now repositioned as a fluid, adaptive,
intermediary text between all three. Indeed, relationships are at the heart of \textit{Bungō and
Alchemist}. As suggested by the careful attention paid to character creation based on historical
literary associations above, \textit{Bungō and Alchemist}’s main focus is the relationships between
authors. When selecting which writers to feature in-game, Taniguchi chose writers who are well-

\textsuperscript{51} Ahoge is hair that “springs up like an antenna,” and is a standard element of character design in anime and video
games. Hiroki Azuma, \textit{Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals}, trans. by Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 2009), 42, 128-129.

\textsuperscript{52} KAWABATA Kazunari 川畑和成, “Kontentsu no chikara: Gēmu ni okeru kontentsu no katsuyō コンテンツの

\textsuperscript{53} Dyer, \textit{Stars}, 63.
known, have interesting connections to other authors and literary movements, or he personally wanted to introduce to players as the producer of the game. Not only was Dazai’s character built around his relationship to Akutagawa and the Buraiha writers, but his interactions with his fellow writers are based off historic events, facts, and “what-ifs” in the case of Akutagawa and Nagai Kafū (永井荷風), whom Dazai was a fan of but never met in real-life.

In contrast to Bungō and Alchemist’s light novels, stage plays, and anime, the game itself has no linear storyline and most of its world-building is achieved through short cut scenes and limited-time event stories referred to as “Recollections” that focus on conversations and relationships between writers. These can be obtained during limited time events, or are triggered when the Librarian sends specific writers into a Book Delve together. For example, when a player sends Dazai, Oda, and Ango into a Book Delve together, a conversation is triggered in which Dazai expresses his concern over Oda’s reckless lifestyle (reminiscent of Dazai’s real-life eulogy for Oda), to which Oda responds, in Kansai dialect, “Anti-authority! Anti-morality! That’s our creed. I’m just doing my best night and day to become an outcast and failure (rakugosha) who lives up to the Buraiha name.” Ango then praises Oda for his efforts. In a short number of lines, the Librarian is informed of the general concept and image of the Buraiha and its authors.

Similarly, in conducting the daily research task that requires the Librarian to read letters exchanged between writers in the Imperial Library labelled “Learn the relationships between

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55 “Oda wanted to die...I, above all other men, felt and understood deeply the sadness of Oda. The first time I met him on the Ginza, I thought, ‘God, what an unhappy man,’ and I could scarcely bear the pain...He wanted to die. But there was nothing I could do.” As quoted in Lyons, The Saga of Dazai Osamu, 49-50.
bungō” (bungō no kankeisei o shire), the player can get to know new facets of the writers’ personalities and relationships. For example, the letters from Shiga Naoya (志賀直哉) and Kawabata Yasunari (川端康成) that are addressed to Dazai’s character are written as follows:

Dear Mr. Dazai Osamu,
I know that you still have no intention of changing your mind and that you’re still as reckless and thick-headed as ever.
But I’m not trying to “exchange verbal blows” with you, why can’t you seem to understand that?

Shiga Naoya

Dear Mr. Dazai Osamu,
Thank you for your kind letter. It seems that it is not only your lifestyle that remains unchanged.
For the record, I do approve of your literary work, and I hope that there is no misunderstanding on that part.
I have no wish to be stabbed.

Kawabata Yasunari

As Haga Shōko notes in her analysis of Kawabata and Yokomitsu Riichi’s (横光利一) relationship as represented in Bungō and Alchemist, the information provided in the game’s conversations and letters are extremely fragmentary in nature to encourage users to supplement them with outside information. Although Shiga quotes a line from Dazai’s “Thus Have I Heard” (如是我聞 Nyoze gamon, 1948), the in-game text does not specify what exactly Shiga is quoting, nor why the two authors are on poor terms. Likewise, Kawabata’s response alludes to the Akutagawa Prize incident and Dazai’s “To Kawabata Yasunari” (川端康成へ Kawabata Yasunari e, 1935), which contains the lines, “According to this, one might think that you alone

decide the Akutagawa Prize…To spend your time raising birds and going to dance concerts—is this such a splendid life? ‘I’ll stab him,’ that’s what I thought.” However, despite Kawabata’s moral censure towards Dazai, he did eventually acknowledge Dazai’s literary talent with high praise for “Schoolgirl” (女生徒 Joseito, 1939) that is said to have increased the amount of critical discussion surrounding the work and contributed to the novella being nominated for, and winning, the Kitamura Tōkoku Prize in 1940. This, perhaps, is why Kawabata’s character felt the need to clarify that his opinions of Dazai’s literary work have changed and that Dazai need not be hostile towards him. Nevertheless, this is all external information that interested players would need to investigate on their own to fully understand the context and implications of Kawabata’s letter. Without a doubt, the words “I have no wish to be stabbed” seem extremely out of place and would motivate many a player to find out what exactly Kawabata is referring to.

In looking into Kawabata and Dazai’s literary work and personal histories, users may also find that the “truth” behind this letter is stranger than fiction.

In this way, each character in Bungō and Alchemist is created, introduced, and shaped via their relationships with other authors, as we saw with Dazai’s age being adjusted to match his admiration for Akutagawa, the matching motifs and weapons for related literary schools and movements, and the allusions to relationships via in-game voice lines, letters, and recollections. As Ishii notes, the relationships between bungō are an “infinite engine” (mugen enjin) of story material, not only for the developers but for players too, as not everything can be covered in-game. The game outright invites an intertextual approach to engagement and encourages

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57 As quoted in Lyons, The Saga of Dazai Osamu, 38.
59 Tachibana, “Bungō no kankeisei wa mugen ni monogatari ga tsukureru ‘mugen enjin.’”
players to build not only relationships to the characters therein, but to the ideas of authors and their texts without. In fact, everything in *Bungō and Alchemist*, from the cafeteria’s menu to letters between authors, was designed to be as realistic and based on historical facts as possible so that the game would become more and more interesting as players researched relevant literature themselves.⁶⁰ Therefore, *Bungō and Alchemist* is an important example of a work that encourages players to look further into the authors and works being referenced, learn more about them as people, as well as write their own scenarios—reauthoring the authors once more.

As discussed above, *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist* both reimagine authors as characters that live in and beyond their texts. Although the approach to reauthoring literary celebrity is different, the goal of outreach and impact is the same. Moreover, as media texts with similar aesthetics and tone, it is important to remember that these multimedia series target a shared demographic through the bridging mechanism of intertextuality. Creators, wanting audiences to explore the world of literature itself, have presented relevant information in select “glimmers,” in the case of *Bungō Stray Dogs*, or fragments, in the case of *Bungō and Alchemist*, to leave room for audience reconstruction and reappropriation of author images, and encourage investigation into the original texts to enrich the fan experience. This, in turn, has brought the world of Japanese literature to a new, contemporary youth audience; generated interest in the authors and literary works themselves; and contributed to the formation of border-crossing fan practices, subjectivities, and communities.

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⁶⁰ Posuto media henshūbu, *Bungō to arukemisuto ofisharu kyarakutā buku*, 85.
3.3 A Search for the “Original”: Popular Culture’s Influence on the Author’s Reception

*Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist* use bright, colourful, and youthful designs and fantasy-based-in-history settings, to make literature and its figures feel more familiar to younger audiences. Because the author-characters are constructed from biographical details—as “glimmers” or “fragments”—with new elements added on top, there is still room for audiences to translate the semiotic signs given to each character—i.e., cross-reference them with pre-existing knowledge of the author’s star text. 61 This process in and of itself may lead to interest in the “original.”62 For audiences who become interested in bungō via manga, anime, or video games, they may read the author’s literary work, gather information online, visit literature museums or tourist sites related to the original author. The characters from *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist* may be “mechanical reproductions,” to use Dean MacCannell’s term, but they nonetheless “motivate travellers [or readers] to find the ‘original;’”63 whether it be through purchasing related works of literature or travelling to sites related to the original authors. Aware of the potential character i-fications have to boost readership and interest in modern Japanese literature, literature-related museums, tourist sites and publishers have partnered with each series to attract new, young audiences.

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61 YAMAGISHI Ikuko 山岸郁子, “‘Bungō’ imēji o shōhisuru to iu koto 「文豪」イメージを消費するということ,” Yokomitsu Riichi kenkyū 横光利一研究 17 (2019): 79.
63 Touristification involves the mechanical reproduction of sacred objects (in this case, the historical authors) as prints, photographs, and merchandise, which in turn gain value and are displayed. This phase, MacCannell argues, is what “[sets] the tourist in motion on [their] journey to find the true object.” Seaton, referencing MacCannell, suggests that popular culture works are themselves mechanical reproductions that motivate travellers to find the “original” via contents tourism. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist* (University of California Press: 1999), 44-45. Philip Seaton et. al, *Contents Tourism in Japan: Pilgrimages to “Sacred Sites” of Popular Culture* (New York: Cambria Press, 2017), 27.
For example, publishers Kadokawa and Shinchōsha have official partnerships with *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist*, respectively. In March 2016, six different collaborations covers were released in celebration of *Bungō Stray Dogs*’ TV anime adaptation, set to air the following month. Each character is in Japanese-style dress, something not typically seen in *Bungō Stray Dogs* itself, and holding old Kadokawa Bunko editions of their respective work. By purchasing these collaboration cover editions, or any other Kadokawa Bunko publication of the above authors with a commemorative book band, you could obtain tickets to enter a raffle for rare merchandise with exclusive art by Harukawa Sango. Without a doubt, this was Kadokawa’s attempt to tap into the popularity of the series’ characters and market Japanese literature in a similar fashion to Shūeisha’s collaboration with Obata Takeshi. Although no official sales figures have been released, Kadokawa noted a large increase in sales with multiple reprints issued in the months that followed. As of April 2023, there are twenty-two different *Bungō Stray Dogs* TV Anime collaboration covers. These covers have become a frequent sight not only at anime retailers like Animate, but also bookstores and locales related to the authors.

*Bungō Stray Dogs* even has its own official Japanese literature handbook, the *Bungō Stray Dogs Official Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature* (文豪ストレイドッグス 公式国語便覧 Bungō sutorei doggusu kōshiki kokugo benran, 2016), which features twenty different authors from the Armed Detective Agency, Port Mafia, and the Special Division for Unusual Powers. It contains answers to questions regarding its references to literary history in the series, such as “why is ‘Beast Beneath the Moonlight’ a tiger,” “was ‘Naomi’ Tanizaki’s sister-in-law,” “were Dazai and [Nakahara] Chūya (中原中也) on bad terms,” and so on; summaries of all the works referenced by the character’s abilities; and brief, one-minute summaries of each author’s life. As many online reviews of the book note, it acts as the perfect transition for kids who start
showing interest in literature through *Bungō Stray Dogs* and want to learn more. It also helps build important associations by featuring the characters alongside the original authors, making literature feel much more fun and approachable to young readers. For example, during my visit to Jiyūken in Osaka to try the historical Oda Sakunosuke’s favourite curry (as shown in the anime), I was surprised to see that I was not the only person there because of *Bungō Stray Dogs*. Sitting across the table from my friend and me was a mother and her young, elementary-school age daughter who had brought her copy of the *Bungō Stray Dogs Official Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature* with her to the restaurant and was beaming with excitement.

*Bungō and Alchemist* has also garnered player interest in historical authors and literary research in general. As previously explained, *Bungō and Alchemist*’s story and gameplay are designed to leave out details to encourage players to actively investigate literary history, authorial relationships, and featured works on their own. Aozora Bunko, a popular online archive for literary works that have entered the public domain, has noted an increase in volunteers inputting and proofreading literary works from lesser-known authors. Okubo Yū (@bsbakery), who is the site’s current administrator, tweeted the following on May 30, 2017: “I am not sure if it’s due to the influence of [Bungō and Alchemist] or not, but people have recently started to input the literary work of (several) authors who were not included in Aozora Bunko’s collection and also appear in the series. Thank you for your support.”

*Bungō and Alchemist* has also published official *bungaku zenshū*, or “compiled volumes of literary works,” that feature the in-game author’s primary works and contain several materials that have been released for the first time, such as the original manuscript for *The Setting Sun*, postcards, correspondence, and more. As advertised on Shinchōsha’s website, these volumes are
“a must have for fans and researchers alike!” In-game illustrations of *Bungō and Alchemist*’s characters have also appeared on Shinchōsha collaboration cover editions of eight different novels, with Dazai’s *The Setting Sun* receiving new, original art of his character in Japanese-style dress and holding Shinchōsha’s regular cover edition of the novel.

All of this is in addition to the revitalization of author-related sites in Japan as a result of fan activity and successful campaigns with both *Bungō Stray Dogs* and *Bungō and Alchemist*. *Seichi junrei*, or “pilgrimages to sacred sites,” which entails consumption of popular culture and travel to specific localities related to the original work, is a behaviour that has been exhibited by fans of both series. For example, when I visited Dazai Osamu’s House of Study in Hirosaki, where Dazai formerly lived during his student days, its guestbook had recently been signed by a *Bungō and Alchemist* fan who had drawn Dazai’s character making a peace sign with the caption “I’ll visit again!” Moreover, memorial museums and exhibitions in Japan related to bungō or modern literature have reported dramatic increases of young, predominantly female visitors. For example, the Nakahara Chūya Memorial Museum in Yamaguchi Prefecture noticed a significant increase of female visitors in their 10s, 20s, and 30s following its collaboration with *Bungō Stray Dogs* from October 4, 2017 to January 21, 2018. Repeated success in attracting new demographics to literary sites via popular culture has resulted in the two series forming collaborations with over thirty different literature exhibitions, memorial museums, libraries, and localities across Japan. Kadokawa, the company that publishes *Bungō Stray Dogs*, has stated that

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64 “Bungō to arukemisuto × Shinchōsha,” https://www.shinchosha.co.jp/bungo_alchemist/.  
65 “Bungō to arukemisuto × Shinchōsha.”  
67 I visited in August 2022. There was no collaboration with either series at the time.
such collaborations are one way that they hope to actively give back to literary museums across the country in exchange for “borrowing” each bungō’s name.68

What does all of this mean for the reception of Dazai’s star text and literature? Many Japanese youth are familiar with Dazai’s name and the general idea of his work but have not ventured further than their Japanese textbook. As was the case with Shūeisha’s No Longer Human collaboration cover, since fewer youth are proactively reaching for books, books now have to reach out to readers.69 In Bungō Stray Dogs’ and Bungō and Alchemist’s case, it is the authors who have begun to reach out to readers. By re-authoring Dazai into a transmedia character, creators and publishers are able to directly introduce the author to new audiences and mediums. Not only does this increase the proliferation of Dazai’s star text within popular culture, but it also creates a sense of familiarity with the author because of “low” nature of the texts his character-ifications are delivered through, i.e., anime, manga, and video games. In many ways, these fictional counterparts function also as paratexts because they provide Dazai’s literary celebrity with a “physical” form that is then mediated to audiences. Most importantly, these character-ifications (like literary paratexts) contain the potential to influence or change public reception and interpretation of Dazai’s star text. They all signify parts of a whole, the “Dazai image,” and condition our entry to his star text, telling us what to expect.70

As Hutcheon discussed, the audiences consuming these texts are not passive recipients of textual meaning but active contributors to the aesthetic process by interpreting each character’s collection of recognizable signs. For example, Japanese audiences may see Dazai’s character

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69 Ryō, “Futatsu no shōhinsei to riarizumu,” 51.
70 Jonathan Gray, Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts (NYU Press, 2010), 25.
searching for a woman to die with him in *Bungō Stray Dogs* or obsessing over the Akutagawa Prize in *Bungō and Alchemist* and relate it back to events from the historical author’s life that they learned about in literature class. These images and narratives have also been mobilized by publishers and educators to encourage students to make connections between the characters, their historical counterparts, and their respective literature, whether it be through collaboration covers or literature companions that directly play on fan’s knowledge of the respective series. This has made Dazai’s star text visually particular and interesting, like a character, and made the study of Japanese literature and its history more accessible for young students.71 For example, Tokyo University students have included *Bungō Stray Dogs* on a list of twenty manga that are “useful in life and in study”:

*Bungō Stray Dogs* is great when it comes to Japanese class. It’s a story that features historical bungō as characters that use abilities related to each author’s literary works. Exam questions asking you to match authors to the names of their works used to be my weak point, but after encountering this manga it’s become a lot easier.72

These visual and mental associations contain the potential to transform Dazai from “wasn’t this guy mentioned in my Japanese textbook?” to “hey, it’s Dazai! He wrote…” in the minds of contemporary audiences. In some cases, this process of translation and association results in fans proactively searching out information related to the original author, picking up new books, and travelling to related sites. In other cases, fans may need a bit of external impetus, such as collaborations with publishers and museums, to learn more and become interested in the historical person and literature behind Dazai’s fictional counterparts. For those who are more

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71 At Kadokawa Culture Museum’s second “Bookshelf Theatre” project mapping collaboration with *Bungō Stray Dogs* (2022), television screens were installed among the theatre’s bookshelves with a QR code that allowed visitors to contribute their own impressions and comments regarding each character or work. Under Dazai’s section, one fan wrote, “my Japanese grades improved.”

familiar with the character than the historical author, visiting literary exhibitions and encountering the personage behind the character for the first time can be an extremely surprising, and even rewarding experience, that piques fans interest in the original. As a paratext of Dazai’s star image, these encounters can also change fan impressions of the author or make them more visually “knowable.” For example, at Dazai’s 105th anniversary exhibition at the Kanagawa Museum of Modern Literature in collaboration with *Bungō Stray Dogs*, one staff member mentioned how a group of young girls stood in front of the author’s photo and exclaimed, “He’s so attractive!” By consuming historical authors alongside their fictional counterparts in the form of character standees and other related displays, fans also form new mental associations between fictional and historical bungō.

These multi-faceted, mutable, and dynamic transmedia images are especially significant in that they have enabled transcultural fandom via a collective search for knowledge that exceeds national orientation and re-authors the author. *Bungō Stray Dogs*, as mentioned, has become a global franchise with its media officially translated into over ten different languages and sold in twenty-six different countries and regions. *Bungō and Alchemist*, too, has its own transcultural fanbase and “knowledge community,” to borrow Pierre Lévy’s term, that has formed around fan translations of the game and its related materials. Both series are part of Japan’s “media mix”

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73 Nagai, “‘Bunkashigen (kontentsu)’ to no kyōdō,” 88-89.
75 For more on theoretical approaches to transcultural fandom, see Bertha Chin and Lori Hitchcock Morimoto, “Towards a theory of transcultural fandom,” *Participations Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 10, no. 1 (May 2013): 92-108.
76 “Dazai Osamu to tomoni, botsugo 70-nen (1): Ningen shikkaku, sekai o miryō 太宰治と共に没後 70 年 (1): 人間失格, 世界を魅了,” *Yomiuri Shinbun* 読売新聞, June 12, 2018. As of April 2023, it has been translated into Brazilian Portuguese, English, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Malaysian, Polish, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Spanish (Mexico, Spain, and Argentina), Thai, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.
culture that disperses narratives across a variety of mediums and encourages audiences to actively form connections between them.\textsuperscript{78} In addition to these bodies of pop culture texts, bungō also have a shared body of literary and historical source texts for fans to reference. As Ishii suggests, these texts are an infinite engine of story material; however, this comes with the caveat that even if players research the authors and literary works themselves, no one can never know everything about modern Japanese literature and its authors. Moreover, the collected works of authors are an expensive and labour-intensive read that does not reveal the relationships between authors themselves—important information for the creation of derivative fan works such as \textit{dōjinshi}.\textsuperscript{79} Thus, bungō fans have sought out knowledge of literary history itself via the Internet, social networking services, and literary museums, and compiled it together as a knowledge archive for other fans to consume.

For example, the \textit{Bungō and Alchemist} Walkthrough Wiki (文豪とアルケミスト 攻略 \textit{Bungō to arukemisuto kōryaku Wiki}, 2016) is a fan-run website that explains gameplay mechanics and relevant references to literary history. It also has a subsection dedicated to current literary museum exhibitions, historic sites related to the authors, and literature databases (such as the aforementioned Aozora Bunko) where players can read each author’s original work as featured in-game. In English, too, the \textit{Bungō Stray Dogs} and \textit{Bungō and Alchemist} fandom wikis have researched characters’ namesakes, literature, and history to write trivia sections for curious fans—who may not have access to or be able to read the original Japanese—to gain a deeper

\textsuperscript{78} “Media mix” is a popular Japanese term that refers to “the cross-media serialization and circulation of entertainment franchises.” Marc Steinberg, \textit{Anime’s Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan} (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), viii.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Dōjinshi} is an umbrella term for self-published, derivative works. It is most commonly associated with fan-produced manga sold at events like Comic Market. IMAI Tsubura 今井瞳良, “\textit{Bungō to arukemisuto} tobungakukan: Kawabata Yasunari bungakukan ni okeru ‘Kawabata Yasunari to Yokomitsu Riichi’ tenji o rei ni ‘文豪とアルケミスト’と文学館: 川端康成文学館における「川端康成と横光利一」展示を例に,” \textit{Yokomitsu Riichi kenkyū} 横光利一研究 17 (2019): 30.
understanding of the series and its characters. There is also ongoing interfandom exchange of information as many people who are fans of *Bungō Stray Dogs* are also fans of *Bungō and Alchemist* and vice versa. In other words, whether in Japan or overseas, the two series tend to exist in tandem to each other due to overlapping content.

Haga Shōko, in her discussion of the reception of these series among Japanese women, suggests that the literary world’s expansive body of texts and the search for relevant information within that text complements pre-existing fan practices. Namely, the tendency for *fujoshi* (women who create and consume media featuring male characters in homosexual relationships) to treat *dōjinshi* as “theses,” researching and referencing the original text to present a strong argument to the readers as to why they should support the artist or writer’s favourite couple.80 Haga suggests that the abundance of bungō-related source texts that can be used to support the artist or writer’s “theory,” and the relationships (i.e., the homosociality of the bundan) in the series themselves, are key reasons why these series continue to enjoy immense popularity among predominantly female audiences.81 Notably, this mode of consumption is largely based on queer re-interpretation of historical materials—a practice that is also prominent in overseas fandom. In fact, the English-speaking *Bungō Stray Dogs* fandom itself has even become a queer-dominated space that celebrates the bisexual subtext of Dazai’s character, among others. This has generated new approaches to not only Dazai’s character, but his historic personage and literary texts too. For example, overseas bungō fans have begun to refer to the real-life Dazai as bisexual, citing a

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81 As of October 2018, women make up 86.3% of *Bungō and Alchemist*’s userbase. TANIGUCHI Kōhei 谷口晃平, “Naze gēmu ga kyōyō no kiten to narieru no ka なぜゲームが教養の起点となり得るのか,” lecture at Iwate Prefectural University Takizawa Campus, Japan, October 27, 2018, as cited in Haga, “Josei no juyō,” 12.
passage from Dazai’s short story “Recollections” (思い出 Omoide) that talks about how the young narrator “Osamu” once had a crush on one of his male classmates:

By that time, I was nearly sixteen. Blue blood vessels stood out transparently on the back of my hand, and I could feel my body grow strangely heavy. One of the other students in my class, a small dark fellow, and I had a secret crush on each other. We would invariably walk home together. If even our little fingers happened to brush against each other, we would both blush. Once when we were walking back along the road behind school, he found a newt swimming in the waterweed-choked ditch between the fields, and he caught it and silently gave it to me. I hated newts, but I stuffed it into my handkerchief, pretending to be delighted.⑧

This has also become the base of theories for fan artists and writers, who re-author Dazai’s character as bisexual and portray him in sexual and romantic relationships with the rest of the predominantly male cast—as is also the case in Japan.

Since the character-ification of literary celebrity in series such as Bungō Stray Dogs and Bungō and Alchemist is still a relatively new phenomenon, it is difficult to predict exactly what the long-term influence these new readings will have on Dazai’s star text in popular imagination and literary scholarship. However, based off of my findings, it is clear that popular culture has played significant role in the generation of meaning—especially through visual association, the role of the public imagination, and historical relationships between authors—and significantly contributed to global youth interest in modern Japanese literature; whether it be through collaboration covers, manga, anime, or video games.

⑧ As quoted in Lyons, “Recollections,” The Dazai Osamu Saga, 205-06. “Recollections” is a fictionalized retelling of “Tsushima Shūji’s” early life through the author’s “Osamu” character.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

“Dear reader, there is always tomorrow as long as we are alive. Let us go forth in good spirits. Do not despair. Now, farewell.” —Dazai Osamu, Tsugaru (津軽, 1944)

As I detailed in Chapter Two, there has been a tendency for people to view “high” and “low” culture as completely separate from one another. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Three by the processes and parties involved in the construction of Dazai’s contemporary star text, it is clear that the two are directly interconnected. The media landscape continues to change and so has Dazai’s star text together with popular culture. From Dazai as a popular author in immediate postwar Japan to his posthumous induction into literary canon in the mid-1950s (via Japanese textbooks and increased scholarship following Chikuma Shobō’s collected works), popularity among students in the 1960–70s, entry into the realm of subculture in the 1980–90s, and heightened presence in popular culture as of the mid-2000s, audiences have molded his authorial image to fit their needs. Yet, because Dazai is not only a mouthpiece for contemporary youth but also one of the “literary greats” (bungō), there are also many Japanese readers who feel resistance to experimentation with his image. For example, a number of online reviews for the first volume of the Bungō Stray Dogs manga express reader outrage at its disrespectful treatment of historical authors.

As David Boyd explains, cultural institutions have erected “narrow canons…to supersede living literary practices” and caused contemporary audiences to “lose sight of the important fact

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2 See TAKIGUCHI Akihiro 滝口明祥, Dazai Osamu būmu no keifu 太宰治ブームの系譜 (Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobō ひつじ書房, 2016) for more details on these historical shifts in Dazai’s reception.
3 Amazon Japan’s 2013 reviews are particularly biting, with many people upset at how little the characters resemble the historical authors. “Are these authors a joke to you?” “Anyone with a favourite author should stay far away from this.” etc.
that literature is, first and foremost, a form of entertainment.” Furthermore, “the academy and a number of other institutions are invested in protecting the integrity of literature as ‘high art,’ divorcing it from the world of popular culture.” Literary prestige and pure literature have often been treated as completely separate realms from celebrity and popular literature, even though the two are always in contact. This is because cultural agents and institutions (critics, schools, publishing houses, and so on) produce historical and critical discourses that assign values—“high” or “low”—to texts and authors and create consumers capable of “recognizing and desiring that value.”

Literary works and authors who are included in textbooks and studied by scholars have also been assigned sanctified discourses and a “high” value; thus, the character-ification of prestigious authors in popular culture is in direct conflict with these values and may be perceived as “lowering” the text—or personage—“according to an imagined hierarchy of medium and genre.” Accordingly, Bungō Stray Dogs and Bungō and Alchemist directly challenge contemporary perceptions of “the modern author” by returning literature to popular culture. Even still, as with any adaptation, there is a tendency for audiences to put down popular culture series like Bungō Stray Dogs and Bungō and Alchemist as “secondary…or culturally inferior” to the “original,” or judge them by historically accurate they are.

Yet, as Kawabata Kazunari notes, character-ification can facilitate the creation of new, fictionalized content without infringing upon copyright laws or issues of privacy. Bungō and

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9 Hutcheon, A Theory of Adaptation, 2.
*Alchemist* comes with a disclaimer that “this is a work of fiction and may differ from historical fact”; similarly, every *Bungô Stray Dogs* light novel and manga volume release includes the following note: “This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.” In other words, “these are not the authors themselves, so please do not take this as historic fact.”

Nevertheless, character-ification in these series is not a direct transformation from reality to fiction but a collection of borrowings from original source material, such as biographical details, from historical authors, with additions of new elements to create entirely new, fictional characters. Strictly speaking, none of the character-ified authors directly correspond to a historic original; instead, they can be more productively understood as adaptations of literary star texts. Moreover, these are merely “paraphrase[s] or translation[s] of a particular other text, a particular interpretation of history.” Many could argue that these adaptations are “No Longer Dazai,” yet who can say if *No Longer Human*’s protagonist was human to begin with, or if Dazai was always Dazai? As Linda Hutcheon argues, the “success” of an adaptation in the age of transmedia storytelling should not be determined by its fidelity to a single “original” that may not even exist but to its popularity, persistence, and the diversity and extent of its dissemination. With these criteria in mind, both series are undoubtedly successful—especially with the extent of their global influence.

Going forward it is my hope that publishers, scholars, and translators will continue to use this increased interest in modern literature as an opportunity to make the Japanese literary world and its historical figures more accessible to young readers and students. So far, I have noticed a

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12 Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, XXVI.
significant increase in the number of English-language translations of modern Japanese literature in the past several years, with many of them even advertising themselves to *Bungō Stray Dogs* fans specifically.\(^{13}\) However, as someone who has interacted with both English and Japanese fandoms, I have noticed that scholarly works that discuss the history of modern Japanese literature or the authors themselves are largely inaccessible to younger students. University students may have access to relevant books via their institution, but comprehensive volumes such as Dazai’s *Self-Portraits: Tales from the Life of Japan’s Great Decadent Romantic* translated by Ralph McCarthy (1991), for instance, have no digital copies, have been out of print for years, and are listed for hundreds of dollars online. Similarly, Dazai’s short stories from *The Twilight Years* have been scattered across different literary collections, published in non-open-access academic journals, or not even translated at all. As a result, there has been misinformation circulating in overseas fandom due to gaps in knowledge. While this, in its own way, “re-authors” Dazai’s star image and generates new meaning, it is my personal hope as a scholar and fan of Japanese literature that popular culture will help revitalize existing forms of knowledge distribution and make them more accessible to new audiences. Perhaps, as Yamagishi Ikuko suggests, we may even see the emergence of new inquisitive minds that “shake up pre-established systems and frameworks” with new approaches to classic works and literary figures.\(^{14}\)

As a future extension of this thesis, I would like to investigate the demographics of Dazai’s fanbase and discuss the potential for queer readings of his literature, especially since many young fans of Dazai openly identify as sexual minorities. Similarly, a large majority of

\(^{13}\) The 2023 Penguin Classics edition of *No Longer Human* is one such example.

\(^{14}\) YAMAGISHI Ikuko 山岸郁子, “‘Bungō’ imēji o shōhisuru to iu koto 「文豪」イメージを消費するということ,” *Yokomitsu Riichi kenkyū* 横光利一研究 17 (2019): 75-83.
Dazai fans have been young women, yet little English-language scholarship has delved into his representations of gender, the use of female narrators, or the reception of these elements by female-identifying audiences. Finally, I hope that my research will help spark further studies on the connections between youth, identity, and anomie as presented in Dazai’s literature.

Closing out this thesis, I would like to leave with an example of the positive effect popular culture has had on Dazai’s image and literature. Even though countless successful writers have listed Dazai as one of their main influences, there has been a certain stigma surrounding his image that has caused many fans to “stay in hiding.” However, times are changing and, following the present “Dazai boom,” liking Dazai has become something of a source of pride for many. One such example comes from a conversation I had at a souvenir store in Japan, where my friend and I purchased matching t-shirts that had “Dazai is my favourite author” written on the front, alongside an illustration containing the names of Dazai’s works. While the cashier rang up our purchases, he reminisced that when he was younger, people were too embarrassed to admit they liked Dazai, and reading was seen as a part of everyday life and study. Now, being into literature has become something cool and trendy, and people can freely walk around with their love for Dazai on display—a most welcome change.

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