

whose friendship she had neglected. These examples show learning Japanese as engaging language.

In chapter 7, the final chapter, Hideo Hosokawa depicts a student who had to grapple with stereotypes she had had about Japanese women when she had to interact with an actual Japanese woman who did not conform to such stereotypes. Learning a language involves negotiating with one's identity through reassessing one's values.

Reading *KK*, I was reminded of some of the principles that Carl Rogers advocated in the fields of client-centered counseling and learner-centered education in the 1950s. I myself was exposed to humanistic techniques in EFL in a graduate program during the early 90s. Naka, one of the authors of the book, also mentions a publication from the 1970s on a similar topic for English language educators that had an impact on his teaching in his chapter. It can be inferred that while the philosophy behind the idea of engaging language might not have been mainstream in the field of foreign language education, it might have been an undercurrent for decades. Equipped with such new perspectives as learners' active participation in the community and the dynamic nature of relationships among multiple cultures and languages that may reside within an individual, as presented in *KK*, the undercurrent might now have come closer to the surface of language teaching and research. As Japan is now set to increase the number of non-Japanese workers, *KK* is a timely publication for those who seek to ponder what language learning and teaching are all about under the surface of classroom interaction.

### ***A Shameful Life (Ningen shikkaku)***

By **Dazai Osamu**. Translated by **Mark Gibeau**. Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 2018. 141 pp. \$14.95.

#### ***Reviewed by*** **Ji Shouse**

According to biographers and scholars of Dazai Osamu, Dazai was one of the most popular postwar Japanese novelists, second only to Tanizaki Jun'ichirō by some accounts. Dazai's popularity seems not to have

waned much over the years, as attested by the fact that his works, such as *Ningen shikkaku* (translated here as *A Shameful Life*) can be found today in convenience stores across Japan, appealing primarily to contemporary young readers. *A Shameful Life* also has the potential to bring Dazai's work to a new generation of Western readers. With only one translation of *Ningen shikkaku* (translated by Donald Keene in 1958 as *No Longer Human*) available, *A Shameful Life* promises to provide Western reading audiences with a new and different voice for Dazai.

Adhering to the original Japanese structure, *A Shameful Life* opens with a short preface and concludes with an epilogue narrated by an unnamed narrator; the body of the text comprises three journals, with the third journal having two parts. Three photographs described by the unnamed narrator in the preface are paralleled by the three journals that form the main body of the text. The journals are presented in first-person narration by a protagonist, whom we later learn is named Yōzō. The first journal opens on Yōzō's childhood and how he becomes a clown who fools others by fooling himself. Yōzō intentionally deceives others as a child—including his family members, friends, and teachers—as a means of hiding his fear of human interaction brought about by his inability to have faith in other human beings. The protagonist's untruthful self and mischievous behavior continues throughout the course of his young adult life as he makes new connections and interacts with people he meets in Tokyo, which becomes the focus of the second journal.

In the second journal, Yōzō becomes fond of Western art and artists and aspires to be an artist himself. At the same time, however, he finds himself becoming more and more unable to understand human beings and cannot foster interpersonal connections with ease. Yōzō is exposed to the pleasures of liquor and prostitutes guided by an opportunist, Horiki Masao, whom he meets in Tokyo. He also descends into poverty brought about by his lavish indulgence in debauchery with Horiki. While Yōzō is perceived as naturally attractive to women, especially prostitutes, he feels more and more ashamed and isolated from society. As an outcast, Yōzō becomes involved in several unusual experiences with women during his time in Tokyo. Towards the end of the second journal, his affair with a café waitress, Tsuneko, turns into a double suicide attempt resulting in the death of Tsuneko, with Yōzō being held and questioned by officials about the incident. The second journal ends with Yōzō's feelings of humiliation at failing to deceive a prosecutor who is about to sentence him for the incident. He recalls the incident as follows: "I broke

out in a cold sweat. I was horrified. No, even now the mere memory of it makes me want to jump to my feet.”

The third journal focuses on Yōzō’s complicated relationships with women, the opportunistic friend Horiki, and Yōzō’s guardian, “Flounder,” appointed by Yōzō’s father. Yōzō first lives under the supervision of “Flounder” and then with a mistress, Shizuko, and her daughter Shigeko, but he leaves them suddenly and never returns. Towards the end of the third journal, Yōzō finally realizes he is truly incapable of having faith in human beings when the girl he hopes to marry is seduced by a shopkeeper; eventually Yōzō is taken to an asylum. The third journal concludes with Yōzō’s acceptance of his past and his perception of himself as a “cripple”: “I am beyond joy or misery now. All things pass. This is the only truth I have encountered in all the days I’ve spent in this cold hell of a world of so-called ‘humans.’ All things pass. I will be twenty-seven years old this year. My hair has turned gray and most people would say I look over forty” (117). Despite the protagonist’s self-disparaging comments, the novel concludes with a very different perspective on Yōzō when the Madam of the Kyōbashi bar remarks: “The Yō-chan I knew was kind and so gentle. If only he didn’t drink—no, even when he did drink.... He was such a good boy. An angel” (121).

When encountering a translation of a highly praised masterpiece such as we have in *A Shameful Life*, one might wonder to what extent the translator has transmitted and/or reproduced the style and quality of the original work? Devoted Dazai scholar Okuno Tateo claims that the quality of Dazai’s work lies in its universality and transnationality. Okuno believes Western scholars find exoticism in the works of leading Japanese writers such as Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Kawabata Yasunari, and Mishima Yukio, but that Dazai Osamu’s works make Western scholars forget that Dazai is a Japanese author because they find Dazai’s work easy to relate to. Some Japanese scholars believe the “universality” of *Ningen shikkaku* lies in Dazai’s emphasis on the presentation of an unguarded and truthful confessional style which, in turn, ensures an everlasting popularity among young contemporary Japanese readers. For Okuno and other critics, *Ningen shikkaku* is the representation of the universality of self-reflection, but to Donald Keene, the universality of the text comes from the influence of the west; this is true not only of Dazai’s work but can be found in most of modern Japanese literature. Keene argues in his “Translator’s introduction” to *No Longer Human*

that this Western influence is what differentiates modern Japanese literature from “the rest of Asia.” As for the work of Dazai, the degree of Dazai’s familiarity with Western writers and culture makes his work more likely to be favored by Westerners, and Keene claims *No Longer Human* can be seen as the representation of the “role of Western Culture in Japanese life” as Keene believes “Western tastes” are inherently embedded in *No Longer Human*. This may be one reason why Keene’s translation has been rendered relatively literally (except for the Western poems that Dazai quotes and for which Keene uses originals from either English or French).

On the other hand, the translator of *A Shameful Life*, Mark Gibeau, does not detect such Western influence in Dazai’s work; instead, Gibeau is keen to tailor to his translation towards general contemporary Western readers. As Gibeau notes in his “Translator’s Afterword,” *A Shameful Life* is supposed to appeal to “a reader knowing nothing of Japan whatsoever” (123). While Keene focuses on the “Western tastes” of Dazai in order to better engage the Western reader, it seems that Gibeau wishes to “guide” the reader by offering his own understanding of the text. For example, the translator finds a crucial component of *A Shameful Life* to lie in “the tension between fact and fiction” (128), and claims this is the focus of his translation in that he wishes to address what is “confession” (137), and what the “impulse to lie” (137). However, it is questionable whether addressing the “tension between fact and fiction” and “confession vs. impulse to lie” is truly valuable for *Ningen shikkaku*, and it is ambiguous as to how this was taken into account in the process of the translation. Although the content of *Ningen shikkaku* overlaps with Dazai Osamu’s own life, both Japanese and Western scholars do not consider *Ningen shikkaku* as belonging to the genre of the I-novel nor to the realm of autobiography because of its structure and the degree of manipulation of Dazai’s own life events. *Ningen shikkaku* is generally considered to be a fiction. According to Japanese scholars, the quality of *Ningen shikkaku* can be found in the reflection of subjective truth based on Dazai’s dilemma and despair as a human being in the chaotic society of postwar Japan. Human psychology is the focus of *Ningen shikkaku* rather than the events portrayed in the novel. That is, *Ningen shikkaku* offers a reflection upon the process of the protagonist’s consciousness and fluctuating psychological hysteria to which readers can relate.

According to the translator’s “Note on the Current Translation,” the translator undertakes to differentiate *A Shameful Life* from Keene’s *No*

*Longer Human* in order to “renew interest in Dazai”; the intention is to focus on Yōzō’s voice and thus be “truer” to the original. Footnotes and explanations of Japanese cultural elements are intentionally excluded to avoid “litter[ing] the work.” Though the translator claims that the translation is an attempt to be “truer” to the original, in many instances the translation appears to be more tailored to the English language. For example, Keene’s prologue in *No Longer Human* opens: “I have seen three pictures of the man. The first, a childhood photograph you might call it, shows him about the age of ten, a small boy surrounded by a great many women (his sisters and cousins, no doubt)” (13). Gibeau’s preface of *A Shameful Life* opens: “I’ve seen three pictures of him. The first is a photo of what I supposed might be called his childhood days and appears to have been taken when he was about ten years old. He stands at the edge of a garden pond, surrounded on all sides by a crowd of girls (his sisters and cousins, I imagine) ....” (8). Keene made a relatively literal translation and did not diverge from the original Japanese, which is rather fractured and interrupted. In order to maintain this fragmented style in the translation, Keene placed commas in relatively similar places to the original Japanese. In contrast, *A Shameful Life* is in this sense more polished and anglicized in that there are almost no interruptions and even some additions to the original text. These additions occur throughout the translation, and some additions seem rather arbitrary: these do not achieve a natural English nor are they close to the Japanese original. The excerpt above is a case in point: “I broke out in a cold sweat. I was horrified. No, even now the mere memory of it makes me want to jump to my feet.” The original sentence is a fragmented phrase as follows, 冷汗三斗、いいえ、いま思い出しても、きりきり舞いをしたくなります which can be literally translated as, “broke out cold sweat, no, even now if I recall [the event], [I] want to spin around rapidly.” きりきり舞いをしたくなります *kirikiri mai o shitake narimasu* is an expression of one’s emotional state somewhat relevant to being so “flustered/disconcerted” that one “cannot sit still” or “know what to do [with his body].” It appears that “I was horrified” is added to clarify the meaning of the original phrase; however, it is equivocal as to why a more literal rendering of the phrase was not considered.

*A Shameful Life* generally does a good job of translating Japanese notions and phrases into equivalent English words and colloquial phrases and maintaining the flow of the story, although this does not always result in successful transmission of the quality, tone, and depth of *Ningen*

*Shikkaku*. For example, the phrase 脛に傷持つ身 *sune ni kizumotsu mi* is replaced with a Western colloquial phrase “to have skeletons in one’s closet.” The literal translation of the Japanese phrase is “A body that has a scar on its shin.” The phrase *sune ni kizumotsu* often refers to a “(hidden) guilty conscience” but Dazai intentionally adds “body” (身) to the phrase to emphasize that the guilty conscience is engraved on the self of Yōzō, and moreover, that as Yōzō narrates the pain and agony of the scar (of the guilty conscience), this grows more and more intense so that it eventually becomes more of himself than his own flesh and blood. Because of the slightly different meaning of the English colloquial phrase, the passage is also modified to accommodate the English phrase, leaving out the importance of the despair within oneself and within one’s own body; the emphasis on Yōzō himself becoming the guilty conscience from which he cannot be separated is left out. It is questionable whether the English phrase addresses the depth of agony and helplessness expressed by the protagonist. Similar instances occur throughout the translation when Japanese phrases are replaced with English ones.

The rationale behind the inconsistency in the translation of Japanese proper nouns and appellations is also unclear. Some are translated into relevant English words while others are preserved as Japanese words. For example, while *anesa* アネサ is translated as “Sis” in one instance, in another instance the suffix *-chan* ちゃん, a diminutive form of address added to personal names, is allowed to remain in Japanese. This is certainly different from Keene’s translation in which all such forms are omitted in favor of the characters’ full names. While Keene translates Japanese clothing and food items into somewhat relevant English words, in *A Shameful Life*, some items are translated into English while others remain as Japanese words. For example, *gyūmeshi* 牛めし is translated as “beef bowl,” but *yakitori* 焼とり remains as *yakitori* in the same sentence. Further, *oshiruko* おしるこ is translated as “Adzuki bean soup and rice cakes” although the dish is a (red mung) bean soup that contains rice cakes. All Japanese clothing items remain as Japanese words unlike in the Keene translation, yet a word like *onnadassha* 女達者, which often refers to someone who is “skilled (*tassha*)” with “women (*onna*)” in romantic affairs, is translated in *A Shameful Life* as the Western fictional character, “Don Juan.” Although the reason for such inconsistencies are not clear, one may assume that this is the translator’s attempt to differentiate *A Shameful Life* from Keene’s *No Longer Human*.

*A Shameful Life* may find more appeal among Western audiences compared to Keene's *No Longer Human* due simply to the flow of the English language and additions to the text for explanatory purposes. However, since some important aspects of the original work have been overlooked or substantially altered, Western readers may likely miss the nuances of the original text. The translation of well-known literary texts such as *Ningen shikkaku* is always a difficult undertaking, and the question of fidelity to the original is a major question. How to balance the complexities of the original with the needs of the target language is a challenge that faces all translators. In the case of *A Shameful Life*, in which the flow of English tends to erase many important aspects of the Japanese original, such translational matters remain unresolved and open to question.